ROAD & TRACK

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INSIDER'S REPORT: The All-new Corvette FIRST TEST: Mercedes-Benz SLK

FERRARI FRENZY

Ferrari 50th Anniversary Collector Issue!

We Test All the New Ferraris:
- 550 Maranello
- F50
- 456 GTA
- F355 Spider
January

If we had known we were going to be around this long...we would have done it exactly like this. 1997 marks Road & Track's 50th anniversary year. We're dedicating this month's issue to Ferrari, which is also celebrating its 50th year. You'll find Road Tests of Maranello's current crop of supercars (as well as a test of the amazing Mercedes-Benz SLK roadster), Phil Hill's personal picks of the top-ten Ferraris of all time, Paul Frère's technical history of the company's engine, plus a Salon on the oldest Ferrari in existence.

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JANUARY 1997
Half a Century, Four Ferraris

In which we consider the end product of Ferrari's first 50 years of building some of the most colorful and charismatic cars of our time

BY PETER EGAN
PHOTOS BY JOHN LAMM
History in Italy comes at you in overlapping layers, like the lifted pages of a transparency in an anatomy book or the rock strata of a road-cut. You see only parts of it, but you see those parts all at once, in a single glance.

Park your red 1997 Ferrari 550 Maranello next to a wall at the Futa Pass on the old Mille Miglia route, and you'll find a plaque commemorating the four Mille Miglia victories of Clemente Biondetti, in 1938, 1947, 1948 and 1949.

Farther down the wall you can see poxmarks where gunfire, probably during World War II, knocked the plaster away from the brick. And where the brick is missing, you see what could very well be Roman stone, or perhaps Etruscan stone. Humans have been treading these paths for a long time, building nice stuff along the way.

Well, some nice stuff.

Drive your rented Fiat down the autostrada from the Milan airport to the Ferrari factory at Maranello, and you notice a great many postwar concrete industrial and apartment buildings crowding out the small pockets of remaining charm and antiquity. Architects in this half of the 20th century have a lot to answer for.

Not so the car builders of Modena and the nearby village of Maranello. With few exceptions, their cars have been a source of almost continuous pleasure since the first car bearing Ferrari's name appeared in 1947. Which, incidentally, is the same year Road & Track hit the newsstands.

To celebrate this dual birthday, we decided it was a fine time to carry cameras, test equipment and notebooks to Maranello. Ferrari President Luca Cordero di Montezemolo (who was born in 1947, by the way) offered us the loan of all four current Ferrari road cars to drive in the hills of the surrounding Apennines and at the Fiorano factory test track. The cars would be the Formula 1-inspired F50; an automatic transmission version of the 456, called the GTA (A for automatic); a mid-engine F355 Spider; and the all-new front-engine, rear-drive 550 Maranello.
Our crew included Phil Hill, photographer John Lamm, Road Test Editor Kim Reynolds and yours truly, team stenographer. We'd driven and tested other versions of three of these cars, and our European Editor, Paul Frère, had done a driving impression of the 550 Maranello, but we'd not yet had a chance to road test this newest and most controversial of the Ferrari family.

550 Maranello

Why controversial? Several reasons.

First, the 550 is a traditional front-engine, rear-drive car that harks back to the glory days of the GTO and Daytona coupes, and yet it replaces the mid-engine 512 Testarossa (TR) as Ferrari's current production supercar. This is at odds with the long-standing notion that Ferrari's road cars should rightly celebrate their modern racing pedigree by placing the engine behind the driver, as the BB (Berlinetta Boxer) and TR series cars have done.

While it's true that a mid-engine layout offers many advantages at the outer limits on the racetrack, its benefits have sometimes been oversold in road cars. With proper tires, suspension and weight distribution, a front-engine car can be made to handle nearly as well as a mid-engine one at the limit, while being more forgiving in everyday driving because a car with a high polar moment of inertia responds more slowly, allowing the driver to more easily maintain control.

More important, perhaps, a front-engine car makes it easier to package passengers and luggage, and generally has the added benefit of simpler maintenance and easier access to the engine and running gear.

So, we have front-engine, rear-drive again—in this case balanced by a 6-speed transaxle at the rear, joined to the engine by a solid driveshaft tube for better weight distribution. What else is controversial?

Well, the styling. While Pininfarina has penned a muscular, handsome car in the 550 Maranello, no one has yet suggested it has the knock-your-socks-off instant classic appeal of the 250 GTO or the Daytona coupe. But then those cars had to contend with neither modern bumper and safety laws, nor a contemporary understanding of aerodynamics. Also, there appears to have been an intentional effort to tone the car down for the buyer who finds a Testarossa, for instance, just a little too flashy and visible. Ferrari's stated purpose was to "create an understatement...consistent with today's tastes and requirements."

Suffice to say that the 550 grows on you when you spend a few days in its presence, and it looks more stunning in real life than in photos. This is especially true when you see one in a rearview mirror, or through a windshield as it speeds off into the distance. Which it will do quite readily, because the 550 Maranello is a very, very fast car. It can lap Ferrari's Fiorano test track 3.2 seconds faster than the 512 Testarossa, according to Ferrari, and our test car accelerated 0-60 exactly as fast as our 512 TR test car did, in 4.7 sec.—on a much less grippy surface—while braking harder and getting through the slalom faster than the TR. We did not have the space to do a top-speed run on the 550, but Ferrari claims a top speed of 199 mph, versus our own test speed of 192 for the TR.

In other words, this civilized, handsome, "conventional" 2-seater is one of the fastest and nimblest cars on earth.

What the numbers don't necessarily convey is the remarkable flexibility of the 550's 65-degree, 48-valve aluminum 5474-cc V-12 engine. It makes usable, stump-pulling power from just above idle and then nails you to the seat with euphoric, hand-of-God ac-
eration all the way to its 7700-rpm redline. No peakiness, just power on tap any time, at any speed. The engine is rated at 485 bhp at 7000 rpm and has a very flat torque curve. As a device for passing slower (almost all) cars on a winding road, the 550 has few equals. Wish yourself into a slot, and it's there, all with a resonant, velvety rustle of V-12 thrust.

Variable-length intake runners, opened flute-like by computer-controlled valves, contribute to this flexibility, as does an exhaust system in which backpressure is regulated with bypass valves. The red cylinder heads have four valves per cylinder with the blessing of hydraulic tappets, eliminating the drama and expense of periodic valve shimming by experts.

The chassis is made of steel tube, with aluminum panels welded directly to the tubing using a special sandwich alloy known as Feran, which allows aluminum to be welded to steel. The interior is the usual feast of soft leather, tan with black trim in this case, with a luggage shelf behind the seats that has straps and buckles to hold down the suitcases. The rear (and only) trunk is deep and wide, though not very long, and holds a Sony 6-disc CD player.

A chromed ball and shift lever snick their way mechanically but nicely through the traditional slotted metal plate, which looks like brushed stain-

What's a Ferrari without a gated shifter and drilled pedals? Racing-style and carbon-fiber-shelled seats are options.

birthday in the summer of 1948.

Nearly a half-century later, driving on the sinuous S-65 highway, Phil Hill pronounced the 550 Maranello “the best Ferrari road car I’ve driven.” A testimonial not to be taken lightly. “The flexibility of this engine,” he said, “is just amazing. Well balanced...pleasant, safe suspension. It took so many years of racing over roads like this, trying this and that, experimenting, to get all the combination right, and they’ve really done it with this car.”

That evening we had dinner at the famous Fini restaurant in Modena, where we sampled such Modenese delights as boiled tongue and the won-
derfully rich zampone sausage, which could clog an artery the size of the California aqueduct. Kim Reynolds, a near-vegetarian, was visibly moved.

At dinner the night before, John Lamm had been trying to pry out of Phil Hill a list of his 10 all-time favorite Ferraris. He had about six on the list and was pondering a seventh. I asked Phil what factors caused a car to be included in the favorites’ list.

“It’s a terrible thing to say,” Phil mused, “but you often judge older Ferraris, particularly the racing cars, on their relative lack of vices, rather than just their virtues.”

The user-friendly cars, he said, those that cooperated with your wishes and didn’t have any strange or unsettling quirks, were often those most fondly remembered.

At the Fini that night, after a day with the 550 Maranello, Phil added this new Ferrari to the list of his 10 best. “A pleasure to drive, and no vices,” he said. “It does everything you want a car to do for you.”

No argument from me. Of all the high-performance and exotic cars I’ve driven, I think the 550 might be my first choice for a summer of motoring around Europe. If I could afford one. But enough of the 550 Maranello, on to the others.
**1997 Ferrari 550 MARANELLO**

**IMPORTER**
Ferrari North America, Inc.
250 Sylvan Ave.
Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 07632

**PRICE**
- List price: est $200,000
- Price as tested: est $227,733

Price as tested includes std equip. (air cond, leather interior, AM/FM stereo/cassette/CD player, power windows, mirrors, seats, adj shocks, center locking, luxury tax (est $15,583), gas-guzzler tax (est $5500), dest charge ($1300), dealer prep ($350)

**TEST CONDITIONS**
- Temperature: 75° F
- Wind: calm
- Elevation: 1.5 ft

**ENGINE**
- Type: aluminum block and heads, V-12
- Valvetrain: dohc 4 valve/cyl
- Displacement: 334 cu in./5474 cc
- Bore x stroke: 3.46 x 2.95 in./88.0 x 75.0 mm
- Compression ratio: 10.8:1
- Horsepower (SAE): 485 bhp @7000 rpm
- Bhp/liter: 88.5
- Torque: 419 lb-ft @5000 rpm
- Maximum engine speed: 7700 rpm
- Fuel injection: elec. sequential port
- Fuel: prem unleaded, 91 pump octane

**CHASSIS & BODY**
- Layout: front engine/rear drive
- Body/frame: aluminum alloy/skeletal steel
- Brakes:
  - Front: 13.0-in. ventilated discs
  - Rear: 12.2-in. ventilated discs
- Assist type: vacuum
- Total swept area: 534 sq in.
- Swept area/ton: 267 sq in.
- Wheels:
  - Front: 16 x 8½ f, 16 x 10½ f
  - Rear: 255/40ZR-18 f, 295/35ZR-18 r
- Tires: Pirelli P Zero
- Steering:
  - Rack & pinion, vari power assist
  - Overall ratio: 13.81
  - Turns, lock to lock: 2.1
  - Turning circle: 39.3 ft

**DRIVETRAIN**
- Transmission:
  - Gear: 6-speed manual
  - Overall ratio: 6:1
- Final drive ratio: 3.91:1
- Engine rpm @60 mph in 6th: 1930

**GENERAL DATA**
- Cubic displacement: est 3725 lb
- Gross vehicle weight: est 3845 lb
- Weight dist (with driver): 50/50
- Wheelbase: 96.4 in.
- Track, f/r: 64.3 in./62.4 in.
- Length: 178.1 in.
- Width: 76.2 in.
- Height: 50.3 in.
- Ground clearance: 4.5 in.
- Trunk space: 5.9 cu ft

**ACCOMMODATIONS**
- Seating capacity: 2
- Headroom: 39 in.
- Seat width: 2 in.
- Leg room: 44 in.
- Seatback adjustment: 35 deg
- Seat travel: 6.5 in.

**INTERIOR NOISE**
- Idle in neutral: 57 dBA
- Maximum in 3rd gear: 85 dBA
- Constant 50 mph: 68 dBA
- 70 mph: 70 dBA

**MAINTENANCE**
- Oil/filter change: 7500 mi/7500 mi
- Tuneup: 15,000 mi/use-dependent
- Basic warranty: 24 mos/unlimited mi

**INSTRUMENTATION**
- 340-km/h (280-mph) speedometer
- 10,000-rpm vert/coolant temp, oil press., oil temp, fuel level

**ACCELERATION**
- Time to speed:
  - 0-30 mph: 1.1 sec
  - 0-40 mph: 2.0 sec
  - 0-50 mph: 2.8 sec
  - 0-60 mph: 3.8 sec
  - 0-70 mph: 4.5 sec
  - 0-80 mph: 5.0 sec
  - 0-90 mph: 5.7 sec
  - 0-100 mph: 6.4 sec
- Time to distance:
  - 0-100 ft: 2.1 sec
  - 0-130 ft: 3.0 sec
  - 0-500 ft: 7.4 sec
  - 0-1320 ft (400 m): 13.1 @113.0 mph

**FUEL ECONOMY**
- Normal driving: 15.0 mpg
- EPA city/highway: 14.0/20.0 mpg
- Cruise range: 435 miles

**FUEL ECONOMY**
- Fuel capacity: 30.0 gal

**BRACKING**
- Min. stopping distance:
  - From 60 mph: 112 ft
  - From 80 mph: 199 ft
- Control: excellent
- Pedal effort for 0.5g stop: 8
- Fade, effort w/0.5g stop from 60 mph: 8
- Brake feel: excellent
- Overall brake rating: excellent

**HANDLING**
- Lateral accel (200-ft skidpad): 0.90 g
- Balance: 0.89 g
- Fade, effort w/0.5g stop from 60 mph: 0.79 g
- Balance: 0.84 g
- Moderate understeer
- Lateral seat support: excellent

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**Test Notes...**

- Despite its transaxle, the 550 easily spins its rear wheels off the line. Oddly, the engine's rev limiter would occasionally intervene 200 rpm prematurely.
- Switching the 550's electrically adjustable shocks to firm transforms the car's responsiveness through the staler, drastically reducing body roll.
- More so than the lower-reving 458 GTA, the 550 positively screams at redline, with that rauccous layering of cam chains, cylinders, and exhaust pulses that are 100-percent pure Ferrari.

Subjective ratings consist of excellent, very good, good, average, poor; na means information is not available.

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456 GTA

A CIVILIZED 2+2 coupe that follows in the footsteps of the old 400i and 412i models, the 456 series was introduced in 1993 and continues to give the Ferrari owner an opportunity to thrill (or frighten) two rear-seat passengers, provided they are not very tall.

Ferrari introduced the 2+2 concept in 1960 with the 250 coupe, but perhaps it should have been called the 2½+2½. A tall adult would have to sit in the back with head bowed as if in prayer, perhaps petitioning the Lord for a short trip. The 456 is really just a very nice Gran Turismo 2-seater with comfortable space for children or emergency space for adults.

We've tested the 456 GT before in these pages (December 1995) and liked it very much. Though "softer" than the 550 Maranello, it is still a force to be reckoned with on a winding road or a run down the autostrada. It has variable-rate shock absorber damping (soft, medium and hard), a movable tail spoiler that keeps a proper balance of downforce above 75 mph and a torquey 5.5-liter 65-degree V-12 that shares its block with the 550 Maranello but produces a mere 436 bhp instead of the 550's 485. Torque is also slightly lower: 398 lb.-ft. at 4500 rpm vs. 419 at 5000.

The difference lies in the cylinder heads and their intake and exhaust plumbing. The 550 has the new hydraulic tappets, different combustion chambers, variable-length intake runners and exhaust system.

So, in the 456 GT we have a roomier car than the 550, in a gentler state of tune. Our incentive for retesting the car, however, was its new 4-speed automatic transmission, which makes it the 456 GTA.

This unit—which is incorporated into a rear-mounted transaxle like the 6-speed manual gearbox but weighs 172 lb. more—uses computer-controlled "artificial intelligence." It reads a variety of inputs to interpret the driver's current mode of sporting aggression and adjusts the shift points to match. It is coupled to a torque converter with a high stall rate, its slippage producing a pronounced multiplication of torque for improved acceleration at any speed. In highway cruising, a me-
nal clutch locks in to prevent slippage and poor fuel mileage.

Our slice-of-history test-bed for this car was another: fast run into the Apennines, this time up S-623 toward the little village of Castel d'Aino, just a few mountain ridges west of the Futa Pass. What is the significance of this little burg, you ask? Well, it's where the American 10th Mountain Division attacked a ridge full of Germans on April 14, 1945, and a young lieutenant named Bob Dole was badly wounded. The town, we were told, was festooned with "Dole for President" banners.

On the long drive to Castel d'Aino, Phil Hill and John Lamm drove the 456 GTA, while Kim Reynolds and I followed in the F355 Spider. Phil was smoking along at a good clip, and it was no small task to keep the 6-speed of the F355 in exactly the right gear to match the GTA's acceleration out of corners, though the F355 braked and cornered flatter, with less body pitch and roll. Phil liked the automatic, but said the music of the V-12 was too heavily muffled and somewhat overwhelmed by the mechanical whirrings of engine and gearbox under hard acceleration.

I drove the GTA back down the mountain toward Modena and had to agree. The car gets the job done, but without the tautness and direct mechanical sensitivity of a manual Ferrari gearbox. During a turn, the automatic trans-

mission has almost a turbo sensation; you have to get on the throttle early to get a strong drive off a corner. The transmission needs a brief moment to gather engine revs and feed solid power into the rear tires. Left in 3rd gear, the transmission works more succinctly, but there's still a hint of lost wallop.

At lower speeds, this is less noticeable, and the car simply becomes a calm, civilized traveling companion with lots of power on tap, allowing fast travel with few demands on the driver. When we hit Modena at rush hour, the automatic was also appreciated. No aching clutch leg, no fiddling with the gearbox.

Ferrari says the automatic is in strong demand in the Far East, and one can almost picture an owner wending his way through a crowded Eastern city street clogged with pedicabs, microcars and Honda 50s, glad for the freedom from shifting.

**F355 Spider**

It would be easy, in this four-car test, to become overwhelmed with the grace and power of the 550 Maranello or the 456 GTA and even convince yourself that the mid-engine road car is perhaps an idea whose time has come and gone.

But then you slip into the F355 Spider, put the top down, head into the mountains and remember: The 550 and 456 GTA are GT cars; the F355 Spider is a sports car. And a sports car can be a very good thing. Especially with the top down on a crisp autumn day in Italy. Not insignificantly, the F355 we
### 1997 Ferrari F355 Spider

#### Importer
Ferrari North America, Inc.
250 Sylvan Ave.
Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 07632

#### Price
- List price: $137,075
- Price as tested: $154,036
- Price as tested includes std. equip. (air cond, leather interior, AM/FM stereo/cassette; power windows, mirrors, seats, adj. shocks, and central locking), luxury tax ($9911), gas-guzzler tax ($5400), dest charge ($1300), dealer prep ($350).

#### Test Conditions
- Temperature: 75°F
- Wind: calm
- Elevation: 59 ft

#### Engine
- Type: aluminum block and heads, V-8
- Valvetrain: dohc 5-valve/cyl
- Displacement: 213 c.i.d./3496 cc
- Bore x stroke: 3.35 x 3.03 in./85.0 x 77.0 mm
- Compression ratio: 11.0:1
- Horsepower: (SAE): 375 bhp @ 8250 rpm
- Bhp/liter: 107
- Torque: 268 b-ft @ 6000 rpm
- Maximum engine speed: 8500 rpm
- Fuel injection: elect. sequential port
- Fuel: prem unleaded, 91 pump oct

#### Chassis & Body
- Layout: mid engine/rear drive
- Body/frame: steel & aluminum/ unit & skeletal steel
- Brakes: Front: 11.8in. vented discs
- Rear: 12.2in. vented discs
- Assist type: vacuum
- Total swept area: 485 sq in.
- Swept area/ton: 277 sq in.
- Wheels: 18 x 7.5, 18 x 10
- Tires: Pirelli P Zero Directional;
- 225/40ZR18 f,
- 265/40ZR18 r
- Steering: rack & pinion, power assist
- Overall ratio: na
- Turns, lock to lock: 3.2
- Turning circle: 38.1 ft
- Suspension: Front: upper & lower A-arms, coil springs, elect. adj. tube shocks, anti-roll bar
- Rear: upper & lower A-arms, coil springs, elect. adj. tube shocks, anti-roll bar

#### Transmission
- Gear
  - Ratio: 3.07:1
  - Overall ratio: 13.35:1
  - RPM: 8500
  - Mph: 48
- 1st: 2.16:1
- 2nd: 1.61:1
- 3rd: 1.27:1
- 4th: 1.03:1
- 5th: 0.84:1
- Final drive ratio:
  - Engine rpm @ 60 mph in 6th: 2860
  - 6-sp manual

#### Drive Train

#### General Data
- Curb weight: 3390 lb
- Test weight: 3500 lb
- Weight dist (with driver), f/r, %: 45/55
- Wheelbase: 96.5 in.
- Track, f/r: 59.6 x 63.6 in.
- Length: 167.3 in.
- Width: 74.8 in.
- Height: 46.1 in.
- Ground clearance: 4.3 in.
- Trunk space: 8.0 cu ft

#### Accommodations
- Seating capacity: 2
- Head room: 37.5 in.
- Seat width: 2 x 18.5 in.
- Leg room: 43.5 in.
- Seatback adjustment: 30 deg
- Seat travel: 6.5 in.

#### Interior Noise
- Idle in neutral: 72 dBA
- Maximum in 1st gear: 88 dBA
- Constant 50 mph: 77 dBA
- 70 mph: 77 dBA

#### Maintenance
- Oil/filter change: 7500 mi/7500 mi
- Tuneup: 15,000 mi/use-dependent
- Basic warranty: 24 mo/unlimited mi

#### Instrumentation
- Speedometer: 320 km/h (199-mph) speedometer
- 10,000-rpm tach, oil press., oil temp., coolant temp., fuel level

#### Test Notes...
- The Spider weighs roughly 250 lb. more than the Berlinetta, and this reasonably accounts for its being 0.4 sec slower to 60 mph. Although subjectively, our test car didn't feel entirely broken in.
- For the F355's test, our slalom was conducted on a slightly lumpy surface, which surprisingly necessitated setting the Spider's adjustable shocks on soft to maintain control.
- Does a mid-engine layout matter in a road car? Subjectively, the F355 feels nimble through the slalom and around the skid-pad, although its rear-weight bias demands that much extra respect.

#### Acceleration
- Time to speed: 0-30 mph: 2.0 sec
- 0-40 mph: 2.9 sec
- 0-50 mph: 4.2 sec
- 0-60 mph: 5.3 sec
- 0-70 mph: 7.0 sec
- 0-80 mph: 8.6 sec
- 0-90 mph: 10.3 sec
- 0-100 mph: 12.7 sec
- Time to distance: 0-100 ft: 3.0 sec
- 0-500 ft: 7.6 sec
- 0-1320 ft (1/4 mi): 13.7 @ 104.5 mph

#### Fuel Economy
- Normal driving: 16.0 mpg
- EPA city/highway: 10/15 mpg
- Cruise range: 330 miles
- Fuel capacity: 21.6 gal.

#### Braking
- Minimum stopping distance:
  - From 60 mph: 122 ft
  - From 80 mph: 219 ft
- Control: excellent
- Pedal effort for 0.5g stop: na
- Fade, effort after six 0.5g stops from 60 mph: na
- Brake feel: excellent
- Overall brake rating: excellent

#### Handling
- Lateral accel (200-ft skidpad) 0.093g
- Balance: moderate understeer
- Speed thru 700-ft slalom: 66.1 mph
- Overall: mild understeer
- Lateral seat support: excellent

*Subjective ratings consist of excellent, very good, good, average, poor; na means information is not available.*
Luca di Montezemolo asks for his car’s keys back. At right, the F355 Spider’s V-8 produces 375 bhp (that’s 107 normally aspirated bhp per liter, friends). Below: The F50 produces two responses—intense concentration and big grins (along with its V-12’s 109.2 bhp per liter).
borrowed from Ferrari just happened to be the personal daily driver of Ferrari President Luca di Montezemolo himself. And when we handed back his keys after three days of testing, he smiled at the car fondly and said, “This is my go kart. It communicates everything on the road and is fun to drive.”

I could probably just substitute that one quote for this test and go to lunch. “Communicative” is exactly what the F355 Spider is. It’s a car with wonderful balance and brakes and a free-revving engine that produces great thrusting pulses of acceleration on a mountain road. Thrown into a fast, bumpy curve, it remains dead flat with a superb ride, soaking up bumps without upset. With the adjustable suspension damping set on Sport, it is especially agile and settled during a hard workout.

Setting aside for a moment the unearthly-exotic F50, the F355 is the one car out of Ferrari’s three “regular” production cars that you can most easily imagine screaming through the streets of some Sicilian village in the Targa Florio.

At the heart of the mid-engine F355 is a 4-cam 3.5-liter 90-degree V-8 with five valves per cylinder and an output of 375 bhp at 8250 rpm, with a redline of 8500. A Bosch M2.7 twin injection system feeds red cylinder heads that draw heavily on Ferrari’s F1 search for high specific output, allowing a detonation-free compression ratio of 11.0:1. The connecting rods are titanium.

Not exactly a truck engine, in other words. A side-mounted close-ratio 6-speed transmission feeds a limited-slip differential en route to the rear wheels, which push a car that is 335 lb. lighter than the 550 Maranello.

Ferrari claims to have worked hard to create a car of considerable speed, commendable stability and good downforce while avoiding a lot of awkward wings and big spoilers. Wind-tunnel work therefore produced a clean, stylish body with a flat bottom, the underside tunneled with aerodynamic ducts that diffuse air upward at the tail.

Open cars have long been a part of the Ferrari tradition, and the F355 Spider makes the convertible top easy to live with. Unhook a latch at the leading edge of the top, lower the windows, push a button and invisible electrical elves do the rest. Seats automatically slide forward a few inches, the top folds back and you snap a cover over it. Wind noise and buffeting are minimal. You can easily talk to the passenger while driving top down, though it seems a shame to talk over the euphonious, mellow snarl of the exhaust.

We drove the F355 Spider first up the famous road from Maranello to Serramazzoni, the early, unofficial “test track” of the Ferrari factory. En route, we stopped at a curve where Phil once had a famous photograph taken, of himself and his Testa Rossa, for the cover of the Fuller Brush Magazine in 1959. It looked pretty much the same, he said, but a new garage had replaced an old house on the outside of the curve. As if to offer proof, an elderly man and his wife came out of their house across the street and showed us a framed photo of the curve from the Fifties, when the original house sat on the site.

Where else but Italy, I wondered, do people own a framed portrait of the curve on which they live?

With dark clouds gathering we headed off the main road onto the loop that took us to Castel d’Aino, home of Italy’s largest Bob Dole fan club. While John Lamm photographed the cars and the Bob Dole for President banners, I found myself talking to a distinguished-looking gentleman from Newport, New Hampshire, named Newt Eldredge. He wore an ascot and a 10th Mountain Division patch on his jacket.

“Were you in Bob Dole’s unit?” I asked.

“No,” Eldredge said, smiling, “he was in mine. We were both wounded the same day, attacking Hill 913. Out of 200 of us, only 28 got to the objective. It was a rough day.”

Eldredge explained to me that the 10th Mountain Division was a lively and well-educated bunch. “You had to have been in a ski club or a mountain climbing club to get in, so we had a lot of college men, many of them out of Ivy League schools.” Bob Dole, he said, came in as a replacement after a bad battle for Mt. Belvedere, in which casualties had been 50 percent.

“Was he a good soldier?”

“Very good. He listened to his men very carefully and talked to them to find out how we were operating and what was going on before he started issuing orders. He was well respected.”

By the time you read this, the Presidential election will be over. But whichever way it goes, we owe a lot to the likes of Newt Eldredge and his young replacement lieutenant, Bob Dole. I looked at the hill they assaulted and felt a tightness in my chest. There were a lot of rough days in these mountains.

**F50**

With rain threatening in northern Italy, Ferrari asked that we not take the F50 out on the road. The Berlinetta detachable top, which can be clicked in to replace the twin headrest/rollbar covers of the Barchetta configuration, cannot be carried with you on the road, so if it rains the leather interior gets wet. We wanted to drive and photograph the car in its open Barchetta form, so we limited our driving to the Fiorano test track.

Which is an environment in which the F50 is quite happy.

The F50 is Ferrari’s centerpiece, its look-what-we-can-do car. Fifty years ago, Ferrari F1 cars were still roadable, with minor modifications, and the F50 is simply the modern embodiment of that spirit. It’s a 2-seater F1 car, compromised as little as possible for the street.
And what a piece of work it is: a 225-lb. carbon-fiber monocoque chassis, pushrod suspension, aircraft-grade rubber fuel tank, electronically managed shock absorber damping control, twin-plate racing clutch, titanium hubs, magnesium axles and a special “Fiorano” tire made by Goodyear.

Propelling this expensive mass of lightness is a 4.7-liter 65-degree V-12 engine putting out 513 bhp at 8500 rpm and 347 lb.-ft. of torque at 6500. On paper, it looks, in many ways, like a 12-cylinder version of the F355’s V-8: titanium rods, dry-sump system, Bosch Motronic 2.7 engine management and injection and Nikasil-coated cylinder bores. The block, however, is of nodular cast iron rather than aluminum and the liners are not of the wet-sleeve type. The V-12 also weighs 66 lb. more than the V-8, but the 2710-lb. F50 is still 680 lb. lighter than the F355 Spider.

So, does she go?

My, yes. The F50 howled up the barely long-enough Fiorano straight, much to the pleasure of German Ferrari owners visiting the track, turning a 0-60 time of 3.6 sec. and a quarter mile of 12.1 sec. at 124.5 mph. By comparison, the next fastest Ferrari, the 550 Maranello, ran 0-60 in 4.7 sec. and did the quarter mile in 13.1 sec. at 113.0 mph. Ferrari claims a top speed of 202 mph for the F50, although our calculations suggest a speed of 190 mph, given our test car’s gearing.

The F50 looked rather relaxed twisting through the slalom cones and turned in the second-highest speed of the family at 65.7, edged out by the F355 Spider’s 66.1 mph. Kim Reynolds pointed out, however, that we had achieved the F355 number in an earlier test on an extraordinarily grippy surface, so on equal pavement the F50 would no doubt better it.

One thing that slows the F50 down a bit in the tight stuff is its heavy understeer. Ferrari has gone to great lengths to keep that big V-12 pendulum in check, tuning the chassis to drift front-end-first toward its destiny.
1997 Ferrari F50

**Manufacturer**
Ferrari S.p.A.
Via Abetone Inferiore 4
41053 Maranello (MO)
Italy

**Price**
List price: $480,000
Price as tested: $480,000
Price as tested includes std. equip. (air conditioning, leather seats).

**Test Conditions**
Temperature: 75°F
Wind: calm
Elevation: 115 ft

**Engine**
- Type: cast-iron block, aluminum heads, V12
- Valve train: dohc 5-valve/cyl
- Displacement: 287 cu in/4969 cc
- Bore x stroke: 3.35 x 2.72 in. / 85.0 x 69.0 mm
- Compression ratio: 11.3:1
- Horsepower (SAE): 513 bhp @ 8500 rpm
- Bhp/liter: 109.2
- Torque: 347 lb-ft @ 8500 rpm
- Maximum engine speed: 8500 rpm
- Fuel injection: elect. sequential port
- Fuel: prem. unleaded, 91 pump oct

**Chassis & Body**
- Layout: mid engine/rear drive
- Body/home: honeycomb carbon fiber and Kevlar/honeycomb carbon fiber with tubular steel and stressed engine block and transaxle
- Brakes:
  - Front: 14.0-in. vented discs
  - Rear: 13.2-in. vented discs
- Assist type: none
- Total swept area: 583 sq in.
- Swept area/ton: 430 sq in.
- Wheels: cast magnesium, 18 x 8½, 18 x 13
- Tires: Goodyear Eagle F1 GS-Ferraro, P245/35ZR-18 & P335/30ZR-18
- Steering: rack & pinion, power assist
- Overall ratio: na
- Turns, lock to lock: 2.0
- Turning circle: 41.3 ft

**Transmission**
- Gear: 6-sp manual
- Overall ratio: 10.32:1

**Drivetrain**
- Engine: 60 mph in 6th
- Final drive ratio: 3.71:1

**General Data**
- Curb weight: est. 2710 lb
- Test weight: 2965 lb
- Weight dist. (with driver), t/t, %: est. 42/58
- Wheelbase: 101.6 in.
- Track, t/r: 63.8 in./63.1 in.
- Length: 176.4 in.
- Width: 78.2 in.
- Height: 44.1 in.
- Ground clearance: 4.5 in.

**Accommodations**
- Seating capacity: 2
- Head room: na
- Seat width: 2 x 14.0 in.
- Leg room: 43.0 in.
- Backseat adjustment: 45 deg
- Seat travel: 7.5 in.

**Interior Noise**
- Idle in neutral: 69 dBa
- Seat belt: 101 dBa
- Constant 50 mph: 82 dBa
- 70 mph: 86 dBa

**Instrumentation**
- 360-km/h (224 mph) speedometer, 10,000-rpm tach, coolant temp, oil temp, oil press., fuel level

**Maintenance**
- Oil/filter change: 7500 mi/7500 mi
- Tuneup: use-dependent
- Basic warranty: na

**Fuel Economy**
- Normal driving: est. 13.0 mpg
- EPA city/highway: na
- Cruise range: est. 345 miles
- Fuel capacity: 21.7 gal.

**Braking**
- Minimum stopping distance:
  - From 60 mph: 136 ft
  - From 80 mph: 213 ft
- Pedal effort for 0.5g stop: na
- Fade, after six 0.5g stops from 60 mph: na
- Brake fade, excellent
- Overall brake rating: excellent

**Handling**
- Lateral accel (200 ft skidpad): na
- Balance: na
- Speed thru 700-ft slalom: 65.7 mph
- Balance: heavy understeer
- Lateral seat support: excellent

**Test Notes**
- At low revs (say 4000 rpm), the F50 is actually easy to stall, but drop the clutch at 6000 rpm and it explodes away from the line in a cloud of tire smoke.
- Through the slalom, the F50 is difficult to get used to, especially its extremely forward driving position, great width and considerable understeer.
- While most exotics copy this hint at what driving a race car might be like, the F50 slaps you in the face with all its visceral ingredients.

Subjective ratings consist of excellent, very good, good, average, poor; na means information is not available.
All trips to Modena, which is the gastronomic center of Italy, end with a good dinner and wine, which is why we had found ourselves at the Fini again. This is when Phil picked the 550 Maranello as one of his 10 favorite Ferraris.

After dinner, we decided to skip the cab ride and walk the 3 or 4 miles back to our hotel through the old center of the once-walled city of Modena. It was a warm autumn night, and we strolled through the cobblestone piazzas around the duomo, past grand old houses of great Modenese families, through parks and out onto the Via Emilia toward our hotel.

Phil showed us where the old Ferrari works used to be; walked us past the former Real hotel—now a bank—where drivers, visitors and journalists from all over the world used to stay; pointed out where the arches of the old walled city had been removed for modern traffic flow, and so on.

Many things have changed since Phil Hill first came here in 1952, but not everything.

After all these years, Ferrari still has four charismatic cars that remain among the most desirable automobiles on earth. They are right on the cutting edge of technology, yet their fastest and best new road car is a pleasing throwback to a classical form. All four cars work brilliantly on the road and racetrack, yet could just as well be driven straight to a museum, admired for their finely crafted components and sublime beauty. Just as in 1947.

The racing, too, goes on. Right before I left on this trip, I turned on my TV to watch Michael Schumacher win the Grand Prix of Belgium at Spa-Francorchamps—in an Italian-red Ferrari. The only car on the track that didn’t look like a cluttered billboard.

Continuity is a wonderful thing. Next time you have a glass of vino rosso, raise it to the folks from Maranello.