

CLASSIC DRIVER

Ferrari F12berlinetta: 12 out of 10

Lead

Going 'fast' isn't that big a deal. But adding a 740HP V12 to a small, two-seat GT brings new meaning to the word – as we found out after a day in the F12berlinetta in the hills around Maranello.

A new V12 Ferrari is always a big event. Just think about the very first 125 S from 1947, or the 250 GTO – or the 275 GTB/4. The 365 GTB/4 'Daytona' defines the 1970s, while the outgoing 12-cylinder Ferrari *berlinetta*, the 599 in its most extreme 'GTO' form, still looks fresh – and incredibly potent.

Consider, then, the latest F12berlinetta, a car more powerful than an Enzo, yet 5cm shorter and 2cm narrower than a 599. It's 50kg lighter, too.

Has the classic Italian supercar peaked in size, then, and now become more compact, more efficient than ever before?





The collection of a 300,000-euro, racing red, pre-production F12berlinetta could not be easier. Having been handed the keys early in the morning, I was simply told to bring it back by 5.30pm. Truly *bella Italia!* This is the first time I have seen the car since the Geneva show, earlier this year, and my initial impressions are confirmed: everywhere - inside and out - the company's flagship GT has been pared down to a minimum. And the 'aerodynamics of omission' (as the Ferrari engineers refer to it) endow the F12berlinetta with the best possible airflow, thanks to the clever cut-outs on the front wings, just ahead of the screen.

Nothing is superfluous and the gaps, channels and abrupt Kamm tail not only make a more compact package but also greatly improve downforce and drag. Compared with the 599, downforce has been increased by 98

per cent. Even inside the car, more space has been created for the driver, their passenger and their luggage.

Starting is via the red button on the steering wheel. The sound is loud, but not Lamborghini Aventador **L O U D**. There's a quiet confidence, if you like. As cars with 740HP and 690Nm torque are fully entitled to have.



Half an hour later, driving in the hills between Fanano and Pavullo, it's a very different story. The almost frightening nature of the sheer animal ferocity of the latest Ferrari 12-cylinder makes itself felt. Ferocity matched with agility, too, as the seemingly endless reserves of power and torque are matched by the sharpest handling. Eighty per cent of the magnificent engine's torque is available from 2500rpm.

From there to 8700rpm comes performance, performance, performance. Tuned to perfection on the dyno, the engineers have come up with an engine that performs at every level; every single component is working to perfection to produce the most power in the most efficient way. And its soundtrack is subtly relayed to the cockpit via a direct connection to the inlet manifold.





It's a roller-coaster ride, seemingly from the PlayStation store to the Modenese hilltops. Tight hairpins follow gentle sweeps and long climbs. The route takes in ancient Italian villages, dark forests, hills and valleys. And, at every moment, the F12 is glued to the Tarmac, giving such extraordinary traction out of the corners that you quickly forget the huge, front-mid-mounted V12 ahead of you. The car is so well-balanced it feels almost mid-engined.

The sensation is greatly aided by another sublime steering set-up from Maranello. Fingertip light, the slightest input on the wheel allows the car to dance delicately from apex to apex. In truth, the speed of response and featherlight touch takes a little getting used to, but soon becomes addictive.





There are times, however, when the almost 'too perfect' electronic systems seem to take a little away from the driver. With its state-of-the-art F1 Trac, ESC and E-Diff maintaining rigid on-road discipline, the driver sometimes yearns for the slight wayward unpredictability of a Berlinetta Boxer. For many customers, though, this will not matter, as they want to be able to drive safe in the knowledge that the car will be stable and secure at high speeds, no matter how skilful the driver.

Don't forget that Ferrari's arguably unmatched technical resources not only produce a clinically efficient driver's safety net, they also make for faster cars. Take the super-smooth 7-speed dual-clutch gearbox, for example, with its clever vectoring of torque to produce a little extra 'nudge' in the milliseconds between gearchanges. A neat touch.





While firmly planted on the road, where does the F12berlinetta sit in the market for the fastest sports cars in the world? It's more powerful and practical than a 458 Italia; less uncompromising and quieter. Compared with the FF four-seater, it's more compact and has racing ambitions. And outside Maranello? The Lamborghini Aventador is in the same class, yet with its bellowing noise and violent delivery of performance, it will always remain a Raging Bull. This latest car from Ferrari is a pure distillation of everything great about the company's 60+ years of making V12 supercars.

Whether it remains the sole representative of this distillation, we shall have to wait and see. All will become clear in a few months' time, when the successor to the Enzo is revealed.

Photos: Jan Baedeker / Roberto Carrer

Gallery

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