

Osprey AutoHistory

FERRARI CABRIOLETS & SPYDERS

166 Inter to Mondial Quattrovalvole

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Dino and 308 spyders and cabriolets

Now we come to two series of Ferraris which, for sheer numbers, overshadow all the open cars that had been built before: the Dino 246GTS, 308GTS and Mondial Cabriolets. Some Ferrari 'purists' may argue that these are not true Ferraris (indeed the 246GTS was built with the Dino nameplate) because of their V6 and V8 engines. But the V12, while long the most characteristic of Ferrari powerplants, has only been one of the many configurations used by the firm, in racing as well as for road cars.

The main concern of this book is bodywork, and the significance of the 246GTS and 308GTS models is that they are Targas, with removable roof panels rather than folding fabric tops. Production of the 206GT berlinetta began early in 1969, followed by the larger 2.4-litre version at the end of the year. The spyder version, the 246GTS, was introduced at the Geneva Salon in the spring of 1972; the lines were essentially the same as for the berlinetta but three slots replaced the quarter window on each sail panel and the removable roof was black rather than body colour. Along with the success of the basic model, the spyder version enjoyed a significant run—1180 examples, beginning with (Dino) serial 02132 and ending with 08518 in 1974.

The 308 series also began as a Dino model, although the GT4 coupés (a Bertone design) later became known as Ferraris. One of these chassis (12788), with the

Previous page and right
*Designated 246GTS, the
spyder version of the Dino
coupé was introduced in 1972;
1180 examples of this popular
Targa were made*



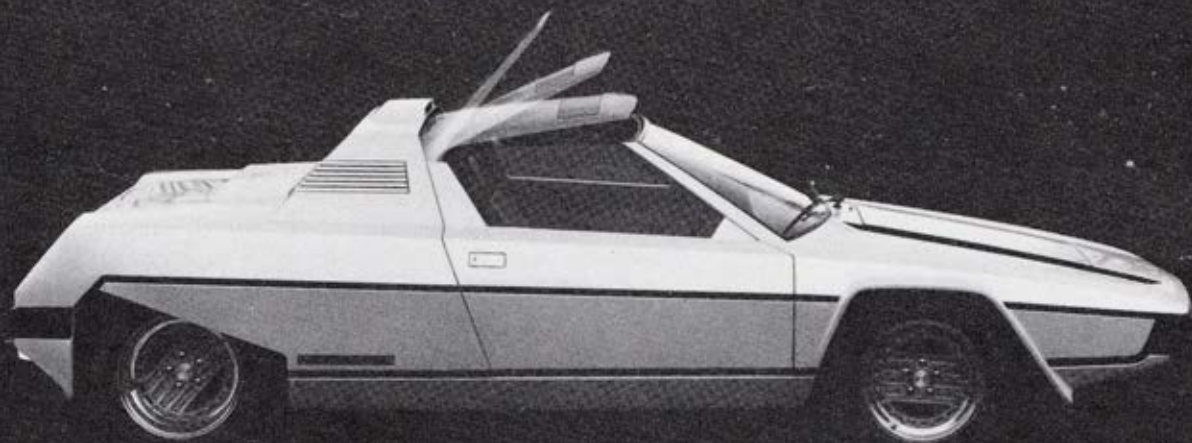
wheelbase shortened from 2550 mm to 2450 mm, was built with a one-of-a-kind Bertone body known as the Rainbow. Of very angular conception, it had a disappearing (rather than removable) roof panel that dropped behind the seats.

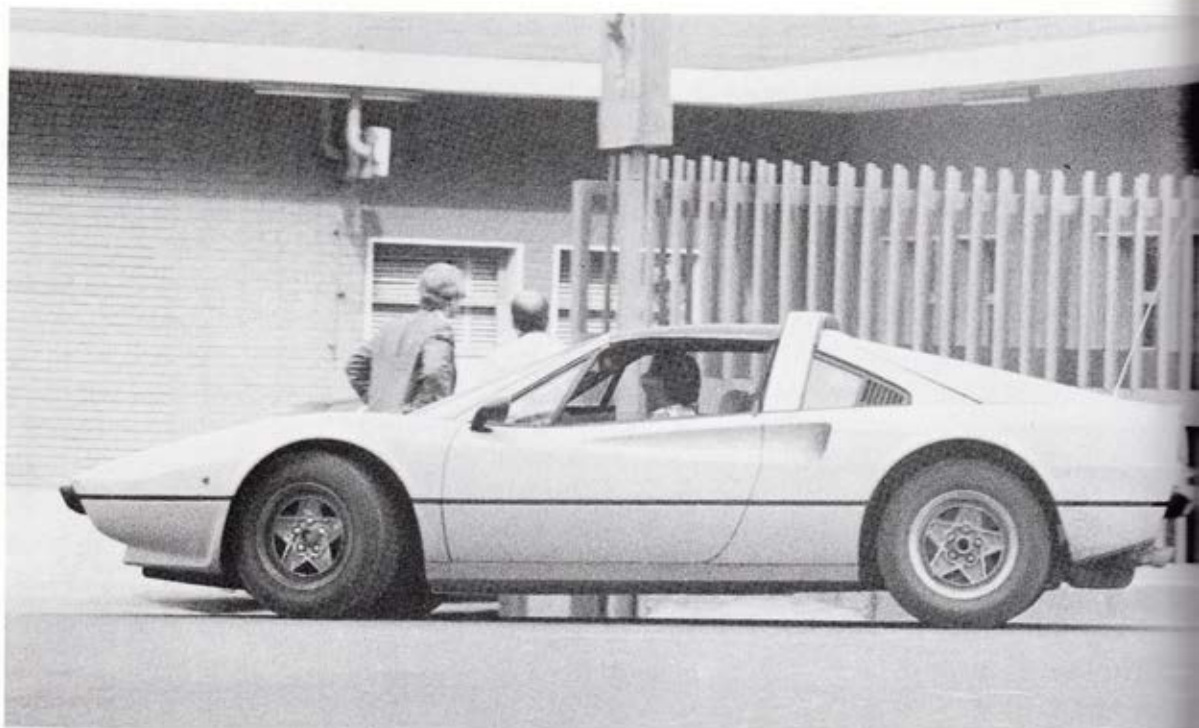
When the 308GTB appeared in 1975 it was a pure Ferrari built on Scaglietti's production line in Modena. Destined to become the most-produced Ferrari in history, it was followed by a GTS model in 1977, when it made its debut at Frankfurt. The same sort of

modifications were made as had been done with the 246GTS, but the sail panels had oblique vanes through which (to the right at least) the driver had some rear-quarter vision. Initially, the 308GTS was seen as an addition to the 308 line, but its overwhelming acceptance (especially in the United States) has caused its production to outstrip the berlinetta version.

Beginning as a carburetted 90-degree V8 with 255 bhp (European version) the 308GTS subsequently received fuel injection (as the 308GTSi in the fall of 1980) and a 4-valve head (as the 308GTSi Quattrovalvole in the winter of 1982). These improvements did not so much increase the power (except in the United States, where it was sorely lacking because of emissions requirements) as improve the flexibility. The changes to the 308GTS bodywork have been slight over its seven-year history, the most notable being in the design of the front airdam, larger bumpers for the United States (as well as a temporary black-underneath paint scheme that emulated the BB512), and a BB-type airfoil on the roof of the latest Quattrovalvole. With production continuing,

Bertone built this special Rainbow with disappearing top on Dino 308GT chassis 12788, its wheelbase shortened from 2550 to 2450 mm





A prototype for the 308GTS, photographed at the entrance to the factory in 1977. The prominent rollbar was not retained, fortunately!

Opposite page The production 308GTS was introduced in the autumn of 1977. Built by Scaglietti in Modena, it has become the most-produced Ferrari body style of all time

one can only estimate the number of the 308GTS spyders produced so far, but it is probably close to 6200 as of mid-1984.

Replacing the Bertone-designed 308GT4 coupé was the Mondial 8 by Pininfarina, a rather dumpy 2+2 that has not enjoyed great success on the market (it is more of a sop to responsible, as opposed to seemingly frivolous, road transport than a truly practical four-seater). To enliven its image, and give the Ferrari customer the option of a true fabric-top cabriolet, Pininfarina designed a reasonably handsome variation which came on the market at the end of 1983. Known as the Mondial Cabriolet Quattrovalvole (the numeral '8' was dropped from the designation), it has the increased power of the 4-valve head to boost its performance in objective terms, and the sensation of open-air motoring to raise it

subjectively. As the author wrote in his May 1984 road test for *Road & Track* magazine:

'When we first tested the Ferrari Mondial 8 (2½ years ago, in the November 1981 issue) we found it less than fast and more than a little dumpy. Trying to move its 3640 lb, even the excellent 308 engine (still in 2-valve form) was uninspiring. The car had Ferrari's typically good gearbox, brakes and handling, but we wondered who the intended customer really was. Who would choose the Mondial, not even a good 2+2, let alone a real 4-seater, over the quicker, more nimble and rakish 308GTBi or GTSi?

If you're an affluent open-air driving enthusiast, there's now a pretty good reason: a true folding soft-top version, the first regular production cabriolet from Ferrari since the 330/365 GTS models of—good grief!—the early Seventies. Add the Quattrovalvole (4-valve) cylinder heads and 25 more *cavalli* and you have a Mondial with some spirit. Not the same car at all.

It's even lighter (though not light) at 3545 lb. Whether Pininfarina saved some weight in converting it from the coupe (the rear glass of which would be a significant amount) or whether our 1981 test coupe was an excessively heavy early production example, this one is nearly 100 lb leaner. It even looks leaner, and Pininfarina has done a good job on the top, both esthetically and functionally. Up, the black fabric top gives the Mondial a rakish line; down, it makes the car festive and inviting. This is the car for the boulevardier, the Monte Carlo or Newport Beach sportsman hard at play.

We were pretty skeptical about the top, having heard stories of a diabolically difficult mechanism and wondering where, between rear seat and engine, they could have found a place to stow it. It's definitely a 2-man top, but if you read the instruction manual and make sure that one of the crucial bows is held at right angle as the top goes down, it's a piece of cake. It does protrude above the rear deck when down, and with the Mondial's low seating you really must depend on the mirror for rearward vision. What Pininfarina has done is leave part of each rear sail in place; this shape is duplicated by the protective boot, helping to minimize the apparent height of the folded top. Another good touch is the provision of retractable quarter windows, which can be lowered electrically even with the top up. There is a certain amount of drumming from the top driving with it up; this becomes obtrusive at about 85 mph, then surprisingly diminishes and gradually builds up again as the car approaches its maximum speed.

'What kind of use will the Mondial Cabriolet get? We still don't see it as a 4-seater—even children aren't well accommodated in the back—but as a 2-seater with very occasional short-run rear seating, such as a blast from cabaña to café on a sunny day with the top down. The interior is still not especially luxurious for a \$65,000-plus car, nor particularly well arranged. To get the seating package within the

Opposite page *The rear aspect of the 1979 US version of the 308GTS. In addition to the side marker lights, the larger bumpers were a major exterior difference from the European type*



The 1982 308 GTSi had fuel injection. The steering wheel, console and seats, differ from the 1979 model

wheelbase (quite a bit of which is used by the engine, even though transverse), the front seats have been shoved forward, very near to the large front wheelhouses, giving the driver and front passenger a shoehorned feeling that is made worse by the low cushion height, which reduces the view all around. If you're driving fast, only looking down the road, it's not a problem, but maneuvering in dense traffic requires a less than graceful amount of neck craning.

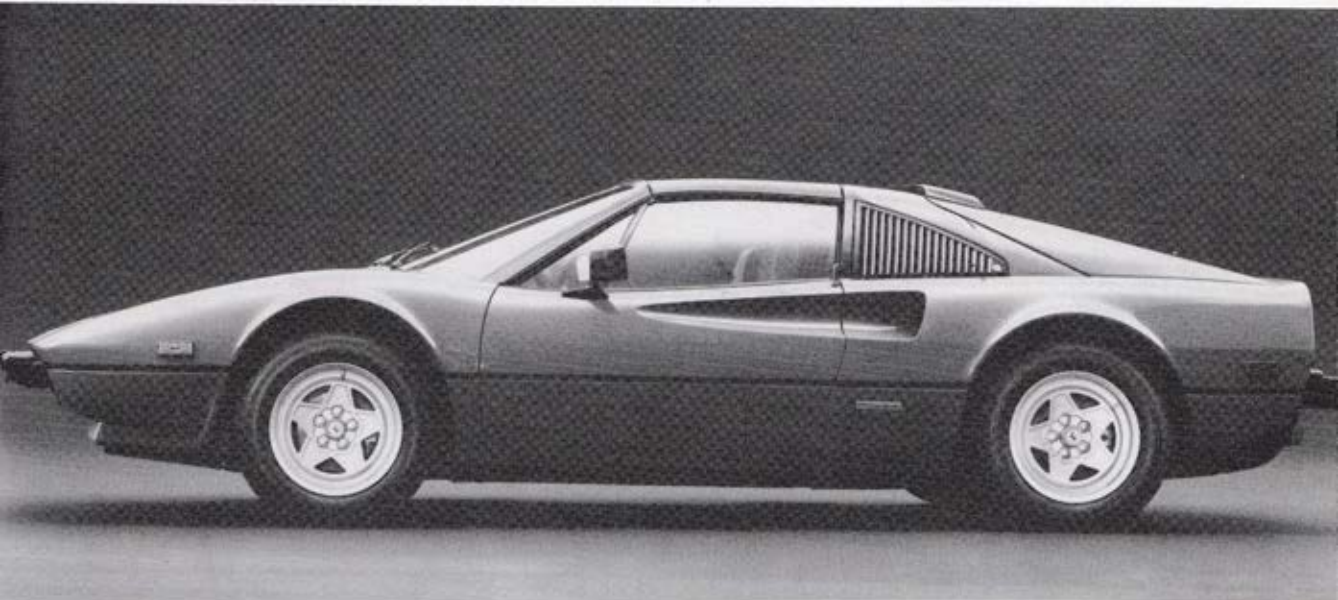
Fortunately, all the controls are where they should be; the steering wheel rim is of just the right thickness and when you drop your right hand, that very positive shift lever is right there. Not so good is the view of the instruments; for some drivers the tachometer is obscured by the wheel. The seats and door panels are covered in simple but high-quality tan leather, the lighter color making the interior design less forbidding than on previous Mondials in black. We were also pleased to see that the formerly protruding mesh

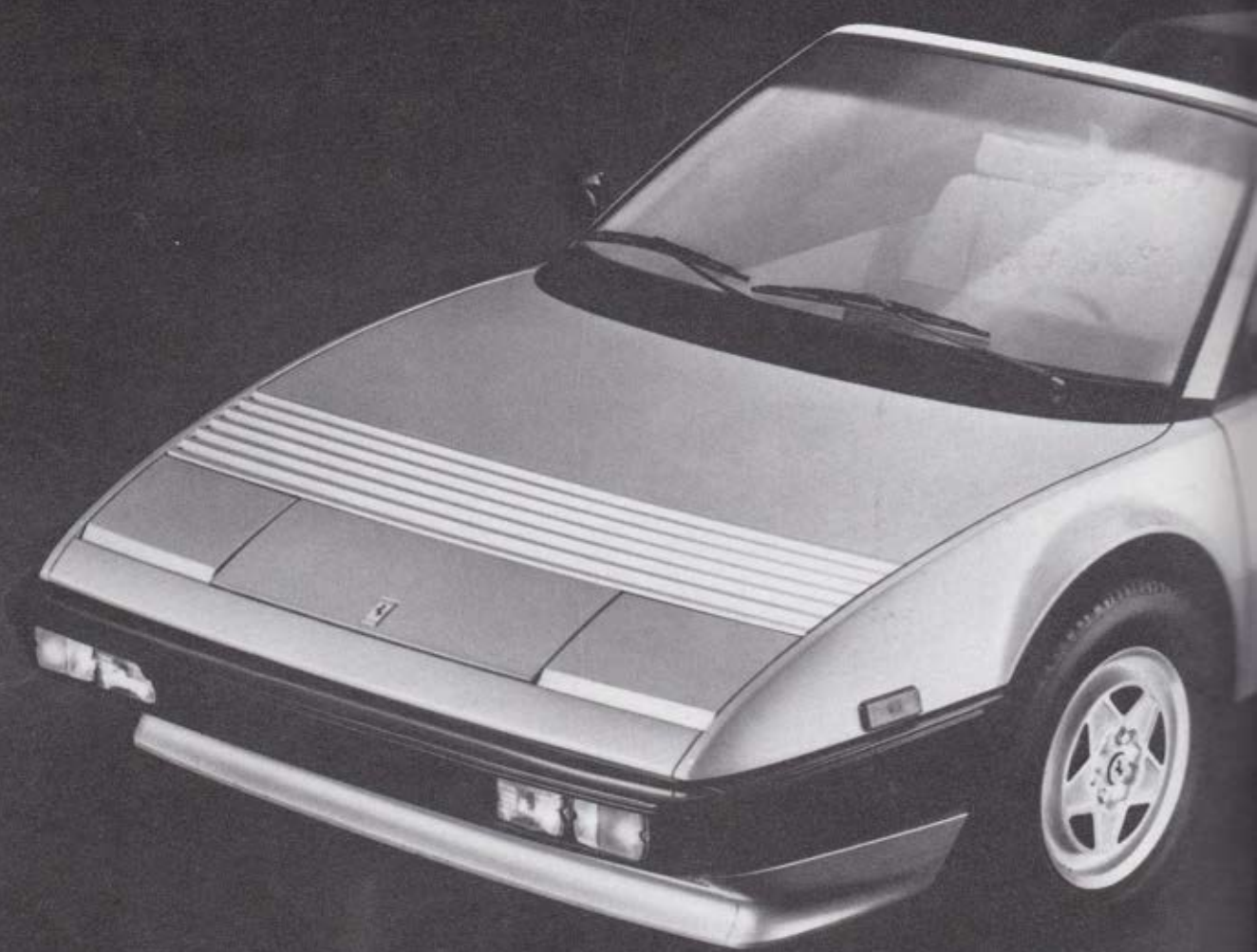
speakers (which could scrape the knuckles of the left hand when the brake lever was being used) have been replaced by nicely integrated grilles in the door panels. But the ventilation system is mediocre for such an expensive car; the center vents put out a fair volume of air but the lack of side vents limits the effectiveness on a really hot day. But then, the top ought to be down, right?

The Quattrovalvole, as we said in our more recent 308GTBi test, is a superb engine, growly and eager, giving out a wonderful howl at its maximum of 7700 rpm. The Mondial gearing has been changed to suit the Quattrovalvole's characteristics; the final drive is numerically higher (4.06:2 versus 3.71), 1st and 5th are slightly lower, and the middle three ratios remain the same, the result being moderately shorter gearing throughout. The 4-valve engine gives vastly improved performance off the line, as Americans are wont to enjoy, much stronger acceleration all the way up, and an increase in top speed, now 138 mph at 6800 rpm in 5th. Cruising for long distances can be unpleasantly loud, more so than with the steel top; the problem is not so much engine noise as structure resonance. Frankly, the top end of the performance spectrum would be better enjoyed in a GTB or GTS, but the Mondial Cabriolet will *feel* just as fast because of its higher sensory inputs.

Using a positive but not excessively heavy clutch, the Mondial can be eased through the gears in a relaxed manner or driven fiercely for all it's worth. The shifting, within the beautiful, no-nonsense gate, needs to be done with absolute assurance; you can't get it into the

Introduced in 1983, the 308 GTSi Quattrovalvole (4-valve cylinder heads) can be distinguished by its BB-type roof spoiler. This is a US model with the larger bumpers







Ferrari's first cabriolet in over ten years is the Mondial Quattrovalvole, built by Scaglietti to a Pininfarina design. Although still somewhat stodgy in appearance, it is a welcome alternative to the poorly-received Mondial coupé





With its substantial top folded, the Mondial Quattrovalvole Cabriolet is a satisfying open-air car. Rear seat room is minimal (as on the coupé) but headroom is no longer a problem! Rear vision is somewhat compromised by the high boot over the folded top



Several true spyder conversions of the 308GTS, with tiny fabric tops, have been built in Germany for Auto Becker

next gear with the fingertips but when you move it forcefully it goes in with absolute directness, telling you in a very mechanical way that, yes, by God, that's 3rd all right. Even if you don't use the gears religiously, the engine's flexibility lets you burble through traffic in a leisurely way.

The steering has a direct, positive feel that some might find a little heavy. It's a bit slow for low-speed maneuvering, and the turning circle is rather large, but for fast road work it really does the job. There is a tendency toward understeer that increases as you go faster. This means you use a bit of muscle controlling the car but the big Michelin 240/55VR-390 tires have more grip than you're ever likely to use in normal spirited driving. There is oversteer at the very limit, as in our skidpad test (0.808g). Throwing the car from side to side in the slalom also makes the tail come out, and you have to keep the power on. The suspension is supple but noisy over sharp irregularities; you also get noticeable bump-steer from anything really protruding from the surface. The Cabriolet's structure is less rigid than the coupe's, transmitting some flexing and shaking.

We now feel that Ferrari has a Mondial with real *raison de'être*;

faster, better looking, with wind-in-the-hair driving and all the attention from the sidelines you can handle. The Cabriolet was genuinely admired by most observers; drive it, and you will not be ignored. Forget the back seat, or put a Doberman in it as a guard dog. Two seats are enough, and the Ferrari has the performance to provide the most exhilarating open-air driving you could want.'

Again estimating the numbers of Mondial Cabriolets produced so far, we have a relatively small number of around 300 (still higher than any previous type of Ferrari soft-top) as of mid-1984. This brings the total of 246- and 308-based open cars into the approximate 7700 range, perhaps well over 8000 by the end of the year. From this we can see that the rarity factor of all the older Ferrari spyders and cabriolets will not be obtained when the current cars compete in future used-car markets. This is not to say that the GTS Targa style will not be more highly esteemed than the GTB—it almost certainly will be—but it cannot command the inflated prices of its predecessors. But this is good, because more Ferrari enthusiasts will have the opportunity of enjoying wind-in-the-hair motoring than ever before.

Dino and 308 spyders and cabriolets

Dino 246GTS	1180—beginning (Dino serial) 02132, ending 08518
308GT Rainbow	One—(Dino serial) 12788
308GTS	Approximately 1300—beginning 22619, ending 30687
308GTSi	Approximately 3300—beginning 31343, ending 41757
308GTSi Quattrovalvole	Approximately 1600 to date—beginning 41815, still in production
Mondial Quattrovalvole	Approximately 300 to date—beginning 47455, still in production

Approximately 7700 cars as of mid-1984