

Super Supercar.



By Nic Boyde

When the Gallardo was first released, as a coupé, the critics all but dismissed it as an unworthy lesser cousin of the Murcielago. Smaller, slower, fiddly, less fun. How times have changed. The open-topped Gallardo Spyder remarries all the fabulous potential stated by the styling with enhanced performance and much more enjoyment.

This isn't just an open-top version of the Coupé, it is a new design from the ground up in the tradition of the Murcielago Coupé and Roadster as a model in its own right. Even the body shape has been re-thought from both stylistic and functional points of view: the inverted wing profile of the body ensures optimal aerodynamic flow, provides the 5 litre V10 engine with the air it needs, and generates downforce on the rear-axle, meaning the automatic rear spoiler doesn't need to be deployed until the car exceeds 120 km/h.

Even the engine has been re-done. The 90-degree flat V reduces the centre

of gravity of the engine, and enables quieter running – or so says the hype. In practice this engine is loud. Very loud. Wonderfully loud. Performance-wise it can deliver 520 horses (or 382 kW in new money), with a massive torque of 510 Nm at 4,250 rpm, and 80% of this at 1,500 rpm. 0-100 km/h in 4.3 seconds gives an indication of how this much *shift* translates to acceleration.

Normal top speed is 307 km/h, but if this isn't fast enough, put the roof up and you can really blast along at 314 km/h. Given the engine's capacity of delivering racing-car output levels of 100 bhp/litre displacement, it obviously doesn't make sense to try this out on a road.

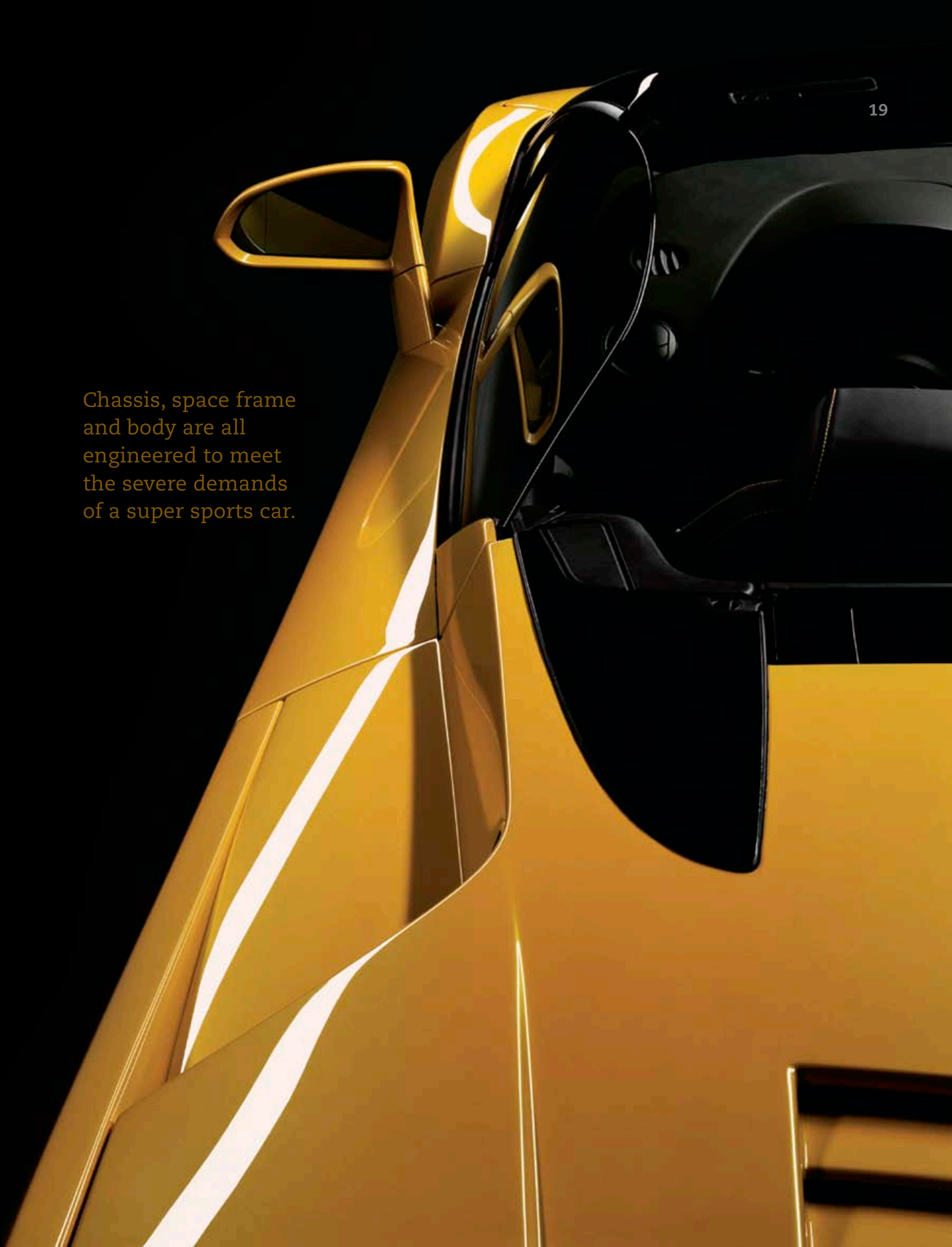
Much of the control systems are electronic, and the look and feel and ease of comprehension of the instrumentation betrays the involvement of Lamborghini's new owners, Audi, in the design process. Mechanical genius wasn't ignored though: the Spyder has

permanent four-wheel drive based on Lamborghini's tried and tested Viscous Traction system which regulates itself without electronic control. For example, the normal drive power ratio of 30:70 for front and rear axles automatically adjusts towards the rear if accelerating up hill.

You can get it with racing-car style paddle shifts on the steering wheel, or the cheaper manual gearbox.

Chassis, space frame and body are all engineered to meet the severe demands of a super sports car. Anti-dive and anti-squat systems keep the body level, so no directional instability when accelerating hard.

Nor have the luxuries been forgotten – automatically-locking doors, once the car is in motion improve security, there is a sound system, sat-nav and all mod cons. And as befits a sports car that is intended for street use, a rear-view camera helps reverse parking. There is even a lifting system for the front axle for getting over speed bumps.



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So much for the technical stuff: now the drive. This is not a car to under-rate. Leaving the Ferrari 360 and Porsche 911 Turbo behind in raw guts, this is a car to drive hard. While a lot of the new engineering has been put into making the car safer and stronger, it is no pussycat. You have a caged tiger at your command, and boy, is it ever angry. It goes where it is pointed, and the combined torque and power, with the enormous brakes moderated by ABS and ESP (the stabilisation system), give it fantastic touch and feel through the tightest corners.

Lamborghini reckon that their cars get driven 10,000 miles a year on average, (remarkably high in the supercar world), and have proved their reliability, a reputation that has only improved since Audi took control. This much fun doesn't

come cheap – AUD650 grand should do it, plus luxury tax, and running a Lambo isn't cheap either. 19-inch Pirellis come as standard and cost a King's ransom in themselves, but the good news is you can get fuel consumption better than 12 l/100 km for freeway driving. Less if you are chucking it around a race track, and you do want to chuck it around a race track.

One reviewer describes the ride as "sitting in the middle of a storm of excitement". Another says "the lunacy is back", and foretells a future of Lambo drivers driving around with permanent grins of delight riveted to their faces. Certainly the colour, the power, the noise, the handling and the speed make this the sports car that doesn't get handed back just because you bought it without the permission of the other half.

