

# FERRARI

The future  
begins in its  
engine bay.

# MONDIAL

Maranello—

**F**errari prices are going through the roof. Testarossas fetch premiums for early delivery, F40s change hands for about \$800,000, the last 412i's command ridiculous sums, and even the humble 328GTBs and GTSs are worth a small fortune now that their production is about to end. The only model that has remained virtually unaffected by the prancing-horse craze is the Mondial. Despite its virtues—good space utilization, elegant design, and well-balanced handling, to name only a few—*Ferraristi* have never been too fond of the practical two-plus-two. It is still too early to tell whether the most recent changes made to the body, the cabin, and the driveline will turn the wallflower into a commercial success. But our first test drive made it clear that the notoriously underrated Mondial is now the best-value-for-money Ferrari model—as well as a wonderful driving machine.

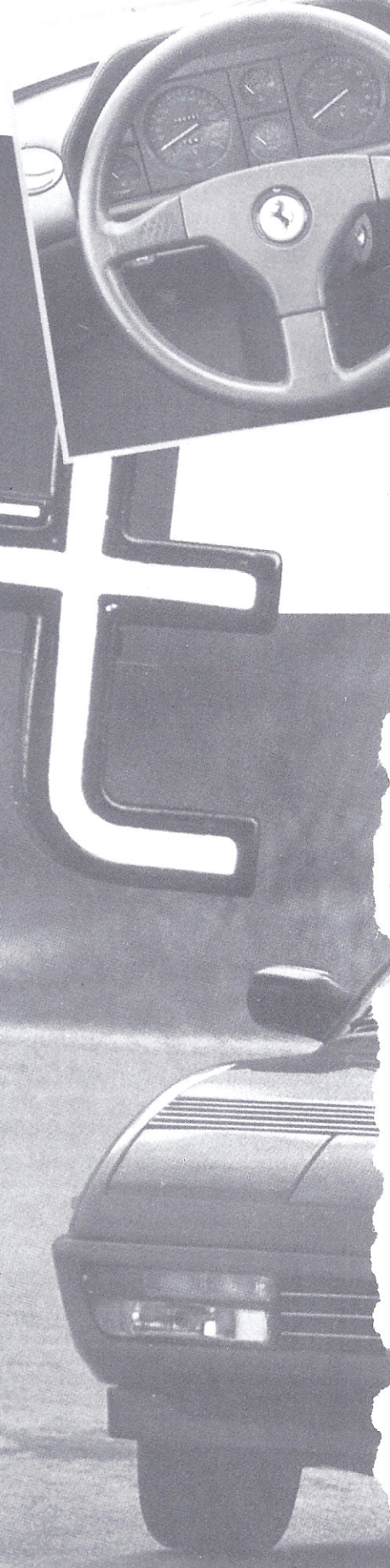
The “t” in the new model designation stands for transverse, despite the fact that the engine is now mounted north to south instead of east to west. We asked senior project engineer Franco Cimatti for an explanation. “You are right—the V-8 is installed longitudinally,” says Cimatti, who acquired his neat West Coast accent during a seven-year stay in the United States. “But the placement of the transmission has

changed from in-line to transverse. This configuration offers a variety of advantages. Among them are a lower center of gravity for improved handling, even exhaust temperatures on both cylinder banks for superior performance, cleaner emissions, and better reliability, as well as easier access for servicing.”

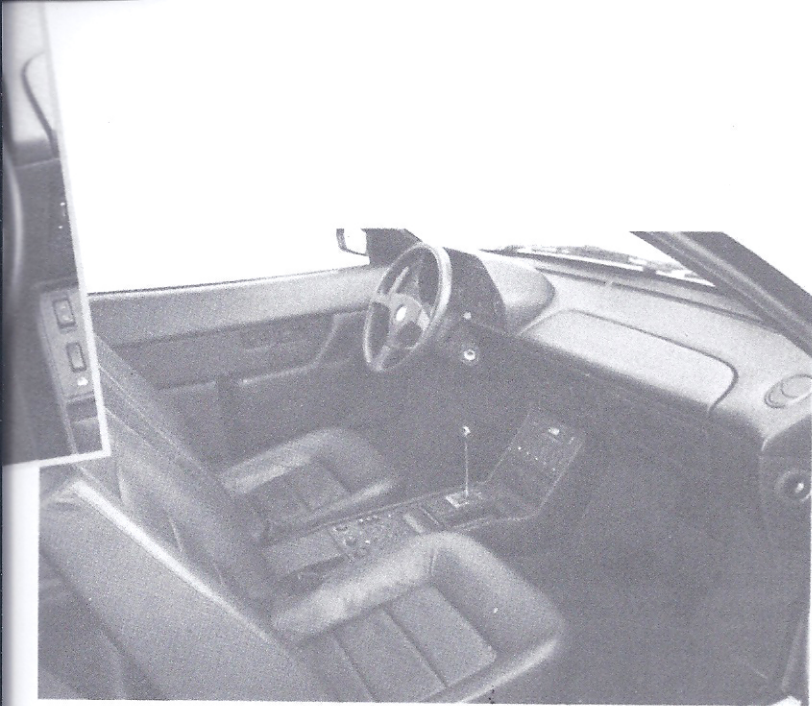
Although there are still some on-paper similarities between the first-series Mondial and the new t model, the engine, the transmission, and the rear suspension have in fact been largely redesigned. The V-8 has been increased in capacity from 3.2 to 3.4 liters, with the maximum power output of the catalyst version boosted from 270 bhp at 7000 rpm to 300 bhp at 7200 rpm. Maximum torque is up from 224 pounds-feet at 5500 rpm to 237 pounds-feet at a more civilized 4200 rpm. The detail improvements made to the engine include a new Bosch Motronic management system, a more precise hot-wire airflow meter, an electronic ignition, narrower valve angles for improved thermodynamic efficiency, and a revised intake tract with separate plenums and a connecting valve that opens at full throttle. “Even the block is effectively brand-new,” says Franco Cimatti. “It has been changed geometrically, and it features longer cylinder liners as well as a single timing belt, a more efficient water pump, dry-sump lubrication, a rerouted free-flow exhaust, and a lightweight alu-

BY GEORG KACHER

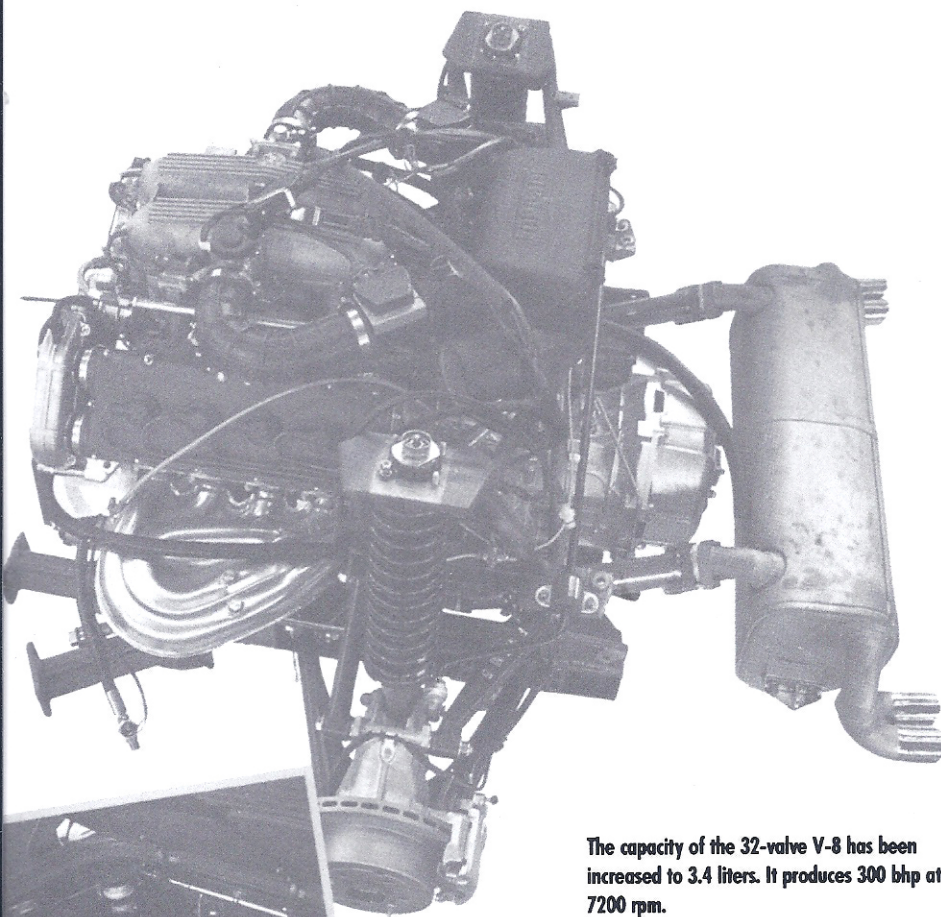
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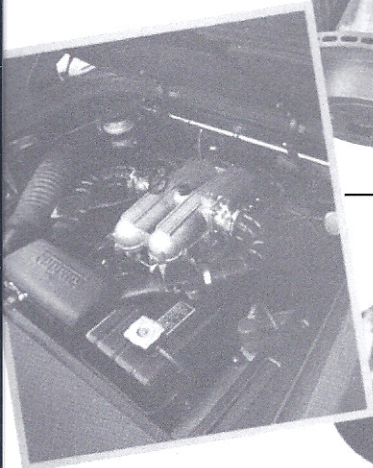








The capacity of the 32-valve V-8 has been increased to 3.4 liters. It produces 300 bhp at 7200 rpm.



**The drivetrain is  
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approximately 3.9  
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the previous  
arrangement.**

minum radiator. The power steering pump and the air conditioning unit are new, too."

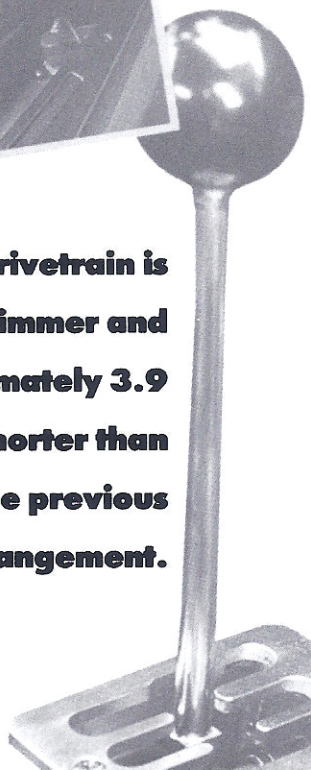
The gearbox runs at a 90-degree angle to the crankshaft. This compact layout enabled the engineers to lower the driveline by about 5.1 inches, but at the same time, it required an unusually complex array of cog works. Torque is passed to the gearbox via a coaxial input shaft that drives first a helical gear and then a bevel gear before passing the drive on to the primary and secondary shafts of the transmission. This sounds complicated, but it works well. The two-mass hydraulically damped fly-wheel eliminates any undue vibrations, and the new cable-operated shifter prevents the gear lever from moving with the torque reversals. Since the clutch unit now sits at the end of the driveline, right in front of the rear bumper, it can be exchanged in about twenty minutes—a vast improvement over the old car, in which the same job took more than six hours.

The drivetrain of the Mondial t is con-

siderably slimmer and approximately 3.9 inches shorter than the previous arrangement. The engine and the transmission are cradled in a new subframe, which entails repositioned mounting points, a slightly wider rear track, and mildly modified suspension kinematics. This installation is virtually identical to that of the upcoming Ferrari 348, to be launched at the Frankfurt Auto Show in September. The chassis was taken over unchanged from the original Mondial, but instead of open-profile C-section suspension arms, the 1989½ model uses lighter and more rigid box-section elements. To accommodate the standard anti-lock brakes, the scrub radius of the front suspension was reduced to almost zero. The standard tire size is 205/55ZR-16 in the front and 225/55ZR-16 in the back, but extra money will buy even fatter 220- and 240-section gumballs.

The cosmetic revisions are inconspicuous and subtle. The Mondial t has mildly flared instead of lipped wheel arches as well as flush-fitting body-color door handles and restyled side air intakes. Although these modifications do improve the car's aerodynamics, the drag figure is still a rather unexciting 0.40, down from 0.42. Progress is more obvious inside the t model, where we note wider footwells, better-positioned pedals, a smaller-diameter Momo steering wheel, more comfortable seats, higher quality switchgear, an uprated center console, and a brand-new instrument binnacle starring six round orange-on-black dials. Unfortunately, the air vents are still too small, the push buttons and the heat and ventilation controls are still an ergonomic mess, and the quality of the leatherwork is poor for a car that costs \$82,000.

Before we hit the road, *ingegnere* Cimatti points out some of the less obvious alterations, like the new wiper blades with integrated washers, the power-assisted steering, the long-range homofocal headlamps, and a small switch next to the ungainly digital clock. "This rocker switch operates the adjustable shock absorbers," explains *signor* Cimatti. "The system, which is governed by vehicle speed and g-force, was developed together with Bilstein. It provides you with three different settings—soft, medium, and hard. The faster you go, the tauter the damping. Above 100 mph, the computer will automatically switch to the stiffest setting. At lower





speeds, any brisk accelerating, braking, or cornering maneuver will alter the damper rating.”

After lunch, we leave Maranello and head for the mountains. Although I have not driven a Mondial for almost five years, the cockpit instantly fits me like a glove. Tall people will welcome the more generous adjustment range of the body-hugging seats and the three-spoked steering wheel. They will also praise the much-better-spaced pedals, which are now more or less in front of the torso instead of offset to the right. The new GTO-style instruments are a lot nicer than the previous design, but they do reflect badly in the windshield at night.


The 3.4-liter engine is a gem. It obeys throttle inputs with the vigor of a Doberman, it eagerly spins to its 7500-rpm cutout speed, and it has lots of top-end punch. Unlike most high-performance units, the 32-valve V-8 from Maranello remains smooth, docile, and relatively quiet throughout the entire rev range. Its predecessor ran out of steam at 4500 rpm, where it started to sound harsh and stressed, but the 3.4-liter version delivers fluid, turbine-like power all the way to within 1000 rpm of the redline. Yet despite this irresistible high-speed urge, there is also plenty of low-end torque on tap. Pulling away from 1500 rpm in top gear is a totally fuss-free exercise, and even in stop-and-go traffic, the Mondial t won't hiccup or sputter as so many oversexed exotics do.

On a dry, flat, straight, and preferably empty stretch of tarmac, the 3439-pound coupe can accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in 6.4 seconds and eventually reach a maximum speed of 158 mph. The average fuel consumption works out to 16.4 mpg, but leadfooters are unlikely to squeeze more than 300 miles out of the 25.4-gallon tank.

The clutch is perfectly balanced and not all that heavy. It feels meaty and powerful enough to tempt some first-gear smoke out of the fat Goodyear Eagles, an exercise that in Italy still draws applause rather than the attention of the police. Full marks again for the four disc brakes, which are sharp, strong, and progressive. Praise also goes to the power steering; it's effortless but still precise and communicative. The new five-speed gearbox, on the other hand, is as balky and stubborn as ever. I love the chromed gate and the traditional spindly lever, but I hate the slow and uncooperative shift action. The adjustable dampers don't work well enough, either. Although the hard setting provides a nice blend of poise and ride comfort, the test car repeatedly bottomed out at soft and medium settings.

Pushing the Mondial t through its paces is much more exciting—yes, even intoxicating—than setting spurs to a Porsche Carrera 4 or a Corvette ZR-1. Whereas the Porsche and the Corvette have been honed and tamed to perfection, the old-school Ferrari is sharper, more demanding, and less forgiving. It

turns in with the determination of a switchblade knife, it holds the road well despite having less advanced limits of adhesion, and it handles the way mid-engined cars do. No dethrottle maneuvers in the middle of a ten-tenths bend, please, and no silly weight transfers, or the tail will come unstuck and swing around like a screeching pendulum. This adrenaline-producing attitude may not be to everyone's taste and skill, but serious drivers will find it entertaining and rewarding.

The old Mondial was much better than its reputation, and the new Mondial t is better still. To me, it is the most desirable Ferrari this side of an F40, and for about \$82,000, it certainly is one of the few remaining buys in the exotic car league. If you are ready for the challenge, grab one now before the word gets around and the line grows long. 

**The 32-valve V-8  
from Maranello  
remains smooth, docile,  
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throughout the entire  
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#### FERRARI MONDIAL t

Base price (estimated) \$82,000

#### GENERAL:

Mid-engine, rear-wheel-drive coupe  
2 + 2-passenger, 2-door steel body

#### POWERTRAIN:

32-valve DOHC V-8, 208 cu in (3402cc)  
Power DIN 300 bhp @ 7200 rpm  
5-speed manual transmission

#### CHASSIS:

Independent front and rear suspension  
Power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering  
11.1-in vented front, 11.0-in vented rear disc brakes  
Anti-lock system  
205/55ZR-16 front, 225/55ZR-16 rear Goodyear  
Eagle ZR tires

#### MEASUREMENTS:

Wheelbase 104.3 in  
Curb weight 3439 lb  
Fuel capacity 25.4 gal

