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CALIFORNIA DREAM

by Ferrari in Cars (<http://www.enevsferrari.com/category/blog/cars/>)

I'm sitting in the passenger seat of a 2010 Ferrari California (<http://www.ferraricalifornia.com/webapp/#/f149/14/12/1/1/>), watching Eduardo, a professional performance driver, effortlessly wheel the 452-horsepower GT around the road course. I need to pay attention. In a few minutes, it will be my turn behind the wheel — my first-ever drive in a Ferrari.

Eduardo is talking, explaining the cars' features. But he's got some competition — the California's truly intoxicating exhaust note. Yes, I'm that kid you knew in grammar school who could tell cars by their exhaust sounds. This one cannot be ignored.

Part of the experience is nostalgic for me. We're on the 1.3-mile road course at Old Bridge Township Raceway Park in Englishtown N.J., known best as "Englishtown" or "E-Town" by drag racing fans. I'd last been here in 1988 in a Pontiac Firebird to learn the art of E.T. racing (a.k.a. "bracket racing") from that sport's top pro. The track complex has grown considerably since then.

I observe the other drivers ahead of me. Each one seems to wear the same smile as he exits the California after his laps. I'd driven other fast cars on road courses before. *But this is a Ferrari. This is going to be a rush*, I think to myself.

The E-town road course is a tight, undulating ribbon of blacktop with a corkscrew and a 90-degree turn leading onto the straight. It is there that Eduardo demonstrates the F1-Trac traction control system — by mashing his foot to the floor midway through the turn. Yet, there's no drama. The California dishes out as much power as the big Pirellis will take, holds firmly to the line Eduardo has taken and guns out of the turn and down the straight.

"Guns" is an apt term; accelerating down the straight, a muffled gunshot-like "pop" punctuates every 0.04-second upshift from the seven-speed dual-clutch transmission. I can't help but grin when I hear it; there's something faintly mischievous about that sound.

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The California is designed to be the brand’s “everyday GT,” something I will get to experience after the track session. The role of “track car” generally falls to the mid-engine and V12 599 models. But here I am, racing around this super-tight course with ease, launching into the straight full throttle and then experiencing the remarkable arresting power of the carbon ceramic composite brakes. *And the car just begs for more.*

When left in automatic mode, the transmission selects the perfect gear every single time. The SCM suspension (an option I couldn’t imagine doing without), with its magnetic fluid dampers, seamlessly absorbs the bumps that dot the surface. They’re bumps that might induce a lesser car to “move around,” which can make any driver feel nervous. When my laps in the California are over, my palms are dry. I credit the car.

A short while later, another pro driver, Morgan, accompanies me on the road drive. The first thing I do is lower the retractable hardtop. I’ve been waiting for this. Now I’m in an open Ferrari GT. Now it’s a whole other world.

Suburbia has encroached on the E-Town track over the decades, and we encounter school buses, stop signs and traffic lights. It becomes a good test of the California’s “everyday GT” claim. I’m stunned by the car’s smoothness in this setting. With the steering wheel manettino switch in “Comfort” mode and the transmission in “Auto,” the California feels very much at ease — aided, of course, by its sumptuous interior. I remind myself that I was just tearing around a road course in this car.

I switch the manettino into “Sport” for the ride back to the track. There’s one more straight before the parking lot. I gun it, paddle shifting just to hear the V8 shriek and that mischievous “pop” on each upshift. Magic.



[For more information, visit the Ferrari California website.](http://www.ferraricalifornia.com/webapp/#/f149/14/12/1/1/)
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