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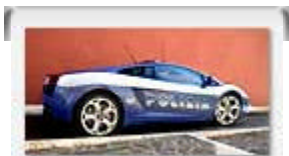


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Reviews: Convertible New Car Reviews

2005 Ferrari F430 Spider

By Jamie Kitman
Photography: Mark Bramley

As observant chroniclers of the automobile scene will note (along with students of Hollywood B-lists and Sunday-dinner fixings), midlife makeovers are not always good news. Alleged improvements are easy to count in the version 2.0-or, as we used to say, Mark 2-editions; we've got press releases just in case we miss them. But sometimes these revisions are harder to feel behind the wheel. Indeed, be they mortal or super, most cars are lucky to emerge from the face-lifting process no worse than they were before.

So welcome, first, the most exceptional of the many exceptional features of the new Ferrari F430 Spider, the just-launched revision of the Ferrari 360 Modena, which debuted in 1999. This follow-up is a striking exception to the rule, not only equaling but fairly blasting past the incredibly super model it updates. As if it suddenly had 483 hp and 343 lb-ft of torque at its disposal, which, of course, it now does. Not since the Z06 version of the C5 Corvette debuted in 2001 has a vessel already so exciting to drive gone in for a mid-ocean course correction and returned to steam so wickedly strong and so noticeably improved.



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Outward refinements seem subtle on this most unsubtle machine, until you learn that the only carryover sheetmetal is the doors. Plus, there are improvements to the wind-deflection system, a revised power convertible top, and new polished stainless-steel tailpipes. There's an updated instrument binnacle, a slimmer central tunnel, and a driver's-mirror shell now embossed to read "F430," just in case anyone was in doubt that yours was the latest and greatest example of a car that now costs about \$200,000.

But the F430's biggest news lies under a glass cover, just behind the driver and just ahead of its nineteen-inch rear wheels, cradled in the exposed rails of a high-tech aluminum spaceframe.

Seven-tenths of a liter in additional cubic capacity doesn't sound like much, even if it does represent an almost 20 percent increase over the none-too-shabby 360 Modena's 3.6 liters. But it turns out the old adage about the lack of a suitable replacement for displacement holds as true for fancy-pants DOHC V-8 rev monsters crafted from aluminum by Italian artisans as it does for the V-8 rock crushers puked out by American factories in cast iron when the adage was new. The F430's larger-displacement V-8 and new four-valve cylinder heads serve up an additional 91 hp and 67 lb-ft of torque, shaving half a second off its 0-to-60-mph time (now about 4.0 seconds) and raising top speed to 193 mph.



Back home, of course, a red Ferrari driven in anger is a surefire invitation to the courthouse anywhere, anyplace, anytime. But in Italy- in the hills above Maranello, at least- it's an entirely different kettle of fettuccine.

We headed skyward at the suggestion of photographer

Mark Bramley, who knew too well Ferrari's planned route for the U.S. journalists who were there to drive the F430, having negotiated the same course with a group of British scribes the week before. So, while I and the rest of the American journalists were busy letting out a collective gasp as our bus pulled into the Palazzo Ducale in Sassuolo to reveal a dozen topless F430s with keys in ignitions, Bramley was already plotting our escape. He had it in mind for us to take an intentional wrong turn out of the plaza, with no goals beyond driving hard for nine hours and rejoining the group at day's end, in the parking lot of the Galleria museum and gift shop adjacent to Ferrari's shrinelike Maranello factory. It sounded like a plan.



In the name of photographic possibility and to smooth our way through the Italian countryside, we were fortunate to detach German (pronounced "Herrman") Gilli, a Ferrari wrench and test driver, complete with company car-in this case, Italy's people mover of choice, the Fiat Multipla diesel. Gilli would serve as our guide, translator, and rabbit.

Initially, it proved hard, comically so, to keep pace with the Multipla, at least as conducted by the twenty-eight-year-old Gilli, who came to Maranello three years ago from his native Argentina. A man possessed, Gilli piloted the Multipla at breakneck speed most everywhere. Showcasing what we took to be local custom, he drove on the wrong side of the road and ignored solid lines as he shot apexes and overtook on blind corners. This in villages whose size, along with general notions of etiquette and the natural impulse toward self-preservation, would seem to have dictated hauling it down to a walking speed or facing the prospect of certain arrest.

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