



POETRY IN MOTION

JOSHUA COOPER RAMO makes a case for pushing the limits.

Often these days, as we move from, say, a Ferrari F430 to a 458, those of us who love cars find ourselves asking not "What are we getting now?" but, increasingly, "What are we losing?" It's no knock on the amazement of these new machines; anyone who takes a 458 out for a serious tumble knows there's a monster in hand. But this sense of something missing? I guess we've probably been worrying over this for some time, as engines became too complex to fix with our own hands, as "remapping" became the lingo for "souping up." We must have known it the moment we could hear the GPS lady more clearly than the shrieking of our passengers enjoying a white-knuckle turn into a fast corner.

Other things are disappearing now, too. Messy things we'll miss: manual transmissions, slippery clutches, brakes that were never quite sharp enough. So we are left with mere symbols of the old age. Take the ignition on the Porsche 911, a

straight-line thoroughbred: You'll find the starter keyhole on your 911 to the left of the wheel. This is an artifact of the days when Porsches dominated the Le Mans circuit and drivers had to sprint to their cars at the gun. That put a premium on the act of getting into the car. So the revolutionary convenience of the Porsche left-side ignition was that you could turn the key with the left hand while putting your racer into gear with the right. This was a gift of milliseconds, a reduction of foreplay to zero, but it was in those instants that the tone of a race would be set. This was a two-handed go, an all-out and all-in age when races began and ended with a sprint and that tie between man and machine was made in a breathy sweat.

The newest 911 keeps that left-side keyhole, but it remains more as an icon, as a reminder, and it's hard not to miss the old, sweaty days. What I'm talking about here is not some sort of technophobia. I love gear—particularly when it makes us go faster. But, you

know, we ask many things of our cars. For those of us who love them profoundly, a whole book of double entendres comes to mind when we speak about them. We want to be moved, to drive, to be transported. What we want from our cars demands that we feel them. The more inhuman they are, the better they excite in us the most human reactions.

The genius engineers aren't going to stop, of course. They are going to keep making cars with fewer sharp edges, cars that are more responsible and more humane. This ups the game for those of us who love the edges. If you don't look at cars this way, what I say to you is: Try to understand that no one gets into a Ferrari to be calmed down. And if you do love cars wildly? Well, remember that what's buried in those too-smooth transmissions or new, environmentally friendly exhausts is nothing less than a challenge. This is: Find the edges all over again, and push, push, push past them, one screaming passenger at a time.