



Words Ben Kelly

LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

SALIFE jumped in the driver's seat with Prancing Horse luxury drive tours, whose supercars have become a regular sight in the Adelaide Hills each autumn and spring, to discover that the experience is even more fun if you're not a rev-head at all.

Photograph Erik Rosenberg



Opposite page Prancing Horse offers its Adelaide Hills luxury supercar experience each autumn and spring, starting at Mount Lofty House and covering 200km of roads that seem as if they were designed for European sports cars. **Above** One lucky journalist gets the feel for the Lamborghini. **Below** Lenswood is one of the many pit stops throughout the day.

Shrouded in silence, a kangaroo peacefully grazes among thick bushland in a steep valley of Gumeracha. The vivid contrast of an inclement spring afternoon creates a dramatic hue to the scene, soft rain sparkling in diffused sunlight.

The marsupial lifts its head from the foliage, ears pricked. Something is coming. The silence is abruptly shattered by the roar of four high-powered supercars snaking their way up Gorge Road, twisting through rocky cliffs and green hills that are reminiscent of an exotic James Bond chase scene.

"Kangaroo on the left," crackles the two-way radio. From behind the wheel of the blue McLaren GT, with a go-kart-like perspective barely a metre off the ground, it's clear the coast is safe – the kangaroo is deep in foliage off in the peripheral, bounding into the trees.

Up ahead, a gunmetal grey Lamborghini Huracán EVO slinks around an upcoming hairpin corner that hugs a towering rock wall. If this was a James Bond movie, the villain would certainly be driving the Lambo.

The dark geometric shape vanishes around the turn up ahead. In the rear-view mirror stalks the luminous red bonnet of a Ferrari F8 Tributo which reflects the lustrous glare of the afternoon sky. Perhaps this is the good guy.

A flick of the downshift paddle and the McLaren's engine sings:

its low centre of mass seeming to defy gravity as it weaves around the corner, around the cliff-face. Out of the turn, the twin-turbo V8 engine kicks like a rocket, bringing the Lambo back into view, the Ferrari catching up behind.

This section of Gorge Road is the exhilarating finale to Prancing Horse's luxury supercar experience which puts you and a friend in the driver's seat for a day out on 200 kilometres of Adelaide Hills roads that seem perfectly suited for European sports cars.

The day starts and ends at Mount Lofty House, stopping for brunch at Pike and Joyce in Lenswood before lunch at The Lane Estate (strictly no wine today). Rather than having an instructor in the car, the keys are handed over to you and your co-driver as if you were taking your own luxury car out for a Sunday cruise.

The morning begins with the trepidation of driving powerful cars all together worth over a million dollars, but by the afternoon, any apprehension has been consumed by childlike excitement and wiping the goofy smile off your face is a lost cause.

The exhilaration takes you back to being a kid on a rollercoaster. The mere thought of driving a 5.2-litre, 10-cylinder Lamborghini seems absurd – an indulgence reserved for movie stars or flashy tennis players – but is surprisingly easy to drive once you get a handle on the controls, and as long as you're a confident driver.

Today's line-up of four vehicles is rounded out with a yellow Lotus



Photograph Ben Kelly

Opposite page, top The Ferrari, McLaren, Lamborghini and Lotus draw some attention when the convoy pulls in for lunch at The Lane. *Photograph: Ben Kelly.* **Middle** Which would you choose? Luckily there's plenty of time to drive all four. **Below** With the rowdy 10-cylinder Lamborghini, this is as peaceful as it gets. *Photographs: Erik Rosenberg.*

These cars are meant to be driven out in beautiful countryside and the experience is almost what you would do if you had a couple of these cars in your own garage

Emira, which is a new supercharged V6 addition to the Prancing Horse stable. After some instructions on finding the start button, using the paddle-shift levers and adjusting the seats, "make sure you put it into sport mode", we fire up the machines and blast up the freeway, through farmland and vineyards towards Piccadilly Valley.

The day is sold as one ticket for two people and is ideal for couples, or pairs of friends. Many come from interstate for the experience, often for a special occasion.

There are plenty of stops along the way to swap drivers and vehicles, all of which have their own personalities. The Lambo might be a bit too aggressive for your liking, so the refined handling of the McLaren could be more your vibe.

Passers-by light up at the sight of the convoy, sharing waves and hellos. Maybe they think we are movie stars or, more likely, simply have a lot of money.

The voice on the radio calling out potholes and oncoming trucks is Prancing Horse co-founder Matt Thio. Matt started Prancing Horse in 2007 as a Ferrari rental business in Sydney. The offering quickly evolved into hosted drive days, and it grew from there, embracing not just cars but tourism, scenery and fine food.

"After a while we realised major cities were a limiting factor. The burden of traffic took away from the experience," says Matt. "We came to South Australia and soon fell in love with the idea of starting from Mount Lofty House and we realised that the Adelaide Hills have so much to offer from a driving perspective. We've now been doing experiences in Adelaide since 2017.

"Picking the right time of year weather-wise is very important to the experience. Autumn and spring are perfect in the Adelaide Hills."

While there's no guarantee which vehicles might be available on the day, the Lamborghini and the Ferrari are the key protagonists. "Driving cars with so many different personalities is very rewarding," says Matt. "The Lamborghini is obnoxious; it has such a big personality and is an important part of the line-up."

Slowly rumbling down the gravel driveway of The Lane is a surreal moment, parking our entourage of ostentatious supercars and stepping back to admire them against the sweeping view. From our table at the winery restaurant, we can see people adoring and taking photos of the cars.

Matt says it's often the participants with the least interest in

cars who have the most fun. Similarly, those who buy the event as a gift for their husbands or partners usually enjoy the driving just as much. Matt's team includes photographer Erik Rosenberg who expertly captures the day so couples can forget about taking photos and simply enjoy the ride.

Prancing Horse offers its Adelaide Hills experience each autumn (April/May) and spring (October/November), fitting into an annual schedule that includes Tasmania, the Yarra Valley, Kiama, Byron Bay and Tweed Valley, and Bowral.

"These cars are meant to be driven out in beautiful countryside and the experience is almost what you would do if you had a couple of these cars in your own garage," says Matt.

"Tourism is our passion. We're not typical car enthusiasts – we want people to use the event as a gateway experience into the region; an excuse to come to South Australia and stay a week.

"We're hoping to create a more consistent calendar in South Australia. We'd love to stay longer, and we could see more frequent experiences in regions such as McLaren Vale, not just the Adelaide Hills."

New characters will soon join the Prancing Horse Stable – perhaps a Maserati or an Aston Martin. A new Ferrari 296 GTB has recently been added for 2024. Those who are willing to save up the cost of \$3990 per couple are unlikely to be disappointed; this is a bucket-list experience that would otherwise only be the stuff of dreams.

"The experience is almost therapeutic," says Matt. He's right: the buzz doesn't wear off for several days, and thinking of driving instantly brings back a giddy exuberance.

A word of warning, though: you will be completely disappointed when you get back into your own car to drive home at the end of the day, before dreaming of car noises in your well-earned sleep.

SALIFE was a guest of Prancing Horse Drive Experiences.

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