

## DRIVING CLASSIC FERRARIS – DREAM WORKS

**One Company Has Taken Every Ferrari Enthusiasts' Dream And Made It Happen. Jonathan Crouch Reports**

**An invitation to drive five Ferrari's in one day isn't one that comes along very often. When it does, you'd better be ready – so drop everything, here's your chance.**



One company, Watford-based classic car hirers Bespokes, claims to be able to turn this pipe dream into reality for anyone with the requisite £825 (ex Vat) to afford one of their Classic Ferrari Luxury Hotel Weekend Breaks. To prove they could deliver on their promises, they recently invited me along to sample one.

First, let's get the downside out of the way. These aren't brand new Ferrari's, so you'll search in vain for a 360 Modena, a 550 Maranello or an M456 GT. Still, real Enzo enthusiasts probably won't care about that, given that the cars you can drive are Maranello classics.

My visit offered the chance to get behind the wheel of five classic models – a Dino 246 GTS, a 308, a 328, a 348 and a 355. All were immaculately presented and prepared as new and each was glorious to drive. Time behind the wheel is limited of course, but relatively generous thanks to the fact that each 'Weekend' Break actually includes four full days of driving.

Each of these Ferrari packages is based at a carefully chosen up-market country hotel, so wives (and husbands!) or partners who don't share your need for red mist adrenalin can sit the test drives out in some style. Mine was based at Ockenden Manor in Surrey, but Bespokes has a whole programme planned at venues throughout the country.

The concept of mixing classic cars with a weekend break away isn't new but the opportunity to drive so many classic examples of the world's most famous marque certainly is. The price not only includes the four full days of driving but also three nights' dinner, bed and breakfast with a 'superior' room and a special 'Grand Prix Challenge Dinner': book all that on its own and it would probably account for much of the £825 per person cost.

For the real Ferrari enthusiast however, the opportunity to experience four decades of Maranello history is not something you could put a price on. In fact, the first time you see all of the cars lined up, keys in the ignition, it's almost a little daunting. Fortunately, there's a Bespokes representative always on hand to guide you through the main points.

Only three 'Ferrari Weekends' are planned this year: at the venue we used, Ockenden Manor in Sussex (Sept 22-26), Calcot Manor at Tetbury in Gloucestershire (Oct 20-24) and Amberley Castle near Arundel in Sussex (Nov 3-7). Here's a taste of what you can expect....

### Ferrari Dino 246 GTS

The car Enzo Ferrari dedicated to his son Dino after he tragically died at a young age. In many ways, the Dino doesn't really feel like a Ferrari: start it up and it's immediately obvious that there's no V8 or V12 under the bonnet. 'Only' a 2.4-litre V6 that in this case, has been rev-limited at around 6,000rpm so that just as the engine's coming on song, you have to change up.

Behind the wheel however, there's no doubt that this is a serious racecar for the road, built in the days when wealthy customers still drove their cars to the circuits, raced them and drove home again. You need all your concentration to drive it fast: the steering follows every ridge in the road and you bottom out over every sharp bump. If you've seen the film 'Grand Prix', you'll identify with the experience immediately. They were brave people, those drivers in the Sixties.

### Ferrari 308 & 328 GTS

Start the engine and just listen to that glorious 3.0-litre V8. Then take a seat behind the wheel and familiarise yourself with your exclusive surroundings. These weren't the prettiest Ferraris ever made but they were highly prized in the Seventies and Eighties – remember Tom Selleck's 308 GTS in 'Magnum'? If you're used to modern interiors, the cheap Fiat switches and yellow instrument graphics will seem a bit tacky but forget that: just get out and drive.

I'd expected heavy steering and an even heavier clutch: in fact, both cars proved to be remarkably easy to drive, once it was possible to select second gear (which is only possible once the engine has warmed up). Gun the engine in second or third and the sound is just glorious.

### **Ferrari 348TS**

We're getting up to date now: ten years ago in the Testarossa era, this was one of the Ferraris to be seen in. The fluted 'cheese-cutter' side vents look a bit over the top now but this was high fashion at the time. The interior still looks down-rent but the driving experience has certainly become more civilised. Unlike the older models, this is a Ferrari you could conceivably consider using every day. It's still difficult to select second gear when cold but once on the move, this car feels agile and 'chuckable'. I decide that it's the first Ferrari I would conceivably consider buying.

### **Ferrari 355 GTS**

Now we're talking: a real modern-day supercar. The F355 has only just been replaced by the new 360 Modena but to my eyes, it's far better looking. I could park this car on my front lawn and just look at it: driving would be a bonus.

Bespokes' example is a Targa version with a lift-out roof, the last Targa of its kind as it turns out for the new 360 comes only as a fixed-top Coupe or a convertible Spider. The Targa arrangement seems to provide the best of both: a chance to hear that glorious engine as it powers from rest to sixty in under five seconds and on towards 189mph but not so much buffeting that you have to put the roof up every time you take to the motorway.

Many of course would come just to drive these cars – but the venue is part of the experience too. Bespokes works in partnership with Pride of Britain Hotels, a collection of some of Britain's finest privately-owned hotels. Certainly, at Ockenden Manor, the service and the atmosphere was everything that the price of this break would entitle you to expect.

In summary then, you've probably gathered that I would recommend this package highly, not only to Ferrari enthusiasts but to anyone with petrol flowing through their veins. All right, so it's certainly not cheap – but then few once-in-a-lifetime experiences ever are. If you can justify it, you'll enjoy it.

To find out more, you can contact Bespokes on [www.bespokes.co.uk](http://www.bespokes.co.uk) or on 01923-250250 or on [www.bespokes.co.uk](http://www.bespokes.co.uk). Lines may be busy...