

AUSTRALIAN TRAVELLER

HONESTLY AUSTRALIAN

The Food Issue

Good Mornington!

WHY YOU ABSOLUTELY HAVE TO VISIT VICTORIA'S FOOD PARADISE NOW!

THERE'S MORE TO THE SNOWY MOUNTAINS THAN JUST SNOW

IS QUALIA THE SEXIEST ISLAND ESCAPE ON EARTH?

THE HIDDEN HUNTER VALLEY YOU DIDN'T KNOW EXISTED



5 OF MELBOURNE'S COOLEST COFFEE HAUNTS

THE ALWAYS ADORABLE Marion Grasby

Weekends

A red HOT RIDE

A country drive never looked so good, finds MEGAN ARKINSTALL.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

We slow down at a stop sign where a group of young kids are standing on the corner with their push bikes ogling at us – or more specifically, the car we are driving.

“What job do you have?” one yells.

Before I can react, my head is forced back into the seat as my husband puts his foot down, attempting to test the zero-to-100-in-three-seconds theory.

Show off.

We're driving in a convoy of five supercars in Victoria's picturesque Yarra Valley as part of a Prancing Horse Supercar Drive Experience: leading the pack is the support vehicle (driven by Matt and Ross from Prancing Horse), followed by a Pearl White Nissan GT-R R35, a Phantom Black Audi R8, a Grigio-Alfieri Maserati GranTurismo S and the one everyone comes to drive, the Rosso Corsa (i.e. red hot) Ferrari 458 Italia.

Full disclosure: I drive a Kia Rio, I'm definitely not a rev-head. The model names

of these cars don't ring any bells to me. I don't know the first thing about 'aerodynamic drag' or 'torque'. But to drive a Ferrari – a car that has a waiting list of around 12 months to purchase, even if you have a spare half-a-mill lying around – is a day well spent, whether you're a motor car enthusiast or not. At first, I was worried it was going to be a bit of a boys' club but I was wrong. The other three couples who join us today are also here for some fun, so the mood is relaxed and unpretentious.

We start our day at Balgownie Estate Vineyard Resort & Spa, where we are shown the ropes for the four cars before each couple picks a set of keys from a bowl... to determine the order in which to drive each car, that is.

We select the Maserati GranTurismo S keys and settle in. Apparently the 'S' stands for Sport, which is undeniable when we hit the road, but I think Sexy is also appropriate. Though driving an expensive supercar is a bit nerve-wracking at first – one scratch would probably be worth my whole Kia – we quickly

ease into it with the regular instructions and communication from our hosts through the two-way radio.

“At the end of this road, we're going to take a left.”

“Roger that,” I chuckle like a big kid.

For the next leg (we stop regularly to switch cars and drivers), I take the passenger seat in the Audi R8 and enjoy sitting back and watching the exceptionally lovely Yarra Valley landscape moving past: natural valleys and rolling hills dappled with vineyards, tall forests of mountain ash trees and an understory of lush green foliage. We pass through cute country towns including Yarra Glen, Healesville and Marysville via the Black Spur Drive, which winds its way through the Great Dividing Range and leads to Lake Mountain. Up here we stop for a coffee break and the requisite photo op (#newwheels).

Our turn in the Ferrari comes on the return leg to Healesville. We sink low into its smooth tan leather seats, entirely enveloped

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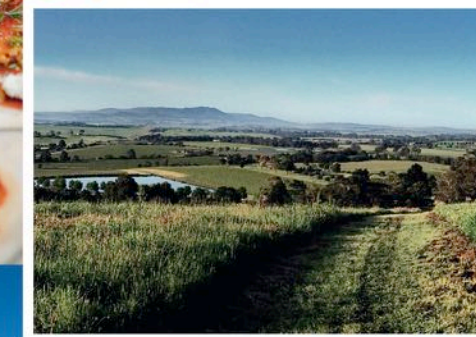
in luxury. So this is what it feels like, I wonder, as I tap the accelerator and hear the roar of the powerful engine.

The GoPro on the dash is adjusted to capture every thrilling moment of our drive – from the amusement of watching heads turn, to the excitement (and sometimes confusion) as we test out the bells and whistles, to the pleads (“Slow down!”) and the rebuttals (“This isn't even fast!”).

We arrive in Healesville and stop for a delicious lunch of wood-fired pizza and tapas at Innocent Bystander cellar door and restaurant. Suitably overfed, we swap cars for the last time as we begin the final leg of our journey in the Nissan, a car that gives the Prancing Horse (AKA Ferrari) a run for its money in the speed stakes... or so they say.

As we reluctantly hand back the keys, our hosts are keen to know which car stole our hearts. Unsurprisingly, most of our group, including my husband, nod to the Ferrari. Worth a cool \$570,000, it really is a dream drive, but I'm more taken by the impossibly stylish \$350,000 Maserati. Perhaps I should have answered those gobsmacked kids with the truth – “I'm a travel writer!” – as we left them in our expensive supercar dust that morning. But it's fun to pretend we own the keys, if only for one exhilarating day. ■

ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF PRANCING HORSE EXCEPT YARRA VALLEY IMAGE BY MEGAN ARKINSTALL



THE DETAILS...

Getting there

The Yarra Valley is around an hour and fifteen minutes' drive north-east of Melbourne.

Staying there
Accommodation at three different locations (including Balgownie Estate

where we stayed) and GoPro packages can be added. Check prancinghorse.com.au for more details.

Playing there
Prancing Horse's next Yarra Valley Supercar Drive Days will run in March and April 2016. Prices start from

\$1990 per couple including lunch, refreshments, wine tasting at conclusion and insurance. Participants must be 25-75 years. Other locations include the Great Ocean Road and NSW's South Coast, Hunter Valley and Sydney.