

**Name:** 2013 Ferrari F12berlinetta

**Published:** 7/31/2012 12:43:27 PM

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**Publication :** Car & Driver



### **2013 Ferrari F12berlinetta**

#### **Another masterpiece from Maranello.**

Within the coral-colored brick walls of Ferrari's Maranello operations, a new supercar is starting to roll off the line. The replacement for the 599GTB Fiorano and its numerous offshoots, the new F12berlinetta will be Ferrari's most expensive, quickest, and most powerful model when it goes on sale in the U.S. early next year at an estimated price of \$330,000. Its reign as Ferrari's flagship will be a brief one, as the Enzo replacement is expected to break cover at the Paris auto show this fall and go on sale in mid-to-late 2013.

But back to the F12. It's a traditional Ferrari in that it seats two and has a V-12 mounted ahead of the driver. And yet tradition isn't among the reasons Ferrari gives when asked why the F12 isn't mid-engined or why it's made of aluminum instead of carbon-fiber composite. As to the latter, Ferrari claims that carbon fiber is much harder to produce and get right, carbon-fiber structures usually make for difficult ingress and egress, and aluminum is easier to repair. This might sound like Ferrari trying to convince us that the world is flat, that drum brakes are better than disc brakes, that *bianco* is *nero*, but we expect the F12 to weigh in at about 3800 pounds, less than the 4085-pound Lamborghini Aventador we tested earlier this year.



### **My Thing Is Burlier Than Your Thing**

Here's another important number: 730. As in 730 *hp*, which is what the F12's 6.3-liter V-12 makes at 8250 rpm, and that's 39 more horses than in the big Lambo. Off the line, the Aventador's all-wheel drive provides a better launch than the rear-drive F12 likely can muster, but the Ferrari's superior power-to-weight ratio should give it the advantage once rolling. Closely related to the FF's 6.3-liter V-12, the version in the F12 gets a unique block without an AWD-enabling output shaft at the front, a higher compression ratio (13.5:1), different cams, and two ingot-like resonators that hang off the front of the aluminum intake manifold to improve breathing. Revs don't so much increase but rather spiral out of control as if someone had forgotten to install the flywheel. Fortunately, LEDs at the top of the steering wheel illuminate as the 8500-rpm redline approaches and then flash in unison when the engine reaches its 8700-rpm cutoff.

The lights aren't merely an affectation, like hood-mounted tachometers or A-pillar-mounted gauges—they're crucial pieces of instrumentation. Through the first few gears, you're looking more at the leather-wrapped visors than the tachometer, as your neck works in vain to level your noggin. In fact, the V-12 seems to be hellbent on making your neck feel like an overcooked piece of spaghetti.

Indeed, the "launch" button between the seats should be marked "whiplash." Press it, place your left foot on the brake pedal, your right foot on the accelerator, and the mighty V-12 will hold at 3000 rpm until you lift off the brake. That dumps the clutch, and the rear wheels briefly break loose before hooking up. The seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox automatically upshifts in this mode. Shifts are *right now* immediate, and Ferrari purposely programs the powertrain to provide an extra jolt on full-throttle upshifts. Why? Because 730 horses are apparently not dramatic enough for Ferrari engineers. We estimate that 60 mph will be a mere 3.1 seconds away, with the quarter-mile a trifling thing accomplished in 11.1. Acceleration continues until 211 mph, at which point the engine reaches its redline in seventh gear.

### **Fast, Yes, but Also Forgiving**

There's an old saw that says good horses don't like bad riders. The F12 is one good horse carefully programmed to tolerate the unskilled. Electronic watchdogs monitor stability control, traction control, magnetic shock stiffness, gearbox shift speed, and rear differential to keep bad riders from becoming dead riders. Better riders can turn the small steering-wheel-mounted knob (Ferrari calls it a *manettino*) to reduce the amount of electronic intervention or shut it off entirely.

Although the electronic nets are onboard to protect the innocent or stupid, they aren't responsible for the F12's friendly manners. Ferrari worked obsessively to lower the F12's center of gravity and to carefully package the heaviest components within its 107.1-inch wheelbase. The V-12 is perched right up against the firewall and mounted lower than in the 599, and the transaxle naturally sits between the rear wheels. A slight rearward weight bias—54 percent rides the drive wheels—ensures balanced handling, without the danger of the tail wagging the dog.

Like a stimulant jag, quick steering can lead to nervousness or irritability. But even though the F12 has seriously quick steering—2.0 turns lock-to-lock—there's no hint of nervousness, just euphoria. Cornering loads result in a steady increase in effort, and every degree of motion results in a predictable reaction from the car. Trust builds quickly when driving the F12, and the chassis does everything better than you expect it to and without any fuss. There is more roll compliance than we expected, but it doesn't negatively impact handling stability or grip from the meaty Michelin Pilot Super Sports.



Nowhere was the chassis' approachability more evident than on Ferrari's Fiorano test track. An unfamiliar circuit—at least to this author—and 730 hp can be as intimidating as facing a 100-mph fastball, but trepidation faded by the second corner, and we were brave enough to powerslide the F12 by the end of the first lap. The F12 has a way of slowing down physics, of making that triple-digit fastball hittable.

### **Sharks with Beards?**

At 124 mph, it's said that the F12 generates 271 pounds of downforce, achieved without any spoilers

or bolt-on gewgaws. Instead, the F12 takes a less-is-more approach and pares away sheetmetal. There's a gap in the front fenders, a channel that Ferrari calls an aero bridge, that directs air around the side of the car. An opening above the rear wheels vents air pressure from the rear wheel well. Electronically controlled vents in the front fascia swing open to send air to the carbon-ceramic brakes.

The end result of the design and wind-tunnel work is a car that looks like the offspring of an FF and 599—it's unmistakably Ferrari, although the proportions are very Corvette-like. Aside from the aero bridge, the most novel styling element is around back. The rear end is supposed to evoke a Formula 1 car; we see a hammerhead with a soul patch.



Research undertaken by Ferrari into its 599GTB Fiorano customers indicated that 20 percent used their car on a daily basis. That statistic, more than any other, seems to have driven the decisions that resulted in the F12. The car strives to be a usable and comfortable supercar, and it succeeds. It's easy to get into and out of, it entertains and delights at any speed, it's blindingly fast, and you don't wear it like a superhero costume. It might not be made of the same stuff that goes into the structure of an F1 car, but should you accidentally turn Ferrari's 211-mph aluminum sculpture into a static monument to your own shortcomings, it can be more easily repaired than carbon fiber. (Still want carbon fiber? Wait for the Enzo replacement.) The F12 can even be fitted with winter tires should you want to drive it through the bleaker months.

Ferrari's civilian buyers, once considered merely a source of funds for racing efforts, are now important enough to drive vehicle design and development. The company is even throwing in seven years of free maintenance. Suddenly, the road-car customer is king at Ferrari, and it's good to be the king.