

[Lifestyle](#) > [Cars & Gear](#)

Driving Toward the Future While Embracing History in Lecce

Italy's Baroque capital is the idyllic backdrop for testing the new Maserati Grecale Folgore, the first all-electric SUV from the famed Italian carmaker.

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Rome may be the Eternal City, but Lecce, positioned on the Salentine Peninsula—the heel of boot-shaped Italy—is a Baroque powerhouse, replete with myriad statues and notable architecture. Yet the urban enclave is more than a monument to the past: In 2023, the city won a prestigious award in recognition of its initiatives to reduce carbon emissions through innovations in transportation. Thus, Lecce served as the perfect venue for Maserati to introduce *Esquire* to the legendary automaker's first all-electric SUV, the Grecale Folgore, on a three-day visit during which we test-drove the new car while getting a taste of the Puglia region.



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Italian Welcome

Part of Lecce's allure is its far-flung location deep in the south of Italy, hundreds of miles from Milan, Venice, and Florence. Traveling from New York City, we caught an overnight flight to Rome, followed by a short-hop flight to Bari and a two-hour drive to Lecce. The trip from the airport offered the perfect introduction to the Mediterranean landscape: breathtaking views of the peninsula, with rolling hills melting into gorgeous seaside towns robust with medieval architecture, and farmland dotted with ancient structures dating back nearly a thousand years.

Lecce itself is a warren of narrow streets and lofting stone buildings, made from a signature type of limestone that's been used in local architecture for centuries. Nearly every house, cathedral, and monument is made from this warm-toned white stone. The typical high ceilings and airy, shaded courtyards have been keeping the city's inhabitants comfortable and cool since the days of the Roman Empire.



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Rooms with a View

Our home base was La Fiermontina Luxury Home, an intimate resort set on a venerable olive grove where each suite has the heroic proportions of an ancient church, with arched stone ceilings that create an airy, hushed ambience. Luxurious furnishings and elegant, evocative sculptures and other artwork inhabit the spaces. All the accommodations offer a private balcony or courtyard—the perfect place to enjoy the sunlight and the warm blue sky of a Lecce afternoon.

The olive grove served as the backdrop for Maserati to unveil the 2025 Grecale Folgore to our small group of journalists. *Folgore* means "lightning bolt" in Italian, and the name was aptly chosen: Based on the company's standard Grecale compact SUV, the Folgore replaces the conventional gasoline engine with all-electric power in the brand's first battery-electric SUV, available in an exclusive matte copper paint color called Rame Folgore. As brand designer Alessandro Silva explained to us, this color evokes the power of electricity and Maserati's audacious ambition to create a 100 percent-electric vehicle that embodies the passion and performance associated with the world-renowned automaker.



City Explorations

After our introduction to the Grecale Folgore, we set out on a walking tour of the cobblestoned streets of Lecce. Dating to 1695, the magnificent Basilica di Santa Croce drips with ornate facades featuring hand-carved depictions of animals, flowers, and religious figures. Even older is Lecce Cathedral, first constructed in 1144 and restored in 1659 with a lavishly decorated bell tower that, on clear days, offers a view over the Adriatic Sea to the mountains of Albania to the east.



LORENZO MARCINNO



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Our dinner this evening was at the historic **Palazzo Bozzi Corso**, an 18th-century palace now operated by La Fiermontina. The palace is home to an impressive modern collection of art, of which we got a private viewing.

The Drive

The next morning, after a breakfast of fresh local fish and fruits and, of course, lots of espresso at La Fiermontina's Zephyr restaurant, our group formed a convoy to sample the Grecale Folgore on the gorgeous country roads.

With two motors providing a total of 550 horsepower, the Grecale Folgore lives up to that lightning bolt that inspired its name. Maserati has always been known for sporty, nimble vehicles, and this one proves that an all-electric machine can provide an exhilarating ride. A dial on the steering wheel selects one of four drive modes: Max Range, which is tuned for efficient driving; GT, which prioritizes comfort for all-day journeys; Sport, which harnesses the power of dual-motor all-wheel drive for thrilling acceleration; and Off-Road, which raises the height-adjustable suspension for sure-footed driving on rough terrain.



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On the fast, flowing highways of southern Italy, GT mode provided a plush, comfortable ride. The Grecale Folgore is nearly silent at speed, but rocket-like acceleration is just a toe-tap away. Unlike with a gasoline-powered vehicle, there's no waiting for the transmission to downshift or the engine to rev up—the all-electric Maserati blasts away on an instantaneous wave of power the instant you squeeze the accelerator.

We soon eased off the highway onto the country roads of the Adriatic coast, where we had the chance to sample Sport mode in all its capacity. Any vehicle that wears Maserati's trident badge is required to provide a scintillating experience on a curvy country road, and we're happy to report that the Grecale Folgore lives up to the legend. In Sport, the air-adjustable suspension firms up, allowing this family-size SUV to carve through corners with the controlled poise of a sports car. The steering is firm and precise, offering just the right amount of resistance, and the brakes felt confident every time we had to slow down for a tight turn or a traffic circle in the heart of a small seaside town. Paddles on either side of the steering wheel allow you to choose between four levels of regenerative braking on the fly: On a long downhill stretch, a few extra clicks allowed us to precisely control our speed, the car using its momentum all the while to generate extra charging power to boost the battery. Back on level ground, we clicked down to the lowest regen setting, coasting smoothly up to red lights and intersections.



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The interior, meanwhile, illustrates how luxury and environmentalism can coexist in one vehicle. Unique to the Grecale Folgore is its Econyl upholstery, made from recycled nylon fishing nets that turn ocean waste into virgin-quality material that's comfortable, durable, and pleasing to the eye. The perforated pattern on the seats is inspired by the gesture of a prima ballerina, while the texture of the material evokes athletic clothing, signifying performance. Carbon-copper accents highlight the dashboard, center console, and door panels, bringing the color theme of the signature body paint and Folgore-specific badges inside as well. And whether you're looking at the 12.3-inch central touchscreen display, the 8.8-inch driver's digital instrument panel, or the head-up display projected on the windshield, you'll always have all vital information at the ready.



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A Refueling

After our morning of serene highway driving and afternoon chasing thrills on Italian country roads, we stopped for coffee and pastries at [Menamè Tricase Porto](#), a breezy café overlooking the sea near the southernmost tip of the Salentine Peninsula. Here we sampled

pasticciotto, a classic pastry of the Puglia region with a dense, egg-washed golden-brown crust and a light custard filling, best enjoyed warm from the oven—accompanied by espresso, naturally. With the afternoon sun casting long shadows over the port of Tricase and a brisk salty breeze coming off the water, this was the ideal way to recharge our batteries—but the Grecale Folgore's battery, capable of driving more than 300 miles on a charge, for its part had plenty of juice left to get us home.

We returned to La Fiermontina for a quick rest, and then our hosts whisked us off to a luxurious dinner at **Gimmi** in Lecce. Housed inside a Dominican monastery built in 1442, the venue expertly melds history and contemporary influences to create an elegant, timeless dining experience. **Executive chef Donato Episcopo** has crafted a menu that pays tribute to the historic cuisine of Lecce while also drawing on global influences. For dessert, we enjoyed “ba-ba-ba”: the traditional rum-soaked sponge cake called babà al rum combined with bananas and beetroot sorbet, in a perfect mix of sweet and earthy flavors.

In the end, we found both Lecce and the Grecale Folgore to be quite similar, each an ideal melange of history and future, pairing quiet, restful luxury with the passionate pursuit of joy. The all-electric SUV is a zero-emissions way to taste *la dolce vita* of the Salentine Peninsula—no matter where in the world the road may be taking you.

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