

CLASSIC DRIVER



Ferrari 599 GTB: From London to Geneva

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What better way to celebrate the Ferrari 599 GTB's third birthday than driving a brand-new example from London to the location of its world debut, the Geneva motor show?

The car was **Ferrari North Europe's** newest 599 GTB, specially equipped with **Pirelli SottoZero M+S** winter tyres on the standard-size 'pentagram' wheels – a rare fitment nowadays. The cold weather equipment was to prove vital as the journey involved a straightforward run across northern France to **Dijon** (where an overnight stop allowed a break), before an exhilarating drive across the **Jura**, through winter resorts and down into **Geneva** for this year's show.



Three years since launch – three years since my first really long trip in the car – 'drive-back' from the Goodwood Festival to Maranello. Its 620bhp Enzo-based V12 still astonishes with extraordinary flexibility, 8000+rpm coming up with a neck-snapping rapidity that belies its 5999cc capacity. Yet – as a result of the capacity, electronic wizardry and continuously variable valve timing – its tractability and response from just 1500rpm is sublime.

Ninety per cent of the car's torque is available at 3500rpm and that makes for nice, relaxed cruising in sixth gear across what must be the world's finest motorway network: the French autoroutes. 3800rpm's even better – it's 100mph/160kph in sixth. Or so I understand.



I'd taken an earlyish start, travelling via the **Eurotunnel** and arriving at **Calais** around midday on Sunday. The crossing is an easy one and, as long as you select the 'high vehicle' carriage, safe and secure for a wide, £200,000 motor car.

I decided to sat-nav it all the way to **Dijon**, with just a stop for fuel and a sandwich. That came up 260 miles from home, when I filled the grey car with **Total Excellium Super**, the 105-litre tank taking around 74 litres. So you are in 16mpg territory (that's around 17.5 litres/100km) when in relaxed cruising mode – pretty good for a 205mph Ferrari.



The winter tyres, by the way, do limit the car's maximum to 150mph and take a certain degree of 'edge' out of its handling. There's a touch more movement under braking and the noise level is a little higher but, all in all, it's a price well worth paying for the all-condition capabilities that were to be tested the next day.

My Sunday night destination was **Dijon** and I arrived at the **Novotel** around 17:00. No records broken, no dramas – just a satisfying demolition of 375 miles solo in around five hours (including a couple of stops).

You could cover massive distances in the 599 GTB. With just an **iPod** for company, **Al Green** to **ZZ Top** is a delight - not only for the quality of the **Bose** premium sound system. The – now standard-fit – satellite navigation and hi-fi is very good. There's no full-screen map, but turn-indications come up on the instrument console at just the right time.



Monday, however, was for maps. A proper, yellow, **1:150 000 Michelin Local** one that was to guide me through the snow-covered **Jura** and then on to **Geneva**. Brimming the now empty car in **Dijon**, I took the autoroute to **Dole** and then D- and N-roads-only into **Switzerland**.

The cabin, airy and spacious on the way down, becomes a real driver's cockpit. **Ferrari GB** had specified the car with standard seats trimmed in the '**Daytona**' style with carbonfibre backs rather than the optional, full-on racing versions. The support is excellent anyway, so I suppose it's only the track-day enthusiast or options-box-ticker that would have the latter.

In fact, the car had been specified perfectly for me. The colour, **Grigio Ferro** is a fine-particle metallic from Ferrari's special order, classic colour chart. The interior is trimmed in **Bordeaux** hide and leather - rather than carpet - on the rear shelf. Carbonfibre is kept to a minimum.

Visibility is good; all the controls and instruments come to hand and, with occasional adjustments to the *Manettino* (the steering wheel-mounted switch that controls the dynamics of the suspension, gearchange and engine), the big car can be driven forcefully along the almost deserted country roads.





With snow on the ground and often 0deg C temperatures, it's a journey to be enjoyed – but taken with some circumspection. At the ski resorts of **Morbier**, **Les Rousses** and **Gex**, the snow is piled two metres high. It's a clear road, but icy at the edges and unlikely territory for a supercar.

Despite the weather, I left the *Manettino* firmly in *Bassa Aderanza*, or 'Low Grip': the default road setting. 'Ice' (it's the same in Italian...) is for more extreme conditions and although I was starting to get a little concerned on the descent into **Gex**, with the temperature plummeting below zero, that setting plus the gearbox in 'Auto' was fine. You could have driven much faster, I'm sure.

As the snow cleared, and the signs began to count down the kilometres to **Geneva**, the car's massive performance could be used more freely. The well-driven **BMW X5** that had overtaken me in the mountains was now easy pickings.



The Swiss border guards offer the big Ferrari barely a glance – they've seen it all before – and it's over to the satellite navigation for a painless delivery to **Modena Cars SA**, the Geneva official Ferrari agent and designated drop-off point.

The odometer reads 1625 miles; so that's exactly 666 miles in my care and a nicely run-in car for the Ferrari press fleet. Far from the usual tester's run, with smoking tyres and a dab of opposite lock, this was a driver's or – more likely – an **owner's** run to Geneva.

The **Ferrari 599 GTB** carries a UK price of (at 1 March 2009) £197,668.06 for manual and £202,674.24 with the F1 gearbox. This includes a four-year warranty (UK-only) and standard **NavTrak** security device.



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