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Five famous Ferraris

Stuart Codling, Author
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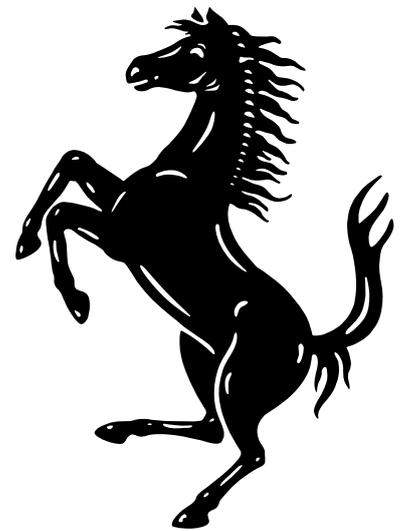
Key takeaways

- Iconic, ultra-exclusive, and steeped in history, Ferrari is the world's most potent sports car marque
- Approaching its 80th anniversary, *Il Cavallino Rampante* remains a byword for power and style
- Stuart Codling, author of *The Story of Ferrari*, selects five models that made the brand

Performance always came first. Famously, Enzo Ferrari claimed that aerodynamics are for people who can't build engines. It was left to specialist coachbuilders such as Touring, Zagato and Pininfarina to conjure functional yet beautiful bodywork in the early years, an arc we trace here as Ferrari moved from the artisan model to homogeneous, quality-first mass-production lines. Power and style remain the pillars of the brand even as it looks to a future beyond Enzo's beloved internal combustion engine.

166 MM (1948-53)

In September 1948 Enzo Ferrari revealed a car at an international motor show for the first time. Many visitors to the Turin Auto Salon would still remember him as the man who used to run the racing division of Alfa Romeo. The 166 MM transformed perceptions of both him and his young company.



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As with all early Ferraris, the 166 MM's nomenclature was functional: 166 cubic centimetres was the swept volume of one of its 2-litre V12's cylinders, while 'MM' stood for Mille Miglia, the epic 1,000-mile road race won by Ferrari earlier that year. Just 25 were bodied in hand-beaten aluminium by Milanese coachbuilder Touring using its patented 'superleggera' (super light) technique.

All these cars were built for competition and it was a 166 MM which claimed Ferrari's first victory in the 1949 Le Mans 24 Hours, a key reputational boost on the international stage. Luigi Chinetti, soon to become Ferrari's US importer, partnered Lord Selsdon, the car's owner. Chinetti drove for 23 hours – one story has it that he plied Lord Selsdon with brandy to render him indisposed – and nursed the 166 MM home after its clutch broke, still a lap ahead of his nearest rival.



166 MM (1948-53)

Engine volume	1,995cc
Peak power	140bhp @ 6,600rpm
Number produced	25
Notable owners/ drivers	Gianni Agnelli, Luigi Chinetti, Alberto Ascari, Eugenio Castellotti
Resale value	\$4m

250 GTO (1962-64)

Arguably the most desirable Ferraris of all are the 36 250 GTOs still in existence. In 2018 one was auctioned for \$70m. Quite a trajectory for a car dubbed 'Il Mostro' ('the monster') by the Italian press when Stirling Moss tested a prototype with crudely modified and unpainted bodywork in 1961.

The launch came at a turbulent time for Ferrari. Designer Giotto Bizzarrini was one of eight key employees who quit after a blazing row that November. Internal tensions had been building in the aftermath of the tragic Italian Grand Prix in which Ferrari driver Wolfgang von Trips and 15 spectators were killed, throwing the company's future into doubt.

At a time when the racing world was embracing the advantages of mounting the engine behind the driver – a trend resisted by Enzo Ferrari – the 250 GTO was a defiant evolution of the front-engine concept. Its race-tuned, 3-litre V12 was mounted as low and far back as possible within the chassis to improve the car's handling balance and maintain a slim nose line, which also theoretically reduced drag (in fact the long nose generated aerodynamic 'lift', making the GTO a handful at high speeds).



The 26-year-old engineering intern Mauro Forghieri completed the GTO project, the beginning of a career which would yield three overall Le Mans victories and seven F1 constructors' championships. GTO valuations reflect not only their rarity, style and technical proposition, but also their success at an inflection point in Ferrari history.



250 GTO (1962-64)

Engine volume	2,953cc
Peak power	296bhp @ 7,500rpm
Number produced	39 (claimed)
Notable owners/ drivers	Chris Evans, Lawrence Stroll, Sir Anthony Bamford, Nick Mason, Ralph Lauren, Bernie Ecclestone, Stirling Moss, Phil Hill, John Surtees, Graham Hill, Lorenzo Bandini, Lucien Bianchi
Resale value	\$70m

Testarossa (1985-96)

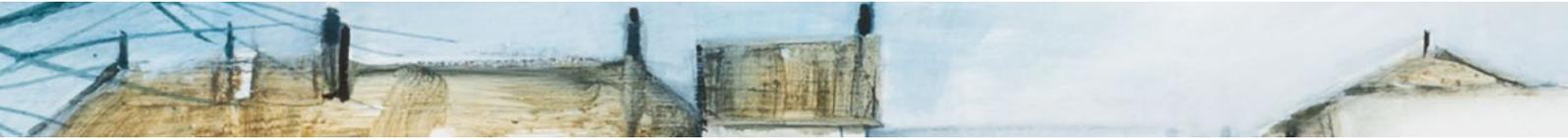
Although the Testarossa is an icon now, few road-going Ferraris have been the subject of so much internal conflict. Six years in development, it was conceived to replace the 512 BB which had been on sale (though not in the US) since 1973.

Fiat, Ferrari's majority owner since 1969, wanted to expand US sales and its preferred – cheapest – option was a 'facelifted' 512 BB, with minimal re-engineering to comply with America's tougher safety and emissions regulations. Sense prevailed: the car was dated, and its cramped and stuffy cockpit would score poorly with US customers.

The decision to invest in a new car brought more challenges and debate. Adding multi-valve cylinder heads to the mid-mounted 4.9-litre flat-12 engine yielded more power but moving the radiators to the rear – to reduce 'heat soak' into the cockpit – was problematic in terms of packaging. In a stroke of genius Emanuele Nicosia, a designer at Pininfarina, Ferrari's go-to styling house, proposed making the air intakes a dramatic design feature on each flank.

While it was named in homage to the 1957 World Sportscar Championship-winning 250 TR, on which Ferrari had painted the engine's cylinder heads red, the Testarossa was very much a product of the 1980s, symbolised by its presence in the slick TV cop drama Miami Vice. It was an unexpected union since Ferrari North America had threatened to sue the programme makers over their use of a replica 365 GTB.

The dispute was resolved when it emerged that Enzo Ferrari was a fan of the show, facilitating a genuine Testarossa in producer Michael Mann's preferred shade of white.



Testarossa (1985-96)

Engine volume	4,943cc
Peak power	390bhp @ 6,300rpm
Number produced	7,177
Notable owners/ drivers	Miles Davis, Michael Johnson, Elton John, Rod Stewart, Gerhard Berger
Resale value	\$270,000

360 Modena (1999-2004)

Enzo Ferrari's death in 1988 precipitated a period of drift for the company on road and track. Political infighting stymied the F1 project for a decade while Ferrari's road car offerings were eclipsed by rivals. New company president Luca di Montezemolo decreed an urgent programme of new models with better performance and quality.

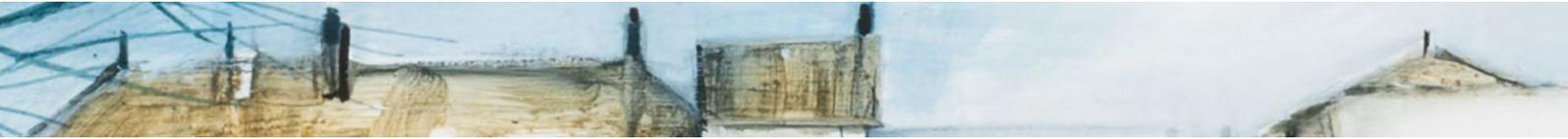
The F355, hurried into production in 1994 to replace the disappointing 348, represented a great improvement but it was the 360 Modena, launched in 1999, which truly defined Ferrari's trajectory into the next century. An aluminium bodyshell, designed using finite-element analysis to reduce material density in less structurally critical areas, made it only marginally heavier than the F355 despite being larger. The ultra-modern production line in the refitted factory ensured a consistently high standard of fit and finish.

From this point onwards cars carrying the insignia of the prancing horse would have the style and performance of a thoroughbred but without the highly strung temperament.



360 Modena (1999-2004)

Engine volume	3,586cc
Peak power	394bhp @ 8,500rpm
Number produced	16,365
Notable owners/ drivers	David Beckham, Jenson Button, Eric Clapton, Kobe Bryant, Greg Norman, Ice-T
Resale value	\$100,000



LaFerrari (2013-17)

The presence of the definite article in this car's title – not just a Ferrari but the Ferrari – signifies its position in the pantheon of the company's supercars. While its name painted the company into a semantic corner in terms of future model designations, on launch this carbon two-seater represented the peak of what was technologically achievable. Limited to 499 examples and costing over \$1m each, LaFerrari combined a 789bhp, 6.3-litre V12 with a 120kW electric motor. The motor reuses energy from braking to boost acceleration, making it a more environmentally responsible option.

Electrification represents a particular challenge to performance car manufacturers, since their brand proposition is built on the visceral appeal of raw noise and muscular power. As remaining fossil fuels become more costly to access and socially problematic to consume, even for those of high net worth, the internal combustion engine is being legislated out of existence in many countries.

While Ferrari's first hybrid was deliberately niche, joining a select group of limited-edition racers for the road – the 288 GTO, F40, F50 and Enzo – it sent a clear signal that the mainstream electrified future held nothing to fear. ■



LaFerrari (2013-17)

Engine volume	6,262cc
Peak power	950bhp @ 9,250rpm
Number produced	499
Notable owners/ drivers	Lewis Hamilton, Dwayne Johnson, Cristiano Ronaldo, Gordon Ramsay, Justin Bieber
Resale value	\$5m

This interview took place in January 2025 and featured in the Research Journal.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of Walter Scott.

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WALTER SCOTT

Walter Scott & Partners Limited, One Charlotte Square, Edinburgh EH2 4DR
Tel: +44 (0)131 225 1357 · Fax: +44 (0)131 225 7997
www.walterscott.com

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