Customer RELATIONS

To make its most elite clients happy, Ferrari offers the opportunity to, in essence, become a factory driver. We explore the F1 Clienti and FXX programs.

by JEFF GLENN photography courtesy FERRARI

Competition has always been Ferrari's first priority, and the company continues to tap Enzo Ferrari's passion for racing with a number of efforts designed to keep its Prancing Horses on track. Sonoma, California's Infineon Raceway offered the second opportunity in the U.S. this year to see two of Maranello's most exclusive programs: F1 Clienti and FXX. They were part of a weekend of motorsport events that included the North American Ferrari Challenge and Shell Historic Challenge. For the *tifosi* on hand, it was a chance to see (and hear) relatively modern Formula 1 cars up close without wing covers or secrecy, and study six examples of the fully functional development buck for the successor to the Enzo—the FXX. Both put owner/collectors in the driver's seat of some extremely exotic machinery.

For vintage racers and collectors who still have F1 aspirations, but missed out on spending their pre-teen years karting followed by years beating their contemporaries in multiple formulas up through F3, it may not be too late. One option is to pick up a car from the early '80s through the mid-'90s (from the likes of Benetton, Arrows or Tyrrell), which are on the market for anywhere between $100K and $250K or so. As with road cars, the red ones from Maranello fetch a bit more. Generally, cars from that era—except for maybe the active-suspension versions from the early '90s—aren't beyond the abilities of a capable prep shop to run and prepare.

F1 Clienti

Not new enough? More recent F1 cars rely on complex proprietary engine management software and telemetry, and are much more difficult to run. Ferrari's F1 Clienti program is the only game in town if you want to experience the thrill ride of a late-model version, right down to the factory crew swarming around the car in contemporary uniforms, running through countless checklists and chatting in Italian. You can run the car on Ferrari's own private track at Fiorano, or anywhere in the world you want to drive it as long as you pick up the tab for transportation and consumables (fuel, oil, tires, etc.). Of course, it's nothing to sneeze at—$1.5 million or so for a car, and you've got to buy the newest ones directly from the factory. To keep its newest proprietary technology in-house, Ferrari mandates that the cars it sells be three seasons out of date.


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In the old days, you'd have to be considered a friend of the company by Enzo himself to purchase an ex-factory race car, but in 2002, Ferrari president Luca di Montezemolo reorganized the Scuderia's rather haphazard Corse Clienti (Customer Racing) program. Before this, the sales department ran the Ferrari Challenge series, and the communications department controlled historic services. Now under one roof, the Corse Clienti department caters to privateer racing in GT categories, the current F430 Challenge series, F1 Clienti and the FXX program.

Andrea Galletti is Corse Clienti's F1 Technical Manager, and oversees running the F1 cars. He has a staff of 20 technicians, most of them, including Galletti, coming directly from Ferrari's F1 team. "We spend a lot of time on the engine functions and reliability," says Galletti, "monitoring all of the systems and making sure the telemetry is working. It takes a minimum of four to five guys to run one car, but only six to oversee two cars, because all of the computer work can be done in stages."

The two newest cars at Infineon, Kevin Crowder's F2004 and Anthony Nobles' F2001, are always hooked up to three laptops each when sitting in the pit garage, while Galletti and crew sift through data on another bank of laptops behind the cars. For more than an hour before the engines are fired, they're connected to coolant and oil heaters that warm the block and lubricating fluids. A modern F1 engine's tolerances are so tight that a cold start would cause its internals to crack.

I pose a theoretical question to Galletti: So let's say I keep my F1 car at Maranello and want the boys to have it ready for me at Fiorano for a test day, what's that going to cost? "About $12,000 for a day," answers Galletti. "But we like to schedule two or three cars to run at a time, it makes more sense and you can spread the costs." We're pretty sure that doesn't include consumables, but to a racer, the price doesn't seem half bad: We've heard of people spending upwards of $50K for a weekend to be a third driver at the 24 Hours of Daytona in a privately run prototype car.

One daunting aspect of the F1 Clienti experience is that the team has race data from these cars at tracks all over the world. Says Galletti, "We take all of the data from the car, and can use it for coaching." That means you can see just how you stack up against Michael Schumacher through Eau Rouge, and everywhere else.

When asked about how the team adjusts the cars for their owner-drivers, Galletti admits most owners won't get to the point

Right: Kevin Crowder piloting his F2004 around Infineon Raceway. Below: Open paddock access allows spectators to get up close and personal with the machines. Opposite bottom: Elaborate and lengthy start-up process underway; you can't simply fire up one of these ultra-sophisticated 3.0-liter V10s.

where they're asking for changes: "We set the car with a high downforce and medium shock package—not too stiff. The hardest thing for non-professional drivers to learn is the carbon brakes; you must be really aggressive right away to build heat and get them to operating temperature." Galletti admits his crew has the most fun when they plug a pro driver, like Tony Kanaan earlier this year at Homestead, into a car. "I prefer to adjust the car and find the speed."

Kevin Crowder is one of the few people who can tell you what it's like to drive a modern-era F1 car. He's had a string of Ferrari F1 cars—an F310B, F1 2000, F2001—and now has the F2004 (chassis 236). "I don't have an elaborate racing background," says Crowder. "I ran the Ferrari Challenge series for a number of years, most competitively in 2001 when it was still the 360 Challenge. I was really going for wins. But now, I'm actually spending less per year with the F1 car." When Crowder's car is in North America, he keeps it with Risi Competizione's shop at Ferrari of Houston. For European events, it beds down at the factory in Italy.

You'd think F1 Clienti might detune the engines a bit to preserve them, but Crowder

says the motors are not emasculated. However, he does admit to using a lower redline: "We run them at about a thousand rpm less—so around 17,500." Just by conserving a few revs, the cars can run six or seven times a year for a couple of years or more before a rebuild. How hefty is the bill when that time comes? "It's not too bad if the factory still has the parts in inventory," says Crowder. "But when they don't and have to make them, that gets expensive. That said, the factory has been more than fair with parts and what they charge to run the F1 cars."

With the limits of contemporary F1 cars being so high, one might assume that driving any of the late-model versions would be pretty similar, but continual changes in the rules package make for a different experience with nearly all of the cars. Crowder explains, "I'm not a big guy, but the 1997 car is tiny inside, I'd really have to fold myself into it. Even the 2001 car is a bit cramped, but with safety rules governing the inner dimensions of the cockpits on the newer cars, the F2004 is bigger inside." Another big change was the advent of traction control in 2002. Crowder says that he had to really feather the throttle on the earlier cars, but he can crack it open with confidence in the '04 car. "I'm not saying you can just mash it in a corner and let it do all the work," he says, "but close."

We find it interesting that the drivers aren't in radio contact with the pits, but it's not like they are shifting fuel strategies during a demonstration. Crowder explains that the only real adjustments he makes while driving are brake bias and, very seldomly, anti-roll bar settings. Says Crowder, "We run the cars as a demonstration, and my limits are always going to be well under the car's, but I'm OK with that."

Anthony Nobles runs one of Schumacher's 2001 cars. He has owned it for two years and it's clear he enjoys every minute he spends with it. "It's the ultimate car-guy toy," says Noble, while soldering up the circuit-board innards of his in-car camera. "I can call these guys up, and run my car anywhere in the world I want to, but my favorite track is Fiorano." As he slips into the car before a session, he points

to his earplugs and shouts, "Never forget these. It's happened to me twice." The pained expression on his face says his head probably hurt for days.

FXX

Another way Ferrari has invested in a relationship with its most loyal (and sporting) clients is with direct factory involvement in the FXX program, also run by the Corse Clienti crew. The 29 participants are not just buying a $2 million toy, but a membership in a two-year-long focus group working on Ferrari's next-generation supercar. A special in-house committee approved applications for entry into the program; it's rumored all those chosen already have an Enzo parked in their garage, but what's certain is that all of them have a special relationship with the factory. FXX participants were able to choose between two and seven test outings per year at events organized by Ferrari at tracks all over the world as part of the program. At the end, the car is theirs to keep.

From the outside, the FXX looks like a Le Mans race version of the Enzo. Weighing in at 2541 pounds dry, it's roughly 300 pounds lighter than the road car upon which it's based. Thanks in part to an increase in displacement from 5,998 cc to 6,262, the FXX's 65-degree V12 puts out 800 horsepower (up from 660 hp) and catapults the car to 60 mph in an estimated 2.8 seconds (down from 3.3). If you think the FXX looks aggressive, just wait until you hear one—it's like a baritone version of an F1 car, with that same intense crackle when the throttle is closed abruptly.

"THE POWER IS JUST AMAZING, AND IT KIND OF KNOCKS A LITTLE SHINE OFF MY ENZO."

As on the Enzo, the FXX has a 6-speed transmission actuated by paddles behind the steering wheel, but new F1 shifting strategies developed after the Enzo's release have reduced the gearchange time to under 100 milliseconds. Massive 15.7-inch front (up from 15 on the Enzo) and 15-inch rear carbon-ceramic brake rotors with 6-piston calipers scrub off the speed.

Despite its race-car looks, the FXX has suspension settings that are closer to a street car's; the setup is softer than a rock-hard racer's. Generating the lowest lap times is not the car's raison d'etre. After all, the fruits of the development program will end up on the road, not the track.

Nearly every surface in the cockpit is molded from carbon fiber, the largest exceptions being the two Nomex-upholstered race seats (they are carbon fiber-backed, however) and the full roll cage—a steel affair that's bolted to the carbon-fiber tub. Air jack canisters that make for quick tire changes and easier servicing are visible in both footwells.

The FXX's bodywork boasts changes that add up to 40 percent more downforce over the already effective Enzo. When analyzed in the wind tunnel at 217 mph, the FXX produces slightly more downforce than its weight. One of the byproducts of all this stick is aero drag, so Ferrari is working on balancing what it calls "aerodynamic bleed." It wants to reduce unnecessary downforce at high speeds to minimize both aero drag and suspension compression. On a street car that's not ridiculously stiff, too much downforce can fully compress the suspension right down to the bump stops.

Working in conjunction with an adjustable rear wing, the FXX's elaborate underbody uses a combination of channels and diffusers with moveable flaps that open and close areas of tunneling automatically at certain speeds to even aero pressure, reduce drag and "bleed off" unnecessary downforce. At 150 mph, the midsection tunnel flaps divert air to outlets under the exhaust, which lessens downforce and cleans up the low-pressure vortex directly behind the car, while flaps in front of the front wheels change the airflow to reduce drag and compression at the nose.

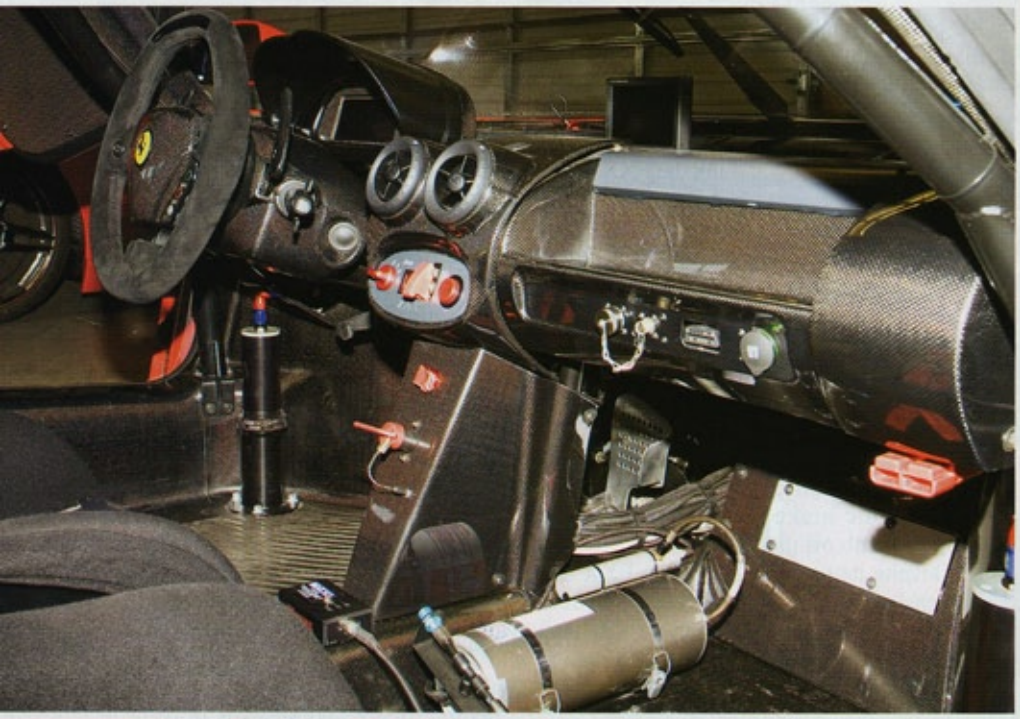
Since the point of the program is to collect information and help establish the per-

Left: Six FXX machines receive final checks before a track session. Below: Anthony Nobles, behind the wheel of his F2001, getting the full F1 experience, including a crew of mechanics and tire warmers.

formance parameters for Ferrari's next supercar, the FXX's Magneti Marelli onboard telemetry system tracks 39 channels of data on driver inputs and vehicle dynamics. Ferrari keeps the data "classified."

During a track weekend, the Corse Clienti staff handles all the car-preparation tasks, leaving the owner/drivers free to entertain guests in well-appointed Ferrari hospitality tents. About ten minutes before the non-competitive track sessions begin, the drivers descend upon the garage, swap stories, exchange thumbs-up and climb into their respective cars.

Most of the Clienti testers bought into the program not for the car itself, but for the opportunity to be a part of the factory environment. Despite diverse backgrounds, most FXX owners have at least one thing in common: They all own a number of Ferraris. Phil Bachman hails from Greenville, Tennessee, and has the only yellow FXX in existence. He owns five Toyota dealerships, started buying new Ferraris in the '80s and now has upwards of 30 of them—almost all yellow. So why do the FXX program? "I threw my name in the hat for this project because it's an opportunity to go places I'd never have even thought I'd ever be driving," says Bachman. "I've driven mine with Schumacher on the track at the same time!" So what does he think of driving the FXX? "The power is just amazing, and it kind of knocks a



Opposite, clockwise from top: You won't find air jacks, a plumbed fire-suppression system and a rearview video camera in an Enzo's cockpit; Phil Bachman confers with Giuseppe Petrotta; monster 15.7-inch carbon-ceramic front brake rotor; 6.3-liter V12 develops 800 hp and sounds unbelievable.

little of the shine off my Enzo, but I'll be honest: That's a lot of car for old Phil."

Cody Liebel has a background in pro hockey, then moved into the record business when an injury sidelined his career. How does the FXX compare to the other cars he's driven? "I've driven a bunch of formula cars (Formula Palmer Audi in England and more notably, Australian F3 with sponsorship from friend Paris Hilton), and compared to those, the FXX is heavy and the brakes still need some tweaking, but the power is the best part."

Preston Henn was also on hand at Infineon to get some seat time in his FXX. If you follow endurance racing at all, you'll remember he raced Ferrari 512 BB LMs at Le Mans and entered Porsche 962s in the mid-'80s for guys like Bob Wolleck, AJ Foyt and Al Unser, Sr. His FXX sports his Swap Shops logo, and is the only one fitted with fender mirrors in addition to the roof-mounted rearview camera. How does he size up the FXX? "It's actually similar in feel to the Enzo, with more power and grip," he says. As with the other drivers, Henn was drawn to the project more for the factory involvement than the merits of the car alone.

Though we weren't able to drive an FXX, we were able to speak with professional Grand-Am driver Terry Borchellor who did. His quick impressions were favorable: "It's a fun car to drive, the power is amazing and it really sounds right. They're working on a brake update for the cars. It's not a huge problem, but when you get into the ABS, it seems like the braking distance increases—it doesn't progressively stop the car harder." He also mentioned that, at Infineon, the car felt a little light on aero at the rear end, and had a tendency to feel slightly loose in high-speed corners.

While aimed primarily at the owner/drivers, the Clienti programs offer some great opportunities for spectators, as well. At Infineon, a general admission ticket let you look over the shoulders of the Ferrari engineers as they sifted through Magneti Marelli engine-management data, poke your head into the cockpits of some pretty recent F1 cars and stand right behind an FXX while it's being warmed up. Today's race paddocks are never this open. Then, of course, there's the thrill of seeing some of Maranello's finest machinery at speed. While exclusivity remains a main ingredient of Ferrari's formula for success, the Clienti programs illustrate that Ferrari enjoys sharing the passion with owners and enthusiasts alike. ●