





In *À Rebours* — the 1884 novel by the delectably florid French writer Joris-Karl Huysmans — the book's antihero Jean des Esseintes, a reclusive aesthete, decorates the shell of a living tortoise with jewels and coloured glass. He does this so that the light reflections given off as the beast lumbers around will enhance the colour scheme of his living quarters. It was roughly this level of dizzy, rampant creative vanity that *The Rake* felt while browsing the Ferrari Tailor-Made laboratory, tucked away in the depths of the marque's Maranello home, having been invited to create our very own personalised car.

It is in this room, since the programme was launched in 2011, that Ferrari's well-heeled clientele have weaved their most elaborate automotive imaginings and watched as their fantasies took shape before them on a virtual simulator. The scheme revives a Maranello tradition that began in the '50s and '60s, when customers enjoyed a great deal of control over the materials, colours and finish of their purchase. The newest iteration of the programme offers far more scope than ever before, though. Upholstery made from chalk-striped cashmere, denim or crocodile skin? Done. A boot space lined in wood? Yes — the same teak timber used in luxury Riva motorboats, in fact. Racing-style gearbox casing? 'Will that be in carbon fibre, Kevlar or Alcantara, sir?'



[Borromeo, Elkann's close friend and business associate], plus experts in the technology, production, research and commercial departments, worked for a whole year trying to figure out who

would provide the best cashmere, cloth, trimmings, ballistic nylon, corduroy, denim, carbon fibre, cellulose gel and so many more substances."

Clearly, we would be spoilt for choice. And hence, back in the office, the invitation to create our very own 'Rake Ferrari' saw rapturous celebration quickly decline into clamorous, heated debate about how the car should look and feel. At one point, it looked like we'd be requesting a classic but futuristic, understatedly flamboyant, family-friendly two-seater in a dark, brooding pearly white, with luxuriant F1 soft (yet hard) furnishings. We were in danger of ending up with a four-wheeled testimony to the censorious old adage, 'A camel is a horse designed by a committee'.

Eventually, though, inspiration for consensus came sauntering in nonchalantly in the form of racing buff (and occasional actor) Steve McQueen — or, to be exact, the chestnut-brown Ferrari 1963 250 GT Berlinetta Lusso, which the star purchased in 1963 (and which later sold for USD2.3 million at a Christie's auction, in 2007), having achieved breakout success in *The Magnificent Seven* in 1960. Now, at least, we had some kind of blueprint.

When it came to choosing a model to suit this vision, together with the extraordinarily helpful boffins at Ferrari Tailor-Made, we quickly whittled it down to a choice between the FF and the California. The former, as Ferrari white-coats pointed out, has the strongest mechanical affinity with McQueen's vehicle, being a front-engined, V12-powered *gran turismo*. On the other hand, the California bears a stronger visual resemblance to the Lusso. Conceived by Italian design giants Pininfarina, the Lusso, like the California, was at once slim, svelte and sexy — a masterpiece of design packed with aerodynamic refinement. It's not without reason that the California is named after the first open-top iteration of McQueen's 250 GT.

But it was a test drive that sunny afternoon, around the sweeping landscape of Emilia-Romagna, northern Italy, that resulted in the California winning out. As *The Rake's* photographer put it over dinner that evening, in a wine-fuelled outburst of eloquence: "The California boasts blistering performance, handy rear seats, tarmac-shredding power, unthreatening handling and a nifty, folding metal roof that vanishes into its perky, Pininfarina-sculpted rump."

He was right. Though the engine might be a V8 — hardly feckless even for a muscle car, but packing less punch than



DASHING



Top to bottom: the author sifts through a flick-book of leather options with a Ferrari consultant; then test-drives a California around the marque's Maranello home; Steve McQueen's 1963 250 GT Berlinetta Lusso, which inspired *The Rake's* creation. Opposite page: Ferrari Tailor-Made consultant Lapo Elkann.

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DASHING

the average Ferrari — the latest California is 30kg lighter (hence being named the ‘California 30’) than its predecessor, largely thanks to Scaglietti’s cutting-edge aluminium fabrication techniques. As a result, it offered an almost frighteningly exhilarating ride — with a recent modification of the torque, driving it gives off the constant feeling that a single slip of your right big toe could send you volleying through roadside trees like Wile E. Coyote astride an Acme torpedo.

With the model settled, there was clearly no fuss to be made over the colour. We wanted our car, like McQueen’s, to have an almost understated hue at a glance, but one which, upon careful inspection, would turn up the richest metallic tones of chestnut brown (‘Marrone Metallizzato’ is its official designation). There would be no deliberation over whether the metallic inserts within the car should also mirror the exterior colour — absolutely, and with dashes of brushed chrome here and there.

When it came to other interior materials, my colleagues and I had cooked up some pretty outlandish propositions back at The Rake HQ. Naturally, the dash, steering-wheel covers and other interior trimmings would need to be leather — and not just any leather, but Russian leather. Russian reindeer leather, in fact. The rare hide to which I refer — and regular readers may have seen it coming — is the leather recovered from the wreckage of the Die Frau Metta Catharinavon Flensburg, which sank off of England’s south coast one stormy December night in 1786.

Sadly — or thankfully, more to the point — Ferrari’s interior materials are all given state-of-the-art anti-flammable and other safety treatments, and eventually foreign substances of such a delicate nature proved unfeasible (as did the Persian rugs we had planned for the floors). But all credit to Ferrari’s painstaking attempts to cede to our outlandish demands. Had I asked for the screen washers to be filled with the Dalai Lama’s tears, I have the feeling they would at least have sent off a pleading letter of request and a giant pipette to His Holiness’s secretary.

In the end, Ferrari’s wealth of material choices proved

abundant enough to sate our needs. And it isn’t surprising: initial attempts to calculate the actual number of possible permutations that the Tailor-Made programme throws up came to a figure in the region of 16 to the power of 19. Then Ferrari added more options. You’d probably need to leave a F12berlinetta-powered data processor running for a few geological epochs to calculate the new figure.

Suffice it to say, the choices come under three brackets. ‘Scuderia’ is a homage to Ferrari’s credentials on the track, and includes carbon-fibre trims, chamois and rubberised leathers, and various matte metals. ‘Inedita’, which roughly translates from Italian as ‘cutting edge’, includes slightly left-field materials and patterns such as teak, cashmere, vicuña, buffalo leather, pinstripe, tartan and Prince of Wales check. Finally, ‘Classica’, as you might expect, is all about Ferrari’s time-honoured design values. “The things set down by Enzo Ferrari, Aga Khan, [Roberto] Rossellini, [Gianni] Agnelli and so on,” as Elkann put it to us. “The global characters, figures of the cinema industry, playboys, the elites, the jet set, the moguls of that era who were having cars that were unique. We didn’t invent this concept — it’s just something we inherited and want to deploy better than ever in the modern era.”

We’re sold. Of course, the Rake Ferrari would have to fall under the Classica band. A glance back at the McQueen prototype, then the leather samples and colour charts, and it quickly became apparent that the interior would be trimmed in Poltrona Frau’s Pelle Frau leather. Panna (cream) with Cioccolato (brown) piping for the seats and dash were decided after some deliberation. The fabric elements of the interior — more familiar territory to us at The Rake, of course — would be in a wool suit fabric from the Vitale Barberis Canonico winter classic collection. Wool, Ferrari’s Tailor-Made experts informed us, is on the rise in automotive applications — not just because of its elegance, but because it is naturally flame-resistant.



'Ad libitum': the Rake Ferrari is proof that spontaneity, whimsy and verbal conflict can produce beautiful results.



In case you're wondering about that horizontal ribbing on the seats, it's known as 'cannettatura' in Italian, *canneto* being a bamboo-like reed. In a fit of uninformed but excited conjecture, we surmised what the carpets in McQueen's vehicle were like, and opted for a luxuriantly deep-pile sample with Panna leather trimming. For the final touch — the wheel hubs — we embraced the Ferrari experts' advice to the max, and plumped for a diamond-cut exterior, with a burnished effect on the inner surfaces to complement the brushed-metal surfaces inside.

The fruit of The Rake's pernickety, much-debated and sometimes whimsical creative labours — or, more to the point, the actual labours of the automotive geniuses at Ferrari — can, as shrewd readers will already have ascertained, be seen on these pages. We fought and hollered in pursuit of a car that would embody our values and character. A couple of our specifications proved to be about as practical as the sparkling baubles that proved too unwieldy for des Esseintes's ill-fated tortoise, which died shortly after being decorated. Yet, creating the Rake Ferrari was easily one of the most illuminating, fulfilling and gloriously decedent personalisation experiences we have enjoyed to date — and at the risk of sounding a tad smug, it's up against some stiff competition.

The feelings it inspires, along with the often reckless spontaneity with which it was created, are perhaps best summarised by the motto we have chosen to have emblazoned on its wing: 'ad libitum'. At one's pleasure. 🍷