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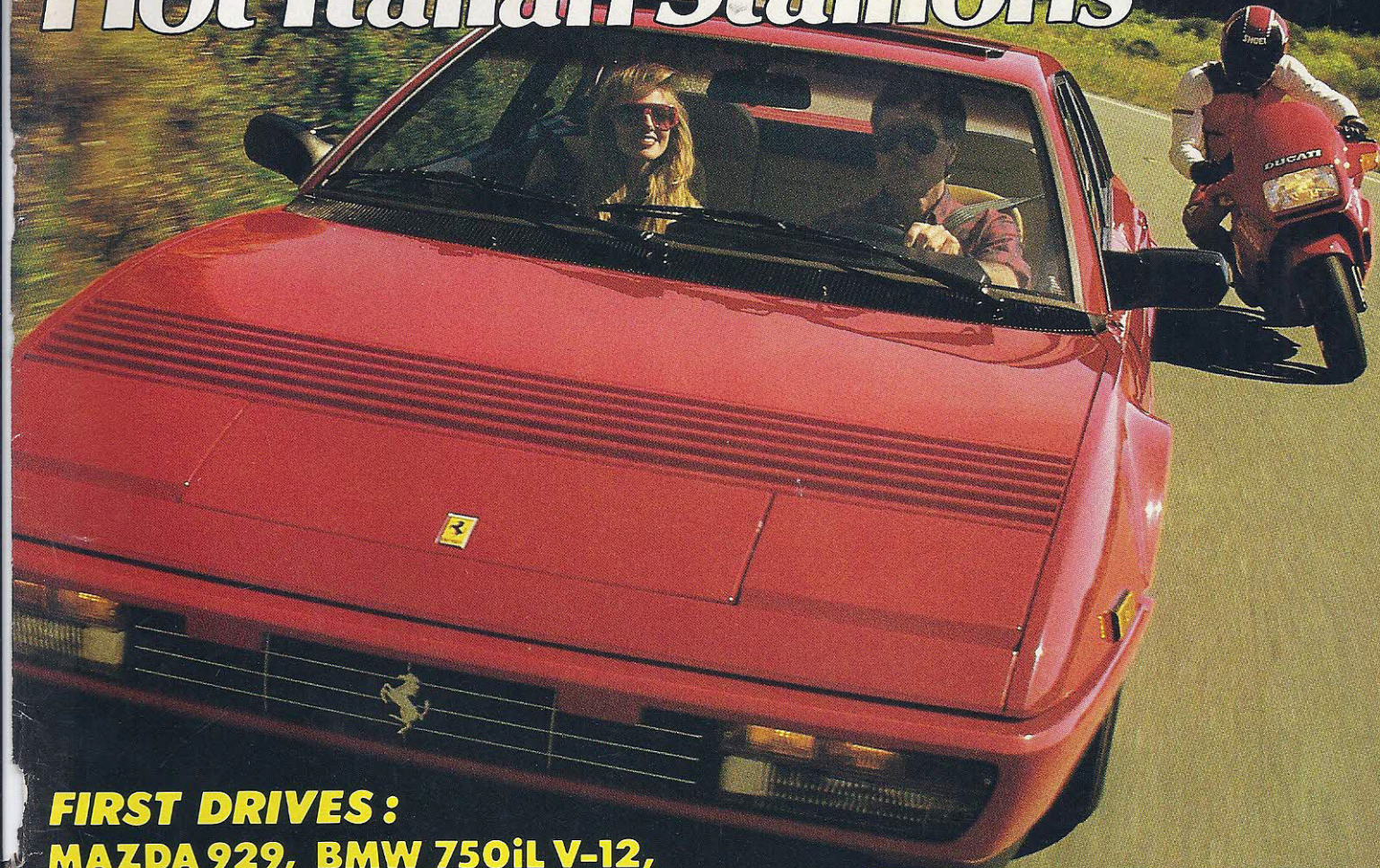


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COVER STORY

# Ferrari Mondial & Ducati Paso

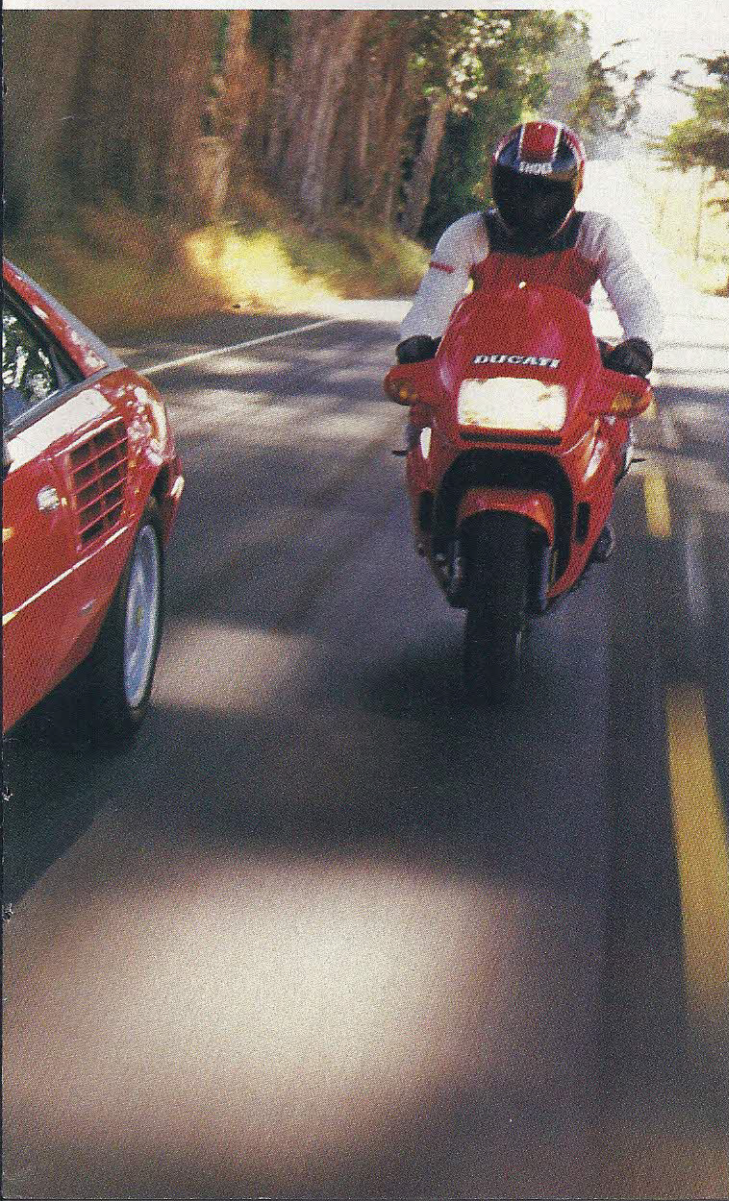
The 6-wheeled express

by Ron Grable

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VIC HUBER







**B**e still, my foolish heart, it's only a Ferrari. And a Mondial at that—not even the fire-breathin' Testarossa or the hot-rod 328. Those of us who have been in this business awhile get a little jaded about all the exotica we drive, hardened to the envious stares and startled reactions of various civilians.

But Ferraris are the exception to the rule; *they* still cause AHR (accelerated heart rate) in even the most hardened journalistic heart. Everyone who comes in contact with these cars falls under their spell: the people who own them, the people who build them, and the people who simply lust after them.

When we arrived at Ferrari North America to pick up the Mondial for this story, no fewer than three employees were lovingly cleaning and waxing it; and we got 15 minutes of instructions on how to close the hood and decklid. As we drove away to be swallowed by L.A. traffic, we noticed both the public relations guy and the service manager standing on the curb waving. They give good attitude, and it's infectious. The foregone conclusion is that the car will have some typical Ferrari glitches, but that can't detract from the special status this marque commands in the automotive spectrum. By contrast, when we pick up most of our test cars, someone will throw us the keys with an "It's space 42 outdaback, darlin'." Sure enough, it is—and usually covered with a week's worth of soot and grime.

Remember the definition of paranoia: It's the fellow at the Super Bowl game who thinks the players in the huddle are talking about him. Well, this righteous red Ferrari qualifies its driver for an advanced paranoia rating. Utterly certain everyone is staring, a rock-solid 55 mph is all that's possible, so sure are you that your driver's license hangs like a ripe plum to be picked at will by any law enforcement officer.

To fuel these paranoias even further, the second star of this story is also a bright-red Italian performance vehicle—of the 2-wheeled variety—a Ducati Paso. For this story, we planned to spend a week on the highways and byways of California in a high-speed touring mode, contrasting the experience between motorcycle and car.

We solicited *Motorcyclist* magazine for the services of



## Ferrari Mondial & Ducati Paso

senior editor Jeff Karr to do the bike-riding duties, and rotated Jeff and me between the two vehicles over the duration of the trip so that each rider/driver experienced the entire range of roads and weather.

The Ducati occupies the same notch in the motorcycle order of things as the Ferrari does in the car world, both the car and bike being mid-level within their respective manufacturer's lineups. For Ferrari, the awesome Testarossa is the top-of-the-line screamer, with horsepower to spare, while the Mondial is a little more civilized, with some additional interior space, less radical 4-valve V-8, etc. The top of the Ducati line is the F1, a thinly disguised race bike with swoopy fairing and radical (read uncomfortable) riding position. The Paso is a slightly toned-down version with touring intent, a little more upright riding position and softer seat designed to pamper its rider for long-

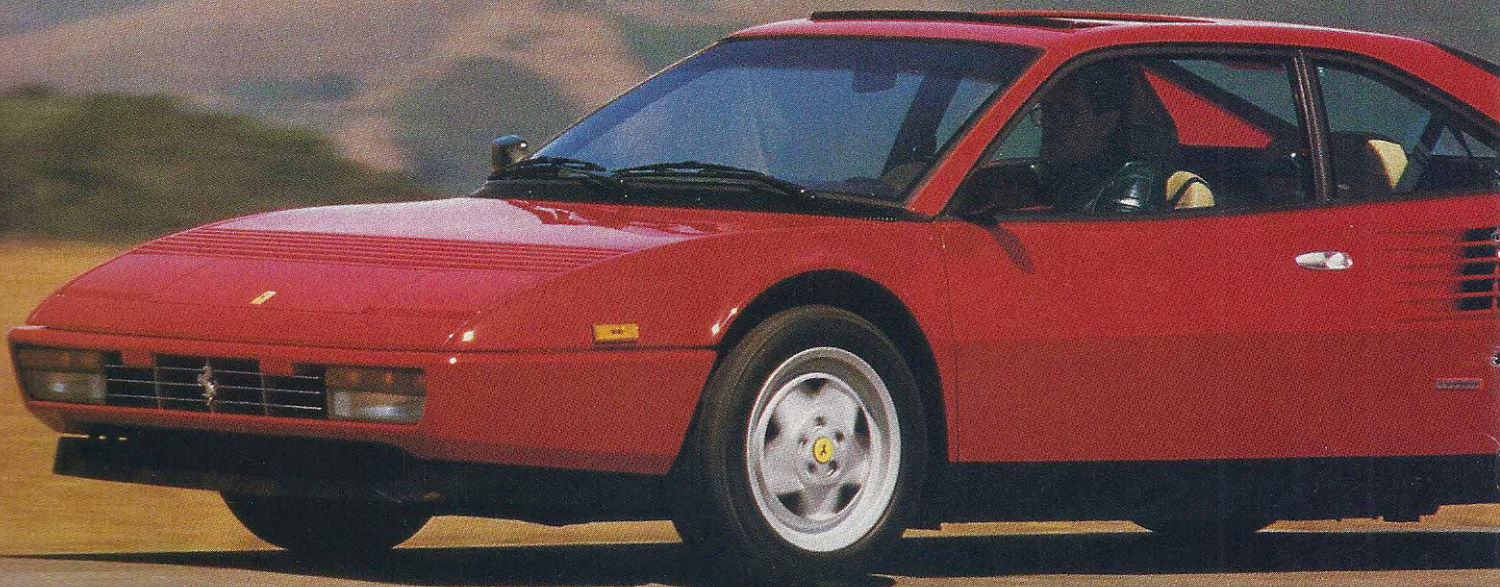
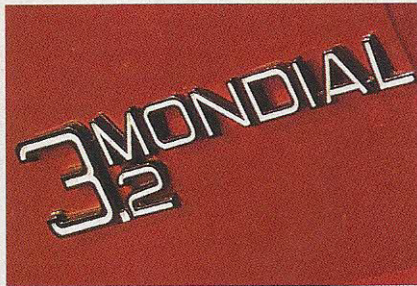
### Ferraris cause accelerated heart rate in even the most hardened journalistic heart

er distances.

But, make no mistake, both the car and the bike share the same insolent stance, are the same glorious red, have the same don't-bother-me-with-speed-limits appearance, and gener-

ate about as much shock value as David Lee Roth at a church social. And that's individually. Imagine what happened when we put the two of them together for a week, blasting along mountain roads, motoring sedately among freewayites, creeping along in commuter traffic, or even parked. This 6-wheeled combination simply stopped everyone dead in his tracks.

Our route took us north from Los Angeles to the cool, wooded slopes of Medocino County, east across the





## Ferrari Mondial & Ducati Paso

state to the hulking Sierras, and south along the length of California's most impressive mountain range. Climate varied from the hot, glaring San Joaquin Valley, to a sparkling San Francisco sunset, through the muffled, fog-shrouded Point Reyes seashore, into 104° midday heat of the Sacramento delta, and the crisp, clear air and small alpine lakes of 8314-ft-high Monitor Pass. Altogether a wonderful look at a diverse state, especially since yours truly drew Ferrari duty (read air-condi-

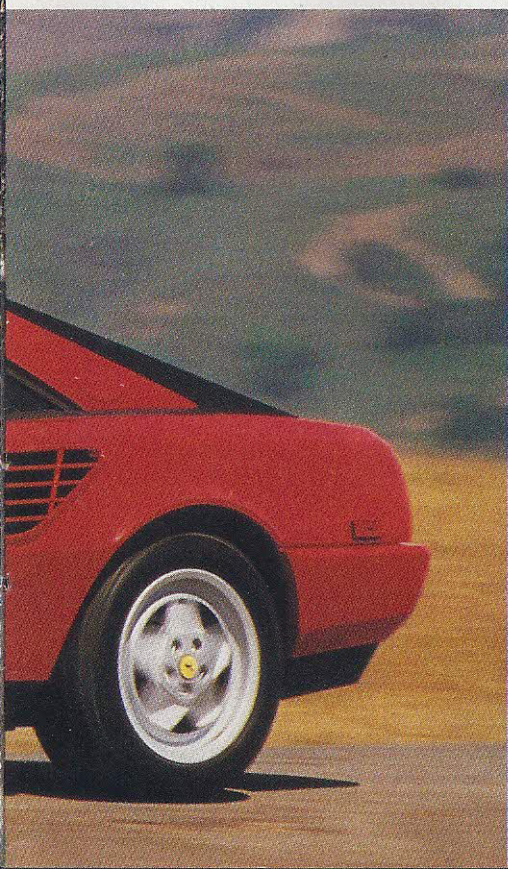
### These two together generate as much shock value as David David Lee Roth at a church social

tioned) during the aforementioned 104° trip.

Before exhausting the first tank of fuel, we had our initial (but, as expected, not last) encounter with the authorities in the small desert town

of Avenal. We had religiously slowed to the legal speed to transit this dot on the map, and, as we were accelerating back up to "normal cruise" on the exit side of town, the mirror suddenly got full of flashing red lights. Prepared for the worst, it came as a pleasant surprise to find that Officer Johnson simply wanted to see one of these Miami Vice things up close so he could tell the little woman (his words) about it tonight, and was it the same kind Don Johnson drove. Ever anxious to please, we gave him the five-dollar walkaround tour (the higher-priced tours include raised hoods and can even go as far as a ride if the situation is deemed "ticket-im-pending").

Transiting the San Benito mountain range, we had an excellent chance to compare the relative performance of these two thoroughbreds on a lovely, deserted series of mountain roads, followed by a 65-mile





stretch of smooth, two-lane blacktop winding north along the floor of the Priest Valley. With the motorcycle guy on the motorcycle, the car was generally faster, by virtue of its higher cornering speeds (thanks to much more rubber in contact with the asphalt). The Ducati's higher power-to-weight ratio would get it off the corners much quicker than the car, but the car would reel the bike in at higher speeds.

With the car guy on the motorcycle, the tables were turned. Not used to the asphalt rushing by mere inches from my personal self, I attacked the corners with great slowness. Equally, bike riders don't have much experience tossing \$72,000 cars around with wild abandon, so our collective timidities were offsetting. The results were that the average speed over the ground was just about equal in this driver/rider configuration.

The Mondial is, in our opinion, the most civilized of the Ferrari lineup.

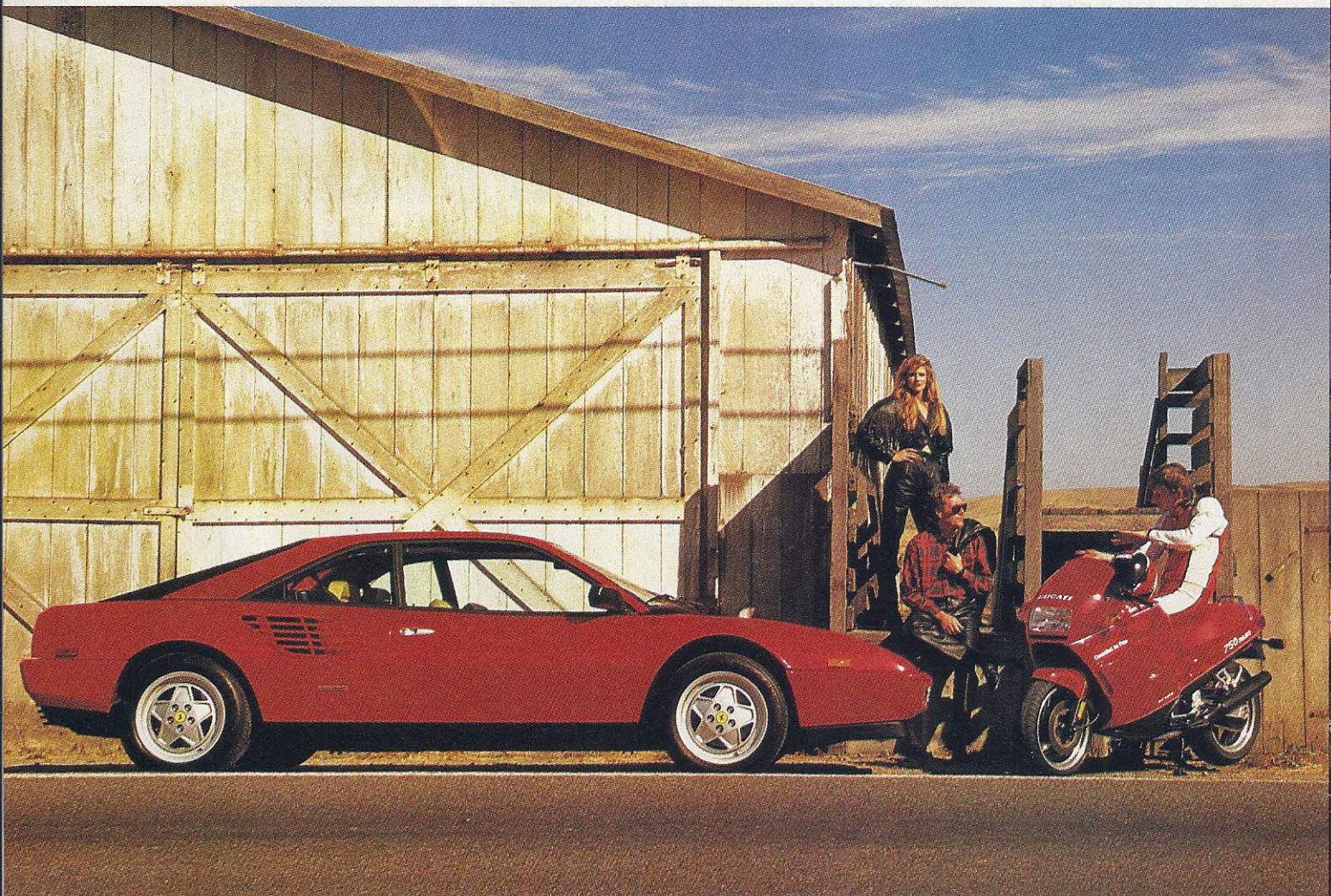
### The Mondial is the most civilized of the Ferrari lineup

This one actually has head room for six-footers, a two-way adjustable steering wheel, vestigial rear seats for the odd luggage and camera, a useable trunk, that wonderful 260-hp 4-valve V-8, and seats that should be the envy of every member of the WSASD (World Society of Automotive Seat Designers). Without exception, everyone's initial comment was, "Wow these seats feel like a church pew"; but, after spending any amount of time in them, all agree they are a nearly perfect blend of support and comfort.

This Ferrari handles like most other Ferraris: heavy steering effort, moderate understeer right up to the limits of adhesion, good ultimate cornering power, superb braking power and stability, and the flawless high-

speed tracking of a Japanese bullet train. The Mondial also carries many Pininfarina styling elements, with its pronounced side grilles, sloping nose, and rear roofline. It's not quite as swoopy nor as low as the Testarossa, but it gets almost as much attention, and is often mistaken for a "red-head."

The engine is also typically Ferrari—that is, truly wonderful. At full acceleration, it makes Italian motor music like only a Ferrari can, a full, throaty moan made of mostly intake air noise and the sound of lots of mechanical components doing their jobs in perfect harmony. The Marelli-Microplex electronic ignition and Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection endow the engine with a silky-smooth response and crispness that make it a pleasure to drive fast—or slow. Most passengers comment negatively on the engine noise when they first get into the Mondial, but, after a while, a strange smile appears on their faces any time





max power gets dialed up.

At your author's skill level with the Ducati, the handling was impeccable, with never a hint of instability. At astounding lean angles (seemed that way to me, anyway), nothing scraped the road and the suspension soaked up everything. Braking was powerful and straight, and engine power was linear and predictable, if not as powerful as anticipated.

When ridden hard, the seating position on the Ducati proved perfect, with just the right amount of weight placed forward on the rider's hands and wrists. In a more laid-back cruise mode, the low fairing didn't provide much protection from the elements, and we had to wonder how difficult it would be to proceed in heavy rain or other such nastiness with which motorcycle riders are occasionally confronted.

Ask a motorcycle rider and car driver to describe an area they have just passed through, and you'll get two

### The Ferrari people give good attitude, and it's infectious

radically different perspectives. The bike guy will wax eloquent about the heat, early morning mists, smells, etc., while the car nut will talk about the panoramic views, dazzling sunsets, and so on. The difference is that the person in the car goes *through* a given area, something like watching a video, and if it's hot/cold/raining/snowing/foggy, he adjusts his environment inside the car accordingly. The motorcycle rider, on the other hand, experiences the environment. If it's raining, he's wet, snowing he's cold, riding by a dairy farm—well, you get the idea.

In any such comparison as this, the conveniences offered by the car for extended touring are obvious. What is perhaps not so obvious is the reaction to these two vehicles when

plunked down in the same surroundings. For example, try this: Ride your Ducati Paso up to the valet parking area at San Francisco's Mark Hopkins Hotel on Nob Hill, leap off, and, while wiping the bugs and grime from the faceshield of your helmet, throw the keys to the valet and saunter up to the registration desk. You'll notice people in the lobby shying away with raised eyebrows and much wrinkling of noses, and you can be certain there won't be a room available for you, buddy.

Same scenario in the Mondial initiates a fist fight between valets to see who (1) gets to open the door and (2) park it; sly smiles from all the ladies in the general vicinity; registration clerks who treat you like a real person; and, "Of course we have a room, Mr. Smith. Will the presidential suite do this evening?" It can get a little frustrating for the bike rider to see the Mondial constantly get priority at gas stations, tollbooths, and parking lots, but, after all, \$72,000 has its privileges.

How's this for a conclusion? Comparing these two thoroughbreds in terms of which is the best long-distance high-speed tourer, our considered opinion is that we'd want to do any trip of consequence with . . . both. When you just have to have the bugs-on-the-teeth smile, climb aboard the Paso. But, when it's time to be cool and let everyone know your stuff is together, only the Ferrari will do it.

If you can step up to the Mondial at \$72 large, another seven grand is pocket change. ▶





### Two Wheels Shy of a Full Load

**T**he way I see it, it all comes down to square feet. Grable sits behind the wheel of the Ferrari, wrapped in about 150 sq ft of bright-red visual stimuli. As for me, well, my little Ducati has maybe 28 sq ft of brilliant red paint to its credit. The Paso normally turns heads wherever it goes, but it suddenly becomes invisible in the presence of the Mondial. Meanwhile, the Ferrari packs enough sensory impact to excite even roadside livestock. Just imagine what this thing can do to real people. Never mind that the Mondial is one of Ferrari's less exciting models. Once civilians are lured close by the sheer sex appeal of the Mondial's silhouette, once they see that virile little horse logo, they quite frankly can't tell a Mondial from a moon rocket.

It just burns me up. How am I supposed to maintain a proper level of contempt for rich dilettantes in expensive cars if I find myself lusting after this damn Ferrari and the attention it brings

to its driver?

Only a couple hours into our trip, this thought eats at me, mile after mile, as I ride along in the shadow of the Ferrari. You see, as somebody who rides and tests motorcycles for a living, mere automobiles generally strike me as utilitarian transportation. Frankly, I get a bigger pulse rise watching Vanna White turn over the letter "S." The bikes I test most every month dispatch a quarter mile in a touch over 10.5 sec, going about 130 miles per at the finishing lights. But, now, I find myself thinking warm, giddy thoughts about some monumentally slow (by my standards) automobile. What's the deal?

So, there I am on my Ducati, hunched hard into the wind. Grable loves deserted roads, and he invariably selects a cruise speed that has us running neck and neck with light aircraft. I agonize over every minor rise in temperature, while large, moist insects expire point-

blank on my faceshield. It's pretty rugged out here in the hot morning sun. Meanwhile, ahead in the luxury capsule, I see Ron reach for the temperature control knob on the Mondial's air conditioner. Oh, yeah, he's really suffering in there. On a straight, fast road, the contrast between these two Italians is stark. Look at it this way: Would you rather ride in the cabin of a 747, or trot out onto the wing and straddle an engine nacelle for a few hours? Sure, I'm the one really experiencing the world we're passing through, but there are limits to just how much of the real world I can handle in one sitting. As the miles roll by, I begin to hope maybe Ron's getting tired of that ho-hum Ferrari and I can help him out and drive it awhile—strictly as a personal favor, mind you.

The moment finally comes at a nondescript country intersection, nearly a full Ducati fuel load north of Los Angeles. At last, Ron is bored. ▶





The Mondial is wonderfully foreign, with quaint little pictographs describing the various control functions like some cockeyed ancient Egyptian drawings on a recently exhumed espresso machine. The basic controls are obvious, of course, but I am more than a little worried about blowing the hood off at speed with an ill-considered attempt to open the sunroof.

I'll admit I'm embarrassed by my excitement at driving the Mondial, but, after a couple miles, I realize it was well founded. The Ferrari sends all the right signals to the driver; the chassis feels taut, and the engine note is clear and urgent. Your head swivels to take in the panorama, both inside and outside. The classic tan leather interior seems so overpoweringly Italian. So perfect. You're out in the country, driving your Ferrari at a comfortably high rate of speed. You could sleep in a packing crate at night, and drive this automobile in the daytime, and your life would be full and complete. Of course, you might have to, to make the payments and pay the insurance on this pup. Luckily, these thoughts are unimportant to the road tester. That's me.

Of course, the Ferrari is not perfect; no machine is. The transmission is as notchy and slow as the master control lever for a Union Pacific switching yard, and the front brakes squeal when they're hot, but the Ferrari's engine is pure chocolate mousse. By bike standards, it has no real top-end rush, but it pulls beautifully at any rpm. I could listen to it all day, if only Ron would let me.

I'm quite content in my Mondial, and it's obvious Grable likes riding the Ducati. After lunch and gas, he offers to continue riding—as a personal favor to

me, of course. I'm not fooled. The deserted road turns seriously twisty, and, at first, the Mondial's capabilities seem limitless. What it lacks in acceleration, it makes up for with pure stick in the corners. The Ferrari gives every indication of being forgiving of minor driver mistakes. Even when run too hard into corners, it doesn't want to come around alarmingly; I can get on the brakes indelicately deep in a turn without any evil yaw response seizing control of the car. To me, this seems a desirable quality in a vehicle that can plow a \$72,000 hole in the underbrush.

After a long while, I'm having tremendous fun on this road, hooting and hollering, when the Mondial gets loose. And I look fabulous. Of course, I can barely keep up with Ron on the Ducati, which, with all due respect, means that we're just stroking along. Still, I'm beginning to see that the Mondial's tendency to slide the front end is not the ideal situation for going fast. The driver

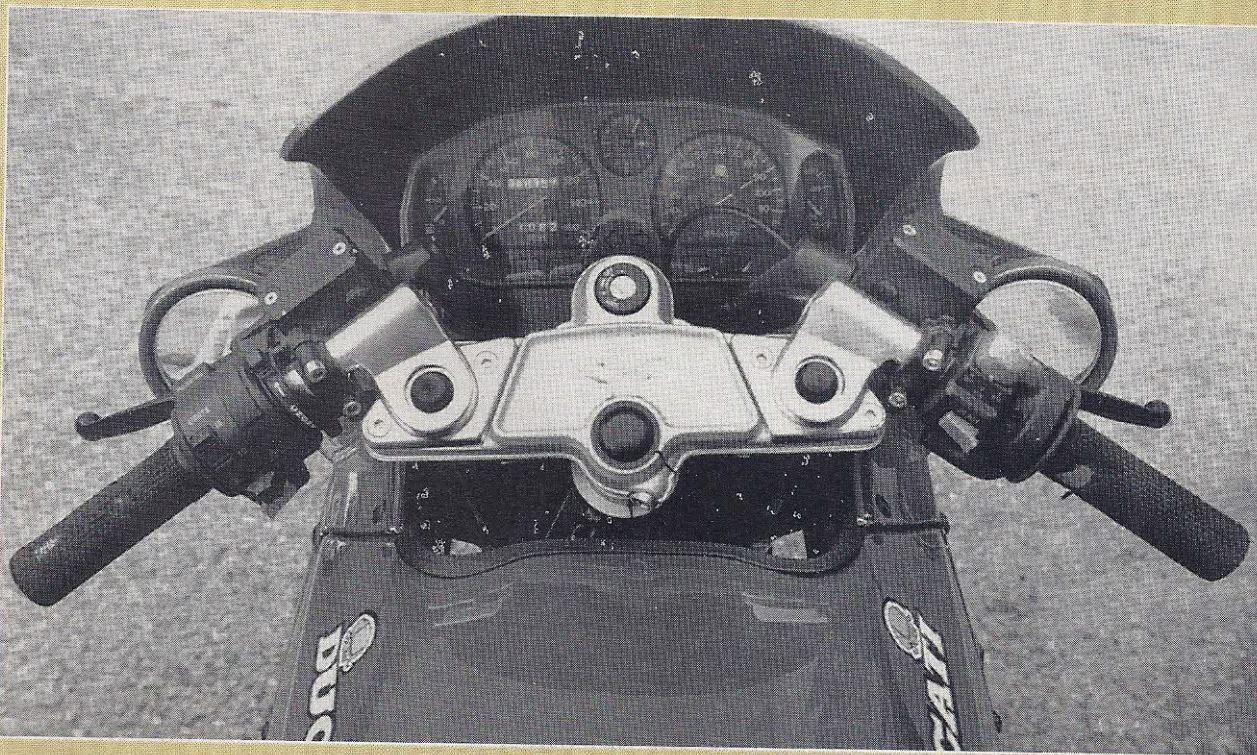
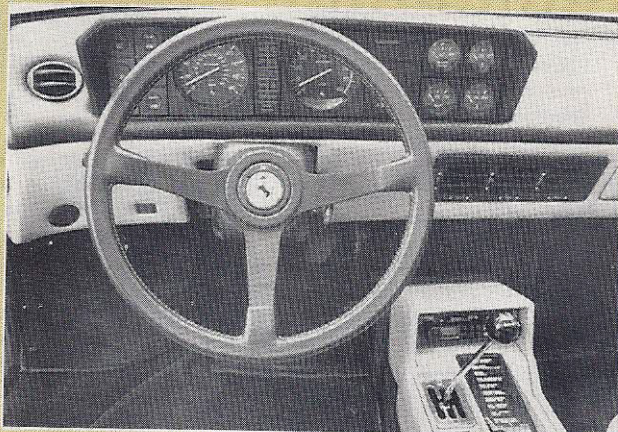
must set up the chassis *just so* with the brakes and throttle to get the most out of the tires; clumsy feet and ham fists result in predictable but rather inelegant front-end plowage through corners.

By contrast, we motorcyclists don't have the luxury of experimenting with slip angles in corners. Generally, one tire sliding is considered a crash in progress, and, at that point, we quit worrying about going fast and start thinking about getting home in one piece. Even with a chassis as rigid and able as the Paso's, one creeps up to the edge of adhesion very gently, over the course of months, not minutes.

About the time I'm feeling a bit too frisky in the Mondial, Ron quite sensibly pulls over for a vehicle swap. Just by sheer chance, he has us aimed up my favorite stretch of road in the world, and the gauntlet has been thrown.

We're a perfect match. Grable and I are both roadracers (though in retirement), and we know where our advan-

**Bug protection has to be one of the Ferrari's strong points (right); the Paso (below) provides its rider with less luxury and, at times, more excitement.**





## Ferrari Mondial & Ducati Paso

tage lies. For me and my Ducati, the road is very wide; I use all of my lane to the best of my advantage. At this pace, my gummy Pirellis wouldn't last a thousand miles. But, even cranked over as far as I dare, Ron and the Ferrari that fills my mirrors have speed on me at the apex of every turn. My little desmodromic V-twin has a big acceleration margin on that red boat anchor from Maranello, however.

Though the air-cooled Paso is old news in motorcycling, it still has a big power-to-weight advantage over most anything on four wheels. The Ducati has just two valves per cylinder, but the fact that they're popped open and snapped closed positively by the desmo valve-train allows the little 750cc V-twin to

spin to 9000 rpm and lets the 492-lb Ducati move down the road smartly, indeed. Though the Paso is no terror compared to the 4- and 5-valve 4-cylinder bikes from Japan, it still makes good useable power. The Ducati rips through the quarter mile in the high 12-sec bracket with a terminal speed just over 103 mph. Despite the apparently slick full bodywork, the Ducati tops out at a mere 122 mph. The Mondial is somewhat faster on top, as Ron graphically demonstrates to me on several long straights. The Mondial's comically inaccurate speedometer has Grable braced for the onset of mach buffet, when in fact the car is only going something in the neighborhood of 140 mph.

As we motor around Northern Califor-

nia, the balance of power seems to shift back and forth. Present me with a tight road, and I'll cough up the keys to the Mondial every time. The Paso has racer-quality chassis components that get you through corners in classic Italian style. The Mondial has nowhere near the corner-to-corner snap, and it's so comparatively huge that most roads offer only one real line choice. And overtaking slower traffic can turn into an all-day job in the Ferrari. The Paso darts past slower traffic quickly and safely in places that would be unthinkable in a car. On the other hand, on more wide-open roads, the joyous oneness of man and machine gradually evaporates on the Paso, and the Mondial seems more and more like an all-satisfying ego-gratification unit. In the Ferrari, you can play or you can simply travel. Both are accomplished in extreme style and luxury. You can say the same thing about the Ducati, only leave out the part about luxury.

I still don't know for sure which vehicle is the more capable or the most fun on a twisty road. Naturally, Ron thinks the car has the advantage—it's his job to think cars are swell. I know he's deluding himself. I figure my Ducati can suck Grable's little pointy-toed Gucci loafers off on a twisty road. The only possible way to settle this gentlemen's disagreement is with considerably more exhaustive research on the back roads of Northern California. Strictly in the interest of journalistic accuracy, mind you.

—Jeff Karr

