



Marking the start of a new adventure behind the wheel of a Mercedes-Benz S63 AMG Coupe

Mercedes-Benz must be one of the most recognizable brands in the automotive world. It has an enviable reputation for bombproof, German-built quality and restrained style that makes it the choice of world leaders, managing directors and those with plain old-fashioned good taste alike. It also has one of the more interesting histories of any car company, for Mercedes was Genesis.

It is a relatively well known fact that the first “car,” the Benz Patent Motorwagen, was developed by Karl Benz and patented in 1886. Together with Gottlieb Daimler and Wilhelm Maybach, the first Mercedes was marketed in 1901, and the Mercedes-Benz brand was formed in 1926 with the merger of these companies to form Daimler-Benz. What is less recognized is that many of the innovations in modern cars that we take for granted started their lives in a Mercedes.

The string of firsts is extraordinary. The first diesel-powered car, the first direct fuel injection, the first crumple zones, the first antilock brakes, the first air bags—the list is endless and very impressive (and I think if I asked you to guess the date of all these innovations you would be 25 years too late). It is a truly remarkable company.

To this recipe add the romance and pedigree of a racing history that is perhaps unrivaled. A single Benz competed in the world’s first motor race in 1894 and the Silver Arrows dominated in the 1930s, while Stirling Moss made history in 1955 in a 300SLR, finishing the thousand miles of the Mille Miglia at an average speed of 98 mph. Success on these shores was with Al Unser Jr. in the 1994 Indianapolis 500, while Lewis Hamilton and Mercedes continue to dominate Formula One, the world’s richest, most watched sport. And finally, for

garnish, add a slight frisson with the knowledge that a Mercedes-Benz was also the favored transport of “Papa Doc” Duvalier, Pol Pot and Idi Amin, and you certainly have a very interesting brand.

I, too, am embarking on a first for the weekend, back in the UK taking my Australian soon-to-be parents-in-law to meet my parents for the first time. A daunting proposition for anyone I imagine, even in the knowledge that it is all going to go smoothly. Keen to impress said soon-to-be relatives, I took up Mercedes’ offer to lend me their top-of-the-line, \$200,000 S63 AMG Coupe for the run from London to the glorious English countryside with open arms.

And what a machine it is. I return from a day racing at Royal Ascot followed by a private tour of Blenheim Palace (by none other than the Duke of Marlborough himself) to find the car sitting outside my apartment building, all subtle curves and menacing touches (I particularly like the not so discreet “V8 BITURBO” badges on the front wings) that really make it look the business.

And it doesn’t just look the business. Open the big, heavy door, and getting on board you are met by a large but very comfortable sports seat and a very thick-rimmed, flat-bottomed steering wheel that oozes style and serious intent. Pressing the big, silver starter button, the first salvo is fired from the quad trapezoidal exhausts at the rear, before settling into a pleasant V8 rumble. My fiancée notes that “when heard from outside, it sounds just as expensive as it is.” A very good start indeed.

I head out of London, taking the Aussies past Buckingham Palace, Parliament Square (where, I note, some tourists stop to nudge each other and look at the car in a very knowing, “blokey” kind of way) and the Tower of London and on to the freeway. I must confess to taking it

HAMPTON DRIVE

somewhat carefully, as for a start the car's not mine; secondly, I've got precious cargo on board and, more important, when I got my driving license 20 years ago not even the most outrageous Lamborghini was packing nearly 600 brake horsepower. But once I get the chance and the road opens up, I push the pedal toward the metal and the effect is simply astounding. Even on half throttle I can only describe it as a shock that an internal combustion engine, not a nuclear reactor, is under the hood of this thing. It is electrifying, smooth in its delivery of such brutal power. And the noise—it has to be heard: a sort of guttural roar that becomes more frenzied and high-pitched, punctuated only by the machine-gun speed of the gear changes. Thankfully the heads-up display in front of me, projecting onto the windshield a digital readout of the speed accumulated in, quite literally, the blink of an eye, is the only thing that saves me from attracting the long arm of the law.

Once on the country lanes after an hour or so, I feel very connected to this car, not just because the seats actively hug you as you tackle the corners. It is big but very manageable, with a wonderfully compliant yet firm ride and good feedback from the steering. You can place the car on the road very well and just savor the moment you get stuck behind a truck—one twitch of the right toe and said obstacle becomes a dot in the rearview mirror. Oh, and did I mention the noise? What a car.

The destination comes all too soon, although I am happy to report the weekend did pass without incident, the car was returned to Mercedes in one piece and I am now a happily married man. With an S63 AMG Coupe on his wish list. ♦

Truly Sensational

Igniting every sense, here are a few features that take the Mercedes-Benz S63 AMG Coupe from ordinary to extraordinary:

See With an extra large panoramic roof (which includes a power internal sunshade) it's easy to get lost in a daydream while gazing up at unparalleled sky views.



Hear Sweet sounds flow through Burmester, a 3D surround sound system developed in Germany and includes 13 speakers as well as a 590-watt 9-channel digital amplifier.

Touch Like a spa on wheels, the car has 6 massage programs installed in its multicontour front seats, including a comfy "hot stone" effect.

Smell An active perfuming system brings fresh scents into the cabin via vents in the dashboard. (There's an interchangeable LED-backlit vial that lives in the glove box)

Taste An optional feature includes a convenient refrigerator box between the rear seatbacks to keep food and beverages nicely chilled while in route—perfect for those hot summer days.

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