

First Drive in the New Ferrari Mondial

AutoWeek[®]

August 3, 1981/\$1.25

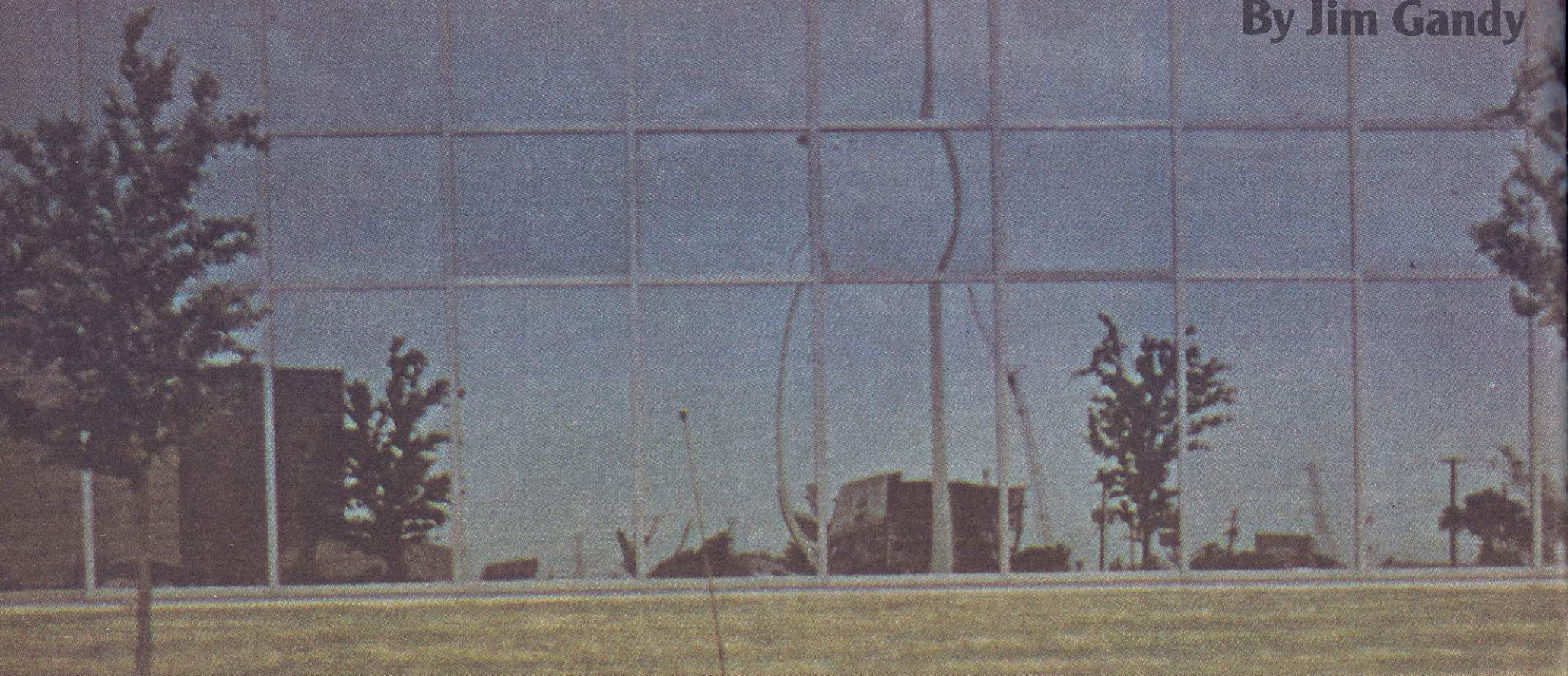


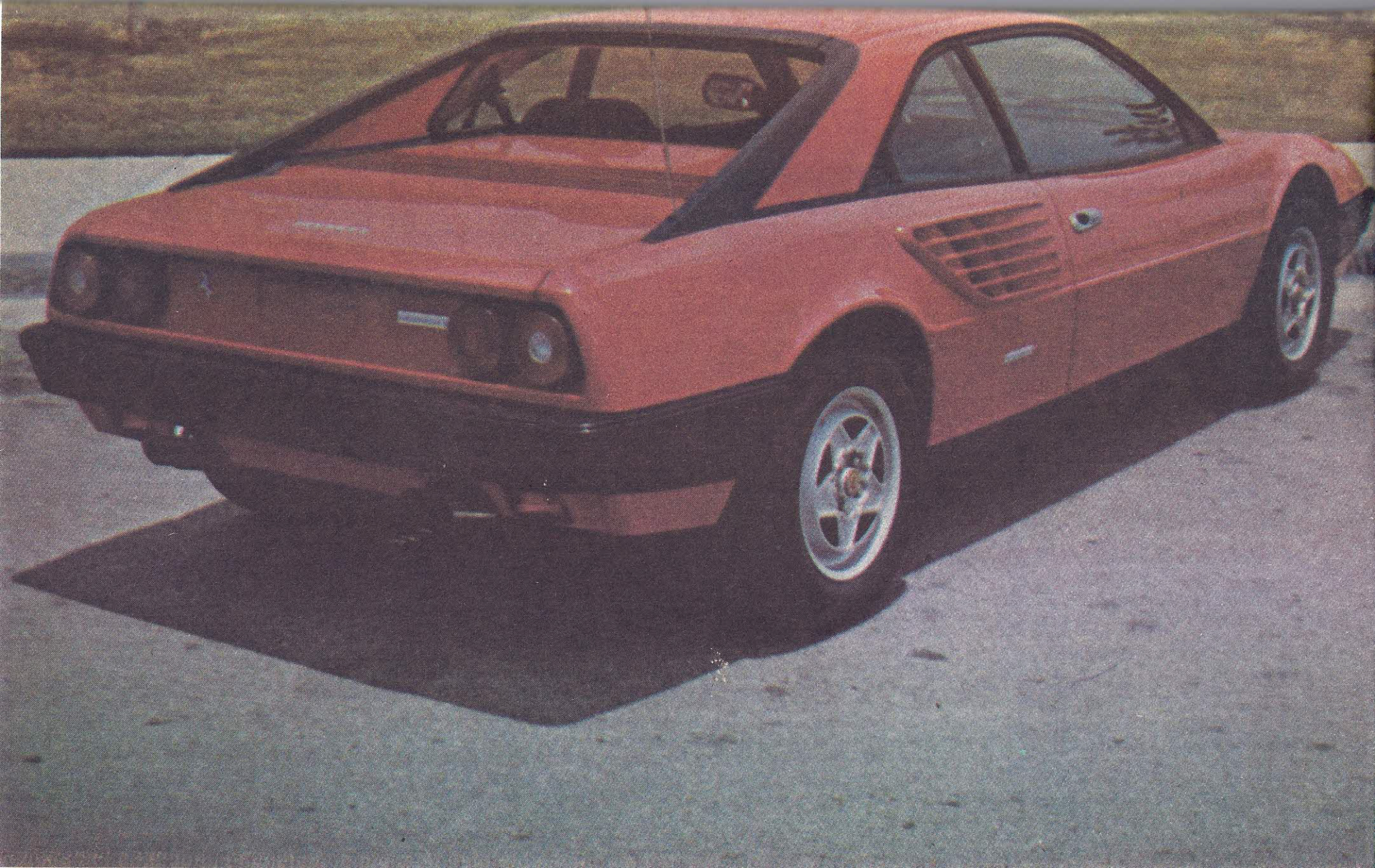
1111111111
90
1111111111

Mondial

The newest Ferrari arrives here this fall
but we couldn't wait to get behind the wheel...

By Jim Gandy



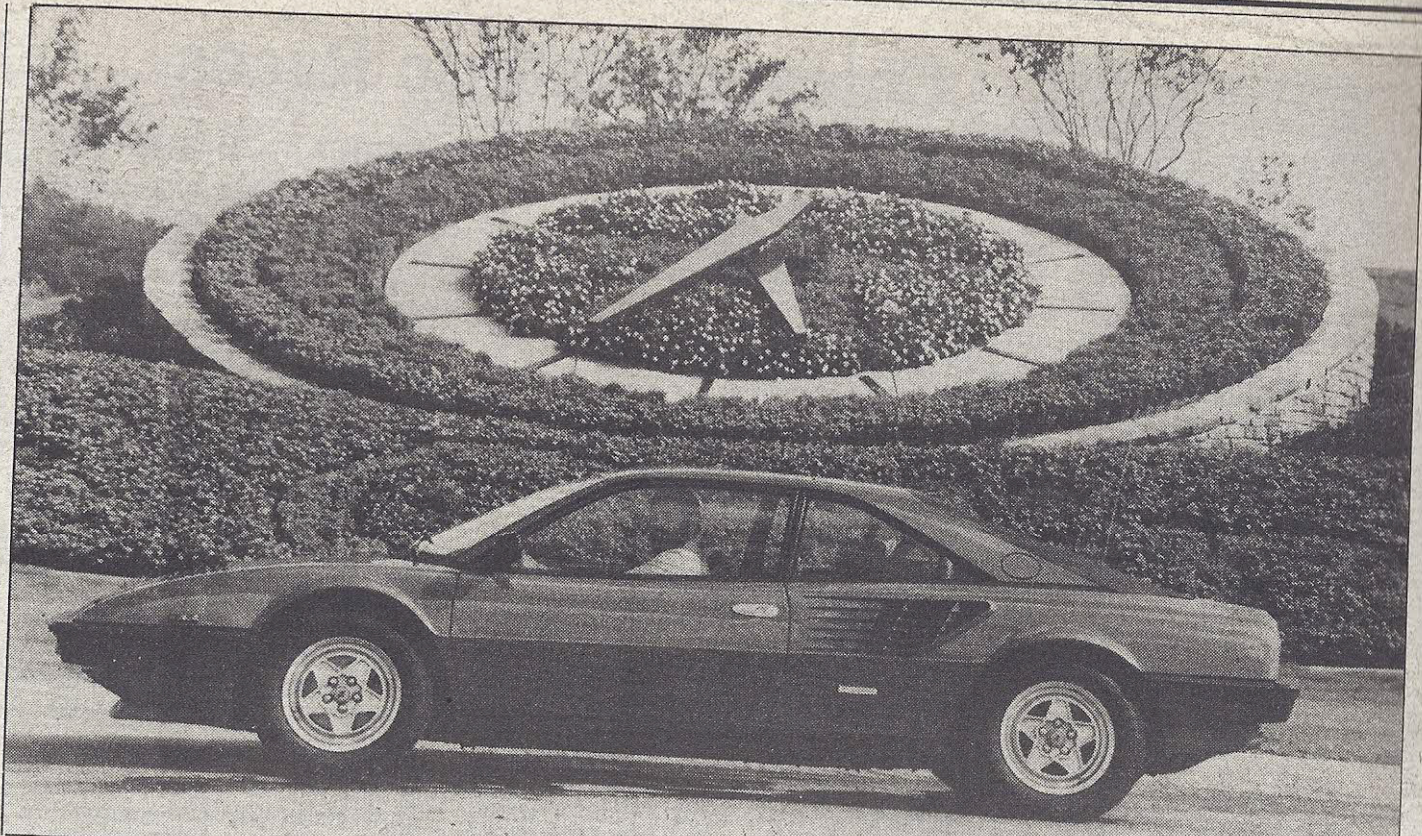


Quick, name the four-passenger Ferrari. Mondial? Gold Star for you. GT4? Only a few months ago, you would have been right. And those of you who said, "There is no four-passenger Ferrari," don't be ashamed. The 308 GT was possibly the most-maligned Ferrari ever in this country.

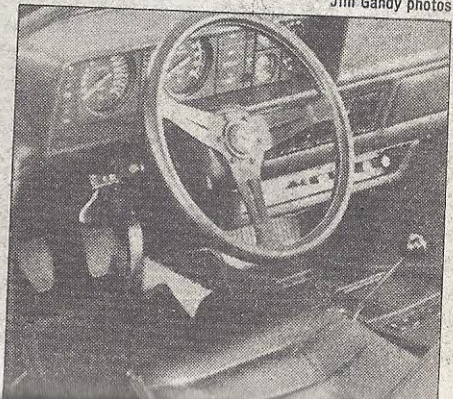
Which is one reason the Mondial 8 is one of the most eagerly awaited Ferraris in many years. Customers in Europe have recently begun taking delivery on the first Mondials, while Ferrari enthusiasts on this side of the Atlantic await word on when the factory will begin building U.S.-legal versions. No firm plans have been announced, but the best guesses say American Mondials should hit dealer showrooms late this year—for an estimated \$55,000 per copy.

All of which is a bit like showing a kid a Christmas present in July, then making him wait until Dec. 25 to play with it. Only in this case, the kid gets a break: There are Mondials already in this country, for sale in federalized trim. Credit a couple of entrepreneurial capitalists in Texas for having the courage to act on the old maxim: "Find a need and fill it."

The two are Bruce Kahn, a 22-year-old specialty-car broker in Dallas, and Rocky Ryan, 21, son of a Corpus Christi-based construction magnate. They're buying Mondials on the retail market in Europe (mostly in Switzerland) and having them shipped to Dallas, where an independent shop is making the necessary modifications. Then the cars go to Texas A&M University at College Station for emissions certification.



Jim Gandy photos



necessary modifications. Then the cars go to Texas A&M University at College Station for emissions certification.

AutoWeek recently visited Dallas and drove one of the first two Mondials brought in. Although still in European trim, the car made a strong statement about the success that awaits it on these shores.

Most important was the way people reacted to the car. Parking-lot attendants and gas-pump jockeys were moved to stare and ask questions in a way the GT4 was never able to provoke. Without exception, the comments were favorable.

Driving the car produced about the same enthusiasm. Esconced in the all-leather seats and gripping the leather-covered wheel, the impressions were very much like those found in the car's two-seat brethren.

Cruising the crowded Dallas freeways and darting through sluggish surface traffic, the Mondial exhibited the crispness, power and good breeding that the current Ferrari image evokes. Don't expect fire-breathing brutality. The Mondial combines the fuel-injected 3-liter V-8's almost mellow manners (but with plenty of potency held in reserve) with convenience and luxury appointments not previously seen in a Ferrari.

Based on other independent U.S. conversions we've driven, we expect that most of the Mondial's strength will survive the certification process. Necessary steps include installing safety beams in the doors, changing the European headlamps, fitting a custom-made, 85-MPH speedometer and adding impact-absorbing struts behind the bumpers. Smog requirements are to be met by adding twin catalytic converters.



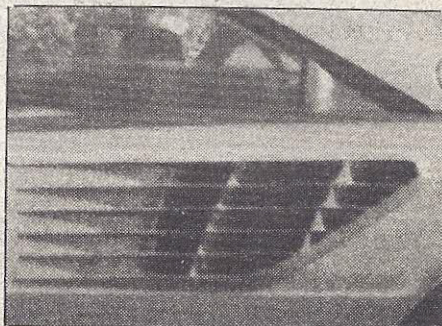
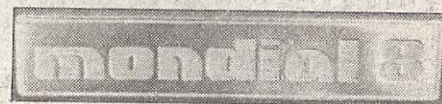
The differences between the European and the U.S. Mondial, however, are minor compared to the differences between the Mondial and the GT4. The Bertone-designed 308 GT4 actually predates the Pininfarina-penned 308 GTB (later given a Targa treatment to become the 308 GTS), but from the day the wedge-shaped four-seater was introduced, public reaction was mixed. From an engineering standpoint, Bertone had done an excellent job, since squeezing four seats into a mid-engine layout without excessive visual length is a real challenge. But the GT4 just didn't look like a Ferrari, according to its detractors.

While the GT4 inspired a passel of contemporary GTs (including the Giugiaro-designed DeLorean and the Lotus Esprit), Ferrari went to

Pininfarina on the Mondial for the "Ferrari look" so ably captured in the GTB. With its swollen front fenders, low-cal center section, upswept rear and abundance of scoops and grilles, the GTB reeks of aggression and grace. Much to Pininfarina's credit, he has been able to translate these strengths directly to the new Mondial.

There is no question of the car's parentage. Family resemblance is obvious, achieved mainly through a more pronounced swelling over the front wheels and an upswept tail.

With the Mondial's 12 extra inches of wheelbase over the GTB, two tricks help the design work: First, the wraparound effect of the rear bumper gives the tall tail a slim look, and second, the massive vents in the rear flanks draw attention



away from the extra length.

A similar effect, de-emphasizing the long roof, is gained by the black treatment of the trailing edges of the sail panels.

Toss in a few details like round tail lamps (instead of the GT4's angular lenses), and the Mondial hardly needs prancing horses for identification.

The extra length is needed inside, since the Mondial is intended as a real four-passenger car, not a two-seater with space for a couple of toddlers in back. Pininfarina has stretched the GT4's wheelbase an extra four inches and moved the front seats and instrument panel as far forward as possible, yielding enough room for two buckets in the rear.

And four medium-sized adults will
Continued on Page 14

Mondial

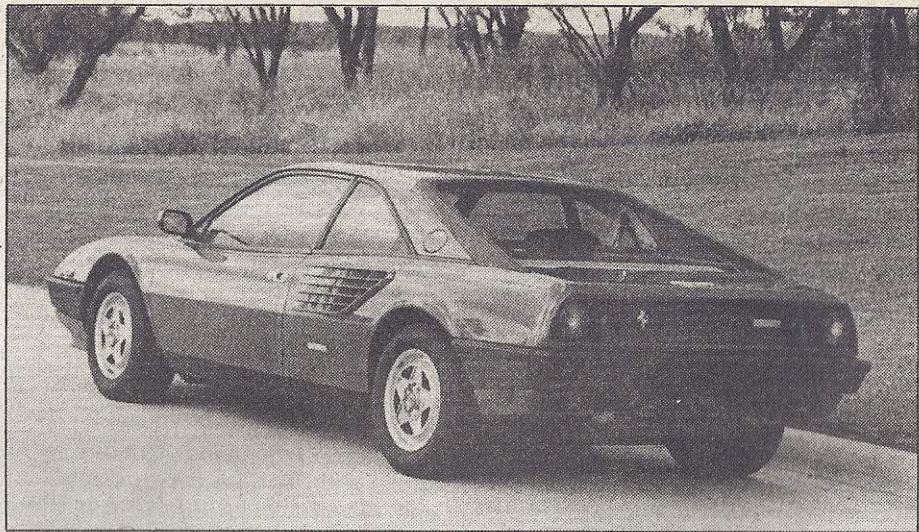
Continued from Page 11

fit in the Mondial, though not in limousine comfort. The doors are irksome; their hinges need to be redesigned to allow them to swing open several more inches. Once into the rear, a passenger finds a fairly upright seating position with enough headroom for sub-six-footers. But when the front and rear passengers split the available legroom, the one in the rear has to splay his or her knees to the sides of the front seat. With short dresses coming back in fashion, m'lady's not going to appreciate it much.

The rest of the interior is new, too, including a redesigned instrument panel. The Mondial forsakes the traditional round gauges on flat panels in favor of a squared-off, modular approach used in new Fiats. The expected gauges are present and visible, as are a vertical stack of warning lights located directly over the steering column. At the left of the dash is an array of touch panels for releasing the hood, engine cover, trunk lid and gas-filler cap.

A center console holds the familiar gate plate for the shifter as well as a display panel for a diagnostic warning system. The console also holds the radio (in our case, a European-spec Pioneer AM-FM cassette stereo), but its location is so far to the rear that it's virtually impossible for front-seat passengers to see the tuning dial.

In several ways, the Mondial reveals that Ferrari is conscious of a general trend to luxury appointments, even in performance cars. An adjustable steering column is standard, as is an LED digital clock. The dash-mounted clock, however, has been positioned so high that the readout is hidden by the dash cowl. The exterior mirror (driver's side only) is remote-controlled by a joy stick on the center console, but the switch is



Jim Gandy

FERRARI MONDIAL 8

Base price: \$55,000 (estimated)
Price as tested: \$70,000
(Including U.S. certification)

DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase (in.): 104.4
Length (in.): 180.5
Width (in.): 70.5
Height (in.): 49.3
Track, F/R (in.): 58.9/59.8
Curb weight (lbs.): 3,186
Fuel capacity (gal.): 22.2

POWERTRAIN

Layout: transverse mid-engine,
rear drive

Engine type: V-8

Displacement (cu. in./liters): 178/2.93

Compression ratio: 8.8:1

Horsepower @ RPM: ... 214 @ 6,600

Torque @ RPM (lbs. ft.): 179 @ 4,600

Fuel delivery: Bosch K-Jetronic
Injection

Redline (RPM): 8,000

0-60 MPH (sec.): 9.9

Transmission type: .. five-speed manual
Gear ratios:

I 3.419:1

II 2.353:1

III 1.693:1

IV 1.244:1

V 0.920:1

Final drive ratio: 4.063:1

CHASSIS

Suspension:

Front: ind. with unequal-length A-arms,
coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll
bar

Rear: ind. with unequal-length A-arms,
coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll
bar

Steering type: rack and pinion

and vibration-free. There's no need to keep stirring the gearbox, as in many lower-powered, more cam-conscious cars.

Brakes are outstanding, especially considering they've been designed for speeds rarely seen on American roads. There's plenty of pedal feel and no over-assist, making smooth applications at low speeds easy. In emergency stops, the balance was acceptable. Some front-wheel lockup required minor steering corrections, but there was no tendency for the rears to lock and make the car slew.

The long-wheelbase, four-passenger character of the Mondial was rarely apparent. Only in lower-speed maneuvering did the far-forward seating position become undeniable, and then the effect was much like driving an oversize Lotus Europa—with feet abreast of the front brake calipers, changes of direction are felt more with a sideways displacement rather than the sense of pivoting that prevails in the GTB and GTS. Especially when making a full-lock U-turn, it's apparent that there's a lot of car following along back there.

Ride, however, is one area where longer wheelbase helps. The Mondial also has more suspension

location is so far to the rear that it's virtually impossible for front-seat passengers to see the tuning dial.

In several ways, the Mondial reveals that Ferrari is conscious of a general trend to luxury appointments, even in performance cars. An adjustable steering column is standard, as is an LED digital clock. The dash-mounted clock, however, has been positioned so high that the readout is hidden by the dash cowling. The exterior mirror (driver's side only) is remote-controlled by a joy stick on the center console, but the switch is fragile-looking and mounted in an exposed place.

The Mondial's small nose compartment holds a spare wheel and tire—full size, not a space-saver. At the rear, there are separate hatches for engine access and for the luggage compartment.

Underneath the new bodywork, the Mondial is pure 308. Drivetrain and suspension are identical to those used on the '80 and '81 GTB and GTS (*AutoWeek*, May 11, 1981). The alloy-block 3-liter V-8 is fed by Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection, and ignition duties are handled by a Marelli Digiplex system. Horsepower of the European version is rated at 214, while the factory-built U.S. engine is said to be good for 205.

Suspension is all-independent, brakes are power-assisted vented discs all around, and wheels/tires are the same Michelin TRX/metric-rim combination introduced on last year's 308s.

On the road, the total package differs very little from the GTB and GTS.

Driving position is excellent and even rear-quarter vision is good since the sail panels are so far aft. From cold, the engine starts with its customary high idle and quickly warms to its quirk-free routine.

Although the curb weight of the European Mondial is about the

Redline (RPM):	8,000
0-60 MPH (sec.):	9.9
Injection	
Transmission type:	five-speed manual
Gear ratios:	
I	3.419:1
II	2.353:1
III	1.693:1
IV	1.244:1
V	0.920:1
Final drive ratio:	4.063:1

CHASSIS

Suspension:

Front: ind. with unequal-length A-arms, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar

Rear: ind. with unequal-length A-arms, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar

Steering type: rack and pinion
Turning circle (ft.): 39.3

Brake system: dual-circuit, power-assisted four-wheel discs

Wheels: 180TRx390

Tires: 240/55VR390 Michelin TRX

Fuel economy: N.A.

same as the U.S. GTS, and although the Mondial sports a higher numerical final drive (4.063:1 vs. 3.71:1), getting away from rest smoothly required practice. The culprit is a clutch that resisted slipping. Low-speed manners were also degraded by the shift pattern, with reverse and first to the left. The first second shift must be made with some deliberation.

The engine has a flat torque curve, varying only about 15 percent in output over the range from around 2,200 to 7,000 RPM. Combined with the engine's excellent balance, the result is smooth, steady acceleration in any gear. With two people and luggage aboard, we clocked 0-60 MPH in just under 10 seconds. This doesn't compare well against the GTS's unloaded 8.1 seconds, but our Mondial was not yet broken in.

The flat torque curve makes the Mondial very easy to drive in traffic, despite the factory's claimed top speed of over 142 MPH. The engine will pull without complaint from as low as 1,500 RPM, and 5,000 RPM is delivered effortlessly

was rarely apparent. Only in lower-speed maneuvering did the far-forward seating position become undeniable, and then the effect was much like driving an oversize Lotus Europa—with feet abreast of the front brake calipers, changes of direction are felt more with a sideways displacement rather than the sense of pivoting that prevails in the GTB and GTS. Especially when making a full-lock U-turn, it's apparent that there's a lot of car following along back there.

Ride, however, is one area where longer wheelbase helps. The Mondial also has more suspension travel than the two-seaters, since it's designed to carry heavier loads. The result is a firm, well-controlled ride that takes road shocks and undulations with no ruffled feathers.

Handling, however, was another story. When pushed hard into low- and medium-speed corners, the Mondial was decidedly tail-happy, both in throttle-on and throttle-off situations. The oversteer was not abrupt or even excessive, but it was the prevalent cornering mode. We double-checked that the tire pressures were on spec, but concluded that Mondial drivers should try a few emergency maneuvers in private so they won't be surprised when the tail moves.

But even if a suspension change is eventually needed, the Ferrari Mondial is almost a sure bet to be successful. The Mondial offers a higher level of luxury than other Ferraris, along with genuine seating for four and, most importantly, it looks like a Ferrari.

Bruce Kahn and Rocky Ryan are betting it's a combination many people won't want to wait a lot longer for. They've pegged a price of their U.S.-certified Mondials at \$70,000, a bit of a premium to pay for the "first on the block."

If a Texas-bred Mondial sounds good to you, don't call us—talk to Kahn at (214) 741-5114.

