

CLASSIC DRIVER

[The Sultan of Brunei's Ferrari 456 GT Venice Cabriolet will leave you green with envy](#)

Lead

The Ferrari 456 GT was already one of the brand's more obscure models, but we doubt you'll have ever heard of this: the incredibly rare Ferrari 456 GT Venice Cabriolet, commissioned by the Sultan of Brunei.



Among the usual monochrome traffic, Ferraris are usually incredibly easy to spot. Their low-slung bodies, vibrant (often red) paintwork and eight or twelve-cylinder howl cut through the urban noise, drawing the attention of onlookers like nothing else on the road. However, there are a few exceptions to this, and the unassuming Ferrari 456 GT is certainly one of them. Ferrari's grand tourer-for-four always flew under the radar compared to its stablemates from Maranello; its clean surfacing, popup headlights, and reserved silhouette don't shout "Look at me!" in the same way as a Ferrari 360 or 550 Maranello, but that's exactly why we love it.



Clearly, the Sultan of Brunei shared this infatuation, because in the late 1990s he ordered not one, but twenty one Ferrari 456s for himself and his family. As you might have guessed, though, these were no ordinary 456 GTs, far from it. The Sultan commissioned seven examples each of three different versions of the 456 GT, all under the umbrella

name '456 GT Venice'. You might have seen the shooting brake variant occasionally resurface on various online forums, while there was also a sedan version, and one 456 GT Venice was even rumoured to have been fitted with a full night vision system. However, if you're like us, this is the first time you'll have ever seen one of these: an ultra-rare 456 GT Venice Cabriolet.



This right hand drive example was custom fabricated by Pininfarina, and was the only convertible that did not make it to Brunei, while all others did. As you can probably tell, everything aft of the doors has been redesigned, the most notable change being the missing roof, of course. If you're concerned about the functionality of that soft top, fear not, because it was actually sourced and adjusted from a Mercedes SL, but it wasn't as easy as simply plugging it in and hoping for the best.



Pininfarina had to reassess much of the 456's engineering to accommodate the convertible roof. To make room for the top assembly, the factory gearbox was swapped out for a Mercedes 4-speed automatic, which was custom-tuned to suit the Ferrari V12 while a differential was also added. Naturally, all those new parts above the rear wheels added weight which the suspension was never designed to handle, so hydraulic self-levelling rear suspension was also installed. Clearly when the Sultan of Brunei hands you a blank cheque, you don't want to be messing around in the engineering department.



As for the cabin, the entire interior was retrimmed in sumptuous green Connolly leather, which earns maximum points from us at Classic Driver, while the electrically-adjustable seats were taken out of BMW's 1990s flagship, the 8 Series. Leaving no stone unturned, even the rear buckets had to be redesigned to accommodate the new roof. The final cherry on top of this impossibly exclusive drop top is a Tubi exhaust system to enhance the listening experience of that V12, whether the roof is down or up.



Now that we have the technical details out of the way, we can turn to the subjective topic of looks. Towards the front, you'll notice just behind those glorious pop-up headlights, this car retains the vents that were lost with the 456's facelift. It's a small detail, but one which adds some welcome aggression to what is otherwise a stunningly simplistic design. While it may still be a case of business up front, there's definitely a party happening in the rear of this Venice Cabriolet. Pininfarina swapped out the 456's oval taillights for Ferrari's signature set of four circular units, each deeply recessed into the Venice Cabriolet's sloping rear bodywork. From behind, this prancing horse reminds us of a more mature and potent version of another 1990s Italian drop top, the Fiat Barchetta, but don't tell the Sultan we said that. Finally, we have to applaud the overall spec of this car, which is finished in a one-off hue called Forest Green exclusively formulated for the Sultan.



As far as ultra-limited Ferrari's go, the 456 GT Venice Cabriolet perhaps falls into the same category as the common-or-garden 456 GT upon which its based. This might not induce whiplash in the same way as the Ferrari FX — another of the Sultan's commissions — but the attention to detail, and most importantly that colour combination make it arguably more desirable in our eyes. Sure, the added weight and four speed automatic might be at odds with the spirit of a "true Ferrari", but as far as summer cruisers go, we can't imagine anything more sublime than this green goddess.



Today, this unicorn resides in the Marconi Automotive Museum & Foundation for Kids. Home to over 100 vehicles with an approximate value of 70 million dollars, the Museum houses many automotive rarities, including the aforementioned one-off Ferrari FX. Doubling as an event venue, the museum donates a portion of all proceeds from events and museum visitors to charities and organisations that help children in need, so if you find yourself in California, we highly recommend you check it out!

Photos by Remi Dargegen

Gallery

