

CLASSIC DELIVERY

MERCEDES BENZ

Fancy the idea of a sports car that is equally at home on the track and the freeway? I do ...

Mercedes-Benz has been designing sports cars for almost as long as we have been drinking Coca-Cola (the fizzy drink wins this race by a decade or so). Who can forget the McLaren F1 launched at the turn of the millennium? It is widely considered to be one of the most exhilarating sports cars ever produced ... although sadly, only a handful of them ever hit the road.

Fast forward to 2010 and the world's foremost automotive producer launched the Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG. What a car! It certainly did turn heads ... with its iconic gullwing doors and wheel-spinning performance.

I loved its raw rumbling power and intoxicating presence. It was amusing to see the crowds that gathered whenever I arrived in one. They were in awe at those doors; in hysterics at me trying to extricate my two-metre frame from the beast.

That car – the first sports car developed in-house by AMG – enjoyed success in its various guises (Blackbird, Roadster and the Final Edition last year). In fact, it was widely expected to lure motoring fans for many more years.

But ... shock ... horror ... it is no more! Don't throw yourself on your gear lever though. I do have some tantalizing news: AMG has developed its second in-house sports car. It offers performance to match, a more refined drive, oodles of racing features ... and it will still

leave you with about R1 million spare in your back pocket.

Enter the two-seater AMG GT, which kicks off at a shade over R1, 6 million, putting it squarely in the sports car fold (as opposed to the supercar fold of its predecessor). The AMG GT is up against some established and highly respected rivals – the Porsche 911, Jaguar F-Type R and Audi R8 to name but a few.

Great things are being expected from the AMG GT, which some say is even better than the previous benchmark in this field, the 911. In fact, deciding between the two could give you quite a headache (assuming that having a couple of back seats isn't a major consideration).

So how do the two Germans stack up? Well the Porsche features relatively modest, flowing lines – not really a physique that lays down the gauntlet at the lights.

The Mercedes-Benz AMG GT, on the other hand has a more macho and menacing look. I love its sculpted and slanted LED high performance headlights, which nestle next to the three-dimensional "diamond" radiator grille and above the daunting Airbus A380-like air intakes.

What about those legendary gullwing doors? Well I am relieved to reveal that the AMG GT doesn't boast that feature. This is a Seriously Good Thing. After all, that look goes back to the 1950s, and they are bad for your back!





Speaking of your back, I am pleased to report that the seats are superb. Yes, the interior smacks of that of a fighter jet, however it is a lot more sophisticated and comfortable!

Gorden Wagener, Head of Design at Daimler AG, puts it well when he says that the interior is a “setting in which the driver can experience the consummate combination of beauty and intelligence”. He’s spot on right; as you pour yourself into the hip-hugging driver’s seat, you cannot help but admire the deep, sloping dashboard and dominant, arched high centre console. The interior smacks of precision, quality and superb workmanship ...

The controls are conveniently spaced on the inclined V shaped centre panel, and it’s a huge relief that Mercedes-Benz didn’t opt for the gear lever on the steering wheel. That is just so wrong for a performance car!

Of course, it’s under the protracted bonnet that the real differences between the SLS and the GT wait quietly to be discovered. Out goes the naturally aspirated 6.2 litre V8 and in comes the new 4.0 litre bi-turbo produced under the “one man, one engine” principle. Incidentally, this policy is unique to AMG – and it means that a single “craftsman” is responsible for an engine ... from the time that the first block is laid down to the very end of the assembly process. Just in case you’re unfamiliar with that particular concept, AMG is quite famous for this unique policy.

Photos: ©

But I digress ... back to the latest power plant itself. On paper it’s not quite as powerful a brute as the 6.2 litre V8. However having tested it on the track, I am in no doubt that the GT is ferociously fast. Furthermore the handling is much more precise.

A dab of the right foot rewards you with a kick in the back akin to lighting the boosters of a Lightning jet. The GT hurtles you to the ton in four seconds (and the S shaves an extra two-tenths of a second off that time). Incidentally don’t even think about pushing this beast to its top speed of 310 km/h along Sandton Drive (methinks the traffic cops won’t buy your story if you insist that you didn’t realise how fast you were going ...)!

Of course what is a sports car without an aural accompaniment? AMG’s second production car certainly doesn’t fail to impress in this regard. It has a throaty roar that will almost certainly keep the neighbours awake – and suitably green with envy.

Having said that the GT isn’t only about making a din. It’s also quite happy to quietly poodle along to the golf course on a Sunday morning, and believe it or not, two sets of clubs can fit in the hatch-like boot. However don’t think that you will be able to arrive at the club unnoticed ... even Tiger Woods wouldn’t be able to attract more attention. ■ Derek Watts

