
1000 MILES IN A MONDIAL - ROAD TRIP TO THE FCA NATIONALS

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I dearly love the Mondial. As the owner of a small boutique dealership specializing in Ferraris from the 70s/80s/90s, I have driven and owned almost every Ferrari from this period, but for some reason the generally unloved Mondial is the car that “flips my cookie”.

Out of the numerous variants and evolutions of the model, my favorite is the 3.2 Coupe. Benefitting from the long evolution of the mid-engine V8 drivetrain in the 308/328, the 3.2 engine is regarded as robust, relatively easy to service, and offers more than adequate power.

The longer wheelbase of the Mondial offers better handling on the street, albeit with a small weight penalty, and I feel that the Pininfarina design of a mid-engine 2+2 format, an evolution from the 308 GT4 of the late 1970s, designed by Bertone, is subtle and elegant.

While the Cabriolet was certainly the most popular Mondial variant, the Coupe provides a much better driving experience because of its closed and more rigid chassis. In addition, the Coupe offers far more rarity; there were only 87 3.2 Coupes produced for the US market during 1986-1988.

I own a 1988 Mondial 3.2 Coupe, with 4,500 miles, in utterly factory-new condition, but with one problem: as with all perfect low-mileage cars, I don't want to drive it, even though I have done a few hundred miles since I bought it.

So, I've been on the lookout for a "driver quality" Mondial 3.2 Coupe with higher mileage that I could enjoy, and in September, I found it. A 1986 Mondial 3.2 Coupe, Rosso Corsa with beige, with 58,000 miles. A two owner car, owned from new until 2018 by its first Northern California owner, it was serviced and then driven cross-country to Connecticut by its second owner.

When the car arrived from Connecticut, it was exactly as the previous owner had described it to be, and I couldn't be happier with the purchase.

The paint is all original except for the passenger door. The A/C compressor wasn't installed but was included. General condition was what you would expect for a California-kept 58K mile Mondial; it's certainly not a concours queen, but that's also not what I wanted. Lots of rock chips on the front, some dents, etc., meant this was a car that I could drive without worry.

At about the same time of this purchase, I was thinking to myself about how I would travel to the Ferrari Club of America National Meet in Scottsdale in November. I've always loved the drive to Arizona from Texas, a drive that I did with my family every year growing up to visit my uncle in Phoenix. Now that I had my "driver" Mondial, the choice was clear: road trip to Scottsdale!

Because I share space with a top-notch service facility for these cars, I couldn't resist going through the car and making it as good as I could, both mechanically and cosmetically, as well as taking care of issues that needed to be resolved before the trip to Scottsdale.

I stripped the seats and carpets out of the interior. Full Leatherique treatment on the seats and all leather in the cockpit. The carpets were steam cleaned. Every nook and cranny of the interior was cleaned.

My service facility went through the entire A/C system; a new compressor, receiver/dryer, made sure the system held vacuum, and charged it up, with the result that the A/C blows ice cold (38 degrees at the vents) now.

All the fluids were changed: oil, transmission, coolant flush, brake fluid flush/bleed, etc. Replaced brake flex hoses. Tested charging system. Replaced leaking oil cooler hose. New O2 sensor.

Because I've owned multiple Mondials, I headed off electrical issues by replacing all fuses and relays, cleaning the fusebox thoroughly; tightening the pins in the connectors, cleaning all ground points, and installed a relay next to the starter.

Yes, I know a new fusebox is the way to go, but everything was working just fine, so I'll do that at a later point. I removed the spare from the front well, to give me some more space for tools, fluids, etc. A couple of bottles of "tire slime" will certainly work better than the original 33-year-old tire on the spare!

I drove the car extensively during the week before the big trip, and found that it's a very strong car. Frankly, it felt a bit quicker than my '88; these cars do run better after some mileage, and things seem to "loosen" up. I went on a shakedown trip to see my parents a couple hours away, and the car was flawless. I figured I was ready to go.

Two days before hitting the road, I drove the car home, in preparation for leaving on Sunday. Sitting in traffic, the temp gauge started to climb, but came down when moving. I got home without incident, and as I expected, neither radiator fan was working.

After checking fuses, relays, and verifying that the fans DID come on when the wires to the radiator fan temp switch were shorted together, I cleaned the temp switch terminals thoroughly, plugged it back in, and the fans worked perfectly. Whew. As they say in Apollo 13, hopefully I just had my “glitch for the mission”.

I left Houston at 6:20 am on the Sunday morning before the meet, and started the drive on I-10 to San Antonio. It didn't take long for the sun to rise and start warming things up, and I was glad that the A/C was blowing some cold air, and that fan speed control was working.

Once into San Antonio, I got on US-90 instead of staying on I-10, which took me to Uvalde and Del Rio, right on the border with Mexico. It doesn't take long for the terrain to change once you're west of San Antonio; green starts giving way to browns and tans, hills start appearing to the north and then mesas to the west, and a gentle climb begins.

I stopped for lunch in Del Rio at a great pizza place, and then headed out of town to the Amistad Reservoir. It was strange to see so much water in the middle of the desert.

After that, it's really a whole lot of nothing. And when I say nothing, I mean it. Often I would go 30 minutes without seeing another car. I can confirm that the Mondial is quite stable at 130 mph indicated.

I decided to stop in Langtry, to see where Judge Roy Bean had the Jersey Lilly bar/courtroom, where he dispensed the “law west of the Pecos”. Quite interesting, a neat part of Texas history.

Back on the road, driving in literally the middle of nowhere, I finally hit that point of relaxation that I look for on a good road trip, and really began to enjoy the landscape. Cactus started appearing, lots of scrub brush, every now and then a railroad track or a small ranch entrance, and even the road started to climb and dip with some curves as well.

This was true West Texas, and while I was tired from the long drive, the Mondial and I were in our element.

Finally, after nine hours of driving, I made it to Marathon, TX, where my reservation at the Gage Hotel awaited me. The word “oasis” perfectly describes this place; a beautiful historic hotel in the middle of the desert.

I got my room, unpacked, and wandered over to the White Buffalo Cantina, where I enjoyed their famous margarita on the rocks topped with Topo Chico. It was the perfect ending to a long day of driving.

As for the Mondial, it performed perfectly. It takes a while to bond with a car, and while I've driven Mondials long distance before (a few years ago, I drove a Mondial QV coupe to the FCA Nationals in Columbus, OH), each one is different with its own “personality”. This 3.2 Coupe is a good one, and we were both ready for another day of driving.

The next morning, I woke up to a beautiful West Texas sunrise, and had coffee at the V8 Coffee Bar next to the Gage.

The Mondial parked outside certainly attracted plenty of attention, both that morning and as I learned in the coffee shop, even the night before, as apparently there was some talk at the bar about “that red Ferrari parked outside”.

I loaded up and hit the road, my next stop planned for the town of Marfa, famous for its modern art exhibitions and overall quirky character that draws visitors from around the world.

Before Marfa, however, I had to stop first at the “Target Marathon”, an art (?) installation located in the middle of nowhere in between Marathon and Marfa.

This was an abandoned train control shed done up to look like the world’s smallest Target store, at least on the outside, complete with shopping cart. Inside, unless you’re a fan of spiders and bees, there’s not much shopping to be had.

As I rolled into Marfa, I figured that, given the long day of driving that was ahead of me, I would not spend time there on this leg of the trip, but would rather stay overnight on my way back. So, it was off to the more famous “retail” art installation in the middle of nowhere, the “Prada Marfa”.

Imagine driving down a road with nothing around other than scrub brush and distant mesas, when all of a sudden a Prada store appears on the side of the road.

Intended as a commentary on materialism and our society, the “store” even has shoes and other merchandise inside, albeit locked up and intended for viewing only. Of course, this was a perfect spot to take some glamour shots of the red Mondial, and I was eagerly helped by other tourists in doing so.

US-90 unfortunately ends in the small town of Van Horn, and from there I was on Interstate 10. My goal for the day was to make it to Lordsburg, New Mexico, a few more hours down I-10, spend the night, and then take back roads northwest through western New Mexico and eastern Arizona until I got to Scottsdale.

However, when I stopped for gas in Deming, NM, I spotted what looked like a small oil or grease leak under the car. Upon inspection, the left rear inner axle boot had split. Now, this boot was just changed before I left, because it was split when I got the car. Why did it split again?

In any event, now I’ve got a problem. So, I went to an auto parts store and bought one of those universal axle split boot kits and a couple of tubes of grease.

I tried two service shops, but none of them wanted to touch the car. Finally, I pulled into a tire place, and said I’ve got \$100 cash for the tech that will install this for me.

I would have done it myself, but I don’t have a jack; and it would be much easier on a lift. The boot got installed, but slipped off on the way back to the hotel.

Back to the shop, tightened it up, back to the hotel, and the entire boot was split and trashed. So now I have no axle boot on that inner joint. And a big mess where the grease has been flung out.

Instead of trying another split boot kit and after consultation with my mechanic on the phone, I decided to just buy a couple more tubes of CV joint grease and keep driving. The plan was to keep an eye on the joint and repack it with grease if necessary.

All I needed to do at this point was make it another 330 miles to Scottsdale. This meant staying on the interstates, though, in case I would break down. Better to be where there are other cars rather than go on deserted secondary roads in the middle of nowhere.

I found a hotel in Deming, somewhat discouraged, but determined not to have this trip ruined by an axle boot. Tuesday morning, I woke up to another beautiful New Mexico sky, and realized that it was a new day.

After a quick breakfast, I inspected the torn boot again, and realized that the OUTER boot was also torn. I didn't notice that the day before.

Buoyed by my optimism, though, I removed the remains of the temporary split boot and clamps, made sure the joint had plenty of grease (it did, and so did my exhaust manifold, the sump, the hoses, and everything else in the area!). Checked all other fluids and tires, filled up with gas, and hit the road. 330 miles to Scottsdale, about five hours give or take at highway speeds.

Other than having the hills turn into some real mountains, and seeing the scrub brush turn into saguaro cactus, there wasn't a whole lot to report on this last leg of the trip. Which, given the mechanical issues, was great news!

The Mondial performed perfectly, utterly without issue, just as it had since I left my driveway in Houston. No strange noises from the engine area, no vibrations, no nothing. Fluid temps stayed rock solid the entire time. Gas consumption was predictable. A/C blew cold, and heat was available when needed. These cars are much tougher than people give them credit for.

When I pulled into the Doubletree Resort in Scottsdale, where the meet was being held, I was welcomed by a large Ferrari flag held by a nice lady from Maryland.

I had a huge smile on my face, feeling quite relieved that the trip was over and I was finally here. I checked into my room, changed into a swimsuit, walked down to the pool, and just floated for a while, listening to the waterfall and looking up into the bright blue sky of Arizona.

Then, it was off to see old friends, make some new ones, judge my class at the concours, see some great Ferraris, and just enjoy the event.

It was a great National Meet! As usual, the highlight of the meet for me was the concours on Thursday.

Judging duties kept me busy during most of the day, but I was able to walk the field, and what a field it was. As opposed to Cavallino, it skewed more towards the modern cars, with plenty of my favorite '70s and '80s Ferraris in attendance.

If you haven't been to a National Meet, you should make plans to go. Next year, it will be in Mont-Tremblant in Canada, outside of Montreal, and I'm sure the scenery as well as the cars will be spectacular.

While I kept driving my Mondial throughout the event, I made the decision to have it shipped home. I'm sure the car would have been just fine, but the possibility of getting stranded in the middle of nowhere in West Texas, combined with a wife and kids who really wanted me home, meant that I flew home and the Mondial went home on a truck.

As Ed Gilbertson, the founder of the IAC/PFA judging standards group says, "Ferraris are meant to be driven!". So go drive yours!