

CLASSIC DRIVER

Ferrari Enzo

Lead

We know the Enzo is incredibly quick: in a straight line, under braking and through corners it has been confirmed as 'The Business'. What I wanted to know is what it's like to drive around British roads, in normal traffic.



So, thanks to Nick Mason I set off in this glorious prize of a machine, taking a tootle around the roads of Gloucestershire and getting to know the Enzo, stopping for lunch at a splendid pub and having a delicious pint of harmless ginger beer (officer!) with my bangers, bubble and squeak. Just a normal day out on the road, you know.

From the start it was obvious that the Enzo involves theatre. You wouldn't want to start it outside your neighbour's house at three in the morning. An impressive blast from the exhausts on start-up is all controlled by electronics. I wonder whether that racket is strictly necessary. No, of course it can't be. It is simply a statement to the world: "My Enzo has fired up and it sounds magnificent, doesn't it?" But soon it settles down to a civilised purr at rest.

Mind you, most owners probably have neighbours who live at least a mile away. Such toys are not for the likes of ordinary folk like me. Just one of the 27 British owners, I learnt from Tony Willis of Ferrari Maserati UK, uses his as a daily car, notching up 24,000 miles so far. The rest appear to be strictly for special outings. Either way, to get the best from an Enzo, your life must be geared to accommodate it.



I discovered that rule years ago, with a borrowed Testarossa which I parked in my garage overnight to comply with insurance rules. The only way out was through the open window, not difficult as all I had to do was stand up and step out. The Enzo, with its scissor doors, is more dignified but supercars should be parked in a spacious motor house, alongside the rest of your cars.

The Enzo's price alone is enough to ensure that: this one was £444,444 and 74 pence. Surely they could

have knocked 30p off, just for numerical symmetry? Okay, I've read the handbook from cover to cover, I'm strapped in and we're going for a drive.

First thing, to get out of the uneven private road where it lives, I press the relevant button on the steering wheel, raising the front suspension to avoid underbody damage. Up it comes, three vital centimetres, accompanied by an ear-piercing screech. Earplugs would be a blessing during this procedure. Why its warning has to be that loud is a mystery; all part of the theatre, I suppose, but... well!

Ready to go, I select first gear on the righthand paddle, release the brakes and apply a little throttle. Off we go, as smooth as you like. Unlike most classic Ferraris from the 1960s, this thing is extremely easy to drive gently. It's also fabulously comfortable despite the sporting driving position; and the view ahead and behind, with the mirrors, is first class.

Out on the road, the suspension drops itself down again automatically as soon as you pull away, and the paddle change is very simple to operate. A few new tricks must be learnt, such as not lifting off for any gearchanges - the fly-by-wire does it all for you; to get reverse, press a button; don't press the hidden horn buttons, by your thumbs, at roundabouts. So long as you remember masses of info from the handbook, it really is dead easy until, that is, you reach the first awkward road junction. Then you can't see to pull out safely. There's only one thing for it: unbelt and shift across to get a proper look. That could get to be a pain.



Cruising along, the chassis feels marvellously reassuring and the ride is surprisingly smooth for such an outrageous car. I had wondered whether all those electronic helpers - ABS, ASR, EBD, Skyhook - might make it feel remote but not a bit of it. You are instantly united with an extremely responsive, superbly balanced machine. It's a million miles from those ponderous Testarossas of 20 years ago.

This thing, if I dare call it that, is keen to get at the corners and share its abilities with you. Driven gently, it is truly relaxing and the longer you sit, the more comfortable it seems. No doubt it's even better when the cockpit has been personally tailored. As it was, I had no complaints whatsoever.

You will not be amazed that the noises inside set it apart from ordinary machinery. It sounds as if there's little soundproofing but the extraordinary stiffness of the lightweight construction - basically it's a carbon chassis with sandwiched carbon-steel fibres and honeycombed aluminium - and the very high build quality, mean that you don't hear any of the creaks and rattles that once characterised even the most expensive motor cars. Nor do I recall any wind noise - whatsoever - but tyre noise is high on concrete.

At very low speeds you can hear the carbo-ceramic brakes, the first to be standard on a Ferrari road car, but they don't sound like brakes as we know them. There's a distant, curiously pleasant, grating sound. Each front disc has six-pot calipers, with four pots on the rears, but they're fabulously easy to use smoothly - even when rolling up to a red light. These brakes really are a great technological leap forward: you can hit them hard when they're stone cold; even on a circuit, they won't fade, nor overheat; and you can't wear those discs out.

Not even a madman could get anywhere near the Enzo's performance potential on the road. As for acceleration, well, I don't need to tell you, do I? I confess, a brief taste made me smile like a maniac. The engine roars, the red rev-warning lights spiral in sequence rapidly towards the limit but there's no noticeable squat, spin, shake, rattle or roll. Perfectly controlled, pure theatre with no silly drama, it's just ridiculous. Ridiculously fast, that is, so we won't do that too often, not in Gloucestershire anyway. A four-day tour of Spa and the old Nürburgring, as run by the RMA club, would reveal the Enzo in all its glory. There's room for a clean shirt and a toothbrush under the bonnet, too.

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