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Our friends have a dilemma. They moved from Burlington to Owen Sound 12 years ago and now they've had enough of farm fresh living and want to move back. Except they can't afford it. Burlington real estate prices are high as the Northern Lights, and barely a bargain can be found in Hamilton.

They already knew this when they came to visit, but we added some more chapters to the sorry tale when we took them on an updated real estate tour.

For our big bucks road trip we chose an appropriate cara \$143,000 Maserati Quattroporte SQ4. May as well feel rich on the way to the poorhouse.

Maserati just put their cars on a press fleet in Ontario for automotive journalist's to test. Prior to that we have had to love them from afar. A surprising number of Maserati's troll the streets of Hamilton. They usually look great and sound even better.

The Quattroporte I tested is a pretty big hunk of salami, full figured for sure, and lovely to look at. Appropriate snarl drifted along its path from the 3.0-litre twin-turbo V6. The 8-speed automatic transmission glides through gear changes, and the 404 horsepower is what's expected in any luxury sedan now, but a bit on the stingy side compared to the competition.

Our first bit of real estate reconnaissance took place close to home. The startling picture of Hamilton's real estate rise is shocking for out-of-towners used to Hamilton the Olde. We took our friends past architect Bill Curran's inventive townhouse project in the North End. Three under construction units will range in price from \$700,000

to \$1.2 million when finished. They are like nothing else in the North End-or much of Hamilton for that matter, and not a moldy piece of fake Victorian bric-a-brac can be found on their facades.

Perhaps the creators of the Quattroporte interior could have ditched some of their Italian opera house decor for a more modern approach to design. Yes the two-tone seats are sumptuous, but the seamstresses went a little Pavarotti on the grey leather inserts with the dizzy geometric stitching patterns.

On the road again, we blaze past the new condos under construction on Barton Street West. The land where Harbour West Towns rise, was vacant for years. Dawn Victoria Homes put up a sales centre, opened the doors, and sold most of the units in a single day. The price is right hovering around \$300,000, and has attracted people I'm sure never thought they would live on Barton Street West.

Our friends would like to sell their place in The Sound, and keep a bit of money in their pockets, but living in the GTHA might be off the table.

We head toward Grimsby and gee I want to love the Maserati but I just can't. The Quattroporte shows its schizoid shortcomings. Maserati is owned by Fiat Chrysler Automobiles. Sleuths like to pick out the bits on Maserati interiors that came from the greasy Chrysler parts bin. Knobs small and crude, the lame paddle shifters and turn signal stalks mounted in an awkward spot.

Out in vineyard land we look at new home subdivisions where prices start at \$600,000, and then twirl in to the old Foran's Marina in Grimsby where resale homes at Mariner Bay Estates are a million plus.

Simcoe is suddenly looking good. Driving on quiet country roads the Maserati exhibits its sporty pedigree with deft handling and sharp steering. But if you are looking for cool infotainment, and gobs of driving nannies, then the Quattroporte is almost turn of the century. Compared to an equivalent Mercedes, BMW or Audi the offerings on the Maserati are meager.

We like a development that overlooks the Norfolk Golf and Country Club, but there's nothing for sale. Paris is a possibility and cozy Cambridge, and Brantford is full of good surprises. But we're running out of gas, and so is the Quattroporte!; it's averaging 13.6 L/100 km.

So the Quattroporte has gone back to its stable, and our friends have gone back to Owen Sound. Real estate is increasingly for rich guys and so is the Maserati, Chrysler bits and all.