

The

DEEP END

It's no secret that owning a Ferrari is at the top of the bucket list for many car enthusiasts. Powered by screaming, high-revving engines and draped in beautifully designed bodywork that could only come from Italy, few other makes can surpass the drama provided by Maranello's finest.

Of course, the flip side of the coin is that the road to Ferrari ownership is often paved in heartache and bank account-draining maintenance and repairs.

Just ask Denver, Colorado, resident and 308 GTSi owner Mark Lavanish. While his car is now a fast, reliable machine that Mark doesn't hesitate to drive on extended road trips across state lines, it wasn't always so.

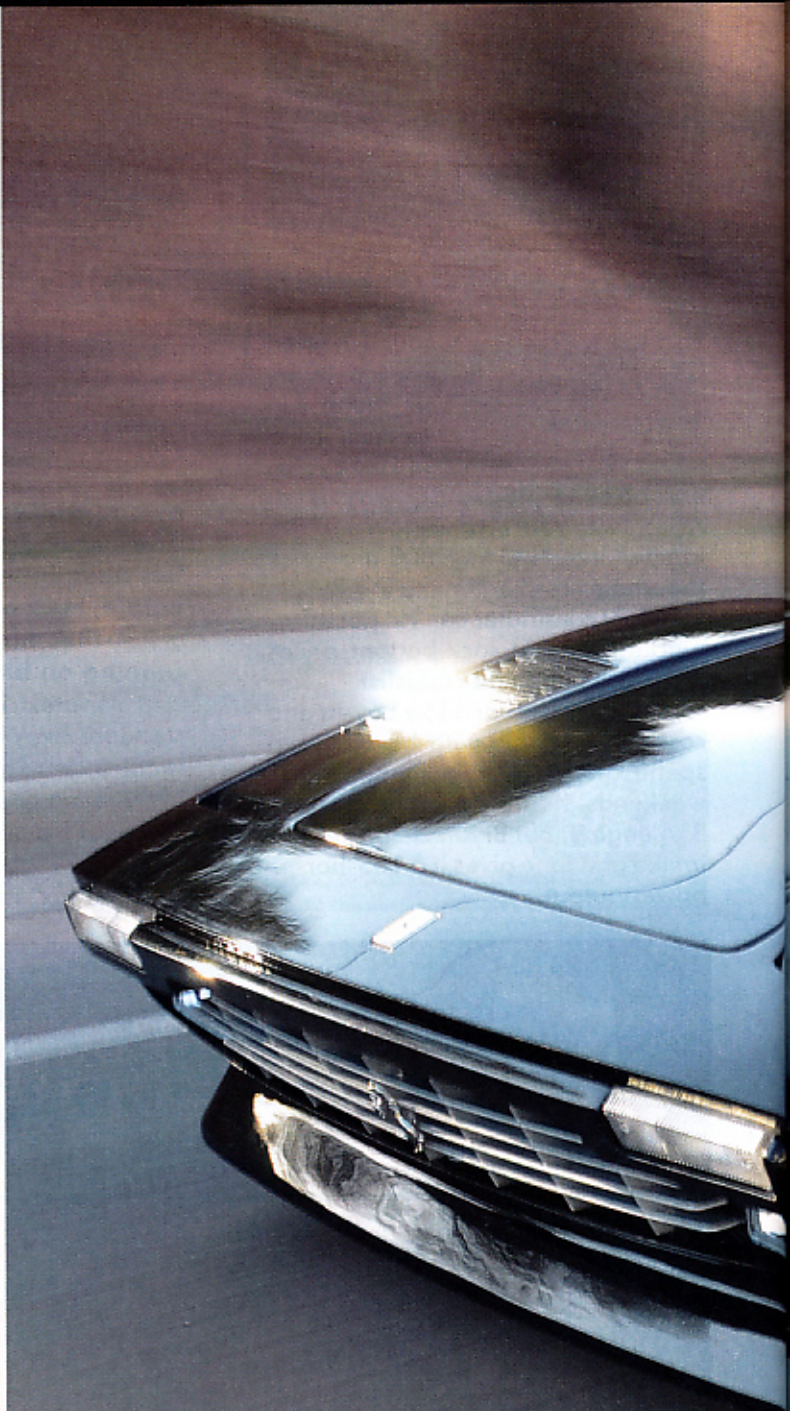
When he first acquired the Ferrari, it started giving him problems after precisely one day of driving. An aging heater hose split open, sending coolant spraying all over the Ferrari's engine bay in a perfect imitation of Old Faithful. "If I had known then what I know now about 308s, I would have punched myself and driven to a Toyota dealership," he now chuckles.

Luckily, ignorance is bliss, especially when it comes to high-end sports cars. Despite a rocky road to get the car to the state it's in today, Mark persevered through a full restoration on the Ferrari. He's ended up with a stunning-looking example that also boasts seriously upgraded performance.

P.I. in the Sky

Mark admits that his love of the 308 goes back to a certain famous TV show that featured a large mustache behind the wheel of a red GTS.

Ever dream of owning a Ferrari 308? Of course you have. Here's the reality of that fantasy.





**A Car Noob Dives Into Ferrari 308 Ownership
and Fixes the Factory's Mistakes**

story and photos by zachary mayne

"My first love was a '70s-era Corvette, before I even knew what a Ferrari was," he says. "Once I saw 'Magnum P.I.,' I obviously fell in love with Ferraris."

Years later, another car show reinforced Mark's desire to own a 308. "I saw a 2-and-a-half-minute short on the Velocity Channel with Wayne Carini showing three different Ferraris varying in price range from a \$4 million 1950 166 Barchetta to a 575M for \$150,000 to a 308 for \$20,000 to \$50,000.

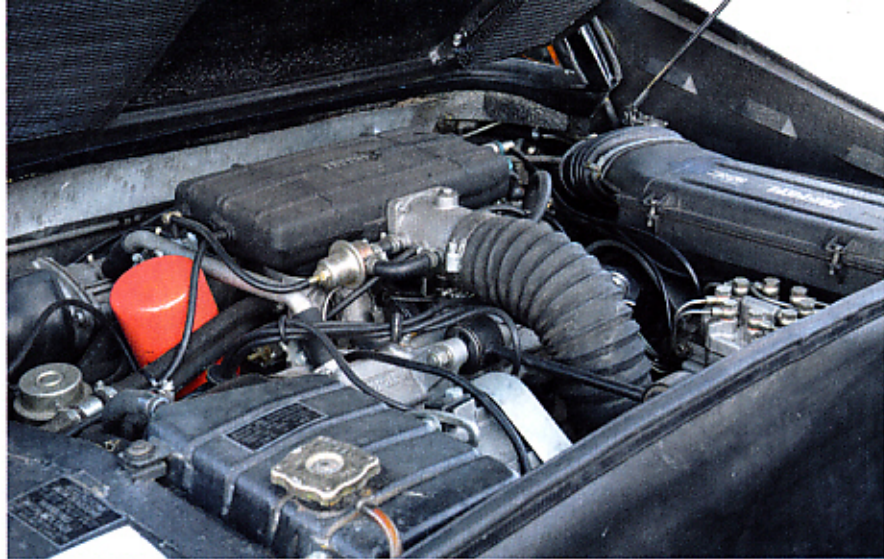
"That put the idea of getting a 308 in the back of my mind," he continues. "Shortly after that, I found myself with some extra income and was toying with the idea of buying a sports car but was having trouble coming up with a good choice." Porsches and Corvettes were too common, and the Maserati GranTurismo was too expensive.

"Then I remembered the short with Wayne Carini and started looking online for 308s," Mark explains. "I started daydreaming about what it would be like to own a Ferrari and really liked the thought of it." He also figured a 308—unlike a newer sports car—wouldn't drop in value, so he'd be able to sell it for the same price he paid.

As luck would have it, an eBay search turned up a Fly Yellow 1981 GTSi that was for sale locally. As 308 models go, the 1980-'82 cars are on the low end of the 308 hierarchy, with the lightweight earlier fiberglass 308s and the later Quattrovalve cars being the most desirable.

Thanks to its two-valve heads and Bosch CIS fuel injection, the one he was looking at put out a modest 205 horsepower. But the cars still boast balanced handling and the engines love to rev, even if they aren't the most powerful around.

Figure a 1980-'82 Ferrari 308 can be found for less than \$30,000—that's a bona fide classic for minivan money. (Although, as our subject has learned, perhaps it's best to start with a cream-puff backed up with a full service history.)



Even when it's not running, simply being inside a 308 is an experience that rivals driving many cars.



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No Lifeguard on Duty

"The car hadn't been driven in several years," Mark says. "The owner had passed away, and the family had hired a local shop to get it running again and sell it for them."

Strangely, the mechanic practically tried to talk Mark out of buying it. "He told me that the car would be very expensive to maintain over time and that they broke down a lot," he recalls. Once he saw the car in person, though, Mark was undeterred by the mechanic's advice and bought the Ferrari on the spot.

It was a brave, perhaps somewhat foolish move by someone who, at the time, knew nothing about cars—"let alone Ferraris," Mark adds. Cue a massive and expensive education on the perils of Italian exotic car ownership.

"The engine had a subtle stutter at idle, which turned out to be a bad ignition module, but other than that, it ran okay," Mark recalls. Elsewhere, though, things weren't that great. The original and dried-out heater hoses began to split as soon as he began driving the car, the fuel lines were original, the shocks were frozen, the suspension bushings were shot, and the steering rack was worn out. The list went on.

The exterior looked good, but the carpeting was dirty and the leather on the seats was dried out. "The windows were slower than a constipated snail, and the cats had blown all their material into the muffler, creating a ton of back pressure on the engine," he recalls. "Other than that, the car was in showroom condition!"

It took but a day of driving for the aforementioned heater hose to split, at which point the 308 was flat-bedded to a mechanic for a full service. After spending more than half what he paid for the car on its repairs and deferred maintenance, Mark was back on the road in his dream car.

But not for long. Mark was soon involved in a car accident when a driver suddenly pulled out in front of the Ferrari. "Luckily, neither of us was going very fast, and the damage was minor," he says.

The 308 was delivered to Glen Watt of Colour Restoration, who specializes in painting Pebble Beach winners, including a \$34 million Bugatti. "Black has always been my favorite color for any car, so that's what we changed it to," Mark says. "It had to come out of pocket a bit, but it was well worth it."

Mark, who is a civil and structural engineer by trade, performed some of the work on the car himself. "I thought this would be a great opportunity to get to know my car as well as perform some much-needed maintenance," he says. "I did a lot of the disassembly, which was a lot of fun, and also changed out the fuel lines, upgraded the headlight system, changed out the A-arm bushings, serviced the window motors, and installed new driving lights."

The 308's curvaceous body was stripped to bare metal, and any rusty areas were repaired. The side markers were removed and the holes filled in. "We also changed the front of the car



Behind the Wheel

What's it like to drive Mark Lavanish's hotrodded 1981 Ferrari 308 GTSi? He tossed us the keys. The 308 didn't disappoint.

It's a long drop into the Ferrari's cockpit, but once inside, the interior wears like a tailored Italian suit. A simple, purposeful gauge cluster is visible just past the leather steering wheel. The pedals are offset slightly to the right and are easier to operate if your feet are on the small side.

It's a little cramped in here, and the driving position forces the knees up a bit. The wheel is canted at an angle approaching horizontal. Despite the cozy interior, the 308 has an undeniably special feeling to it.

Thanks to the increase in displacement, the 3.5-liter's exhaust note is deeper than a stock 308 V8's, while the Magnaflow muffler raises the motor's volume a couple of decibels. On the road, the difference between a stock, two-valve 308 car and this one is massive. While added horsepower is always great, it's the mid-range torque of this engine that impresses.

Torque tapers off after 5000 rpm, but the engine continues to produce usable horsepower and revs willingly to 7500 rpm. Mark says the engine can be taken as high as 8000 rpm. Overall, the larger engine in this 308 gives it the feel of later Ferraris like the 348 and the 355, both of which are considered fast cars in their own right.

In unmodified form, the 308 handles very well and is impressively balanced, but it does exhibit body roll during aggressive cornering. The changes made to the Ferrari's suspension take the car's basic ability and amplifies it. There is less dive upon braking for a corner and then far less body roll during turn-in. The added power also makes it that much easier to banish understeer by adding more throttle.

All up, this is a completely transformed car. It has power to spare, corners flatly and confidently, and stops without drama. We have to echo the owner's sentiment about the car: This is how the 308 should have been built originally.

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mechanic's advice and bought the Ferrari on the spot.



to European style with a Euro bumper, valance, grille and driving lights," Mark adds.

Rinse and Repeat

Once the Ferrari was reassembled, Mark was again behind the wheel of his mid-engine dream car. But you guessed it, not for long.

About two weeks after the car was repainted, one of the valves in the Ferrari's 3.0-liter V8 engine snapped in half. That's not a common occurrence, but the sodium-filled valves that Ferrari fitted to two-valve 308s can become brittle over time; in the worst-case scenario, this happens. The result is an engine that needs to be rebuilt.

The 308 was parked for a year while Mark saved up for an engine rebuild—not exactly an inexpensive proposition when it comes to a Ferrari. As it turned out, the whole episode was a blessing in disguise. From the first time he drove it, Mark wasn't happy with the engine's power. "I was very disappointed and desperate to get the car to a more respectable level of performance," he says. "You couldn't get the car to do much below 4500 rpm. Even then, you couldn't do much."

While he was biding his time, Mark began frequenting the Ferrarichat online forum. There, he heard of a company called Carobu Engineering that specialized in improving the performance of Ferrari engines. One of their most popular upgrades for the 308 series is a larger, 3.5-liter version of the 3.0-liter. "I made a few calls asking about their operation and what I could expect from a 3.5-liter engine," Mark explains. A subsequent visit to the New Mexico shop sealed the deal, and the Ferrari was soon delivered to Carobu for one of its 3.5-liter engine conversions.

"The seed for the idea of increasing the displacement of the 308 engine beyond 3.2-liters was planted at the time when we were rebuilding 360 GT Michelotto racing engines for one of our racing clients," says Tate Casey, who owns Carobu Engineering along with technician Bert Wehr. "We noticed that the bore centers and the main bearing saddle spacing and size for the 360 engine and the 308 engine were the same. While the 360's 85mm steel, thin-walled Nikasil-coated liners wouldn't drop into the 308, we visualized a redimensioned 360-style sleeve working fine, as Ferrari had already done the bulk of the engineering."

This rebuild centers on a 78mm billet crankshaft that replaces the original 71mm Ferrari item. The crank not only enlarges the engine's displacement, but it also sheds around 10 pounds from its internals. Reducing rotating mass frees up horsepower and improves throttle response. Like the 360 Modena engine's factory crank, Carobu's custom cranks are drilled and hollowed to achieve that lightness.

The stock liners were replaced with 85mm ceramic-coated steel cylinder liners. The combination of larger pistons and a longer-throw crankshaft results in a displacement of 3541cc.

That wasn't the only internal engine work. Stock 308 connecting rods were mated to 10.5:1 Razzo Rosso pistons. The V8's heads were also ported for better airflow, and the original valves replaced with sturdier stainless-steel valves. Reprofiled camshafts have also been added. A Razzo Rosso lightweight aluminum flywheel reduces the engine's weight by another 10 pounds.

Reality Check: What's It Really Cost to Own a Ferrari?

Always wanted to emulate Hawaii's most famous crime fighter? Feel the need to get nostalgic and break out the short-shorts? Always wanted to justify a really great mustache?

First, the good news: According to Hagerty's price guide, some of these 1980-'82 Ferrari 308s are now trading in the \$20,000-\$32,000 range—prices took a hit a few years ago and have been flat since. In the Ferrari world, that's an absolute bargain for a model that comes from the brand's most iconic line.

As Ferrari 308 owner Mark Lavanish has found, that's just the tip of the iceberg.

"There is no way to predict what you are going to run into," he says regarding expenses. "I don't have a specific budget for annual maintenance. If I did, I would have sold the car after the first three months."

Actual prices for keeping the car alive? Mark has plenty of figures.

"I'll give you some examples: Let's see, within the first week of ownership, one of the—probably original—coolant hoses slit open underneath the plenum, shooting a geyser of steam through the engine deck. That hose and a couple of others that were ready to split needed to be replaced: \$700."

But wait, there's more: "The local Ferrari mechanic knew that car and told me that the belt service was long overdue. While it was in there for the belt service, I needed new Digiplexes to eliminate a stutter at idle, a new distributor cap, and a few other things that escape me: \$10,500."

Soon after, the car was back out of service. New fuel lines cost \$400, but Mark replaced them himself. A faulty crank sensor cost another \$200, and again, Mark did the labor. The steering rack rebuild set him back \$800, and the alternator rebuild cost \$400. The original catalytic converters had come apart, and fabbing up a custom exhaust was another \$1100 for parts and labor.

While Mark farmed out the unexpected engine rebuild—he could

have bought a loaded Kia Optima for the same money—some of the work has been a bit DIY-friendly.

"If you are patient, pay attention to detail, and are willing to get dirty, you can do most everything yourself. But be prepared to set a lot of time aside to do so," he explains. "Figuring your way through the issues can move at a glacial pace sometimes."

When the alternator/water pump belt stretched and started to squeak, Mark fixed it himself. He figures a shop would have charged at least \$200 considering all the heat shields and body panels in the way.

The replacement fuel pump cost \$200, but making the swap didn't require any special tools or knowledge. When a stud wore through an aluminum coolant pipe, he welded it up himself. He figures that job would have been a grand at a shop considering all the hoses, lines and parts that first had to be removed.

Then the cooling fan went out. "I disassembled it and rebuilt it with new brushes: \$15. That would have cost several hundred for a replacement part plus labor."

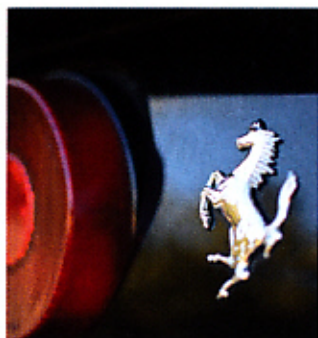
Mark redid much of the interior himself, too. "I took the entire interior of the car out and had the carpets professionally cleaned for \$75. It would have cost \$1350 to replace carpets."

While the interior was out, he spent \$200 on soundproofing materials from Dynamat and Roadkill. His quote to have that job done by a professional: \$1800.

"I also took the center console and door panels and scrubbed them raw, painted them with SEM flexible paint—professionally matched to the seats—and resanded them with fine-grit sandpaper to soften them up: \$55," he adds. "Everything looks brand new. Replacement leather would have been more than \$1000 in leather alone."

Parting advice from a guy who has already been there? "Don't buy a fixer-upper!" Mark exclaims. "With the cost of parts, it is impossible to come out ahead. Buy the most expensive, documented, cared-for one you can find for \$40K to \$50K. And then get a set of metric wrenches, a jack, stands and a Ferrarichat username, because even the cream puffs need work periodically."





After a big horsepower upgrade, this 308 now drives like the fast, precision machine you expect from Ferrari.

The 308 retains its original Bosch CIS fuel injection and ignition system as well as the original cooling system. Spent gases evacuate through stock headers that lead into a Magnaflow muffler. The five-speed gearbox also remains as it left the factory, but the clutch has been upgraded to a stronger Razzo Rosso unit.

Along with the added straight-line performance, Mark wanted to improve the 308's handling and stopping ability. To this end, he installed adjustable coil-overs from Nicks Forza Ferrari in Custer, Washington. These are adjustable for rebound and compression.

The larger, three-piece Compomotive Motorsport wheels are, by far, the most dramatic additions to the 308's appearance. Similar in style to those used on the legendary 1984 Ferrari 288 GTO, these measure 17 inches in diameter and are wrapped in Bridgestone Potenza tires. In order to allow the wheels to fit, Carobu used a fender lip roller to massage the wheel arches. Carobu also installed a Girodisc brake upgrade kit. The kit uses bigger, two-piece rotors on the front and Wilwood calipers at all corners.

After a year or so of work, Mark was finally able to experience his Ferrari in its renewed state. "Why these cars weren't built this way to begin with is beyond me," he says. "The throttle response is incredible, and with the lightweight flywheel, the engine spins up much faster. It's like being shot out of a cannon compared to the how the car used to be."

Making the experience all the sweeter was the fact that the 308 handled the drive home to Colorado from New Mexico without a hitch. Blown heater hoses and self-destructing valves were now a thing of the past.

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