

ROAD TRIP



ITALY

Raging Bull

The beastly Lamborghini Aventador makes some noise in otherwise tranquil Tuscany BY CINDY-LOU DALE

"TAKE ONE LIBERTY with this car, and she'll take you down," says the Lamborghini test driver as the closest thing I've seen to a stealth fighter rolls through the factory hangar doors in Sant'Agata Bolognese, Italy. Its Y-slanted headlights glaring, its sunset-orange carbon-fiber body and flared air intakes looking angry, this is Lamborghini's new supercar, the Aventador. Already as legendary as the company's flagship, the Murciélago, it's the perfect union of beauty and beast.

I slide into the Aventador's high-tech cockpit, trying to find an ignition to slot the keys into. "You push the button there," the test driver says. "No, there. *Mamma mia*, the button on the center console!" He points to a *Top Gun*-style starter button under a red flip-up cover. I push it, triggering what sounds and feels like a seismic event. And away we go.

Following a winding mountain road en route to Tuscany, I roar into Compiano, where I stop to »

MAP BY TIM VIENCKOWSKI

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» take in the view from this medieval village and its magnificent namesake castle. I then lunch on chestnut gnocchi with ricotta at La Vecchia, on the village piazza. While I eat, a crowd tentatively forms around the car, spellbound by its sinister good looks. (This will prove to be a common occurrence in the days ahead.)

After lunch, I return to the road, setting the car in drive mode. In the hills I

BOARDING PASS

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steer by what feels like telepathy. The Aventador's gearbox is sharp, with remarkable traction and fierce pulling power in the corners. For a bit of fun I drop into track mode, step on the gas and throw the car into a few tight turns, which it shrugs off without my needing to brake or change gears. Emboldened,

I decide to put the Aventador's F1-grade engine to the test on an open stretch of tarmac. In seconds it goes from fun, to exhilarating, to somewhat unsettling.



ABOVE, AND BEYOND Climbing the road to the Italian mountain village of Compiano pays off in jaw-dropping views across the Taro River to the Apennine Mountains

When the horizon begins to warp, I take my foot off the accelerator.

Rounding a bend, I'm presented with a sudden, magical tableau of green fields and steepled villages spread across an undulating land, like a shaken-out quilt

that's just settled back onto the bed. I pull off the road to photograph the scene from atop a rock. A *polizia* vehicle draws up beside me, and one of the policemen saunters over to ask if he can check out the Aventador. Sure, I say, and return to my photos.

He comes back a little while later, looking downcast. "Lamborghini," he says, "this is a car of dreams, a dream shared by all of Italy." He considers this statement for a moment, then adds, "But looking at her makes me feel sad. I can't help thinking that the economy, the environment, oil prices, the war on speed ... cars like this will soon be restricted to the history books."

We part ways, him sniffing, me pondering the irony of a police officer lamenting the war on speed. The road snakes deeper into the hills around Rapolano Terme, where I finally park and bed down for a couple of nights at Laticastelli. Owned by a retired Argentine polo player, this formerly abandoned centuries-old village has been painstakingly restored and converted into a boutique hotel offering long views over deep valleys, as well as a restaurant hailed as one of Tuscany's finest.

I end my trip here, dreaming retirement dreams of moss-softened corners somewhere in ancient Italy, of quiet, unhurried mornings and good wine. And, naturally, of an aircraft-inspired supercar always near to hand to keep things interesting.

CINDY-LOU DALE, an English writer who specializes in supercars, has rather amazingly never been pulled over for speeding.



2012 LAMBORGHINI AVENTADOR

The bells and whistles



Starting Price:
\$387,000

Engine: The rear-mounted 6.5-liter V-12 delivers 700 horses and all-wheel drive via a seven-speed automated manual gearbox. This is a track-tuned power plant of the highest order.

Performance: The Aventador does zero to 62 mph in 2.9 seconds and can hit a top speed of 217 mph. It's longer, lighter, narrower and slightly taller than its predecessor, but that's irrelevant, really, when all you're trying to do is keep it on the road.

Perks: There's an onboard computer, a booming Lamborghini sound system and a rear-view camera equipped with parking sensors to keep the bumper (such as it is) pristine. And did we mention its menacing power and jaw-dropping looks?