

Not Quite “Magnum, P.I.” Grade

Some Ferrari folks hate the Mondial; some think it's the biggest bargain in the world of the Prancing Horse

by Mark Wigginton



1988 Ferrari Mondial 3.2 cabriolet, sold by Bonhams in June for \$24,750

You look in the mirror one morning and instead of your own bleary eyes and grim, pre-work mug, you see Tom Selleck. It's not the grizzled old Tom — it's the dashing young Tom of “Magnum, P.I.,” as he casually vaults into that Ferrari.

Owning one of those would change everything, you think. You think you could afford one of those.

“One of those” is a 1984 308 GTS Quattrovalvole, and a few clicks in the SCM Platinum Auction Database tells you that ain't happening for many of us. A hundred large for a decent example is a bit out of your price range. (A 308 GTS actually used in the show recently crossed the block at Bonhams' 2017 Scottsdale Auction for \$181,500, including premium.)

But wait, the Mondial *from the exact same era* can be had for a quarter of the price of a 308, and it was almost the same car, wasn't it?

Yeah, much like Cindy Crawford and Ruth Buzzi were almost the same, you can hear your Ferrari friends say.

Since we are now in Affordable Classic Land, let's set aside the sneers for a moment. It takes a strong constitution to walk to a different drummer, even if it's because your checkbook doesn't allow you to keep the big-kid cadence.

Instead, let's look dispassionately at the Mondial. Specifically, let's look at the 1985–88 Mondial 3.2.

As the Mondial turns and runs

When Selleck jumped into his 308, it was nearing the end of a production run that started in 1975. The replacement was the 328, starting in 1985.

Introduced way back in 1980, the Mondial started out as the coupe version of the 308, and it was based on the mechanicals from the 308. That is, until the 308 and Mondial mechanicals and the bright red envelope were updated.

The 1985–88 328 and Mondial sport a more modern look and a torquey V8.

The 328 and Mondial 3.2 have a lot in common. First and foremost, they use the same motor and tranny, in much the same chassis.

The naturally aspirated 3.2-liter V8 puts out 270 horsepower, which is an important change, as the earlier cars lacked propulsive excitement.

The new V8 solved that problem with more horsepower and added tons of torque, giving both cars a reputation as among the most easy-to-drive models from Ferrari.

You can drive all day in second gear, if that's your pleasure. Or you can row through the gated shifter like a madman if that floats your boat.

Wait, the Mondial is heavier...

Make no mistake, the Mondial needed the horsepower boost. The wheelbase is a foot longer than the 308, and the Mondial was a groaning, lumpy 3,400 pounds, about 300 more than the 308.

With the new V8 aboard, the 1985–88 Mondial still isn't what you would call fast. At the car's introduction, stopwatches got quarter-mile times of just a tick under 15 seconds at 96 mph.

On the other hand, that was quick in the day, as a Porsche 928 from the same year — with much the same leather-clad 2+2/V8 coupe configuration — was only a couple of tenths quicker.

Yes, there is a back seat, kinda. That foot Ferrari added to the wheelbase went to the second row of seats, which is about two feet short of the actual need. Realistically, it's a package shelf — or a United Airlines economy “seat.”

As it is a mid-engine car, there is plenty of space for your luggage in front and rear compartments — you know I'm kidding, right? The front cargo area is full of spares and odd bits that didn't quite make the initial design envelope, and the rear is a perfect place to put your bespoke overnight bag after practicing your “tightly rolled clothes” packing skills.

But that big, dreamy guy in the mirror — yeah, you — doesn't want to think about sticky kids and big luggage. You've got a minivan for that already. What's the Mondial 3.2 like to drive?

Details

Years produced: 1985–88

Current price range: \$25,000 to \$40,000

Pros: Cheapest Ferrari on the block, easy to drive and not TOO dear to maintain.

Cons: A long unloved model (not necessarily for good reasons) can mean buying a car with lots of deferred maintenance if you aren't careful, and your Ferrari gang might turn up their noses at you.

Best place to drive one: On long, fast sweepers on the edge of town as you head back to the diner to be seen.

Worst place to drive one: Don't drive this in the snow, even a hint of snow, even the memory of snow. Remember, Thomas Magnum never drove his 328 in the snow.

The front seat on a roller coaster

First, there's plenty of room inside, up front. And the seating is well forward. Adjust everything right and you won't even see the hood or front of the car. It's like the front seat on a roller coaster. Since your feet are about level with the front wheels, the pedals are offset toward the center of the car, which is slightly awkward, but not a deal breaker.

Lots of lovely leather and a lot of plastic switches fill the rest of the cabin, it being the 1980s.

That decade was about emissions, so the 328 GTB, the 328 GTS and Mondial 3.2 had the mechanical Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection. Fuel mileage is well below 20 miles per gallon, but you aren't looking for a freakin' Prius to add to the garage.

Gear selection for the 5-speed manual transmission is through a lovely gated shifter, but don't plan on getting into second until you have driven for the 10 minutes or so it takes to get the goo in the gearbox to warm up. Thankfully, third gear and gobs of torque solve most of your commuting problems.

So, at bottom, the Mondial is one of the easiest Ferraris to drive ever, with plenty of power for passing, easy to keep in a straight line on good surfaces, good handling on the twisty bits, and other than a big honkin' blind spot, it has great visibility.

Yes, there are issues

Rubbing your hands in anticipation, are you? Take a deep breath, Sparky. There are issues.

First, it's that danged Ferrari badge. That means special Elves — from a special place in Italy — made everything on the car. The Elves are quite proud of the parts they produce, so don't expect to find them inexpensively when you need them.

And need them you will.

The biggest expense will be your "major service," which in this case means timing belts, about every five years or 30,000 miles, whichever comes first.



Ready for a thrill at Six Flags Over Maranello?

This service sets you back \$5,000 or more. And since this is a 1980s Ferrari, you can expect electrical issues, unless the previous owner has already replaced the fuse box, where most of the gremlins lived. If not, there's a couple of grand. Those tires will cost \$500 a corner as well.

If you get a great deal on a Mondial 3.2, somewhere in the \$25k-\$30k range, and if you didn't get a thorough pre-purchase inspection, you could be looking at spending nearly that much again to get things right. We at SCM World Headquarters call this the Keith Martin Protocol.

A bargain or a fright pig?

Some Ferrari folks hate the Mondial; some think it's the biggest bargain in the world of the Prancing Horse. The market at this point is undecided.

There were about 1,800 Mondial 3.2s made from 1985 to '88, pretty evenly divided between coupe and cabriolet. Auction results show that the coupe is a little bit more in demand.

Both models typically sell in the low \$30k range and up.

The 328 GTS of the period can fetch almost three times that — but it must be almost perfect.

In other words, cool costs money. How cool are you?

You may be Mondial cool. Take another look in the mirror. ♦

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- Jason Wenig, Owner of The Creative Workshop

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