

New cars, technical highlights, even a couple of Ferraris

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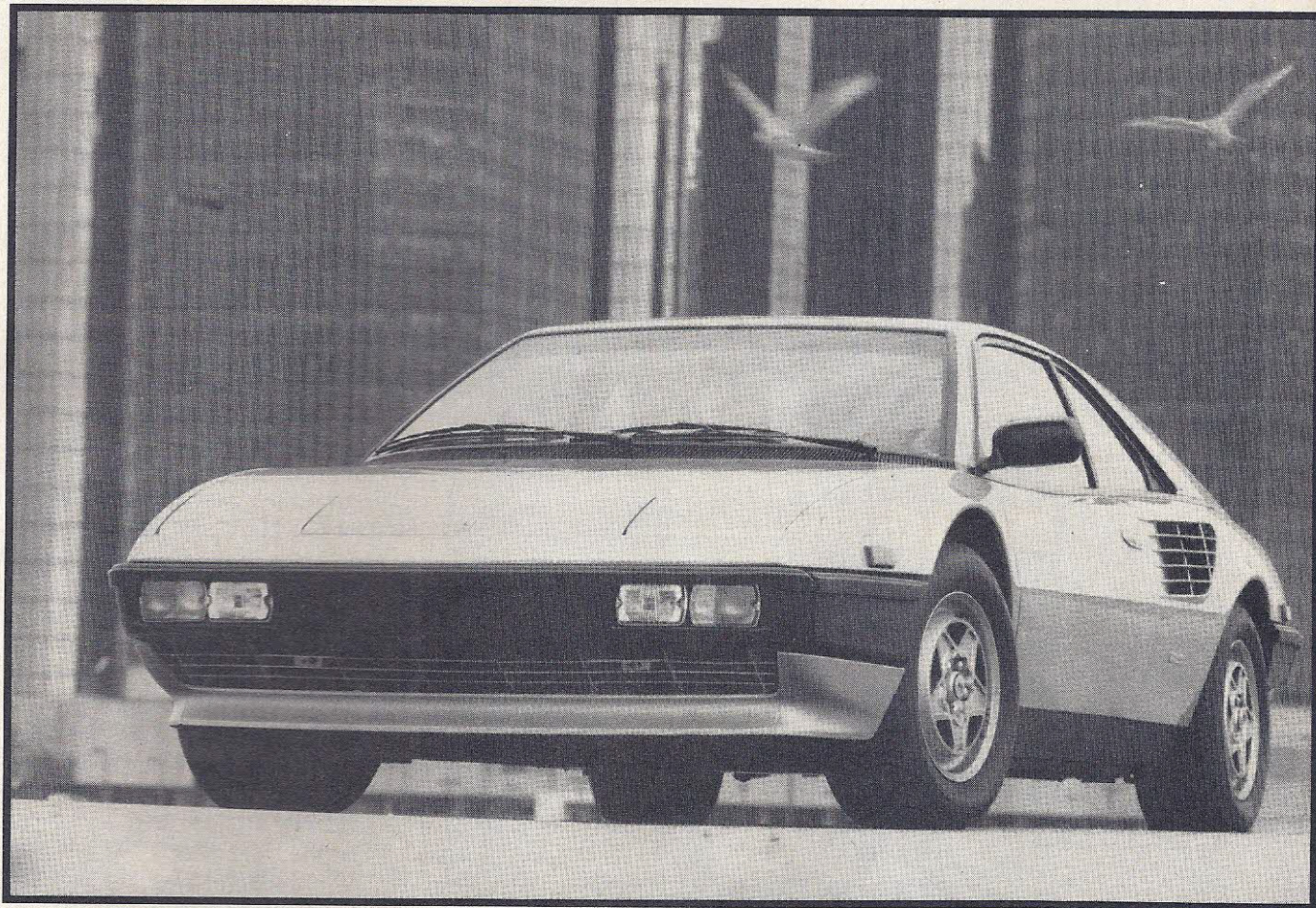
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Ferrari Mondial 8

Is there life after rip and snort?

BY PATRICK BEDARD

• It must be hell trying to design new Ferraris. Over the years the legend has thickened, becoming a Jell-O inhibiting every stroke of the pen, every flight of the imagination. How can a new model live up to expectations? Too many twelve-cylinders have shrieked down the autostrada pumping too much adrenalin along the way. Too many road testers have fired too many salvos of hyperbole. For years we car critics have reviewed the world's finest sporting cars, pronounced them nice, even exciting, but not Ferraris. Ferrari was always atop the pedestal, and that pedestal was always being jacked up a bit each year. Now the altitude is such that even new Ferraris can't measure up. A Ferrari owner of our acquaintance drove the Mondial 8 a few miles and judged it nice, but definitely not a Ferrari.

So how are we to decide the truth of

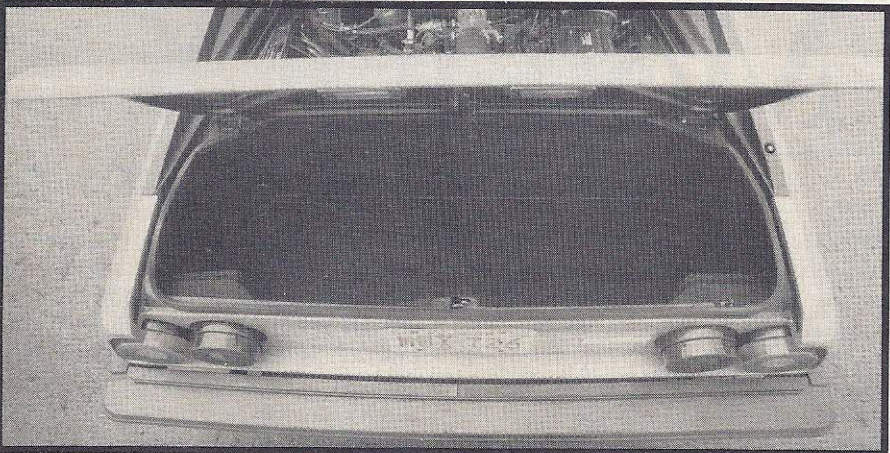
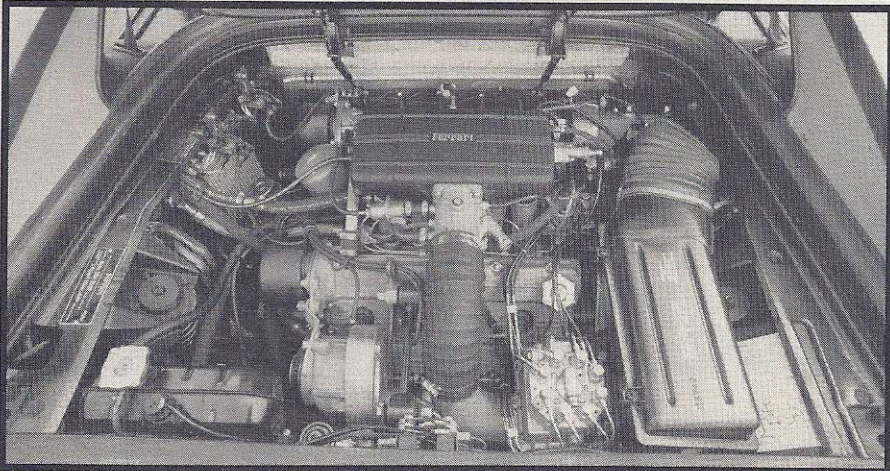
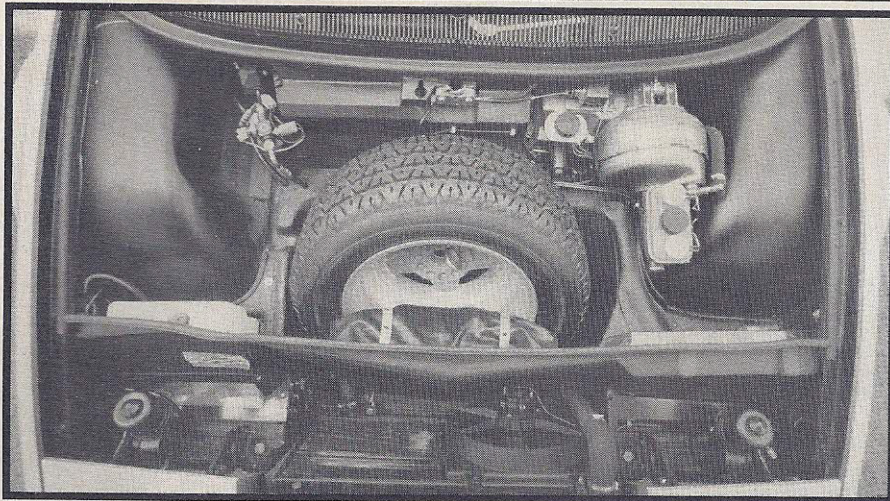
this latest product of Maranello—by measuring its stifled snorts and screams against the legend (in which case it will inevitably fall short) or by holding it up to the sporting requirements of the Eighties? Were it of any other brand, we would unhesitatingly do the latter. But with a Ferrari, the legend always lurks. Perhaps, by starting with the basics, some appropriate yardstick may evolve.

The Mondial 8 is a transverse V-8 mid-engined coupe with an upholstered section in back that appears to be a rear seat. So you would expect this to be a two-plus-two. And you would be wrong. Ferrari has built models in the past officially designated two-plus-twos, and they always had sufficient leg and head room back there to accommodate the occasional occupant of adult dimensions, but only Venus de Milos need apply for the rear compartment of this car.

Such a configuration has precedent in the 308GT4 that was discontinued two years ago, so the Mondial 8 must be accepted as consistent with past Ferrari practice. Still, it is a dumb way to build a car—okay in a hatchback where the trunk space can be extended forward by folding the seats, but essentially useless in a mid-engined design.

The Mondial 8 is also a rather unattractive lump. Pininfarina is known for soft shapes that approach the zaftig, but this one just came out vague. Except in the side view, that is, where air-intake grilles the size of storm sewers ruin even the fundamental blandness. Apart from the Lusso Berlinetta, the 1964 GTO, and the current 308s, Ferraris have always looked sort of *ehhhh*—and the Mondial 8 continues the tradition. We therefore cannot deny its Ferrarihood on this count either.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON KILEY

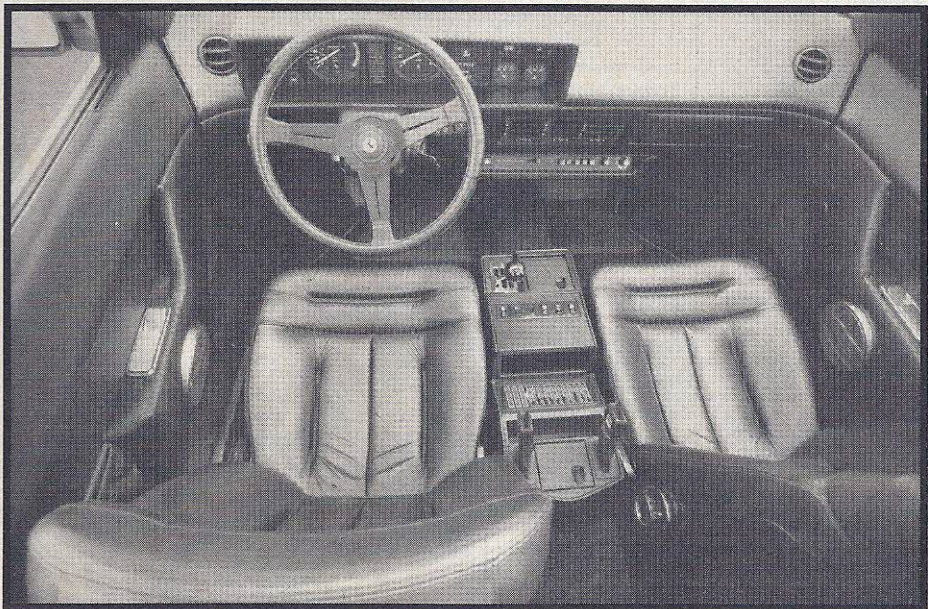
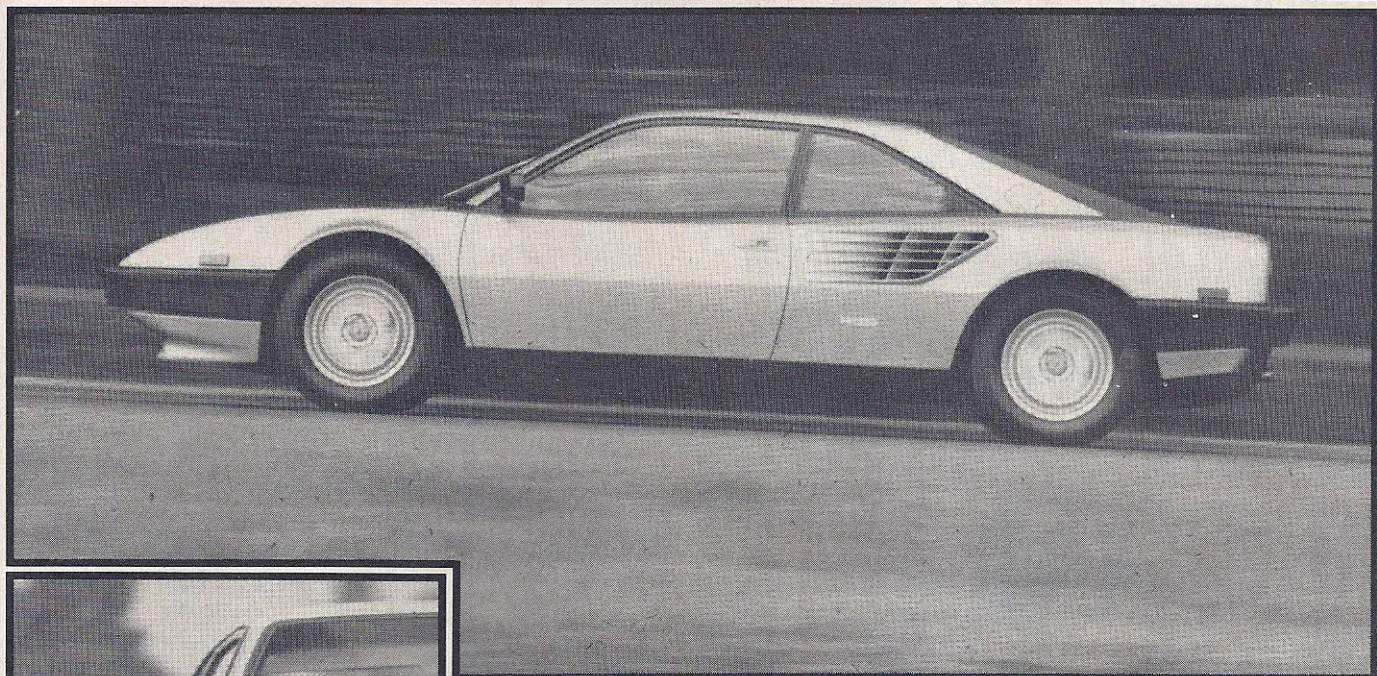


But what about the way it drives? Objectively, Ferraris have always been a pain in the butt in this regard, a quality appreciated only by those who thought the very definition of a man's car was that nobody else could even get it out of the driveway. Ferraris have been uniformly balky of shift, stiff of clutch, and hard of steering for as long as anybody can remember. Here the Mondial 8 may not be a true-red Ferrari. Your sister could drive it. The steering is not bad, the brakes no sweat, the clutch so gradual in action that nobody would ever kill the engine and so moderate in effort that there should be no complaints. The five-speed shifter is still genuine Ferrari, however—maybe not quite as hard to stir as some past models, but a purebred for notchiness. No other brand has so many traps in the pattern waiting to catch the lever.

But maybe it's time to stop beating around the bush. People buy Ferraris neither for the mazelike qualities of the shifter nor for the hospitality of the back seat. Instead, they seek the essential prancing-horse rip and snort, and if the Mondial 8 can deliver that, no question, it's a Ferrari.

Here we may be in trouble. The rip is subdued—a velvet purr, more song than shriek, that sweetly changes pitch as the engine climbs through its broad rev range. It's a splendid sound, but it soothes rather than incites to riot. That's not very Ferrari.

And, sadly, there is no snort whatsoever. The Mondial 8 will barely get out of its own way, or, more correctly, out of the way of other Ferraris. It's the slowest one in memory. Weight is largely the cause. The Mondial 8 shares the same Bosch K-Jetronic-injected three-liter V-8 with the GTBi and GTSi, but the car weighs in at 3560 pounds, 280 more than the GTBi that we tested in October 1980. This extra mass burdens it down to the point of being dog meat for the turbocharged Porsche 924 and



Datsun 280-ZX. A Ferrari that slow is certainly an enigma and maybe even a contradiction in terms.

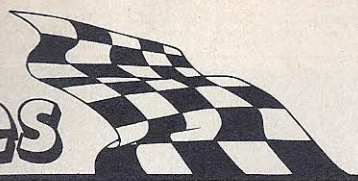
It's not much fun to drive either. The Mondial 8 doesn't make you giggle, doesn't goad you into trying some foolish feats of antigravity. Instead, it suggests serious grand-touring transportation. It whispers, "C'mon, let's head for the coast." And it's not kidding. You could go anywhere in this car; it wouldn't fry your nerves in the manner of past Ferraris. No zingy noises, no jouncy ride, no hang-onto-the-wheel-with-both-hands-lest-it-get-away-from-you feeling. Just get in and go. How much more un-Ferrari could it be?

You may think, since the Mondial's back seat is worthless, that it ends up merely a slower and uglier GTBi. Actually, the two are much different. The GTBi is a full-time sportster. It'll never



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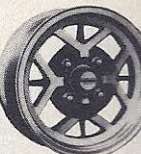
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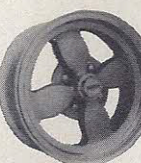
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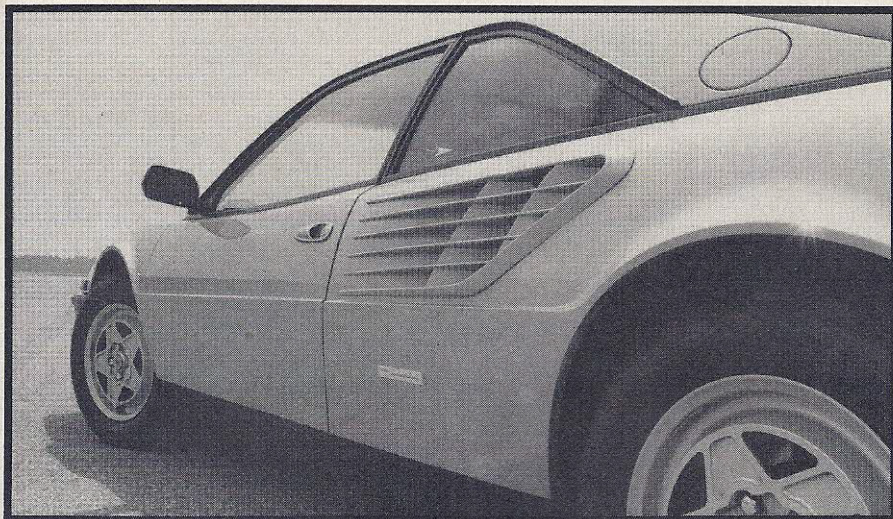
MONDIAL

let you forget. Its roof presses down against your forehead, the door against your elbow, the console against your thigh—it's tight. And noisy. And demanding. The Mondial, in contrast, is relatively roomy. The front wheel arch takes a bite out of the spot the driver would like to have for his left leg, but that's the only encroachment.

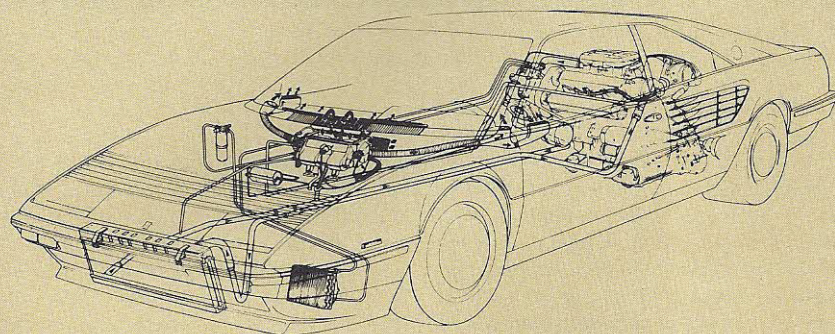
The Mondial is also more relaxing. It doesn't have the low cowl of the GTBi (or the old GT4), so you can't see the road streaming directly under the nose. You are forced to take a longer view, and that's less dynamic, less stimulating. The suspension doesn't batter you either. The Michelin TRX tires are notably resilient, and the shocks have been calibrated to merely damp ride motions rather than prevent them. Except for some expansion-joint *hawop*, the ride is very pleasant. Nor does the Mondial make you keep your guard up. It doesn't kick back through the steering like the 308s. You may have noticed that the Mondial's wheels have an uncommon amount of "inset" to reduce the scrub radius. This is a new idea at Ferrari, and it takes much of the twitch out of the steering.

You add all of this up—the twitchless steering, the elbowroom, the friendly (if not quiet) acoustics, the low-effort controls, the civilized ride—and you find a pretty nice sports car, not a Ferrari in the traditional sense, but not bad either. The real question at this point is, Are there enough drivers in the Eighties who would buy a real Ferrari if it were available? It's easy for all of us sitting around wondering how we're going to cover the next Visa-card bill to say yes. But those who make their livings in the car business have noticed that by far the majority of those with resources to buy a Ferrari go for a Mercedes 450SL or SLC instead. Fiat, which now pulls the strings at Ferrari, is in the business of making money (or at least of trying to), and it's very tempting to dilute the Ferrari rip and snort in favor of some proven-in-the-market M-B civilization. We even hear oblique references in that direction from Fiat of North America, which imports Ferrari.

It sounds sacrilegious. Be assured that the Mondial is still a whole lot more Ferrari than it is Mercedes, but at the same time there is a conspicuous drift away from the joyfully mechanical persona that made up the traditional Ferrari. It shows up particularly in the use of electronics and electrics—maybe we

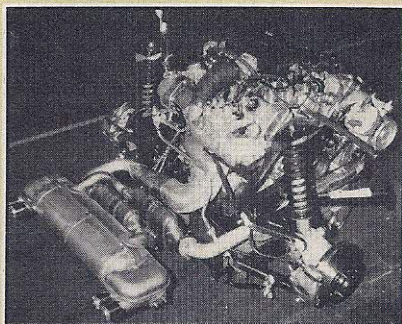


Technical Highlights



• Fiat's influence on Ferrari hasn't produced a wealth of horsepower as yet, but the relationship has at least borne a few practical improvements. Every Ferrari body is now dipped in an electrophoretic rustproofing solution. Zincrometal is used in particularly vulnerable areas of the coachwork for corrosion resistance. For a final layer of protection, every car is undercoated with abrasion-resistant PVC.

Access to Fiat's engineering resources has encouraged the use of ribbed and boxed steel stampings in the body structure, although the basic construction is still a relatively crude steel-tubing skeleton fleshed out with panels of steel, aluminum, and fiberglass. Electronics, at long last, have also penetrated the Ferrari works: Marelli Digiplex ignition is standard equipment, providing eight different spark-advance curves to better suit the needs of the double-overhead-cam V-8 engine, with the added advantage of practically no maintenance. The Mondial also introduces an electronic "check control monitor" that scrutinizes various liquid levels and lighting systems for proper operation every time the engine is fired up. An inductive pickup in the transaxle generates an electrical signal that drives the Mondial's speedometer. Finally, the in-



strument panel boasts a combination electronic stopwatch and clock.

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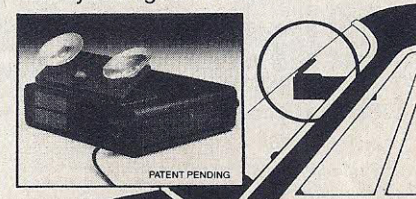
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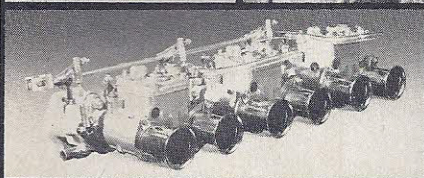
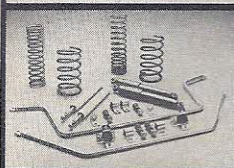
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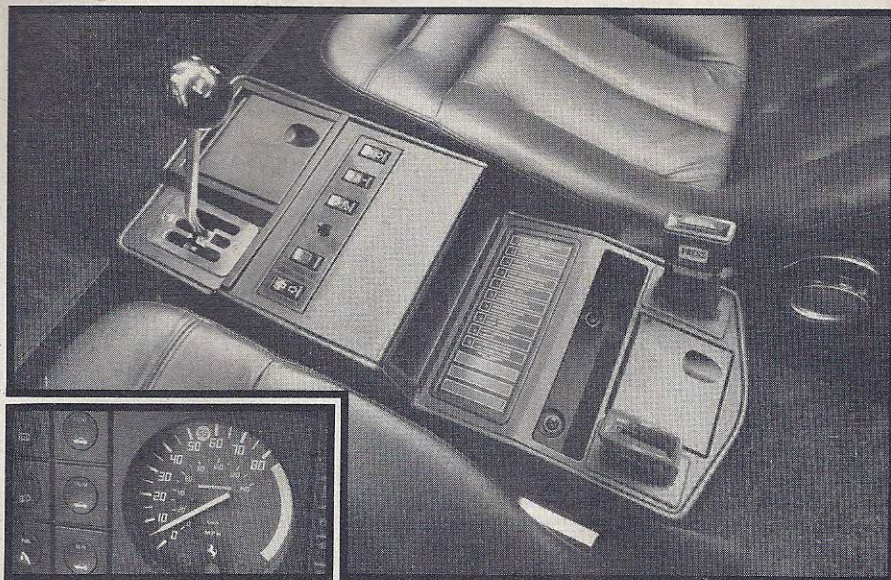
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MONDIAL



COUNTERPOINT

• This Mondial has plunged me into a dilemma from which I see no escape. All at once, I think it's terrific *and* that I can't stand it. Every time it grows on me I discover something about it that's unforgivable. Almost.

Everything about the Mondial, from its sleek sheetmetal to the magnificent wowl of its V-8, sets you up, tells you it's going to be some kinda ride. But the most barbaric, proletarian Trans Am will suck the headlights out of this chic flyer at any stoplight you choose. "Emasculated" is the word that comes to mind.

But even so, it's a ball to barrel around in—the kind of car that talks to you, eggs you on. I went too fast too often and loved every minute of it.

Then again, here is a megabuck driver's car that you have to sit sidesaddle in, and that you can't even heel-and-toe. But, God, every time you turn the Mondial down a new street, it's an ego-stroking grand entrance.

I could go back and forth like this forever. It's probably just as well that most of the people who can actually afford a Mondial won't care much about how it runs, just that it makes them look so good.

—Rich Ceppos

There are but two things wrong with the Mondial: somebody in Italy slipped on the wrong nameplate and the wrong price tag. If the truth were known, the Mondial is a Fiat. It runs like a Fiat, handles like a Fiat, it even has an interior full of Fiat parts. There is no denying that it is the product of Fiat thinking. The Mondial would make a terrific replacement for the Fiat 124 Sport Coupe that left our midst several years ago. The 124SC was never replaced, and I've always wondered why. Now I know. In Ferrari's defense, the

Mondial does reflect progress. The engine sounds as if it's in the car behind you instead of in the right front seat. Conventionally built human beings now come close to a proper match-up with the steering wheel and the pedals. The ride is perfect. And the air conditioning works. With a little work on the torque curve, the throttle linkage, the shift linkage, the rear passenger compartment, the seats, the interior decor, and the console, Fiat—or Ferrari, if you prefer—could make a real machine of the Mondial. Right now, it's a 10-grand car hiding behind a 68-grand nameplate.

—Don Sherman

Ferrari should include a lifetime supply of hoi-polloi repellent with this new Mondial. Although initially it's ambrosia for one's ego to encounter a crowd of gawkers every time you park on the street, you soon just want to get into the car and drive off without answering questions about what it is, how much it is, and how fast it will go.

Particularly that last question, because after hearing that it's a 68-grand Ferrari, people are unmoved by a 138-mph top speed and acceleration figures that can be bettered by a good-running RX-7. In other aspects the Mondial is very civilized for a car wearing the prancing horse. Its road manners are reassuring; its driving position, although it appears to be Classic Italian, is really livable; the rear seat can accommodate a pair of supple adults for short periods; and the general level of quality and solidity marks a new high for Ferrari. But Ferraris are supposed to be fast, first and foremost. When they're not, like this Mondial, the patina of civilization is a very inadequate substitute, and their whole reason for existence falls into doubt.

—Csaba Csere



should call it electricks—in the interior. Somebody decided that remote trunk releases are nifty, so the Mondial has an array of solenoid buttons on the dash to open the front hood, the engine cover, the trunk, and even the gas-filler door. This is harmless fun, but it gets a bit silly when applied to the glove box, the door of which is neatly devoid of any latch—the effect is spoiled by a big black button poking out below the dash that remotely releases the door from a full six inches away. The “computer” early-warning system, which tells of trouble with *liquido raffredd.* or *lavacristallo* or any of eight other possible menaces, is similarly misguided, because the signal lights are on the tunnel down by your hip, where you’d never see them until the problem became apparent anyway. These gimmicks are certainly typical of cars of the Eighties. Maybe we should even be reassured that Ferrari is less adept at them than other automakers; maybe this is proof that Ferrari has not wholeheartedly embraced electricks.

In any case, Ferrari spokesmen anticipate some redesign of the interior before full-scale production begins for American models. The console will be less conspicuously plastic, the air-conditioning controls below the dash will be relocated, and the brow over the instrument cluster will be reangled. This latter will be a mixed blessing. Right now it is both flat and level, the perfect place to clamp your radar detector. But the semigloss vinyl surface also reflects a shiny spot onto the windshield right where you’re supposed to be looking at the road, so some alteration would be appreciated.

But enough of this minutia. Returning to the original question, is the Mondial 8 truly a Ferrari? We say yes, albeit the most democratic one ever built. Anyone with the price of admission can drive it. Maybe that’s not the way Ferrari cars were built in the past, but this is the Eighties and things are different. For one thing, people aren’t buying anachronisms.

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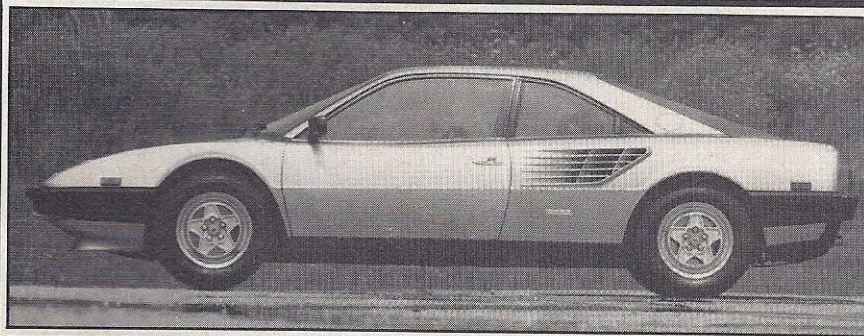
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Vehicle type: mid-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 4-passenger, 2-door sedan

Price as tested: \$68,000 (estimated)

Options on test car: metallic silver paint, \$780.

ENGINE

Type V-8, aluminum block and heads
Bore x stroke 3.19 x 2.80 in, 81 x 71 mm
Displacement 179 cu in, 2927 cc
Compression ratio 8.8:1
Fuel system Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection
Emissions controls two 3-way catalytic converters, feedback fuel-air-ratio control, EGR, auxiliary air pump
Valve gear belt-driven double overhead cams
Power (SAE net) 205 bhp @ 6600 rpm
Torque (SAE net) 181 lbs-ft @ 5000 rpm
Redline 7700 rpm

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission 5-speed
Final-drive ratio 3.71:1
Gear Ratio Mph/1000 rpm Max. test speed
I 3.59 5.7 44 mph (7700 rpm)
II 2.35 8.7 67 mph (7700 rpm)
III 1.69 12.1 93 mph (7700 rpm)
IV 1.24 16.4 126 mph (7700 rpm)
V 0.95 21.5 138 mph (6400 rpm)

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase 104.3 in
Track, F/R 58.9/59.7 in
Length 180.3 in
Width 70.5 in
Height 49.2 in
Ground clearance 4.9 in

Curb weight 3560 lbs
Weight distribution, F/R 42.1/57.9%
Fuel capacity 22.2 gal

CHASSIS/BODY

Type unit construction
Body material welded steel and aluminum stampings

INTERIOR

SAE volume, front seat 48 cu ft
rear seat 27 cu ft
trunk space 3 cu ft
Front seats bucket
Recliner type infinitely adjustable
General comfort poor fair **good** excellent
Fore-and-aft support poor fair **good** excellent
Lateral support poor fair **good** excellent

SUSPENSION

F unequal-length control arms, coil springs, anti-sway bar
R unequal-length control arms, coil springs, anti-sway bar

STEERING

Type rack-and-pinion
Turns lock-to-lock 3.4
Turning circle curb-to-curb 39.4 ft

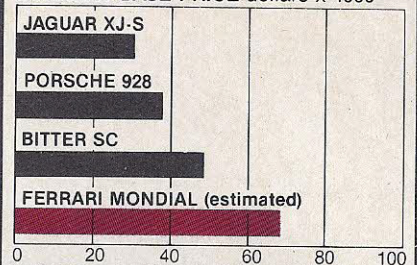
BRAKES

F 11.4 x 0.8-in vented disc
R 11.7 x 0.8-in vented disc
Power assist vacuum

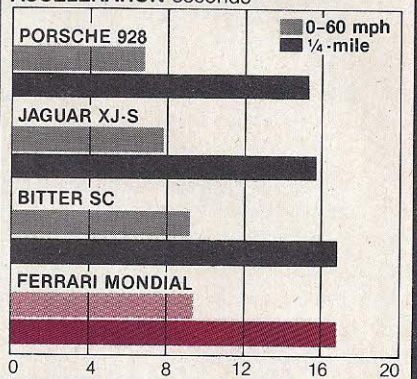
WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size 390 x 180mm, 15.4 x 7.1 in
Wheel type cast aluminum
Tire make and size Michelin TRX, 240/55VR-390
Test inflation pressures, F/R 35/39 psi

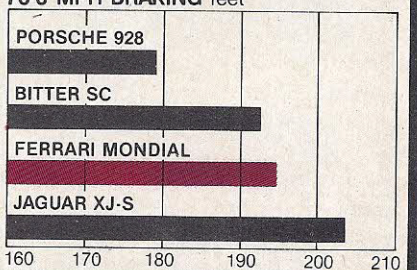
CURRENT BASE PRICE dollars x 1000



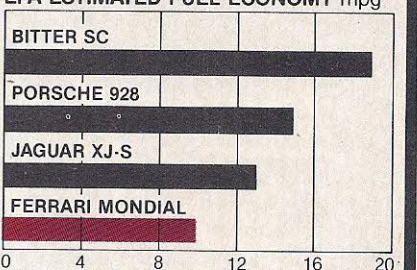
ACCELERATION seconds



70-0 MPH BRAKING feet



EPA ESTIMATED FUEL ECONOMY mpg



Car and Driver Test Results

ACCELERATION

Seconds
Zero to 30 mph 3.1
40 mph 4.6
50 mph 7.1
60 mph 9.3
70 mph 12.9
80 mph 16.0
90 mph 21.7
100 mph 27.8
110 mph 37.7
Top-gear passing time, 30-50 mph 13.1
50-70 mph 11.8
Standing 1/4-mile 16.9 sec @ 83 mph
Top speed 138 mph

BRAKING

70-0 mph @ impending lockup 195 ft
Modulation poor fair **good** excellent
Fade none moderate heavy
Front-rear balance poor fair **good**

HANDLING

Roadholding, 282-ft-dia skidpad 0.79 g
Understeer minimal moderate excessive

COAST-DOWN MEASUREMENTS

Road horsepower @ 50 mph 15.5 hp
Friction and tire losses @ 50 mph 8.0 hp
Aerodynamic drag @ 50 mph 7.5 hp

FUEL ECONOMY

EPA city driving 10 mpg
EPA highway driving 18 mpg
EPA combined driving 13 mpg
C/D observed fuel economy 14 mpg

INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL

Idle 71 dBA
Full-throttle acceleration 94 dBA
70-mph cruising 77 dBA
70-mph coasting 75 dBA

INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL dBA

