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Ferrari California 30: Less is more

Lead

An additional 30bhp, a reduction in weight of 30kg – those are the bare figures that give Ferrari's latest California its '30' suffix. But, statistics apart, how does driving the new car hood-down in late autumn measure up?

In 2008, the California broke new ground for the Italian company when it married a front/mid-engined layout with an electrically retractable hardtop, twin-clutch 7-speed gearbox, generous space (or seating for children) behind the front seats and a commodious boot.

The car was marketed as having more 'accessible' performance, easy for everyone to drive, yet still packed with Ferrari DNA. When we experienced the original version (in [2009](#) and [2012](#) in the UK - SW) it felt like any Ferrari should: very fast, exciting to drive and packed with practical personality. 'Slow' it most definitely was not. So now, with 490bhp/505Nm torque, how much better is it than the original? And is the optional handling package fitted to this car (faster steering, electronically controlled dampers and stiffer suspension) a step too far?





The quick answer to the latter is ‘yes’... and ‘no’. ‘Yes’ for the stop-start crawl out of the centre of Zurich, and most definitely ‘no’ for the country road journey to Einsiedeln, just a short drive away in the canton of Schwyz.

It’s mid-November. Snow is in the air. With a warm coat, though, roof-down motoring is more than merely ‘possible’, it’s a pleasure. Turn your collar (and the heater) up and enjoy the charismatic barks, bangs, screams and coughs of the Ferrari V8, as the gearbox makes lightning-quick downshifts and the exhaust note echoes around the valley.





Only in Italy could such a tremolo riff be picked with such consummate style. With a little practice, the California can be played as fast as Eddie Van Halen does his Ibanez Destroyer. The throttle response matches the super-quick (21st Century Ferrari) steering. The smallest input is enough to wheel the car round tight bends or through long, sweeping curves. And the sportier suspension seems the equal of the very top, super-high-performance cars from Maranello. All that said, the California 30 is an easy car to drive – without being predictable or boring.





Hood-up, the car is another classic Ferrari *berlinetta*. It sprints from zero to 100km/h (62mph) in just 3.8 seconds. It then goes on to 312km/h, exhausts roaring all the while; a very fast car indeed. So far so good, you might say – a typical Ferrari road test, in homage to the marque. Well, some would say that the styling is not perfect, the interior a touch cluttered and the rear seats impractical.

But others would rejoice in its compact dimensions, its speed and charisma, its sheer ‘Ferrariness’ – and we’d be among that latter group.

Photos: Jan Baedeker

Gallery

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