

FERRARI 308 GTSi

The i means injected—and improved



EMERSON WROTE THAT "Beauty is its own excuse for being." Some automotive enthusiasts feel that the same can be said for exotics—such as Ferrari's latest 308GTSi. Here's a car that is expensive, not terribly space- or fuel-efficient, a car which demands that its driver pay it full heed while at the helm. Yet, the 308 is also a car whose beauty, craftsmanship and mechanical intricacies can overwhelm even a seasoned car buff such as one of our senior staff members who remarked, "Cars like this don't have to be justified." One of his co-workers concurred and added, "The 308

is an enthusiast's dream car and dreams don't have to have the least bit of practicality."

This is not to say that the Ferrari is impractical. It is simply less practical than, say, a Fiat 131. But then the 308 and cars of its ilk are designed primarily for personal and not group (family) transportation and as a means of pleasure and not just conveyance. They're not for everyone.

But we digress because the subject is the 308GTSi. Ferrari of North America's latest bauble. Notice the *i* suffix: That stands for *iniezione*, Italian for injection, in this case, Bosch K-Jetronic.

imports because it is relatively simple to adapt to an existing powerplant. It's quite foolproof too, good news for those of us who have to live with it. The K-Jetronic represents the most significant change found in the 1980 (no, they're not 1981s yet) 308 models known as the GTBi and the GTSi. By the way, the B and the S stand for Berlinetta and Spyder and while one is a coupe and the other a targa, the two models are identical mechanically.

Other changes to the latest 308s include digital electronic ignition, as well as minor styling, mechanical and equipment revisions. For example, the interiors of both cars reflect subtle refinements that include extensive use of Connolly leather and cut-pile carpeting plus a redesign of the dashboard. It took our resident Ferrari expert to find this last change because to the casual observer the instrument pod looks the same except for its fascia which is flat black rather than brushed aluminum. "But look here," exclaimed the Ferrarista, "the clock and oil temperature gauge formerly located on the left side of the dash (and obscured by the steering wheel) are now on the console." Bravo. Our friend was not aware of the redesigned clutch pedal linkage which is said to reduce pedal effort by 20 percent. This simple fix involved changing the angle of attack of the pedal return spring.

The final change concerns wheels and tires. The wheels are Speedline cast alloys fitted with Michelin 220/55VR-390 TRX tires. They replace the Cromodora alloys and 205/70VR-14 Michelin XWXs fitted to the Spyder of our July 1978 road test. That car was one of the four best handling automobiles we've ever tested, at least insofar as skidpad and slalom times are concerned. One of the first Spyderys (they had all been Berlinettas before that), it managed 0.852g and 60.8 mph in its evaluation runs and only the BMW M1, the Lamborghini Countach S and the 1978 Corvette could match or exceed its performance.

We expected as much (more, actually) from the latest TRX-shod 308, so you can imagine our surprise at its test scores. Although the GTSi's 60.6-mph slalom speed was only a tick slower than before, its 0.810g skidpad showing was markedly less than that of its predecessor. In fact, the new GTSi was suddenly relegated to the realm of such impressive but less sensational automobiles as the Pontiac Turbo Trans Am and most of the Porsche line, including the 924S Turbo, the 928 and the 930 Turbo. Admittedly, this is still fast company, but somehow you'd expect more from an exotic, especially one costing almost \$53,000.

So we called Ferrari and were told that while the new tire/wheel combination is 1/2-in. taller than the old setup, it has a wider footprint and better all-weather (wet and dry) performance. You'd expect it to handle better than before but, in fact, this is not the case. Our tester found that what had formerly been a neutral-handling automobile now tended toward oversteer. "Its natural attitude is 20 degrees tail-out and this diminishes the excellent steering, suspension feel and tire grip," was the comment he made after repeated passes through the slalom. On the skidpad there was more of the same. The 308 would zip around with little drama, but with its tail hung out. Power-off brought the rear end out farther, power-on broke loose the rear wheels, causing the same reaction. Our test driver concluded, "This is not a car for the novice to drive on a winding, slippery road because it does not reward indecision."

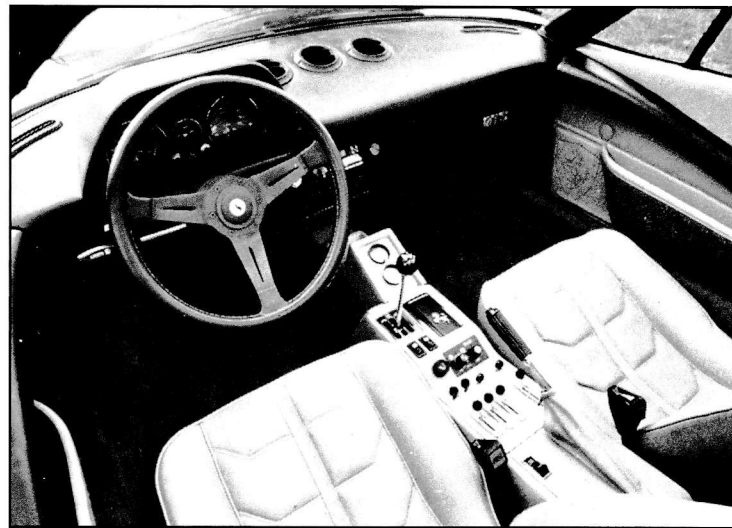
On the bright side, other members of our staff find the 308's steering precise, except that at low speeds it seems heavy and a bit slow. But all of us admit that the steering's feel and responsiveness change when the car is driven at speeds more appropriate to a Ferrari.

There was never any question about the GTSi's brakes, which require only a modest touch of the large pedal to do their work. And excellent work it is, with virtually no fade and impressive stopping distances—154 and 254 ft from 60 and 80 mph respectively. That's better than the early Spyder's stops and one reason why the GTSi earned an excellent overall brake rating.

K-Jetronic for that, even though its reason for being is more effective emissions control. With fuel injection, the 1980 308s get a clean bill of health from all 50 states, including finicky California. Their engines exhibit positive cold start and smooth cold running and have none of the former's flat spots and fuel starvation problems (when cornering). However, a somewhat frightening side effect of the engine's new emission controls is its 2500-rpm cold idle. Ferrari says it's high to meet smog control standards and assures us there's nothing to fear. Maybe so, but one can't help but cringe when a stone-cold engine lights and immediately revs to a rapid idle.

In addition to the new induction system, the latest 308 engines are also equipped with Marelli Digiplex electronic ignition. Among other things, the Digiplex automatically advances the spark along one of 90 different curves tailored to meet a variety of driving conditions and engine loads.

As effective as they are, all of these advances in induction and ignition contribute little to the car's net performance. Rather, they allow the 308 to maintain the performance level that existed



before the heavy hand of the EPA was felt on the industry's shoulder. So even though the 308 is saddled with an air pump, thermal exhaust and catalytic converter, horsepower and torque (205 bhp, 181 lb-ft) remain unchanged and acceleration is only a trifle slower. The GTSi goes from 0 to 60 mph in 7.9 (versus 7.6) sec and reaches the quarter-mile in 16.1 (vs 15.8) sec.

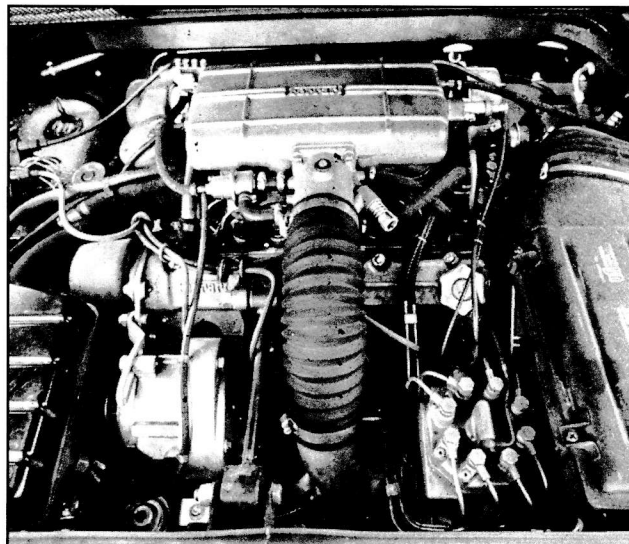
The important news is that the engine is smoother and quieter

AT A GLANCE

	Ferrari 308 GTSi	BMW M1	Porsche 928
List price	\$52,640	\$115,000	\$38,850
Curb weight, lb	3250	3325	3410
Engine	V-8	inline 6	V-8
Transmission	5-sp M	5-sp M	5-sp M
0-60 mph, sec	7.9	6.2	7.0
Standing 1/4 mi, sec	16.1	14.5	15.6
Speed at end of 1/4 mi, mph	88.0	97.0	93.0
Stopping distance from 60 mph, ft	154	156	138
Interior noise at 50 mph, dBA	76	79	71
Lateral acceleration, g	0.810	0.858	0.811
Slalom speed, mph	60.6	62.7	59.7
Fuel economy, mpg	11.5	13.0	16.0

than before and has a more flexible power curve. It can be lugged to as low as 1000 rpm without protestation, yet it will rev freely right up to the redline, even in 5th gear. That translates to almost 150 mph, mighty impressive in this day and age.

Driving the latest Spyder is not a unique experience. But it certainly is pleasurable. So much so that one's criticisms are easily forgotten, once the lightweight roof panel (secured by two clasps and stowable behind the seats) is removed, the engine started and the car set into motion. The visible shift gate is precise, although it can prove balky if rushed. The gear ratios are evenly graduated to exploit engine output to its fullest (no super-tall 5th gear here). As a result, the 308 is facile in traffic and an absolute flier on the highway. The lack of wind noise and buffeting, sans top, is a testimonial to the car's aerodynamics which are manifested in a design that looks as good as it works. We received nothing but compliments from other drivers who commented on the Ferrari's swoopiness. Because, personal gripes (limited seat adjustments, a ridiculous side-view mirror, a less than frugal 11.5 mpg in our admittedly enthusiastic driving) aside, the 308GTSi is certainly distinctive. It's exotic, even beautiful and, thus, is its own excuse for being.



PRICE

List price, all POE	\$52,640
Price as tested	\$55,040
Price as tested includes std equipment (air conditioning, elect. window lifts, leather interior), AM/FM stereo/cassette (\$1800), pre-delivery insp (\$350), black rocker-panel trim (\$250)	

GENERAL

Curb weight, lb/kg	3250	1476
Test weight	3415	1550
Weight dist (with driver), f/r, %	42/58	
Wheelbase, in./mm	92.1	2340
Track, front/rear	57.8/57.8	1468/1468
Length	174.2	4425
Width	67.7	1720
Height	44.1	1120
Trunk space, cu ft/liters	5.3	150
Fuel capacity, U.S. gal./liters	18.5	70

ENGINE

Type	dohc V-8
Bore x stroke, in./mm	3.19 x 2.79 .. 81.0 x 71.0
Displacement, cu in./cc	179 .. 2926
Compression ratio	8.8:1
Bhp @ rpm, SAE net/kW	205/153 @ 6600
Torque @ rpm, lb-ft/Nm	181/245 @ 5000
Fuel injection	Bosch K-Jetronic
Fuel requirement	unleaded, 91-oct

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	5-sp manual
Gear ratios: 5th (0.95)	3.52:1
4th (1.24)	4.60:1
3rd (1.69)	6.27:1
2nd (2.35)	8.72:1
1st (3.58)	13.28:1
Final drive ratio	3.71:1

CHASSIS & BODY

Layout	mid engine/rear drive
Body/frame	steel/tubular steel frame
Brake system .. 10.7-in. (272-mm) vented discs front, 10.9-in. (277-mm) vented discs rear; vacuum assisted	
Wheels	cast alloy, 390 x 190
Tires	Michelin TRX, 220/55VR-390
Steering type	rack & pinion
Turns, lock-to-lock	3.3
Suspension, front/rear: unequal-length A-arms, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar/unequal-length A-arms, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar	

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/bhp (test weight)	16.7
Mph/1000 rpm (5th gear)	18.8
Engine revs/mi (60 mph)	3200
R&T steering index	1.30
Brake swept area, sq in./ton	263

ROAD TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION

Time to distance, sec:	
0-100 ft	3.5
0-500 ft	8.9
0-1320 ft (¼ mi)	16.1
Speed at end of ¼ mi, mph	88.0
Time to speed, sec:	
0-30 mph	2.9
0-50 mph	6.1
0-60 mph	7.9
0-70 mph	10.6
0-80 mph	13.4
0-100 mph	22.1

SPEEDS IN GEARS

5th gear (7500 rpm)	147
4th (7700)	122
3rd (7700)	87
2nd (7700)	63
1st (7700)	41

FUEL ECONOMY

Normal driving, mpg	11.5
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BRAKES

Minimum stopping distances, ft:	
From 60 mph	154
From 80 mph	254
Control in panic stop	excellent
Pedal effort for 0.5g stop, lb	20
Fade: percent increase in pedal effort to maintain 0.5g deceleration in 6 stops from 60 mph	
Overall brake rating	excellent

HANDLING

Lateral accel, 100-ft radius, g	0.810
Speed thru 700-ft slalom, mph	60.6

INTERIOR NOISE

Constant 30 mph, dBA	72
50 mph	76
70 mph	79

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph indicated is actually	27.0
60 mph	56.0

ACCELERATION

