



FERRARI'S GREATEST ROAD CAR

*Celebrate with Octane as the pinnacle of Enzo Ferrari's
career reaches its 25th anniversary*

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HE FERRARI F40 is regarded by some of the most experienced road-testers as the greatest road-going Ferrari ever. This is interesting because, prior to its launch in 1987, supercars were huge monsters that usually sported a massive, normally aspirated V12 engine, not a relatively diminutive V8 wearing twin Japanese IHI turbochargers. The F40 was a real game-changer.

Before its launch, the *über*-car of the day had been the complex and very competent Porsche 959. Back in 1983 the fastidious engineers of Stuttgart had trumped Enzo Ferrari's previous best effort, the 288GTO, by developing the Gruppe B, later to become known as the 959. As a celebration of Ferrari's 40th anniversary, Enzo responded with the F40, a car at the opposite end of the engineering spectrum from the Porsche. The F40 was not built actually to race – although a number were track-prepared by Michelotto for privateers – so the £193,000 road rocket initially came in for some criticism as a bit of a poser's car. The McLaren F1 of 1992 was not designed as a racing car either, but went on to win at Le Mans in 1995 against all the odds, guaranteeing its perfect credentials.

The Leonardo Fioravanti-designed F40 was the last Ferrari completed under Enzo's reign, and history has proven The Old Man got it spot on. So much so, the initial production run of just 300 examples was radically increased to 1315 when production ceased

in 1992. Ferrari had developed the first production car that could breach a genuine 200mph; a hypercar that was raw, dangerous and exciting. It went against the accepted consensus of ever-more-powerful supercars needing ever-more-complex computers to shield the drivers from themselves.

The F40 is not simple: it is pure. It is extremely cleverly engineered, being constructed of Kevlar, carbonfibre and aluminium. With its double overhead-cam, flatplane-crank, fuel-injection 2.9-litre V8 treated to forced induction, the F40 weighs just 1104kg and pumps out nearly 500bhp (see following F40 facts), which translates to a white-knuckle power-to-weight ratio of 433bhp per tonne. With no ABS, no power steering, no airbags, no brake servo and not even a radio fitted as standard, the F40 was de-contented to the point of austerity in order to preserve an absolutely focused and intimate experience of raw speed and razor-sharp handling.

Almost unbelievably, the F40 is 25 years old. Looking back on it, you understand why it is now appreciated as one of the finest drivers' cars ever. It provides old-school driver involvement with brutishly supercar levels of performance. It will beat the 5.0sec barrier in the dash to 60mph, and the unrelenting acceleration continues right up to 201mph. Classic car types relish the F40 because subsequent supercars have become heavier, more complex, computer-controlled variations of each other. In our world, the Ferrari F40 is appreciated as the best analogue sensation in a sanitised digital age. ➔

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‘EVERY TIME I CLIMB out of an F40 after a drive I feel exhilarated – and lucky to be alive!’ says experienced historic racing driver James Cottingham. ‘Each drive is a dramatic experience. The F40 is so thrilling and alert. The rush of power after 3750rpm – once the turbos have spooled up boost pressure – is totally addictive and intoxicating. That turbo kick has to be experienced to be believed, although the turbo lag takes a bit of getting used to and the power drops off at over 7000rpm, so extracting the maximum from this narrow powerband requires concentration.’

Although light and superbly balanced, the Ferrari F40 is not an easy car to drive really quickly. Sure, on a straight road, it is simple to shove the firmly sprung throttle pedal down as far as it will go, wait for the needle on the revcounter to break 3500rpm, and then hold on as the projectile goes ballistic. The clutch is heavy and the dogleg five-speed manual gearbox is obstructive which, combined with turbo lag, makes the F40 hard work. But as with all fast vintage or older classic cars, give it time and learn its foibles and the Ferrari will reward.

Smooth inputs reveal astonishing levels of acceleration and road speed. This is enhanced by the ever-so-direct and sensitive steering, one of the car’s best attributes. Once ignited, the whoosh and hiss of the twin turbos overlays the exhaust note (unless you have a Tubi-style straight-through system fitted), and the lovely unencumbered steering has to be minutely adjusted to keep the lightweight F40 on your chosen course. The ride jiggles but it will absorb rather than crash over road bumps, while the carbonfibre bodywork transmits every squeak, boom and rumble into the cockpit, along with a huge amount of road roar.

Yet this sensitivity communicates the road surface directly to your fingertips and the seat of your pants in a wonderfully tactile manner. Dynamic timing makes every drive in an F40 an unforgettable experience, as does judging the braking distance accurately because closing speeds can be immense. But get everything right and you will come away feeling like you have truly tamed the *Cavallino Rampante* – and no motoring encounter is more vivid, exciting or satisfying.

25 AT 25

F40 FACTS FOR THE TIFOSI

01 THE ONE TO HAVE

All Ferrari F40s built from 1987 to 1992 were red with red interiors. And all were left-hand drive, except for the seven especially constructed for Brunei. Ferrari initially proposed to limit production to just 300 examples but demand was so prodigious that 1315 were actually manufactured. The price new in ’87 was £193,000. Values peaked in 1989 at a million, with a low point of £100,000 in 1991, but now the best examples command around £400,000. So, with all the cars pretty much the same, what determines the top value? Low mileage is all. Low mileage plus being an early non-cat, non-adjust, sliding-window, British-spec, accident-free example (see points 9, 11 and 15). There are a surprising number of F40s with mileages under 15,000, which makes you wonder what the hell the owners did with their fabulous road racers.

02 GO FIGURE

The Ferrari F40 was the first production road car with a top speed of over 200mph – just, at 201mph – and it had a 0-60mph time of 4.5sec thanks to official figures of 478bhp at 7000rpm and 426lb ft of torque at 4000rpm. Weighing a nimble 1104kg, it gives 433bhp per tonne (see fact number 9).

03 WEAK BLADDER

Ferrari F40s are fitted with racing-car-style bladder tanks. One in each sill. The bladders are ‘lifer’ for ten years and cost about £13,000 to renew from Ferrari itself, although specialists can replace them for around £7500. This used to be an issue when F40 values were

on the wane but, now that prices are strongly on the up, the expense is amortised by the increased equity in the car. Another solution is to swap them for two aluminium tanks at around £5500. Fit and forget.

04 ANCHORS AWEIGH

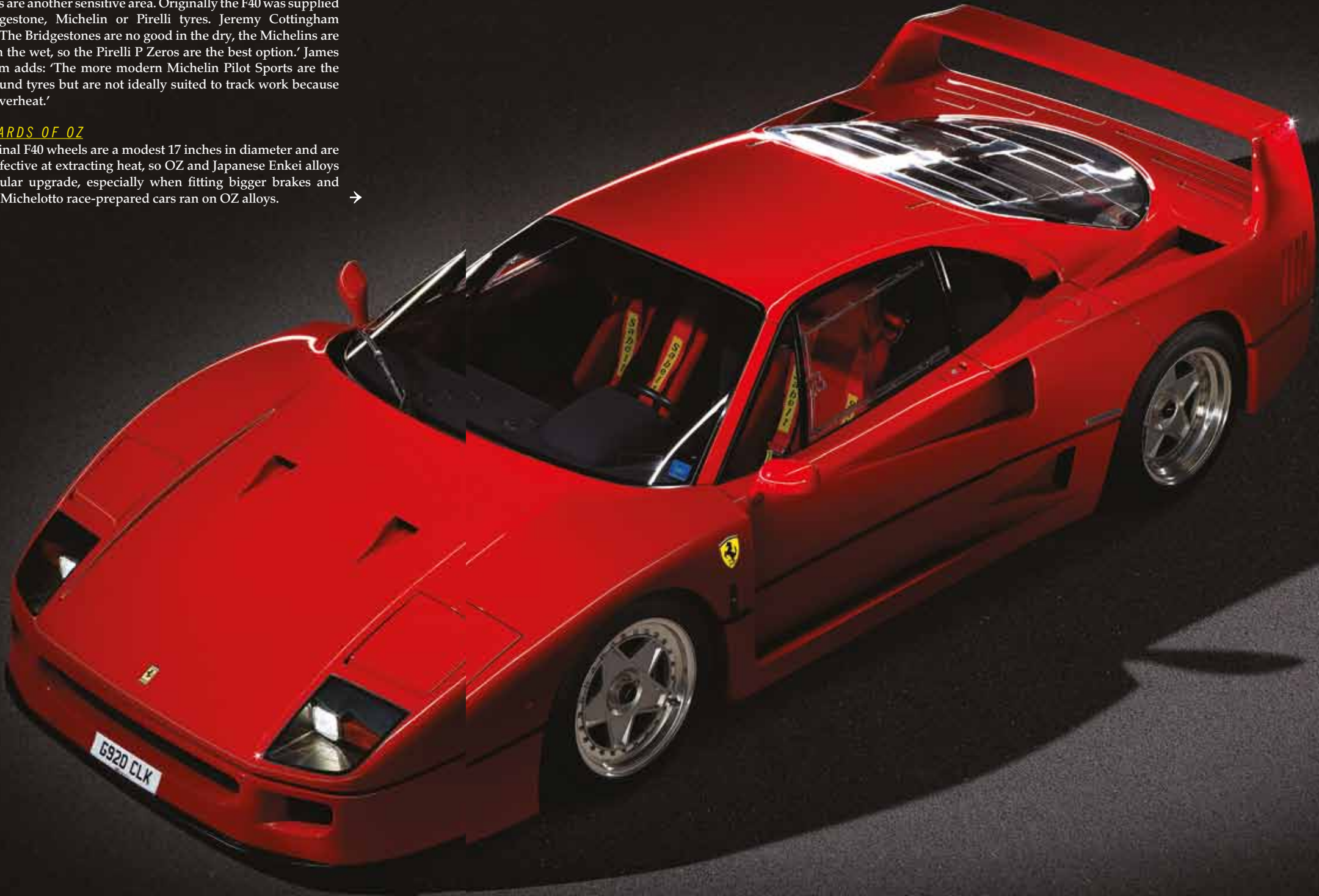
With 478bhp to play with, it is easy to pile on the acceleration – but less easy to slow down, thanks to the F40’s underwhelming brakes. The four-wheel, non-servo-assisted, vented discs are its weak point, so brake upgrades are popular. Better disc and pad materials are available and some owners fit bigger brakes, but that necessitates larger alloy wheels (see point 6), which some purists decry.

05 BURN RUBBER

Tyres are another sensitive area. Originally the F40 was supplied with Bridgestone, Michelin or Pirelli tyres. Jeremy Cottingham suggests: ‘The Bridgestones are no good in the dry, the Michelins are no good in the wet, so the Pirelli P Zeros are the best option.’ James Cottingham adds: ‘The more modern Michelin Pilot Sports are the best all-round tyres but are not ideally suited to track work because they can overheat.’

06 WIZARDS OF OZ

Original F40 wheels are a modest 17 inches in diameter and are not that effective at extracting heat, so OZ and Japanese Enkei alloys are a popular upgrade, especially when fitting bigger brakes and tyres. The Michelotto race-prepared cars ran on OZ alloys.



FERRARI F40

07 DRAG QUEEN

The Ferrari F40 was styled by Pininfarina's Leonardo Fioravanti, the artist behind the Daytona, 512BB and 308GTB. His previous designs were curvaceous and beautiful, while the F40 is sharp, angular and efficient, with a low drag coefficient of Cd0.34.

08 RACING OR NOT

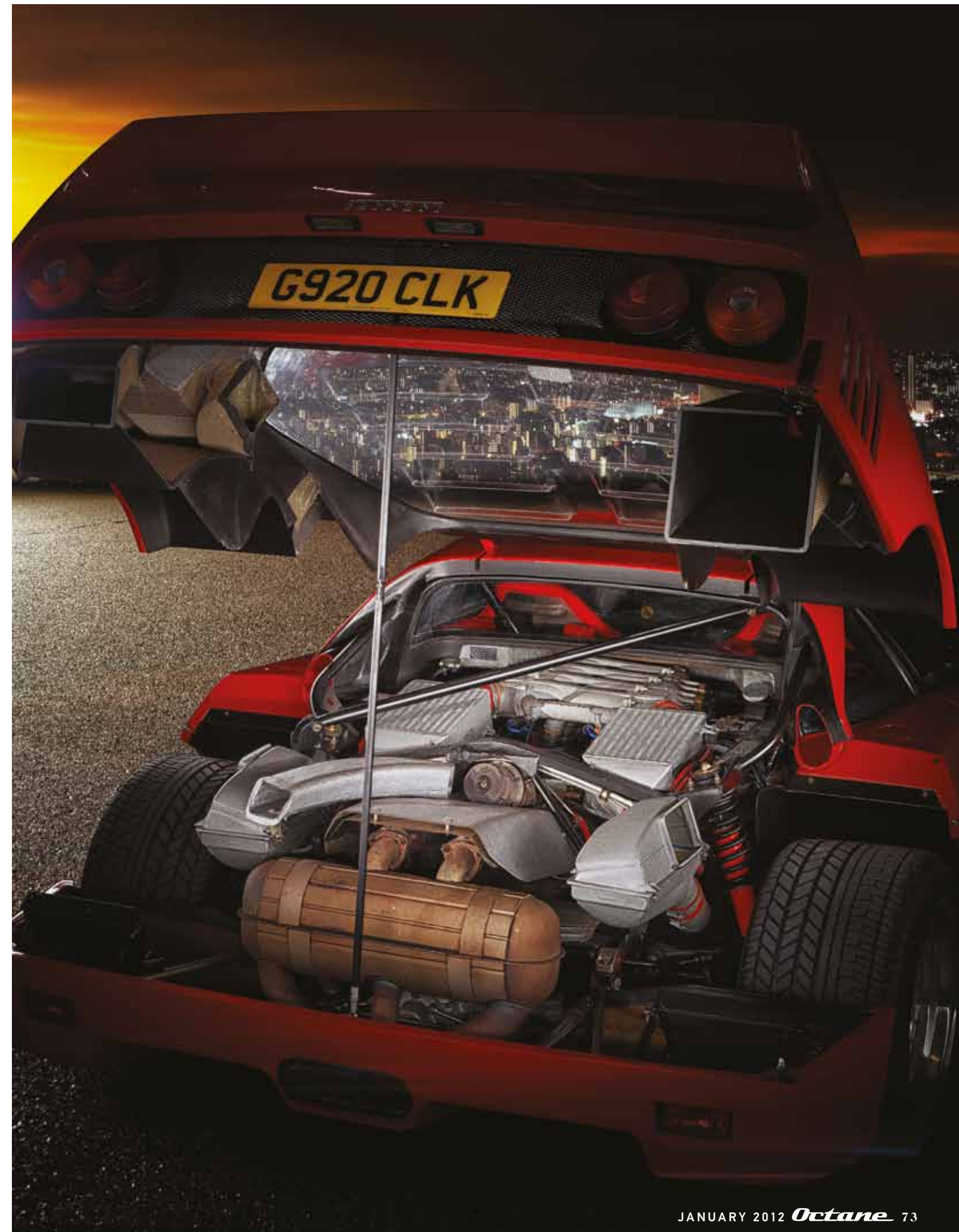
Ferrari never intended the F40 to go racing. But it made its racing debut in 1989 when a couple of privateers campaigned F40s in the IMSA series at Laguna Seca and the BRP Global GT series in Europe in 1994, winning the 4 Hours of Vallerlunga. In LM guise they were beaten by the McLaren F1 GTR at Le Mans. The F40 was always fast; staying the course was the problem.

09 ITALIAN STALLIONS

Ferrari quoted 478bhp for the catalyst-equipped F40 and we all know that Italian horses are usually bigger than others. But with the early cars not fitted with catalytic converters, which were quoted at 486bhp, the power is actually nearer to 500bhp. That's a nice bonus and it's why pre-cat cars are the most desirable.

10 PASTA-FREE DIET

Ferrari's current hotshot 458 weighs a portly 1485kg and gives 378bhp per tonne. This puts the F40's very light 1104kg weight into perspective – it's about the same as a 1973 Porsche 911 Carrera RS 2.7 Touring and considerably less than the (admittedly more complex) four-wheel-drive 959 competitor of the time, which weighs 1450kg. →



‘PETROL WILL
BURST THROUGH
THE FILLER CAPS,
THROUGH THE NACA
DUCTS, INTO THE
TURBO. KER-POW!’



11 *ADJUST VERSUS NON-ADJUST*

Later F40s had hydraulically adjustable suspension, which causes problems. Some people actually need adjustable suspension for steep driveways or speed humps but it's best to do without. The suspension has three settings: highest under 30km/h, then it drops and drops again at over 50km/h. You can feel if the hydraulic system has packed up when the car fails to lower or porpoises along the motorway. Also, the F40 could be ordered with two ride heights, set by the factory by adjusting location points on the wishbones.

12 *AMERICAN SPEC*

In total 600 F40s were built to American spec and they are not as desirable: less power, more weight because of extra crash protection, catalysts, adjustable suspension, additions to the bodywork, strange seatbelts and so on.

13 *NUMBERS GAME*

Something for the real anorak: F40 chassis numbers begin ZFFGJ34B0007... followed by the car's personal four digits. The first cars' number started with a 7 and, of course, these are the most desirable. Those beginning with 8 are the most common; the later cars' start with a 9.

14 *SEAT OF THE PANTS*

The F40 could be ordered with three seat widths: small, medium or large. The majority were fitted with medium, as small is really tight. Most small seats come with nicely turned little aluminium blocks that fit under the runners so those of Alain Prost dimensions can actually see over the steering wheel.

15 *TRIMLESS*

The cockpit of an F40 is a very sparse place. The red cloth seats do not adjust for rake; seatbelts are either inertia reel or a harness; there is no stereo or central locking; the simple, unassisted steering wheel is airbag-less; carpeting is totally absent, exposing the carbon/Kevlar weave; the drilled alloy pedals are functional and the brake pedal does without a servo or ABS; the manual, dogleg five-speed shifter sprouts from an exposed gate; and the first 50 F40s even had sliding windows. Pure, uncomplicated, functional and race-car exciting. OK, air conditioning was fitted, and is well received.

16 *CLUTCHING AT ROARS*

The clutch on an F40 is always weighty and gets heavier as it wears. Replacing it is a big job, as the rear valance and gearbox have to be removed to get at the clutch unit. The cost is around £3000 to have it changed but they don't wear excessively – although it is possible to burn one out in ten minutes through excessive slipping. On or off is the best way.

17 *BELTS AND BRACES*

Unlike the later 355, which requires the engine out, the F40's cambelts can be replaced with the V8 engine in situ, as the belts can be accessed by removing the seats. Costs around £1800.

18 *BLINDED BY THE LIGHTS*

Want some lights on? You have to move the stalk up and down and twist it as well. Altogether too easy to turn the flip-up main headlamps off completely when going for dipped beam. Not fun.

19 *TUBI-LA-BELLS*

An F40 is hardly for the shy and retiring but in standard trim the turbocharged engine is actually fairly quiet, even if it features the signature three tailpipes. Most owners opt for a modified Tubi system. These can be had in three levels of excruciation: 'cans' give a great howl, 'straight-through' is even louder, and the 'LM bypass' pipe will have your ears bleeding before you reach the end of the *autostrada*!

20 *WONDER WEAVE*

The F40 is constructed of a spaceframe and chassis and the bodywork consists of 11 carbon/Kevlar panels. The front clip is available for more than £14k; the rear more like £25k. Make sure you watch out for those speed bumps on your commute, then.

21 *WHO'S WHO*

As the ultimate supercar of its day, the F40 was owned by a number of well-known personalities:

- // Nigel Mansell, F1 World Champion. He sold his for £800,000
- // Alain Prost, F1 World Champion
- // Patrick Tambay, racing driver
- // René Arnoux, racing driver
- // Jacques Laffitte, racing driver
- // Jean Todt, ex-CEO of Ferrari
- // Gianni Agnelli, ex-owner of Ferrari. Had a Valeo semi-automatic gearbox
- // Luciano Pavarotti, opera singer. How did he squeeze in?
- // Nick Mason, musician. His is probably the highest-mileage example
- // Jay Kay, musician
- // Chris Evans, radio and television personality
- // Rod Stewart. Had his painted Giallo Fly. That's yellow to you and me
- // Sir Anthony Bamford, chairman of JCB. Thankfully not in JCB yellow...

22 *TURNING JAPANESE*

And from those proud Modena engineers we bring you... twin water-cooled IHI turbochargers from Ishikawajima Harima Heavy Industries in Japan! Well, they provided the highest technology turbochargers at the time, and the good news is that to recondition one costs a reasonable £600.

23 *SCARLET FINISH*

'To keep the F40's weight down to 1104kg, only two litres of red paint were used on each car,' says DKE's Harvey Stanley. 'The finish was not great and the thin covering means that the weaves in the body panels are visible.' Must give Ferrari concours queens apoplexy – the reason why you find so many cars have been repainted, as the original finish was apparently so poor.

24 *REAL RACERS*

Race preparation specialist Michelotto was supplied with bare F40 chassis, which they used to build F40 LMs from new. The Michelotto F40 GTs were converted road cars, and the successful Michelotto GTEs were never officially sanctioned. The cars were raced until 1997 and gave the McLaren F1 a good run.

25 *KER-POW!*

And here's a rather useful tip from James Cottingham for budding track day racers. 'If you take your F40 along for some fast work at a circuit, don't brim the twin fuel tanks. The weight and pressure of the petrol will burst through the cheap and nasty filler caps. The gas will then be funnelled straight into the conveniently placed NACA ducts that feed the engine and directly into the hot and spinning turbocharger.' Ker-pow! Game over, as the pop artist Roy Lichtenstein might have put it.



1990 FERRARI F40

ENGINE 2936cc twin-turbo V8, DOHC per bank, 32-valve, fuel injection **POWER** 478bhp @ 7000rpm **TORQUE** 426lb ft @ 4000rpm

TRANSMISSION Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive **STEERING** Rack and pinion

SUSPENSION Front and rear: double wishbones, co-axial springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar **BRAKES** Vented discs **WEIGHT** 1104kg

PERFORMANCE Top speed 201mph.
0-60mph 4.5sec



'I WAS THERE IN 1987' JOHN SIMISTER



IT'S A SUNNY day in July 1987, but inside Maranello's Civic Centre all is dark. So Enzo Ferrari, wearing his trademark dark glasses in what was to be his last public appearance, wouldn't have seen clearly the crowd of eager journalists gathered for the unveiling of the mystery supercar.


We knew the sharp-edged shape under the red cloth was something special, intended to celebrate Ferrari's 40th anniversary. But what? The 288GTO we'd seen, the *evoluzione* racing version we knew was imminent, but this was something different again. Ferrari's technicians had already given the mystery car the working title of LM, as in the 250 and 275LMs of the 1960s, but would the world have been gathered here just for a racing car's unveiling?

The red sheet was swept aside. The red car beneath, obviously derived from the GTO but whose Pininfarina styling was altogether more chiselled and menacing, wore a new name on the uprights of its huge, integrated rear spoiler: F40. Mr Ferrari then introduced his latest creation, an idea he'd hatched on 6 July 1986. 'It is a car to be remembered like an LM or a GTB,' he said. Ten days later, director general Giovanni Razelli and Fiat Auto supremo Vittorio Ghidella approved the idea, with 450 examples to be made. (And the rest...)

As well as its extraordinary rear wing, the F40 showed front air intakes redolent of those 1960s LMs', a 'face' much more characterful than the bland grids usual on 1980s Ferraris up to then. And the F40 was wonderfully basic, even down to sliding plastic side windows. The sills were unpainted carbonfibre,

reinforcing the tubular structure beneath; this material, together with Kevlar, also formed the body panels and was, declared Ferrari, the first time such composites had been used in a production car.

An hour later, we reassembled at the Fiorano test track. Two F40s in full flight, flat-crank, twin-turbo V8s bellowing their 478bhp past the pit and crackling like F1 cars as they slowed for the corner. The world's fastest road car in action. We couldn't drive one nor even ride in one; with so many eager potential participants, favouritism would have caused a riot.

For me, that came a year-and-a-half later – in Nick Mason's car, F40 NPG, probably now the highest-mileage F40 of all and blessed with the luxury of wind-up windows. It was insured for £1m. I'd never experienced wheelspin in third gear before, and I'm happy to admit that the F40 frightened me. The greatest Ferrari road car ever? Probably, with familiarity; it's certainly the most savage, visceral, tactile and challenging. And we love it for that. 

THANKS TO Jeremy Cottingham, James Cottingham and Harvey Stanley of DK Engineering, www.dkeng.co.uk, +44 (0)1923 287687.

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