

LIKES	DISLIKES
Delightful engine performance, sound and appearance Precise steering and handling Powerful braking A smart looking sedan	Large turning circle Low ground clearance Restricted rear leg room Speedo placement and markings Temporary use spare tyre

The Alfa Romeo brand name is one of the most emotive in the automobile world, with a sporting heritage that stretches way, way back.

The subject of this test – the 156 GTA manual sedan – captures all the excitement, exhilaration and emotion of the Alfa Romeo spirit, perhaps better than any other Alfa model of recent times.

At the heart of the 156 GTA is an engine that is just sensational. This 3.2 litre quad cam V6 provides levels of throttle response and performance that are extremely satisfying, and on top of that it also sounds great and even looks terrific.

To ensure that the 156 GTA gets its considerable power safely and effectively to the ground, the drivetrain, suspension, steering, wheels and tyres, and braking systems have all been extensively revised and upgraded.

When you combine this highly specified mechanical package with the 156 GTA's unique styling cues and the abundance of luxury, safety and convenience equipment that's standard, you end up with a very capable and desirable sports/luxury sedan.

Of course, the 156 GTA experience doesn't come cheaply. It's priced at \$89,950 and if you want metallic paint, that will cost another \$890. A power sunroof is optional for \$2,000.

As mentioned, equipment levels are substantial. On the safety front there are dual front, front side and window airbags, high performance Brembo brakes with anti-lock and electronic brake assist, traction control, front and rear fog lights, rain sensing wipers and Xenon headlights with washers.

Luxury items include climate control air conditioning, a high quality Blaupunkt sound system, electrically adjustable front seats, cruise control, leather trim, an Infocentre readout panel, power operated windows and (heated) exterior mirrors, tilt and telescopic steering wheel, and remote central locking with immobiliser.

Though the 156 GTA does without the overt wings found on many a high performance car (it uses front and rear under-body splitters), there's no mistaking the GTA's sporting intent thanks to its low ride height and its large 17 inch wheels shod with ultra low profile tyres.

Inside, the theme is continued with high bolster sports front seats, aluminium pedals and use of leather and metallic trim.

Accommodation is much the same as in

other 156s; front occupants have plenty of leg room, but there's only enough room for children in the rear if the front seats are set well back.

Boot space is generous; however, the opening isn't that large. The rear seat doesn't fold, just a porthole is provided.

As is usual in Alfa Romeos (and indeed, many European cars) it takes some time to get accustomed to the position and operation of the various controls and switches.

One feature that I did not get used to was the speedometer. With a maximum reading of 300 km/h!, the speedo dial has to cram in the other speed markings, with the result that there are no numbers for 40, 50, 70, 80, 100 or 110 km/h. That means you have to judge your speed against these important limits by lining up the needle with just a line!

It's just as well the 156 GTA has cruise control, because with its prodigious engine performance and eagerness to respond, speed limits are reached with deceptive ease.

The six speed manual transmission has a nice change action and its ratios are well chosen, with no large gaps between. But whilst the 156 GTA's high performance capabilities are best appreciated by extending the engine through the gears, it will also pull happily from quite low engine revs in the higher gears.

With an extensive program of suspension changes, quicker steering and bigger wheels with lower profile tyres, the 156 GTA handles in a very precise manner, with high levels of adhesion.

Two downsides to these changes are a very firm ride and a large turning circle. The GTA also rides quite close to the ground, demanding care when encountering dips or speed humps, otherwise it's likely to scrape.

The Brembo braking system does a superb job of harnessing the GTA's considerable performance, providing powerful emergency braking and excellent resistance to fade.

SUMMARY:

The Alfa Romeo 156 GTA takes the sporting abilities of its stablemates to far greater levels with its delightful high performance engine, its precise sure-footed handling and its superb braking system.

There are penalties, such as the harsher ride, a larger turning circle, lower ground clearance and a substantially higher price tag; however, for dedicated Alfa enthusiasts, the 156 GTA could very well represent a dream come true.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE

Type V6, quad camshaft, 24 valves
 Capacity in litres 3.179
 Induction Electronic fuel injection
 Fuel recommendation PULP
 Claimed max. power 184 kW at 6200 rpm
 Claimed max. torque 300 Nm at 4800 rpm
 Specific power output 57.9 kW/litre

TRANSMISSION

Type Six speed manual
 Driving wheels Front
 Speed per 1000 rpm in top gear 40.0 km/h

WHEELS Alloy, 7.5 x 17 inch
 Tyres Michelin Pilot 225/45 ZR17
 Spare Speed limited, temporary use

STEERING

Type Power assisted rack and pinion
 Turns lock to lock 1.8
 Turning circle (measured) 13.0 metres

DIMENSIONS

Mass 1410 kg
 Length 4430 mm
 Width (incl. mirrors 1980 mm) 1765 mm
 Height 1402 mm
 Ground clearance (measured) 92 mm
 Seating capacity 5
 Fuel tank capacity 63 litres

TOWING Not permitted

NRMA THEFT RATING

Points on 0-120 scale (high score best) tba

WARRANTY Three years, 100,000 km

MANUFACTURED IN Italy

TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION

50 - 80 km/h (in 3rd gear) 3.8 sec
 60 - 100 km/h (in 3rd gear) 4.7 sec
 0 - 80 km/h 5.7 sec
 0 - 100 km/h 8.1 sec
 0 - 400 metres 15.6 sec

FUEL CONSUMPTION (litres/100 km)

Best recorded during testing 10.2
 Worst recorded during testing 14.1
 Average on test 11.4

BRAKING

Distance to stop from 80 km/h ... 27.1 metres

NOISE

Interior at constant 80 km/h 67 dB(A)

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