

## Still Feels Italian

### Tonale is a Small Luxury SUV with Rare Character and Bite

By Derek Price

CARGAZING.COM

It takes about two stop signs to understand the Tonale's best trick. The brake pedal is immediate, firm and unusually satisfying, and that alone gives this Alfa Romeo a personality most small SUVs never bother to develop.

That character runs through the whole vehicle. The 2026 Tonale uses a turbocharged 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine making 268 horsepower and 295 pound-feet of torque, paired with a nine-speed automatic and standard all-wheel drive.

On paper, that sounds like a familiar modern crossover formula. On the road, it feels more alert and more eager than the norm, which is exactly what an Alfa Romeo is supposed to do.

What impressed me most over a week was how different it felt from the usual herd of compact utilities. Even among vehicles that promise some sort of sportiness, the Tonale has a sharper, more distinct personality.

The steering is quick, the responses are immediate and the brakes in particular feel like a deliberate act of engineering rather than a part-bin afterthought.

It also looks the part. The Tonale is pretty in a way most crossovers are not,



The new Alfa Romeo Tonale stands out with crisp proportions, signature front-end styling and a shape that feels more elegant than most compact crossovers.

with a face and stance that still carry some of Alfa Romeo's old glamour. I would not call it a design bombshell, though.

It is handsome, polished and clearly more stylish than most rivals, but I still found myself wishing Alfa had pushed harder into the unusual. The brand's best cars have always had a bit of theater to them, and the Tonale, while attractive, plays things slightly safer than I would like.

Inside, the Sport Speciale does a good job selling the premium idea. The trim adds exclusive 20-inch wheels, a black-and-pearl

Alcantara interior and distinctive ambient lighting, while the Tonale lineup also carries a 12.3-inch digital cluster and a 10.25-inch center display.

Material quality is mostly convincing, though some pieces still remind you this is a compact crossover built within a large corporate family, not a hand-finished Italian exotic. Cargo space is decent rather than generous, with 27 cubic feet behind the rear seat and 54.7 cubic feet with the seats folded.

That brings us to the awkward part: price. At \$48,290 as tested, this

Tonale is flirting with territory where buyers start expecting either more prestige, more space or more obvious performance.

My tester mostly felt like a premium product, but the pricing still strikes me as ambitious. That feeling gets sharper when you remember a Dodge Hornet GT starts at \$29,995 and posts the same 268 horsepower, 295 pound-feet and 21/29 mpg ratings.

The Alfa looks better, feels more special and carries a more interesting badge, but it is fair to question how much that extra character is worth.

In the end, the Tonale works best for a buyer who wants crossover practicality without accepting crossover anonymity.

That is the real appeal here. It looks different, feels different and drives with more personality than this segment usually allows. I would still argue the sweeter deal is lower in the lineup, where the Alfa experience comes with less financial strain.

But even in loaded Sport Speciale form, the Tonale offers something valuable and increasingly rare: a small SUV with an actual point of view.

#### AT A GLANCE

##### WHAT WAS TESTED?

2026 Alfa Romeo Tonale Sport Speciale AWD (\$41,995). Options: Premium paint (\$695), active assist package (\$1,250), Harmon Kardon premium audio (\$750), active suspension (\$350). Price as tested (including \$3,250 destination charge): \$48,290

##### BY THE NUMBERS

Wheelbase: 103.8 in.  
Length: 178.3 in.  
Width: 72.4 in.  
Height: 63.2 in.  
Engine: 2.0-liter turbocharged I-4 (268 hp, 295 lb.-ft.)  
Transmission: Nine-speed automatic  
MPG: 21 city, 29 highway

##### RATINGS

Style: 9  
Performance: 8  
Price: 5  
Handling: 8  
Ride: 6  
Comfort: 7  
Quality: 7  
Overall: 8

##### WHY BUY IT?

The Tonale gives compact-crossover buyers something most rivals cannot: a real sense of style and a genuinely distinctive driving feel.

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It also looks the part. The Tonale is pretty in a way most crossovers are not, with a face and stance that still carry some of Alfa Romeo's old glamour. I would not call it a design bombshell, though.



Inside, the Tonale combines a driver-focused layout, modern digital displays and just enough Italian flair to keep the cabin from feeling ordinary.

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#### A CLOSER LOOK



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FACTS, FIGURES AND RATINGS

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