

Lady in

Is on the prowl and out to seduce. We happily surrender

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Red





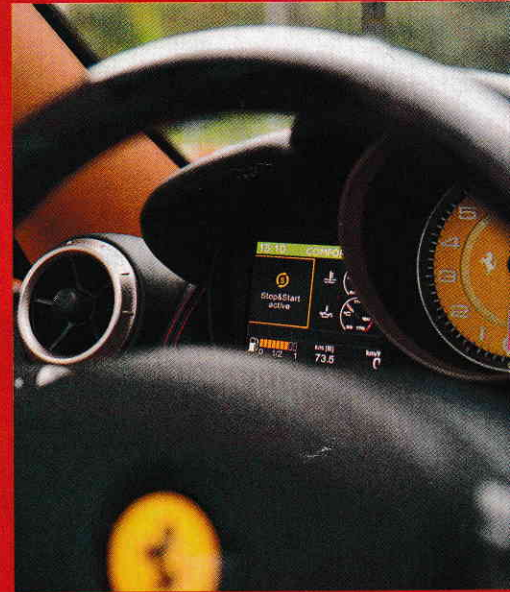
ANYONE WHO GIVES YOU A KEY TO A Ferrari has to be a 'good man'. In my case it was a woman, and let me tell you she was a 'very good woman'. And when she spoke, her words straightaway stirred the soul. "The route is set on the navigational system. It is a mix of urban and fast and twisty mountain roads. You will really be able to experience all the performance. Please drive slowly in the towns and villages. But in the non-populated areas you can push. The police, well I believe they know when you are in a Ferrari - some things just happen. Enjoy the drive".

And then my lady Santa Claus was gone. The key was in my hand. And in front of me at the gates of the magical factory in Maranello, stood a blood red Ferrari California. This is where dream cars are made and now my dream was about to come true. My hand was shaking as it reached out to depress the engine start button on the F1-inspired steering wheel. In the centre of the wheel was the iconic 'prancing or rampant horse' logo and



as the V8 engine fired up, I thought I saw the 'rampant horse' smile.

It's actually a very special horse with a simple and fascinating story. It was originally inscribed on the fighter plane of Francesco Baracca, the ace Italian pilot of World War I who was



shot down at Montello. It is believed that in 1923, when Enzo Ferrari was at the first Circuito del Savio at Ravenna, he met Count Enrico Baracca, the father of the heroic pilot. Enzo Ferrari was also introduced to the Countess Paolina Baracca who



later said to Enzo: "Why don't you put my son's rampant horse logo on your race car, it will bring you luck". Enzo not only put the logo, but also added a gold field to it - this being the colour of Modena. This 'lucky horse' still adorns all Ferraris and is amongst

the best known logos in the world.

The V8 motor had already barked its first welcome, but before driving off I decided to take a walk and look around the California, which is not really a typical Ferrari. Though Ferrari has made several front engine cars,

none so far has been powered by a V8. Ferrari have also not made many convertibles, but the California is one and that too with a fancy retractable hardtop that goes up or down in 14 seconds. Interestingly, Ferrari says its hardtop is lighter than the fabric alternative! But the folding hardtop requires space to stow and this has resulted in a big backside for the California whose styling is inspired by the 1957 original 250 California. The new California is big and somewhat bulky with lots of curves and though it's quite nice looking, it's not a rolling piece of art like some other Ferraris. The form also incorporates function and has features like the vertically stacked exhausts that are designed to aid proper air extraction and allow better airflow under the rear.

The surprisingly spacious interior is not just classy and full of top class leather and workmanship, but it also offers the driver a very comfortable driving position and seats that hold you nicely even when you are cornering hard. One very nice feature is the



F1 style manettino system that is placed on the steering wheel to adjust vehicle settings. By just flicking the manettino switch you can select comfort or sport mode and even CST off, which gives more driver freedom by disengaging all electronic driving aids other than ABS.

The direct injection (a first in a Ferrari) 4.3-litre V8 sounds amazing and makes all the proper sounds. It barks, growls, spits venom and is eager to sprint. This sweet as sugar engine is mated to a new dual-clutch seven-speed auto transmission (another first in a Ferrari) that provides instant and jerk free shifts. Power delivery is instant and seamless and the rear-wheel-drive California's

453 horses are always on hand to speed it away. In fact though it's big and weighs almost 1800kg, it gets to 100kph in less than four seconds!

What's also great is that it grips the road really well and corners flat and fast. It's impressively agile and very easy to drive even at high speeds. The steering is also fairly light and direct and talks nicely to you. What's also very remarkable is that though the California's handling is very dynamic and sharp, its ride quality is very compliant and comfortable. It's almost like having a big powerful gun that has little or no recoil and you don't get punished and bruised for firing it. In fact we feel the California has set new benchmarks in maintaining a balance between ride and handling and it has shown that you don't need to ride uncomfortably to go fast.

Another astounding feature is the braking. The cross-drilled carbon ceramic brakes make sure that it stops as well as it goes. Very honestly, apart from some bits of the styling there is little we don't like in this car. It's possibly one of the most user friendly and best Ferraris yet and it can play many roles. It can drop its top and cruise the streets catching the

FERRARI CALIFORNIA

SPEC CHECK

Price (crore): 2.27 onwards

Engine: 4297, V8 Petrol

453bhp@7750

485Nm@5000

Drive: Rear-wheel drive

Gearbox: 7-Speed Auto / 6-speed manual

Susp F: Twin Wishbone

Susp R: Multi-link

Brakes F: Carbon-Ceramic with ABS/EBD

Brakes R: Carbon-Ceramic with ABS/EBD

Tyres F: 245/40 R19

Tyres R: 285/40 R19

Dimensions: L/W/H (mm): 4563/1902/1308

Wheelbase (mm): 2670

Kerb weight (kg): 1735

EQUIPMENT

Alloy wheels	✓
Anti lock brakes	✓
Airbag	✓
Audio system/MP3	✓/✓
Central locking/remote	✓/✓
Climate control/rear A/C vents	✓/X
Electric mirrors/retracting	✓/✓
Electric seats	✓
Parking sensor	✓
Tilt steering	✓
Traction control	✓

eye of every pretty girl. It can also sprint from streetlights and even put in a fast lap on the track. It's easy to drive and you ride comfortably too. All this we think makes it ideal for the Indian millionaire who likes to live in the spotlight. As for me, well I shall wait for lady Santa Claus to return. Did I tell you she is really nice, and my 'lady in red'? ▲