

Ferrari FF first drive

£230,000 Driven February 2011

Ferrari doesn't do development drives. Journalists are never normally allowed near a new Ferrari until all the corporate levels at Maranello have signed it off. Plus maybe given the once over by the Pope, just to be sure.

But the FF is different. Not only is this 612 replacement the first Ferrari to get four-wheel drive, and also the first Ferrari to be officially styled as a shooting brake, but it's also the first time Ferrari has allowed a development drive.

Hence the reason we've come all the way to Arjeplog in Northern Sweden, to be the first website in the world to get behind the wheel of this 660bhp FF.

Given all that, and the fact it's one of only a handful of prototype FFs in the world, the Ferrari engineer accompanying it is pretty cavalier about letting me have a go. There isn't even a rundown of the controls, and no fretting when the Manettino gets wound round to 'Race'.

Jump in it, and you can understand why. It's got 660bhp, I'm driving on a frozen lake, yet it all feels remarkably controlled. Even if you bury your foot from a standing start, it doesn't fishtail away. The FF just calmly tries to find the traction.

It's seriously impressive stuff, and it's thanks to the clever four-wheel-drive system, not any trick studded tyres. Ferrari hasn't just slapped a centre differential into the FF - it insists that is too heavy, so instead the four-wheel drive is all controlled by electronics and a set of clutches in front of the engine.

Most of the time, it's still rear-wheel drive. But if the car's brain detects wheel slip, it can send drive to either or both front tyres via those clutches. And there's no mechanical link between the front and rear axle.

What does this mean in practice? Nothing, and also everything. Nothing, because this still drives like a Ferrari. You can still do glorious power slides, and the chassis doesn't feel numbed by the four-wheel drive set-up. This car is still full of feel.

And yet it also means this is the first Ferrari that can do everything. Snowing outside? Not a problem. Loads of luggage for the family ski trip? Ha, the FF laughs in the face of such trivialities with its enormous boot.

Ferrari has been building ever more useable supercars recently, the sort that anyone can drive and still feel like a driving god. The FF, on the basis of a short development drive, feels like the best yet.