

## Ferrari 458 Spider review

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Image 1 of 3

The 458 Spider has a folding metal hard-top rather than a fabric roof



Image 1 of 3

The V8 engine sends an incredible noise through those three exhaust pipes



Image 1 of 3

Interior quality and driving position are excellent



By [Erin Baker](#)

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My mate Tom recently bought a Ferrari 355 Spider. Not long afterwards, he sold it. At least a third of the relationship was spent apart, Tom on his scooter, the Ferrari in the workshop, attracting much whistling and head-shaking from the men trying to fix the long, sorry list of problems.

The reality of ownership, it's safe to surmise, did not match the dream. So, despite Tom being used to high-maintenance other halves, he did what I imagine many wealthy car owners are thinking of doing: he swapped the Fezza for a more reliable Audi R8.

And therein lies the fork in the road, where supercar owners must choose which path to follow. Do they stick with eye-wateringly expensive Italian stallions, which are tricky to handle, with electronic and mechanic hissy fits galore, but the kudos to match ownership of such a difficult beast, or do they buy something that has the looks, sound, speed and handling of a supercar, but the reliability and badge of an Audi? My mate Tom has come down on the side of security and caution, despite having previously dismissed my R8 V10 test car as "boring" before his experience of Ferrari ownership.

Well, have I got news for Tom. The days of former Ferrari owners sobbing at their destroyed fantasies may be nearing an end. Welcome, instead, to the new world of the Ferrari 458 Spider, where all your dreams could just come true.

This car marks not so much an evolution as a revolution in Ferrari's history. Whereas the F430 was a revitalised 360, the 458 is an entirely new car. It appeared in 2009 as the 458 Italia coupé, with the convertible Spider making its public debut at the [Frankfurt Motor Show](#) last month.

Like the coupé, it looks fantastic in the metal, but that's true of the majority of Maranello red dragons. Those piercing headlights strafing continental motorways at high speed, the high buttresses behind the driver and passenger shielding the occupants, the massive arching bodywork over the wheels, the rising sharp flanks... it's a mighty presence on the road.

Step inside, however, and you notice a new quality to the cabin. More thought seems to have gone into the way the materials cover areas and are stitched together. The air vents and buttons are all within easy reach of the driver (although a focus on easy ergonomics has led to an odd design, with clusters of controls bulging out of the dashboard) and the seats are better cushioned and more supportive than in the F430. In short, it's a better place to be.

But it's the way this car moves that is so different. Until now, Italian supercars often meant stratospheric blood pressure for the driver, but the 458 Spider is reassuring from the off. The

engine roars into life with suitable Ferrari theatricals, but you can pull on the right paddle behind the steering wheel to select first gear and simply trickle away at low revs with no drama whatsoever. No lurching forward, stalling, or generally embarrassing yourself while onlookers smirk. What a relief.

Pick up speed and nothing goes wrong; in fact, things just keep on getting better. What a noise this car makes on the go. The engineers have modified the exhaust system to suit the convertible. It's an unbelievable sound. You don't have to drop down a gear to get a more aggressive bark; you simply alter the pressure of your right foot on the throttle and the engine responds with an infinite variety of tunes from the hot gases exiting the exhausts. You can practically play Saint-Saëns's entire Organ Symphony with your right foot. I've never heard a car sound so good.

The convertible, then, is the right choice for people who want to be seen and heard. Ferrari has ditched the fabric roof of the F430 in favour of an aluminium folding hardtop. The roof folds in 14 seconds, and is 25kg lighter than the fabric equivalent, with just two moving parts that slot neatly into a gap between the engine and the seats, and the relatively compact space needed to house it means there's a small rear luggage bench. It's a question of taste whether a fabric roof would have looked better, but this car couldn't be ugly if it tried.

Has chopping the roof off affected the handling? Not noticeably; Ferrari has strengthened the chassis to compensate, which has added 50kg, but the monstrous power hides the gain, and the company says that as a result of the stiffer chassis, structural rigidity is unchanged. And what percentage of 458 Spider owners are ever going to test their car's performance to the limit on a track? Not a high one; Ferrari estimates that only 20 per cent of 458 Italia (coupé) buyers use their cars for trackdays, and for them a free handling upgrade is now on offer to give a greater performance edge over the Spider.

No, Ferrari has identified the Spider owner as someone who drives with a partner, mostly with the roof down, on a daily basis. This is the sociable side of Ferrari, then.

For these owners, this car will provide enough thrills, and then some. The free-revving V8 engine makes the 458 ludicrously fast, with cheek-sucking grip through corners. Vicious carbon-ceramic disc brakes come as standard and then there's that light, finger-tickling feedback through the steering wheel.

There are a variety of set-ups for the car, from the safe sport mode, to the all-systems-go, every-aid-off mode, and you can vary the damper setting as well for a harder or softer ride. In comfort damper mode, the suspension provides a ride that soaks up more ruts and cracks in the road surface than some German family saloons are capable of. Yet you never feel like you've sacrificed the precision of the drive, which is clever engineering indeed.

The car's ground clearance is surprising, too. I lost count on the test drive of the number of times I was on the edge of a nasty sharp dip in the road, too late to do anything about it. Holding my breath in anticipation of bottoming out and a nasty bang, the 458 simply sailed through it. In fact, I spent half my time driving this car with held breath and a flinching right foot, when I needn't have worried once. It's a huge step change for Ferrari from the F430.

Magnificent as it is, however, the Spider version is just shy of a whopping £200,000. For an extra £900 you can add the company's HELE system, which is a fuel-saving package, including stop/start, that increases your Combined fuel economy figure by roughly 2mpg while decreasing emissions. Only 20 per cent of the UK's 300 Spider customers are expected to tick that box on the order sheet, but it's clearly not the cost putting them off – what's an extra £900 between friends when the average Ferrari owner adds £60,000 worth of options? More likely, a true Ferrari experience doesn't include being environmentally friendly – you going soft, or what?

No, the only real financial debate is whether all that fresh air is worth an extra £25,000 over the Italia coupé. You bet it is. As well as that amazing sound, which is the clarion call of the extremely wealthy, the Spider gives you endless posing opportunities, which is basically what having a supercar on public roads boils down to. Make mine a red one.

## **THE FACTS**

Ferrari 458 Spider

**Tested:** Naturally aspirated 4,499cc V8 with dual-clutch F1 paddleshift gearbox, rear-wheel drive

**Price/on sale:** £198,856/now, first UK deliveries next spring

**Power/torque:** 570bhp @ 9,000rpm/398lb ft @ 6,000rpm

**Top speed:** 198mph

**Acceleration:** 0-62mph in 3.4sec

**Fuel economy:** 21.2mpg (Combined)

**CO2 emissions:** 307g/km

**VED band:** M (£1,000 first year, £460 thereafter)

**Verdict:** An awesome piece of engineering and art

**Telegraph rating:** Five out of five stars