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1961 Ferrari 250 GT California Spyder

1:18

Produced by CMC

Story by Matt Boyd

I have a confession to make. The car that made me fall in love with Ferrari's most famous Spyder was a *fake*! I was 14 years old and chuckling and cheering at the strange mix of sophomoric wit and sage wisdom that is the 1986 John Hughes teen classic *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. About midway through the third reel, Ferris's reluctant right-handman Cameron opens the door his father's museum-quality garage, inhales dramatically, and delivers an introduction for the ages (or at least for car nuts of my age): "The 1961 Ferrari 250 GT California". Oh Yeah! I was in the library the next day, rooting through the automotive section for anything I could find on that red, scene-stealing stunner. Away went my posters of Lamborghini Countachs and Ferrari Testarossas – I had found a new love. It was a year or two later, after the film had gone to VHS, that I became well-versed enough in California topography to recognize that the silver screen version was a fiberglass-bodied facsimile. By then it didn't matter. I had become a convert to the school of thought Enzo himself had once enunciated most succinctly: real sports cars have 12 cylinders *in front of the driver*. (If it took a kit car from a

teen comedy with only eight cylinders to get me to that realization, so be it.)

In the years since I have come to admire the California – the *real* California – for its perfect proportions. And why shouldn't they be perfect? Starting from Ferrari's most illustrious series – the 250 – with lines originally penned by Pininfarina, then finessed and hand-built by Scaglietti, it has the greatest pedigree in sports-car-dom. Toss in the fact it was a Luigi Chinetti concept specifically for the American market and that it had a Colombo V12 and you pretty much have the entire Ferrari pantheon represented in this one car.

In many ways, CMC holds a similar position in the diecast community that Ferrari does in the automotive world. Their products are aspirational, expensive, uncompromising blends of art and engineering. They are not for the masses, nor are they meant to be. Owning one is a sign that you've stepped up to another level. Not surprisingly then, CMC produces a number of Ferrari models, each exquisite in craftsmanship and almost unfathomably detailed. A CMC scale version of the California Spyder has long been anticipated by collectors.



1:1 scale car picture by Peter Harholdt©



all considered aesthetic improvements, making this model the best of the best in the eyes of many – including myself!



It seemed the logical evolution of the company's 250 GT Berlinetta, in much the way the original was for Ferrari. Because CMC's preceding 250s – the Berlinetta and Testa Rossa – were both short-wheelbase (SWB) models, CMC chose a later year version of the California, as the 1957-59 models were LWB chassis. The 1961 model also featured the fully faired headlights, thicker, more muscular tail fins, a more streamlined hood scoop and bumper guards – all considered aesthetic improvements, making this model the best of the best in the eyes of many – including myself!

So CMC picked the right car and the right model year. How well then did they render it? No model is perfect, but this one comes damn close. The proportions are a study in balance and flow. Lesser mass-market renditions of the California have often made collectors wince at distortions and compromises. None of that nonsense here. Panel gaps, seams, the fine flair to the wheel lips – all meticulous, even on this pre-production piece. The Rosso Corsa paint is lustrous and liquid-smooth. The chrome and brightwork on a CMC replica are usually separately cast in metal, and that is the case here. It boggles my mind that the windshield surround, which comprises numerous

overlapping metal pieces, has perfectly spaced seams – right down to the scale-accurate weather-stripping! The headlight fairings have individual mounting rivets. If pressed to find a flaw, the fact that the individually cast, hinged, rubber-bladed wipers stick up so high is a bit distracting. And maybe the fog lights are a touch too large. That's about it.

This is a true Spyder – no boot or folded top here. A removable hardtop was a factory option, and so too with CMC's version – if you opt for one of the 2500-piece Special Edition colors. The red car you see here is a standard edition, but limited runs in black, silver and blue will have a color-matched top. It's a worthwhile consideration for serious collectors, but I have such a fondness for the red (like the movie car I fell for) that I decided to forgo the top. The better to see the beautiful real leather upholstery, I say! (It should be noted that the blue SE shares the standard car's beige interior, while the black car gets red leather and the silver car receives black cowhide.) The seats even have scale piping! The floorboards have super-fine flocking and rubber floor mats. The white-face gauges are perfectly legible, shielded in polycarbonate and with authentic chrome bezels. The only blemish is some

slight glue fogging on one of the etched metal steering wheel spokes, but I did say this was a pre-production sample being reviewed.

There is more flocking in the trunk, along with a chrome trim strip, spare tire and real leather tie-down. In the upper right you can see the fuel cap and filler neck. The California was envisioned as a dual-purpose street and track car, and so some received quick-fill flip caps cut through the deck cover, but such would have marred the sleek look of this model and so CMC chose to render the regular "civilian" style gas cap. While we're back here, note the laser-etched badging on the deck *under* the clear coat! Also, the signature quad exhaust with looong chrome tips. If they look low-slung to you, that is scale-accurate – the pipes route under the De Dion rear axle, so beware when cresting speed bumps! And in case you were wondering – yes, that is a functional scale trunk lock. Unbelievable!

If you want a look at that live-axle rear, carefully (!) turn the California over. The tube frame chassis, springs, shocks, fuel lines and pump, brake lines, drivetrain, mammoth oil reservoir – all of the details are there, down to the individual metal clamps and hangers for all of the exhaust, fuel and brake plumbing. Really



though, the best part about the California undercarriage can be seen with the car upright, just by spinning the functional center cap on one of the brilliantly rendered – and removable! – Borrani wire wheels. Beneath you can see impressively detailed disc brakes – one of the functional upgrades the California received for the 1961 model year, and an opportunity for CMC artisans to showcase both their skill and attention to historic accuracy. Oddly, that doesn't quite extend to the tires. CMC shod its California with replica Michelin XWX 215/70-R15 radial tires. While XWX's are a perfectly sensible radial replacement for the original bias-ply tires (and were the preferred high-performance for European exotics in the 1970s), they weren't around in 1961. That said, they are spectacularly accurate renderings of tires you'd probably rather have on your California than the stock ones, so perhaps we'll let that go, particularly given the exquisite workmanship on those wire wheels, which continue to be an industry benchmark.

Now look under the hood at that Colombo V12! The 250 series got its name from this engine – each cylinder displaced just under 250cc (246.1cc to be exact) – which was Enzo Ferrari's preferred method of assigning his

model designations in his company's early years. Add it up and that motor displaces just under 3.0 liters – which makes the 280hp it musters exceptional, particularly for 1961. That made the svelte 2300lb California not just the world's most beautiful roadster – but also the one of the most potent. I swear at least half of the California's 1600+ pieces are under this hood. I've seen CMC versions of this engine before, and each new one is more impressive than the last. The wire-wrapped hoses, the real metal throttle return springs, the separately machined hose clamps and tie-downs – everything is accounted for. The "Ferrari" embossed and black-crinkle-finish cam covers even have individually cast chrome mounting bolts in the specific number and location for a Colombo 12. Likewise, the chrome wing nuts holding down the huge oval air-cleaner with its metal mesh element. You can just catch a glimpse of the hyper-realistic triple Weber carb setup beneath. Hyperbole is impossible when complementing the job CMC has done here. It is simply one of the best scale engines I've ever seen.

It's been a quarter century since my discovery of the 250 GT California. I still believe in Mr Ferrari's maxim about front-engine V12s. I still love the 250 GT California. And I



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SCALE: 1:18

PRODUCER: CMC

still agree with Ferris's assessment – especially in the case of CMC's scale masterpiece. "It is so choice. If you have the means, I highly recommend picking one up!" When it comes to a real 250 California, "The means" means about \$11 million, if the last one publicly auctioned is any indication. The CMC edition is slightly less dear, but by no means cheap at around \$400 for the standard edition (the SEs will set you back another \$15-20). It takes an exceptional model to make \$400 sound like a bargain. This is that model.

