

Ferrari Mondial t Cabriolet

The Formula 1 convertible.

BY CSABA CSERE

• Who among us hasn't dreamed of driving a Formula 1 car? Like a Cessna pilot fantasizing about flying an F-15 or a baseball fan imagining knocking one of Orel Hershisser's pitches out of the park, most driving enthusiasts look to F1 as the ultimate adventure. And it's more than just the thought of driving one of the world's highest-performance machines. The high-brow ambiance, the jet-set lifestyle, and the sheer excitement that surround Formula 1 are at least as tantalizing as the driving.

Alas, the dream is shattered by even the briefest rational reflection. Realistically, none of us will ever race in a Grand Prix. In fact, few of us stand a chance of

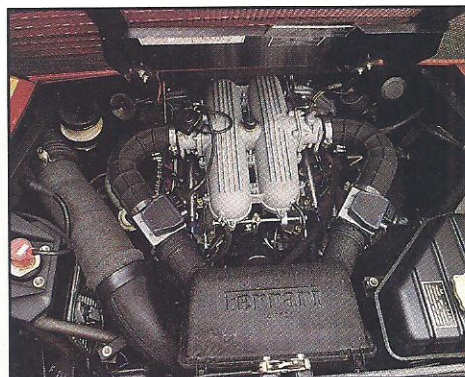
even *sitting* in a Formula 1 car. Reaching the top rung of motor racing requires a combination of talent, money, and commitment that only a handful of individuals possess.

There is, however, a way—albeit a costly one—of sampling the Formula 1 experience. For \$97,000, Ferrari will put you into a Mondial t Cabriolet, complete with open-air bodywork, the prancing-horse emblem worn by more than 100 Grand Prix-winning cars, a shrieking engine, a Formula 1-inspired gearbox, a mid-engine chassis with sophisticated suspension and brakes, and enough charisma to make you the center of attention wherever you go.

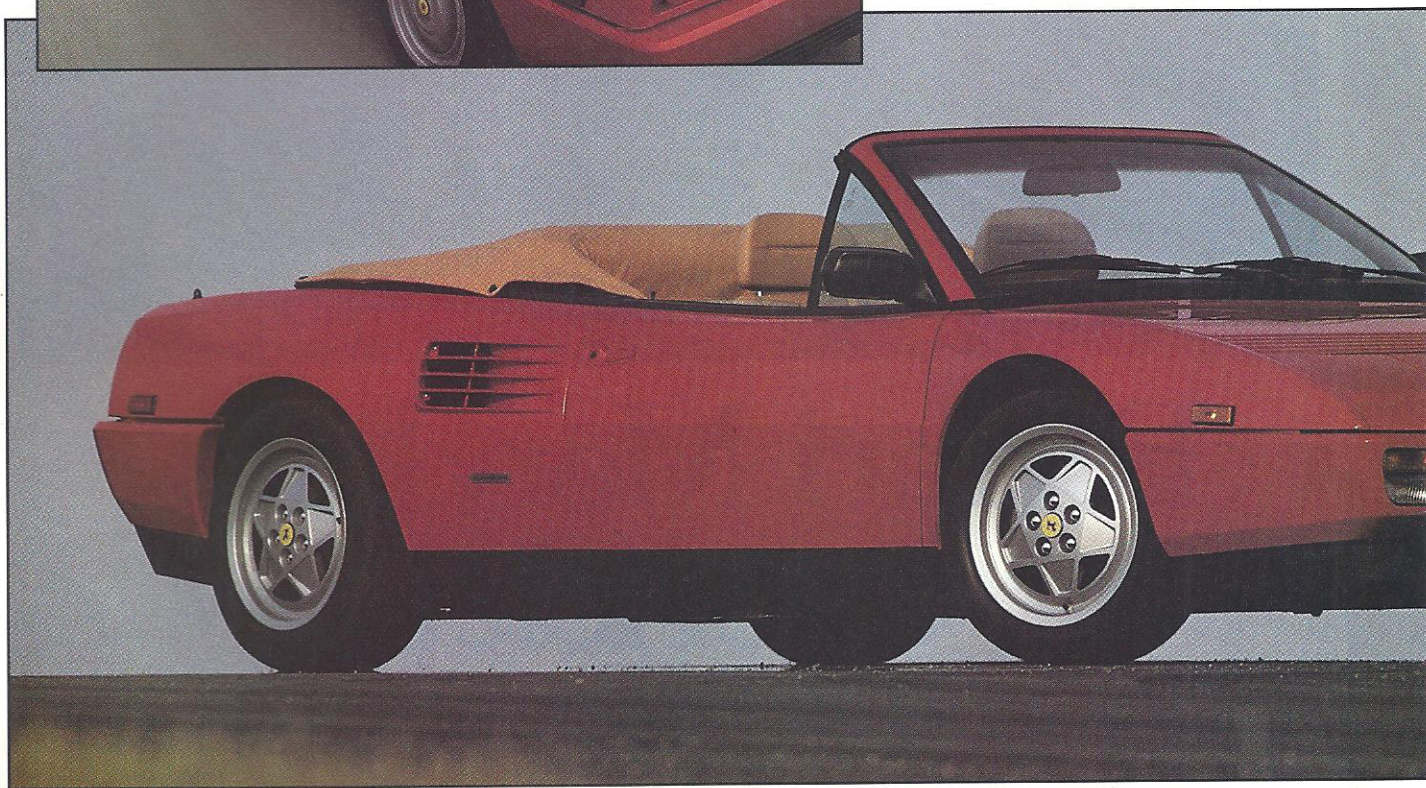
Not only does the Mondial t Cabriolet offer all the right pieces, it tingles your soul with all the right sensations. Slide into the cockpit and you're surrounded by purposeful gauges and controls. Turn the key and you light off a hot-blooded powerplant that can't wait to be unleashed. Stand on the throttle and you are shoved back by smooth, hard thrust that never seems to quit. Driving the Mondial t is definitely not your average homogenized automotive experience. What we have here is your basic Formula 1 street machine.

The engine is so strong that our Mondial t Cabriolet test car, actually a 1989 model, pulled to its 7500-rpm red-

MONDIAL t CABRIOLET



The Mondial is powered by Ferrari's largest V-8, the same longitudinally mounted, 300-hp, 3.4-liter unit fitted to the new 348.



line in fifth gear—an honest 159 mph. That's faster than any previous Mondial we've tested.

Acceleration is also impressive. Although the Mondial t is a bit sluggish off the line—even with a good, tire-smoking start—it reaches 60 mph from rest in 6.2 seconds and runs the quarter-mile in 14.5 seconds at 98 mph. Keep the throttle down and the Ferrari really comes into its own: it needs but 32.5 seconds to reach 130 mph. The Mondial t can't quite beat a Corvette or a 300ZX Turbo across an intersection, but it will pull away steadily from both cars at anything above an urban crawl.

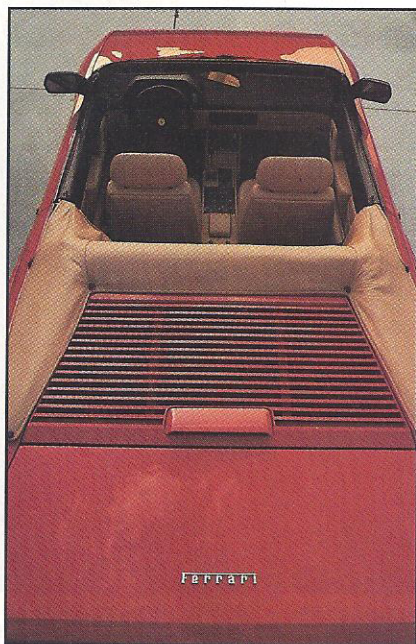
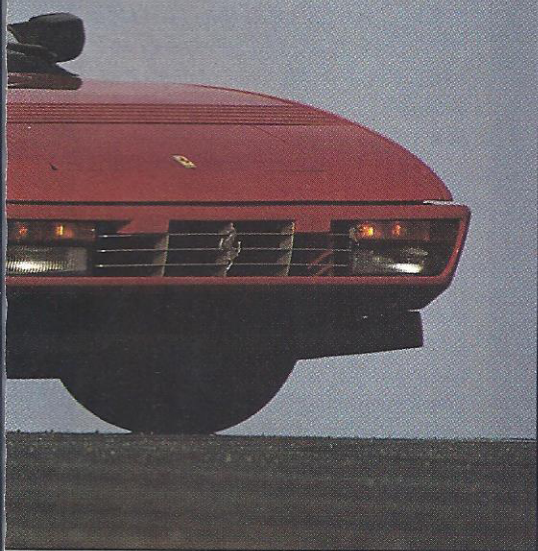
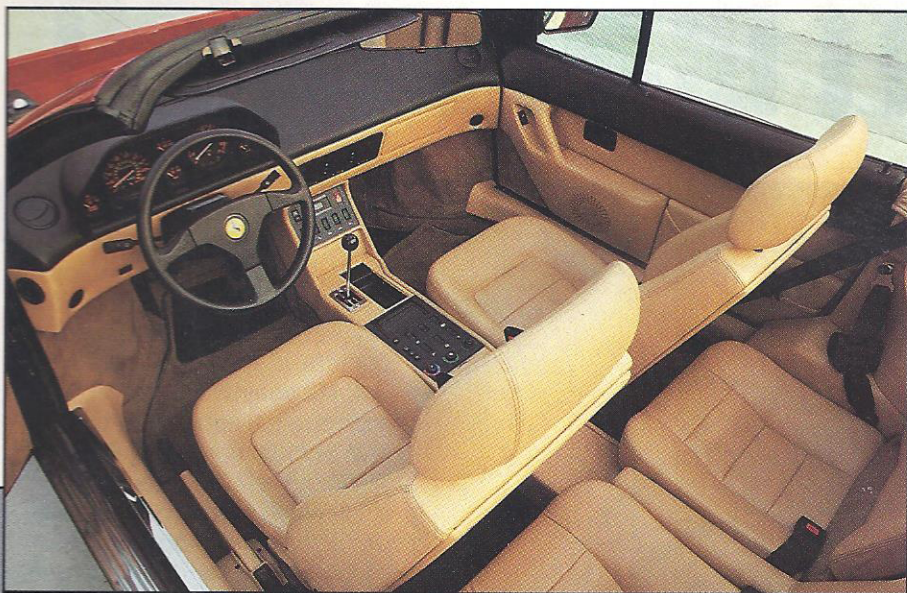
Motivating the 3540-pound Mondial t

is Ferrari's newest engine: the same longitudinally mounted, 32-valve, 3.4-liter V-8 fitted to the spanking-new 348. Developing 300 hp at 7000 rpm and 229 pound-feet of torque at 4000, this dynamic energy cell makes electrifying sounds that you don't expect to hear from a car wearing license plates.

Like its Ferrari V-8 predecessors, the 3.4-liter engine uses a flat crankshaft that produces perfectly even firing intervals between its two cylinder banks. This design makes for efficient exhaust tuning—at the expense of greater vibration than in conventional V-8 configurations. It also contributes to a high-rpm shriek that makes the Corvette's V-8 burble and the

300ZX's turbocharged hum sound positively wimpish. Wind the Mondial t to the redline and you hear 90 decibels' worth of precisely meshing gears, harmonically tuned intake pulsations, and staccato exhaust explosions. Blast through a tunnel with the top down and you can easily imagine that you're accelerating toward the harbor in the Monaco Grand Prix.

Unfortunately, when it's time to change gears the Mondial t brings you back to reality. No Grand Prix car could be so hard to shift. Despite its all-new design, the transverse gearbox feels as unwieldy as its predecessors. It's stiff, sticky, and generally uncooperative. The gated shift lever responds best to a heavy



hand—although when the transmission is cold, you fear that the chrome shift lever will bend before the transmission moves into second gear. This is not the sort of gearbox you want to be stuck with in heavy traffic.

In other respects, the Mondial t is perfectly at home in an urban environment. The power-assisted steering makes low-speed maneuvering easy, and the suspension glides over most of the potholes and undulations that mar much of our transportation infrastructure.

Some of the credit for the excellent ride belongs to the Mondial t's electronically adjustable shock absorbers. The system offers three settings; within each,

the damping varies with changes in speed and longitudinal and lateral acceleration. Even in its plushiest mode, the system tightens up the shocks sufficiently to provide excellent control when you pick up the pace. In fact, we found little reason ever to use the stiffer settings—except to heighten the car's Formula 1 character.

The direct steering also contributes to the sporting spirit. The power-assisted rack-and-pinion mechanism provides a light and delicate touch with excellent feel. And that's important, because the revamped Mondial t maintains the handling characteristics of the previous mid-engined V-8 models. As you start corner-

ing hard, you first encounter reassuring understeer. But as you approach the car's 0.85-g cornering limit, the tail steps out—and then you're in for a challenging ride. Unlike a Porsche 911, whose lift-throttle oversteer can be controlled by firmly reapplying the throttle, the Mondial t steps out with no predictable way to pull the tail back into line. Basically, you fight the wheel like crazy until you somehow gather the car up.

This tail-happiness makes fast driving challenging. Indeed, the Mondial's pendulumlike limit handling keeps it from being as quick over the road as many lesser sports cars. But it also provides an opportunity to sample firsthand the excitement that is the Grand Prix driver's stock in trade.

We find little to fault with the Mondial t's brakes. The anti-lock-equipped four-wheel discs stop the car from 70 mph in just 176 feet, and they resist fade even after repeated braking from high speeds.

Good as the Mondial t Cabriolet is in providing a simulated Formula 1 experience, it is also a remarkably practical package. In coupe or cabriolet form, the Mondial t is the most comfortable Ferrari on the market today. The back seat is too small for adults, but it does provide a handy place to toss your briefcase and overcoat. And the additional interior volume provides a spaciousness lacking in more closely coupled two-passenger sports cars.

A new dashboard and interior layout make the Mondial t airier than previous models, but the arrangement of the instruments and controls is still haphazard. Although the steering column's tilt is adjustable, it's impossible to find an angle that offers both a good hand position and a decent view of the instrument cluster. Happily, the wheel is within easy reach, and the overall driving position is reasonably comfortable.

Raising or lowering the Cabriolet's top is relatively easy. You must perform a number of simple maneuvers in the proper sequence to have any hope of getting the top into its well; but once you master the drill, the only tedious task is the fitting and removal of the boot. With the top up or down, our blood-red Mondial t looked smashing.

Admittedly, the Mondial t Cabriolet provides only a taste of the Grand Prix experience. But it's a stronger flavor than almost any other car can provide. Plus, the Mondial t is easily the most comfortable and practical of the high-priced Italian exotics.

You can even drive it without wearing flameproof underwear. ●

MONDIAL t CABRIOLET



Vehicle type: mid-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 2+2-passenger, 2-door convertible

Price as tested: \$97,000

Options on test car: base Ferrari Mondial t Cabriolet, \$94,450; gas-guzzler tax, \$1500; freight, \$1050

Standard accessories: power steering, windows, and locks, A/C, tilt steering

Sound system: none

ENGINE

Type V-8, aluminum block and heads
Bore x stroke 3.35 x 2.95 in, 85.0 x 75.0mm
Displacement 208 cu in, 3405cc
Compression ratio 10.4:1
Engine-control systems 2 Bosch Motronic M2.5 with port fuel injection
Emissions controls 3-way catalytic converter, feedback fuel-air-ratio control
Valve gear chain- and belt-driven double overhead cams, 4 valves per cylinder
Power (SAE net) 300 bhp @ 7000 rpm
Torque (SAE net) 229 lb-ft @ 4000 rpm
Redline 7500 rpm

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission 5-speed
Transfer-gear ratio 1.14:1
Final-drive ratio 3.56:1, limited slip
Gear Ratio Mph/1000 rpm Max. test speed
I 3.21 5.7 42 mph (7500 rpm)
II 2.11 8.6 65 mph (7500 rpm)
III 1.46 12.5 93 mph (7500 rpm)
IV 1.09 16.7 125 mph (7500 rpm)
V 0.86 21.2 159 mph (7500 rpm)

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase 104.3 in
Track, F/R 59.9/61.4 in
Length 178.5 in
Width 71.3 in
Height 48.6 in

Curb weight 3540 lb
Weight distribution, F/R 42.4/57.6%
Fuel capacity 22.5 gal
Oil capacity 11.6 qt
Water capacity 21.1 qt

CHASSIS/BODY

Type full-length frame bolted to body
Body material welded steel stampings and aluminum stampings

INTERIOR

SAE volume, front seat 49 cu ft
rear seat 28 cu ft
luggage space 4 cu ft
Front seats bucket
Seat adjustments fore and aft, seatback angle
General comfort poor fair good excellent
Fore-and-aft support poor fair good excellent
Lateral support poor fair good excellent

SUSPENSION

F: ind, unequal-length control arms, coil springs, 3-position cockpit-adjustable electronically controlled shock absorbers, anti-roll bar
R: ind, unequal-length control arms, coil springs, 3-position cockpit-adjustable electronically controlled shock absorbers, anti-roll bar

STEERING

Type rack-and-pinion, power-assisted
Turns lock-to-lock 3.0
Turning circle curb-to-curb 38.9 ft

BRAKES

F: 11.1 x 0.9-in vented disc
R: 11.7 x 0.8-in vented disc
Power assist hydraulic with anti-lock control

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size F: 7.0 x 16 in, R: 8.0 x 16 in
Wheel type cast aluminum
Tires Goodyear Eagle ZR55; F: 205/55ZR-16, R: 225/55ZR-16
Test inflation pressures, F/R 38/39 psi

CAR AND DRIVER TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION

Seconds
Zero to 30 mph 2.2
40 mph 3.2
50 mph 4.8
60 mph 6.2
70 mph 8.1
80 mph 10.2
90 mph 12.4
100 mph 16.1
110 mph 19.8
120 mph 24.0
130 mph 32.5
Top-gear passing time, 30-50 mph 9.0
50-70 mph 9.1
Standing 1/4-mile 14.5 sec @ 98 mph
Top speed 159 mph

BRAKING

70-0 mph @ impending lockup 176 ft
Fade none moderate heavy

HANDLING

Roadholding, 300-ft-dia skidpad 0.85 g
Understeer minimal moderate excessive

COAST-DOWN MEASUREMENTS

Road horsepower @ 30 mph 7 hp
50 mph 17 hp
70 mph 35 hp

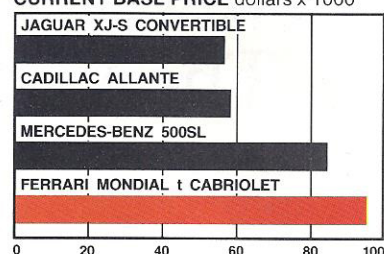
FUEL ECONOMY

EPA city driving 12 mpg
EPA highway driving 17 mpg
C/D observed fuel economy 16 mpg

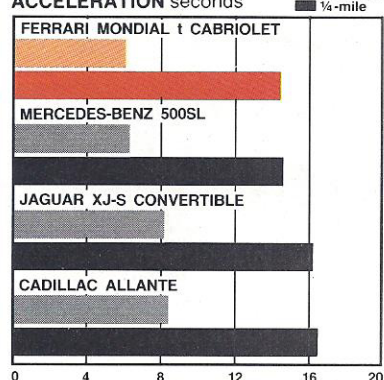
INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL

Idle 65 dBA
Full-throttle acceleration 90 dBA
70-mph cruising 79 dBA
70-mph coasting 78 dBA

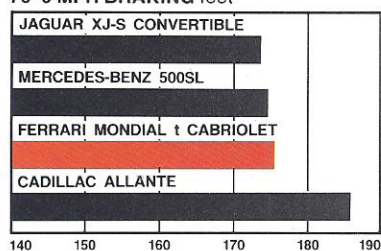
CURRENT BASE PRICE dollars x 1000



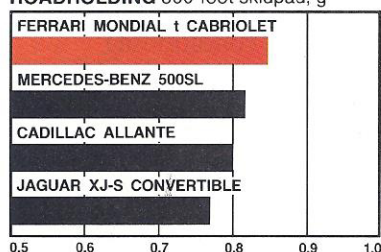
ACCELERATION seconds



70-0 MPH BRAKING feet



ROADHOLDING 300-foot skidpad, g



EPA ESTIMATED FUEL ECONOMY mpg

