



2010 Ferrari 458 Italia - Quick Spin

Ferrari's new, absolutely fabulous, highly technical 458 Italia.

BY AARON ROBINSON, PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHIAS KNOEDLER AND KGP PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE MANUFACTURER
November 2009

Ferrari's storied Fiorano test track in Maranello, Italy, is a special place. It's even more so when we get to experience it in the [2010 Ferrari 458 Italia](#), the company's latest sports car. Today, Ferrari test driver Raffaele De Simone is making Fiorano look easy.

All it takes to master the 1.85-mile circuit in the Italia is two light palms, one steady foot, and a strict diet of Muslix and fresh fruit. Or so it seems from the passenger seat as the rail-thin De Simone thrusts and slides the 458 through Fiorano's curves and hairpins in a ballet of bawling rubber. After three laps, much of which are sideways, De Simone climbs out and beckons us to the driver's seat, then walks away. We're on our own, even though about five years ago, a certain *Car and Driver* personality [introduced a new Ferrari to a wall](#) on a similar day not far from this very spot. Don't these people learn?

The Feel

Turns out, driving the 458 quickly is practically effortless, like strapping on parabolic skis or doing square roots with a calculator. With an 11.5:1 ratio, the steering is unbelievably quick and

surprisingly light, as though the front axle is barely touching the ground. Still, the grip is tenacious, the turn-in to a corner so fierce and direct that you'll swear it has a rudder tilling the asphalt.

The direct-injection 4.5-liter V-8 whirls up to its 9000-rpm redline with a fearsome roar but a throttle so controllable and a torque band so flat that it never runs away on you. The carbon-ceramic brakes—standard on all 458s, as they are on all new Ferraris—respond to minute changes in foot pressure, not a trait always associated with carbon brakes. The suspension, enhanced with magnetorheological shock absorbers, keeps the body flat and calm, even over Fiorano's various bumps and ripples. The electronic differential and multilevel stability control can track the car out of corners as if it's stuck down by God's own wad of gum. Thanks to the car's finely orchestrated chorus of electronics and solid engineering, a chimpanzee on Vicodin could set a lap record in this car.

The Goods

Here's what's new about the 458, which will go on sale next June in the U.S. with an estimated base price of \$225,000: Compared with the outgoing [F430](#), the 458 was designed less for sex appeal than for maximum efficiency in power production and aerodynamic slipperiness. The wheelbase was stretched slightly, the overhangs clipped a bit, and the cockpit bubble moved forward and heightened like the canopy of an F-16 fighter. But if you don't find its neo-amphibian face particularly sultry, blame the various concessions to aerodynamics, such as the plastic nose winglets which look like carp whiskers and deform at speed to change airflow over the radiators for reduced drag and lift. Or the corner vents that pinch the headlights into bizarre slits of stacked LEDs while also flowing slower-moving air over the front fenders to cut lift while not increasing drag. Like the oddly shaped Enzo, the 458 is meant to show off everything Ferrari has learned about airflow with its wing- and duct-bristled F1 cars, whether it's pretty or not.

The 4.5-liter dry-sump V-8, codenamed F163FB and part of the F163 family of V-8s, shares bore centers and a basic block configuration with the mills in the [Ferrari California](#) and outgoing F430. In the 458, it makes 570 hp at 9000 rpm—an astonishing 127 hp per liter, a world record for a nonturbo production engine, Ferrari boasts—and 398 lb-ft of torque at 6000 rpm. Three areas of attack got them there: implementing direct fuel injection, reducing internal friction, and improving breathing, especially by cutting pumping losses through better windage control inside the block. Compared with the F430, the 458's growl is deeper and arrives earlier on the rev band. The "Big Sound," what Ferrari buyers vent their wallets for, comes in at just a quarter-throttle or so, when the bypass flaps in the silencers fully open. This time the note is from the chest, more resonant and less of a bawdy shriek than the F430's.

Jerk-free upshifts in the 0.4-second range are supplied by a Getrag seven-speed dual-clutch automated manual gearbox, a variation of the one found in the California and the only transmission offered after the manual was dropped from the program due to, says Ferrari, poor demand of less than one percent in the F430. Aluminum extrusions, flat sheets, and die-cast nodes still make up the bulk of the 458's space-frame structure, as they did in the F430. But new alloys allow thinner sheet thicknesses in the body shell—the roof is onion-skin-thin at 0.04 inch—and new bonding processes cut weight while increasing torsion and beam stiffness.

Curb weight is up about 100 pounds over the F430 to around 3300 but horsepower is up as well, by 87. Ferrari expects 62 mph mark to pass in less than 3.4 seconds on the way to the 458's 202-mph top speed. We think the standard launch control should be good for at least a 3.2-second sprint, with the quarter-mile vanishing in the mid-11s.

The Experience

Inside, the cabin is slightly larger than the F430's and there's more space behind the seats for golf clubs or small bags. Ferrari has moved more controls onto the electrically tilting and telescoping steering wheel, pruning all column stalks and putting wiper and headlight controls at your thumb-tips. Because the column stalks are gone, the shift paddles are longer and easier to hit, and the hyperquick steering means you're only spinning the wheel 90 degrees off center in U-turns.

The five-position *manettino* rotary switch on the wheel governs traction control, stability control, throttle, suspension, and shift settings and has a new option called "CT off," or "a driver's parachute," according to De Simone. This is a new, high-threshold setting for the stability control that allows so much oversteer that you can be looking out the side window before the computer will intervene to prevent a full spin. We used it to great effect on a mountain switchback to do some no-fear fishtailing silliness for the camera. As we said, easy. Another steering-wheel button allows you to reset the magnetic shocks to a softer setting even if you're still in the hard-core "Race" or "CT Off" modes. That's great for Italy, where lumpy pavement in the mountain passes can toss your cookies around.

Speaking of which, with all its high-g grip, straight-line zoom, and denture-launching brakes, the 458 is a new benchmark for megadollar vomit inducers. The 458 has performance that race cars could once only dream of. Pick your passengers carefully for their intestinal fortitude, especially if you're headed to Fiorano.

Check back soon for full specs and more details on the 458 Italia once Ferrari makes us give back the keys and forces us to leave Maranello.

Copyright ©2009 Hachette Filipacchi Media U.S., Inc.



