

The fastest SUV? Our first drive in Lamborghini's 641-horsepower Urus

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- A Lamborghini that can do it all?
Jim Resnick
- OK, the looks might not be for everyone, but you could say that about any Lamborghini, and none of the other ones can seat five people and carry their luggage, too.
Jim Resnick
- Lamborghini's design studio has a thing about hexagons, and they show up on the seat cushions.
Jim Resnick
- Being part of VW Group means the infotainment system is actually quite good.
Jim Resnick
- 641 horses live inside this (dusty) powerplant.
Jim Resnick
- The Urus is a well-rounded bull, and in Corsa mode it's happy to do some hot laps.
Lamborghini
- Nothing this heavy should handle so well on track.
Lamborghini
- The Urus isn't built for rock-hopping, but it will cope with some light off-roading.
Jim Resnick
- Quad exhausts sound best on the road.
Jim Resnick

From time to time, Lamborghini does the unexpected. Not so much recently—many expected a new SUV from the Italian exotic automaker—but Lamborghini stunned automobiledom in the 1960s and 1970s. The original Miura sports car blueprints were initially thought by some to be for a race car, not a street car. Then, the Countach rewrote the exotic car design book and instantly became holy.

The next shocker was the LM002, a huge four-wheel-drive off-roading beast that actually began life in “LM001” phase as a proposal for a light-duty military vehicle. When not even one government nibbled at the thought of a military off-roader designed and built by an Italian company famous for temperamental exotic cars, Lamborghini had a major rethink and built highly revised LM002s from 1986 through 1993 for public sale. Most went to the very wealthy.

But more recently, as Lamborghini plays nice with its Porsche, Bentley, and Audi siblings and discovers the opportunities of platform sharing, the brand has also grown in its thinking and execution. Lamborghinis are now—deep breath—just about reliable enough to be used everyday. Couple this with the fact that more than half of Porsche’s sales now come from SUVs, and it indicates there’s room in the market for the Urus, the Lamborghini of SUVs.

Be forewarned, though. The costs involved are very nearly military, too. Starting at about \$200,000 and parked at a whopping \$261,000 as you see here with nearly all possible options, the Urus had better be a supersport-utility, as Lambo executives put it. The evidence backs up the claim.

Numbers and specs aplenty

First off, the numbers are pretty staggering. At 4,843 pounds (2,197 kg), the Urus weighs more than two of the giant bulls its actually named for. And like other bulls that buck and tangle riders, it defies physics by handling like a car half

its weight. Nothing so heavy should handle so well, and this is the most stupefying thing about the Urus—not the brutal acceleration, not the room inside, not the outlandish design. Rather, it's the fact that such an SUV can perform like an exotic car. Others try. Mercedes offers multiple AMG editions of its SUVs and they're damn fast, but none of them have the well-rounded eagerness of the Urus.

The vital stats include 641 horsepower (478 kW), gigantic 17-inch-diameter front brakes and all-wheel drive that sends drive to all of the steamroller-sized tires sufficient to kill any wheelspin.

The twin-turbocharged, 4.0L V8 engine born by the larger Volkswagen Group for use in a variety of applications is modified by Lamborghini and assembled in Hungary to yield 627lb-ft (850Nm) of torque in addition to the 641hp. Indeed, the changes from other applications are comprehensive, with special plumbing for the turbos and intake; a completely different exhaust system; unique pistons, connecting rods, and camshafts; and revised cylinder heads.

All that thrust brings 60mph (100km/h) up in under 3.6 seconds and a top speed of 189mph (304km/h); impressive even for an outright sports car, let alone a vehicle that weighs at least 5,000lbs (2,268kg) with a test driver aboard.

The V8 barks through active valves in the exhaust to reduce noise. However, noise is somehow more pronounced on the road than when on track in the Corsa driving mode on a circuit (Thermal Motorsports Club near Palm Springs, California).

The first off-roading Lambo in 26 years

An off-roader must endure endless crawling exercises where the vehicle either needs to slip a clutch (which would overheat

and fail very quickly when off-roading) or simply allow a torque converter to do the slipping it can sustain for eons. With the huge strides made with modern converter-backed automatics recently, the bridge between off-roading needs, hair-on-fire racetrack lapping, and normal everyday driving to the grocery store is best met with an automatic. Lamborghini's deployment of this ZF 8-speed genuinely meets all those needs.

The Urus' Tamburo drive-mode selector perched in the center console puts all seven driving modes (Strada, Sport, Corsa, Sabbia, Terra, Neve, and Ego) at your index finger, though the latter two off-road programs are part of an off-roading option package. Strada, Sport, and Corsa cover the on-road part of the program.

Strada ("street") is the default drive mode. Sport lowers the ride height and sharpens gearbox and throttle response. Corsa ("race") adjusts the transmission, suspension, exhaust and other on-road performance variable to their most aggressive track settings.

The off-road settings Sabbia (sand), Terra (terrain), and Neve (snow) all raise the vehicle and adjust both the transmission and traction control for those conditions. A first for Lamborghini—though nothing new in the segment—the Urus can disconnect the anti-roll bars, yielding better wheel articulation and therefore more off-road suspension compliance, which is precisely what you want to maximize in the soft or rocky stuff.



Enlarge / The Urus' drive-mode selector—no VW Group parts bin parts here!

Jim Resnick

Let's be clear, though. The Urus is no lifted and kitted rock-crawling Jeep Wrangler. Lamborghini is very honest that this kind of heavy-duty off-roading is not the Urus' mission. With the sand, small rocks, dirt and soft-roading we did, the Urus performed well within its own bandwidth.

All is not sunshine and lollipops in the Urus' driveline, though. With Strada (street) mode selected, throttle response is lethargic. As an exercise in engine management and fueling, slow throttle response yields both marginally better fuel economy and slightly lower emissions. But when attempting to merge with fast-moving traffic or even getting out of harm's way, a driver wants immediate response. You get that in Sport mode, but Strada is too sleepy.

Four-wheel steering (4WS) is not exactly new to the market. The Honda Prelude had a form of it way back in 1988, and it's been used on everything from Porsches to full-size pickups. At

slow speeds, 4WS turns the rear wheels in opposite phase (in the other direction) to the front wheels to tighten severe corners. Conversely, at higher highway speeds, this system makes lane changes more immediate and responsive.

Having driven about a dozen cars with four-wheel steering over the past year or so, the concept seems to actually work better on heavier vehicles like the Urus and pays major dividends in maneuverability in tight off-roading quarters.

City streets prove the Urus' everyday ride quality firm but perfectly acceptable and show little harshness as evidence of its track readiness. Those anti-roll bars that de-couple from the body when off-roading negate nearly all body roll in aggressive cornering on-road. In addition, three-chamber air springs all around adjust their firmness and ride height to suit the Urus' mission, be it on-road or far from it.

The Urus' all-wheel drive system wakes up at a 40-60 front-rear balance upon start-up and conventional driving. But it has an enormous variability, with extreme bookends of 70-30 front-rear to 11-89 front-rear. This all depends on road (or lack of road) surface and driving behavior. And though the Urus gives a decidedly rear-drive feeling, the Thermal track's tighter corners reveal the car clawing for traction (mostly at the front end) from its active torque vectoring.

We now interrupt your regularly scheduled Resnick to bring you an additional take on this divisive SUV by Ars' Managing Editor Eric Bangeman, who convinced Lamborghini to let him borrow one while he was in California.

Living with the Urus—albeit briefly

- The virtual cockpit in the Urus will look familiar to those who have driven an Audi of recent vintage. It's really an outstanding setup.

Eric Bangeman

- This is the same dual-screen infotainment system you'll find in a new Audi. It works really well, but it is a fingerprint smudge magnet.

Eric Bangeman

- Handwriting recognition works quite well. We were planning to drive down to the Salton Sea.

Eric Bangeman

- This is quite possibly the most useful Lamborghini ever when it comes to grocery runs.

Eric Bangeman

- This little tweeter pops up when you start the car.

Eric Bangeman

- An exotic car in an exotic landscape at Joshua Tree National Park.

Eric Bangeman

On a recent family vacation to Palm Springs, I had the chance to use the Urus as our daily driver. That included a run to the grocery store and hauling around luggage, plus driving around the Coachella Valley, out to Joshua Tree National Park, and along a stretch of the Palms to Pines Highway with plenty of switchbacks. If your bank account balance matches up with a taste for luxury SUVs, the Urus really has everything you need, with some minor caveats.

For a family of two adults and two teenagers, the interior of the Urus provides plenty of comfortable room. The cockpit feels spacious—even my 6'6" (1.98m) neighbor would have no complaints about riding in front (the aggressive downward slope of the roof means less headroom in back). The 21.8 cubic feet of cargo space is less than a comparable mid-size luxury SUV (well, maybe not truly *comparable*...), but it's more than enough for doing typical SUV things.

Rear visibility is really limited by the headrests in the backseat, which cannot be flipped down. Backseat passengers will find comfortable seats, climate controls, ample legroom,

and a great view through the panoramic moonroof. What they will *not* find are USB ports or cupholders capable of holding anything larger than a can of Red Bull. There are also a pair of tablets mounted to the headrests of the front-row seats. They have the same Lamborghini infotainment system as in the front row, which can be used to change radio stations and watch video via USB or SD card, among other things.

Acceleration in sport mode is amazing. The only thing I've driven that gets off the mark any faster is the McLaren 570S Spider. Handling on mountain switchbacks is stellar, too—there was zero roll, top-heaviness, or anything else to suggest that I was piloting a 4,800-pound SUV through the Santa Rosa Mountains rather than something smaller and lighter. We did some light off-roading on our way to the Indian Cove trail at Joshua Tree, and the Urus handled it without a hitch.

I don't know that anyone who is thinking about a Lamborghini has driver-assist tech on their mind, but we used the adaptive cruise control in light-to-moderate traffic on the way out to Joshua Tree National Park from Palm Springs. [*I dunno, I bet the kid who wrecked this Huracan Performante in the UK wished he'd left the driver aids on—Ed.*] As has been my experience with any car from the Volkswagen family, it works really well. What particularly impressed me was how the Urus dealt with changing speed limits. We had cruise set at 67mph on a 60mph stretch of highway. As we approached Yucca Valley, the speed limit dropped to 50mph. The moment the car passed the sign showing the new speed limit, the adaptive cruise control set itself to 50mph. It's a nice trick for a car that could certainly be a police magnet.

The Urus is rated at 14mpg (17mpg highway and 12mpg city). We actually saw 15.4mpg during our time with the car, which included a mix of city, interstate, and mountain driving. Given that slightly more than half of our time behind the wheel was in sport mode, the mileage was better than I expected.

– *Eric Bangeman*

Not quite pretty, not at all subtle, every inch aggressive

Even though it's far from pretty, the Urus has a tangible presence and speaks with its looks about what it promises to deliver. It's severe, aggressive, and hunkered for a large SUV. The details hint at the Lamborghini sports cars, themselves no champions of subtlety. But this is what you'd hope and expect a Lamborghini SUV to look like. Part exotic and part spacious conveyance.

And on that theme of spaciousness, Lamborghini claims people up to 6'7" (2m) will find comfort up front while those up to 6'3" (1.9m) fit in the rear. At 6'1" (1.8m), I tried and fit everywhere. You can also stuff eight carry-on-sized bags and up to 21.8 cubic ft (617L) of cargo in the back with the rear seats up (56.3 cubic ft/1,594L with seats down).

Inside, the Urus is on the mark with leather and Alcantara everywhere, but you'd expect that with a \$200,000 base price. Audi lent its recent touchscreen, smartphone-like MMI infotainment interface, as well.

So the Urus is the first supersport-utility, seats five real adults, goes like stink at the racetrack and can do a basic level of off-roading. All this while being quicker than the first Gallardo, and all for the bargain price of \$261,839.

Listing image by Jim Resnick

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