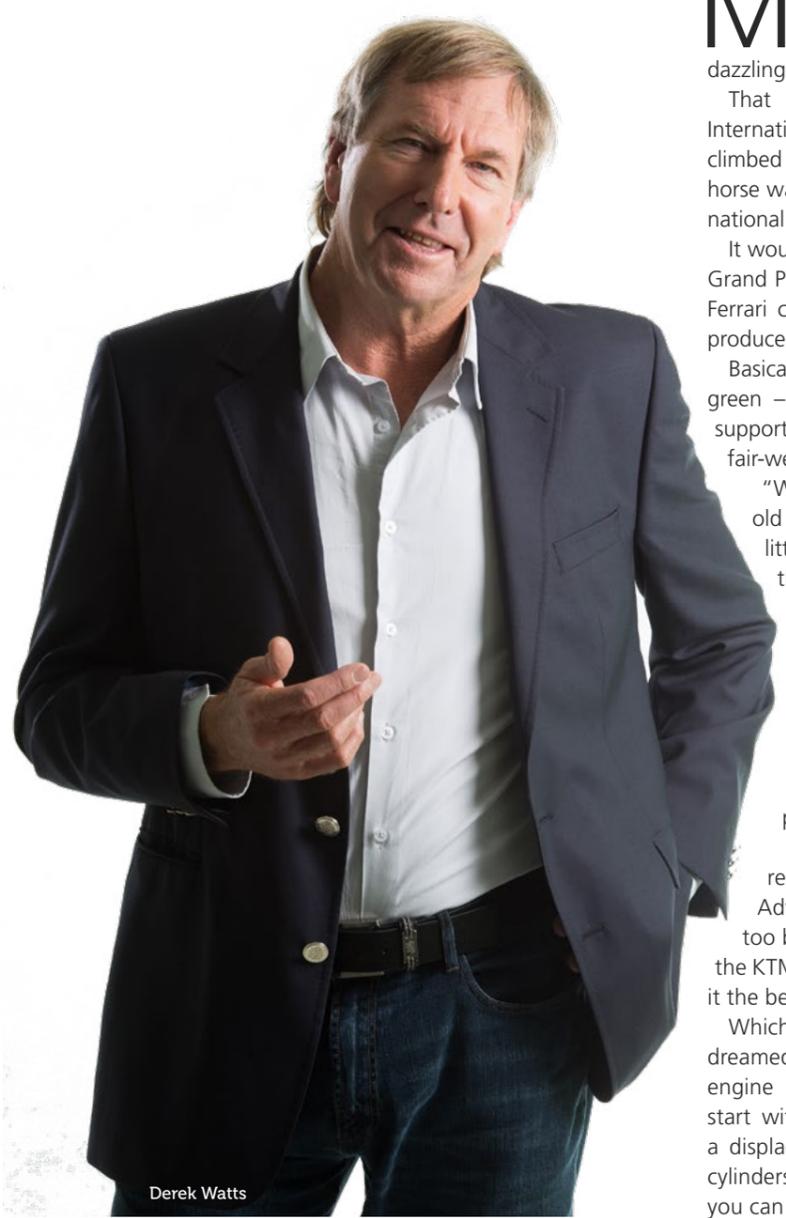


PRANCING AGAIN



Derek Watts

My neighbour hasn't been smiling much for the past few years. You know, the full-blown smile that erupts into a silent laugh, the eye muscles creasing and the dazzling pearly whites (in some cases) emerging subconsciously.

That all changed in March this year at the Bahrain International Circuit. After 45 races without a victory, Ferrari climbed to the top two steps of the Formula One podium. The horse was prancing once again and tears flowed as the Italian national anthem rang out.

It would have been the perfect finish to the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix held at the Autodromo Internazionale Enzo e Dino Ferrari circuit a few weeks later... but racing can and does produce a variety of emotions and no lack of tears.

Basically, the blood of Prancing Horse drivers is not Springbok green – it is pure Maranello red, and the Scuderia Ferrari supporters, known as the Tifosi, make Liverpool fans seem like fair-weather supporters.

"Win races on Sunday and sell cars on Monday," goes an old saying in motoring circles. Truth is, the lean years had little to no effect on Ferrari image – it remains one of the world's strongest brands with a cultish, even quasi-religious devotion.

Which is not to say that Ferrari fanatics all nod their heads in agreement with every model and engine change. Take the 488 GTB, voted Supercar of 2015. The downsized turbo-charged V8 was more powerful than the naturally aspirated 458, but many a Tifoso (or Tifosa) preferred the raw grunt of the previous model.

If you have an interest in motorbikes, you may remember that when KTM launched the 1190 Adventure, some off-roaders complained the engine was too big. So, what did the Austrians do? They brought out the KTM 1290 in 2015 to rave reviews and Cycle World voted it the best Adventure Bike of the Year.

Which is precisely the opposite of what the Italians have dreamed up with the latest version of Maranello's mid-rear engine two-seater Berlinetta – the Ferrari 296 GTB. Let's start with the nomenclature. That's easy... the engine has a displacement of 2,992 litres (let's call it 2,9) and has six cylinders. Even if eight out of five people are bad at maths, you can work that one out.



But where you should have gasped is with the last number. 6. This is the first six cylinder engine installed in a road car sporting the Prancing Horse badge!

A total revolution... so to speak. And yet it is getting scores of 10 out of 10 from some of the globe's most obnoxious and pernickety motoring scribes.

And here's the reason why. Although not punted as a full hybrid, the V6 has a very good friend snuggling under the seats. It's a 70 kilogram battery pack which powers a modest but mighty electric motor which sits between the engine and the eight-speed twin clutch gearbox.

Nothing startling about that. But the engineering marvel is how the electronic boost is always on call to enhance the Supercar experience and provide an exhilarating 2.9 second sprint, with all the right, albeit more shrill, Ferrari tones!

Also coming to the party are the redesigned turbochargers, using high performance alloys that allow maximum revs to be increased to 180,000 rpm. That may seem a nebulous figure, but the performance and boost efficiency is increased by a massive 24 per cent.

If you are that rare creature, a modest millionaire, you can touch the haptic eD button on the steering wheel and have a ghostly exit from Hyde Park shopping centre and, driving on electric power only, make it all the way to Midrand feeling like Freewheelin' Bob Dylan.

I'm sure there are two questions you want answered. How much and When? Answers: R6.38m and two years... subject to the foreign currency exchange rate in two years...

Is my name on the waiting list? Unfortunately this breathtaking lithe and low design makes it a challenge for my 1,98m frame to swing into the cockpit gracefully. And it wasn't my wallet getting in the way.