





Four a few dollars less

With the Mondial QV David Vivian discovers the words sublime, Ferrari and affordable can be whispered in the same breath

My wife has a Ferrari keyring I gave to her about 10 years ago after a trip to Maranello. It's the classic design: stiff leather fob, embedded metal Ferrari badge, plenty of pocket presence, a pub bar god. It looks convincingly old and gnarled now, scuffed and scratched by a thousand encounters with... let me see... an A-reg Nissan Prairie and, more recently, a Suzuki Swift. Diane can get away with it. Possessing an intelligence that coolly ignores my childish obsessions, she knows that a Ferrari is just a car and a chunky keyring isn't easily lost. No pretension, just pragmatism.

I couldn't be so detached. Every time I used the keyring it would remind me: I haven't got one. I never believe enthusiasts who say they have no desire to own a Ferrari. Unlikely to, maybe. But no interest? These people need counselling. I mean, Porsches are great, but you can buy a beer-budget 924 and join the club. The stakes for owning a Ferrari are higher. It's highly strung, more temperamental, more labour intensive. If you're lucky it's the car you've moved towards all your life.

In fact, luck has nothing to do it. If you have enough money for a new Vauxhall Vectra – say £15,000-£20,000 – you can go out tomorrow and buy a 32-valve V8 Ferrari with 240bhp, a top speed of 146mph and a 0-100mph time of 16.2 secs. No tricks, no conditions. I've just driven one and it was great.

Of course, some Ferraris have always been more affordable than others. Hard to believe, but there was a time in the mid-'70s when the value of the 246 GT Dino slumped to £2000. A while before that, when they were selling in the £6000-£10,000 bracket, Dinos had been



FACTFILE

Ferrari Mondial QV

ENGINE

2926cc 32 valve dohc V8

Power: 240bhp at 7000rpm

Torque: 191.7lb ft at 5000rpm

GEARBOX

five-speed manual

SUSPENSION

Front and rear: independent, double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar

PERFORMANCE

0-60mph: 6.4 secs

Max speed: 146mph

SIZE

Length: 4580mm Width:

1790mm Height: 1260mm

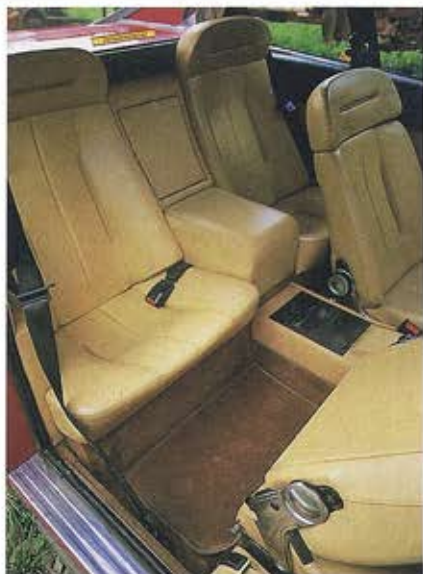
PRICES

New: £25,851

Today: £20,000



On the move Mondial thrills, communicates and, best of all, flatters, immediately inspiring confidence



Critics argue whether four adults can fit in



Two major dials – speedo and rev counter



QV indicates 32 valve V8 and 28bhp extra



Not the most powerful prancer, but the ambience and feel of the interior are full-on Ferrari

hoovered up by people who couldn't afford to run them. The baby Ferrari needed the same tender fettle as its big brothers. From those who understood its high-tension disposition, it received the right sort of kid glove treatment. Those who saw a Ferrari merely as means to enhance image, though, did so at the expense of the Dino's and a lot of examples rapidly became very tatty and chronically unreliable.

Esteem nosedived, and so did prices. Most rough examples needed at least £10,000 to put them right. Thankfully, there were enthusiasts prepared to do just that and who rescued many from a premature appointment with the scrap heap. The Dino slowly matured into the valuable classic it is today (ie out of our league).

The car that took on the entry-level mantle was the 308 GT4, launched at Paris in 1973. Billed as the Dino's successor (it even carried the badge) it was actually a very different car. Bertone did the styling, not Pininfarina, and it was a four seater. Bertone had its work cut out clothing a mid-engined 2+2 in anything that looked remotely as sexy as the two-seater Dino and, in the event, didn't come close.

But this was good news for budget Ferrari aspirants. The dubious design and 2+2 configuration suppressed the GT4's popularity and, over the years, it depreciated to the point where people who never dreamed they'd own a Ferrari suddenly found one parked in their drive. A pretty good one, too, with a transverse mid-mounted, Weber carburetted, quad-cam V8 developing 205bhp at 7700rpm, all independent suspension with unequal length A-arms and coil springs and vented discs.

Even now, the GT4 is still a popular first-time Ferrari. It's not as popular as it was, though, because its vastly more stylish and capable successor, the Mondial, has itself entered the sensible money zone. The original Mondial 8 – again toting an all-alloy 90 deg V8 – made its debut at the Geneva Show in March 1980. With Pininfarina back at the drawing board, it was certainly a better looking car than the GT4 but, perhaps more than anything, showed how hard it was to get the proportions of a mid-engined four-seater right.

The Quattrovalvole featured here – and the owner of those BMW-humbling performance figures quoted earlier – was the first Ferrari to benefit from a new and (according to Maranello, F1 derived) four-valves-per-cylinder layout. In conjunction with a compression ratio increase from 8.8 to 9.2:1, QV lifted the 3-litre V8's power from 214bhp at 6600rpm to 240bhp at 7000rpm, and torque from 179lb ft at 4600rpm to 192lb ft at 5000rpm. It was all shipped to the rear wheels via a five-speed manual gearbox and limited slip differential.

Suspension was via double wishbones front and rear with coil springs and Koni dampers, an anti-roll bar at each end and anti-dive geometry at the front. It was hung on a tubular steel chassis frame dressed in a mostly steel body (aluminium boot lid and engine cover) built, as was the GT4, by Scaglietti. Another Ferrari first: the powertrain and rear suspension were assembled on a separate detachable subframe.

Although it doesn't look it, the Mondial is pretty big. Measured against the mainstream metal it was having to share the tarmac with back in the early '80s, it was an inch longer and two inches wider than an Austin Ambassador and weighed about 150lb more than a Ford Granada 2.8. This bulk made the 214bhp 16



B558 AKM

MONDIAL
Qualità in un'auto

valve car a comparatively feeble performer.

And as I slide down in to the leanly padded seat of the gleaming red 32 valve QV you see here – supplied by Maidstone specialist Kent High Performance Cars – I'm not expecting it to snap my head off. But there's no denying this is the real thing. The look, feel and ambience of the cabin, the sense of anticipation: all full-on, authentic Ferrari. For £19,000 (the price this 50,000-miler sold for) that buzz is rare.

Once you've wiggled your torso into the skinny-looking but surprisingly supportive seat, pulled shut the long door, wondered what all the switches on the broad centre console do and, finally, twisted the dainty key in the column-mounted ignition, the magic starts.

The first whiff of Italian exotica is a driving position that makes you stretch your arms and pedals that are offset to the left. And do you want to know what the first "cab forward" car was? Forget it, Chrysler, the Mondial beat the Neon to the punch by 15 years; just look how far forward and comparatively upright the windscreen is. It gives the Mondial's cabin an appealingly airy aspect. The two big major dials (speedo and rev counter) are easy to see through the upper portion of the steering wheel, the cluster of gauges to their left less so.

The best thing about the Mondial QV, though, has to be its engine. It has the classic Ferrari quad-cam V8 sound – not as intense or nape-tingling as the current F355's, maybe, but unmistakably part of the same family. The real beauty of this classic powerplant is that it has a broad, flexible powerband yet gives every impression of being deliciously racer-peaky. It surges up to 6000rpm then screams all the way to 7800rpm. It's mellow at idle, scalp-tingling at full chat, compellingly musical in between.

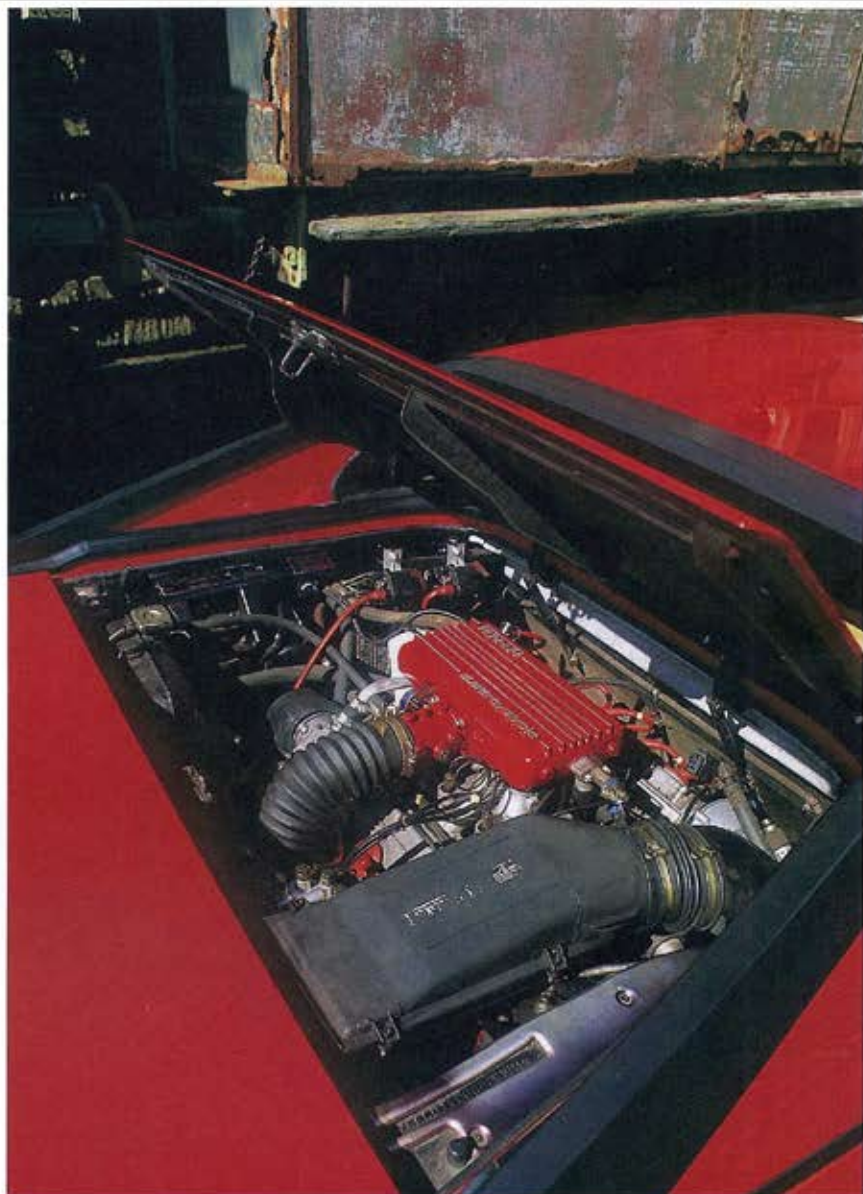
All the serious action occurs above 4000rpm. Keep the engine singing the high notes and the gearchanges flowing – once the gearbox oil is warm, the recalcitrance of the open gate gearchange melts into sweet click-clack co-operation – and a 0-60mph time of 6.4 secs is yours for the taking. That's a good half-second quicker than an early Porsche 928, by the way.

The Mondial's steering, handling and ride are amazingly good. The car inspires bags of confidence straight away; feedback is terrific by any standards but a mild soft spot about the straight-ahead betrays the Ferrari's age and Michelin TRX tyre technology.

Body motions are well damped and contribute to a ride that doesn't draw attention to itself through being either harsh (like the 928's) or overly cosseting (which wouldn't be very Ferrari). No tramlining, no worrying thumps or shudders, just a well-judged trade-off between pliancy and control.

Everything is designed around a gratifying input-feedback loop. The car communicates, thrills and, best of all, flatters. What it doesn't do is keep you cool. I suppose we should be thankful that the Mondial has air conditioning at all. But it's hard to regulate and refuses to send cool air to your face and warm air to your feet. This isn't symptomatic of generally flaky build and finish: when the Mondial came out it was praised for raising Ferrari's game in these areas. Apart from a vibratory steering column, this one is reassuringly tight and rattle free. And its glossy paintwork has worn well.

On the other hand, if you don't get sweaty in a Mondial QV, you're probably not trying hard enough. Its reputation for being comparatively



Extra 16 valves provide the performance always thought to be lacking in basic 3-litre Mondial



Knobs overshadowed by trademark gate

easy to drive is true: visibility, gearchange, the driving position and pedals (once you're used to them) work, don't hinder. None of this should be interpreted as a damper on excitement. Not having to concentrate too hard on mastering the basics of driving the Mondial makes exploiting its abilities more satisfying.

What makes the Mondial such a tempting buy, though, is its practicality. Rear legroom is extremely tight but those leather buckets are very comfortable. You can squeeze more than a couple of squidgy bags in the boot. It can cope with 1990s real-world traffic conditions – you don't feel guilty if you're not driving it hard. And running a Mondial QV should be as affordable as buying one. Kent High Performance Cars reckons, on average, you should put aside £1000-£1500 a year for servicing. Rust and electrics can be problematic but, basically, Mondials are tough cars with powertrains that breeze through 100,000 miles. Full service history is a must, though, and be prepared for a shock when it's time to adjust the tappets.

I just hope Diane's keyring doesn't give out before I've found it a proper home. ♦