

## First Drive: 2013 Ferrari California

April 20, 2012 / By Joe Lorio



The Ferrari California has been on the market for three years now, which means the time has come to give Maranello's first-ever front-engine eight-cylinder GT some attention. At Ferrari, the march of progress is denoted by increased power and reduced weight -- and both are here in the 2013 California.

The 4.3-liter V-8 now spins out 483 hp at 7750 rpm, an increase of 30 hp. Torque increases from 357 to 372 lb-ft. Credit for the extra output goes to reshaped pistons, a reprogrammed ECU, reduced friction losses, and new exhaust manifolds that lessen back pressure.

Weight, meanwhile, is down by 66 pounds (to 3817 pounds), mostly due to efficiencies gained in the [car's](#) aluminum spaceframe architecture, although switching from steel to aluminum for the engine cradle saved thirteen pounds. With its rear transaxle, the California maintains a 53 percent rear weight bias. The combination of less weight and greater engine output shave a fraction of a second off the 0-to-62-mph acceleration time, which is now given as 3.8 seconds.



That's with the seven-speed dual-clutch F1 automatic transmission, which is standard. The previously available six-speed manual is no more. The F1 gearbox is one of the best of its kind, but we must ask for moment of silence to commemorate the passing of the stick-shift Ferrari. The California had been the last Ferrari to offer a six-speed manual in place of the dual-clutch automatic, but with that choice now officially off the table, you can no longer buy a Ferrari with a manual transmission. It's hard to criticize that move, however, when you realize what the take rate for the manual was: two. Not two percent -- two [cars](#). Out of some 8000 Californias sold.

That's perhaps not so surprising for the California, which is supposed to be easy to drive. This is the more accessible Ferrari, one you would drive every day. At just a little more than \$200,000 (\$201,290 with destination and gas guzzler tax), the California is the least expensive Ferrari and also has one of

the shorter waiting lists (six to eight months). It's designed to bring people into the brand, and it's working, as the company claims that 70 percent of California buyers are first-time Ferrari owners.

The other 30 percent, the Ferraristi, were already Ferrari owners, and some of them found the California too soft. So Ferrari has added the Handling Speciale package with a firmer suspension and quicker steering. At \$7227, it's not cheap, but it includes the optional magnetic dampers, which themselves go for \$5200. The HS package is about hardware (and software), not visuals, but Ferrari spotters should know that the package does include silver-painted mesh in the front grille, the hood air intake, and the side fender vents -- although buyers aren't required to take it.

We spent a morning driving a 2013 California in the hills outside Maranello, first an example with the Handling Speciale package and then, briefly, one without (although that car was equipped with the optional magnetic dampers). Comparing the two, the HS suspension (which is 15 percent stiffer at the front and 11 percent at the rear) felt firm and tight but not harsh; the ride in the standard version was a little more compliant. The difference in the steering (2.35 turns lock-to-lock versus 2.57) was more subtle, with the HS requiring a bit less wheel winding in quick hairpin turns. Both cars have the manettino switch with three positions: comfort, sport, and CST. The modes affect the magnetic dampers, steering effort, shift speed, exhaust valving, and traction and stability control. CST turns the latter two completely off. Sport is definitely the preferred setting, if only for its slightly higher steering efforts -- the California's steering is very light otherwise.



Even with the extra edge brought by the HS package, the California remains true to its mission, which Ferrari executives describe as "delivering Ferrari performance in a comfortable way."

The performance is there. The normally aspirated V-8 revs to 8000 rpm, and its 180-degree crankshaft makes for a unique and characterful engine note. Slap the oversized downshift paddle a couple times and press the long-travel throttle toward the firewall, and this grand tourer sheds its relaxed demeanor in an instant. The California has the reflexes of a sports car and fantastic chassis balance. It changes direction eagerly, never pushing or feeling front-heavy. Although light, the steering is ultra precise, which helps the driver confidently place this wide car on narrow Italian byways that seem sized for a [Fiat 500](#) -- the old one. Although we didn't drive on a track, the carbon-ceramic brakes (which have been standard on all Ferraris since 2008) certainly inspired confidence on the road, hauling the car down from triple-digit speeds. And they were (almost) squeal-free in town.

The comfort part is there, too, starting with the wonderfully shaped seats. Like the seats, the cabin is lined from stem to stern in rich, aromatic, hand-fitted leather. The aggressively sculpted steering wheel feels great, and on our test car it was tricked out with carbon fiber trim and a series of red LEDs at the top of the rim that light up sequentially as your approach the [redline](#). Neat. As in other Ferraris, the tachometer occupies the central spot in the gauge cluster (with a digital gear readout inside), flanked by an analog speedometer and a reconfigurable LCD screen. The switchgear isn't hard to decipher, although it's a little jarring to see the same touch-screen navigation unit you find in a Chrysler (and not even Chrysler's best one). Visibility is quite good, top up or down, except that you sometimes have to look around the oversized A-pillars.



Then there are the livability aspects: the token rear seats (which might accept a child seat or a pint-sized adult with unnaturally erect posture); the decent-sized trunk (8.5 cubic feet under the stowed roof, 12.0 cubic feet with the top up); and the center console that has plenty of space for sunglasses and cell phones under the metal arch housing the window and top switches. For a bit of financial peace of mind, there's a new -- as of last year -- seven-year free scheduled maintenance program (on all Ferraris).

One area that was not addressed in this update was the exterior design, and the car has received some brickbats for its styling, particularly the rear. The J Lo butt remains, as the exaggerated rear is necessary to accommodate the [retractable hard top](#). Styling, of course, is subjective, but having seen several Californias with a contrasting-color roof (it can be painted in any standard color), we'd say that seems to help a lot. And we'd also say that the car looks just great from behind the wheel. Indeed, one aspect in which the California is every bit as potent as its stablemates is in the reluctance it engenders when it's time to give back the keys.

### **2013 Ferrari California**

**Base price:** \$201,290 (including destination and gas guzzler tax)

**On sale:** June

**Engine:** 4.3L V-8, 483 hp @ 7750 rpm, 372 lb-ft @ 5000 rpm

**Transmission:** 7-speed dual-clutch automatic

**Drive:** Rear-wheel

**Curb weight:** 3817 lb

**Fuel economy:** 13/19 [mpg](#)

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