

CLASSIC DRIVER

[The Alps are mighty, but the Bentley Bentayga S is even mightier](#)

Lead

Can a two and a half tonne SUV be fun to drive and would we be able to live with one every day? We spent a week in the Engadine valley with the new Bentley Bentayga S to find out.



If you are a regular Classic Driver reader you might already have an idea about the fact that — although we do have a particular penchant for orange racing cars — when it comes to luxu-barges, cars that could not only be parked beneath but also be mistaken for a stately home, our taste in colour combos is rather conservative.



We like green over tan, or navy blue over beige. In our mind a burgundy red interior naturally only goes with a dark grey exterior. We also believe crazy green upholstery of a sports car needs a counterpoint in a sleek, silver exterior and of course our favourite scheme of all time is “all black everything”. You might therefore imagine that when we were presented with a brick-orange Bentayga S (official designation “Orange Flame”), with orange leather and black alcantara inside, finished off with an ocean of chrome and carbon fibre, we were slightly shocked.



A few seconds on the move however and this 550 hp, 2.4 tonne car quickly redeemed itself, proving that it is not only a serious tool for long distance cruising, but also actually fun to drive. Ever been stuck in a queue of cars waiting for their chance to overtake a lorry that is making slow progress up an Alpine pass? In a Bentayga S you just need a minimal amount of space to clear the obstruction and get ahead. That's the true superpower of this Bentley: turning a potential nightmare into a small nuisance.



The twin turbocharged 4-litre V8 develops 770 NM of torque and sounds like a potential avalanche threat. It is blisteringly quick. The steering is fantastic (and so is the thick wheel itself), and no doubt the best part of this car. It gives plenty of feedback and through clever engineering and suspension trickery, the Big B is surprisingly pointy on turn-in. Going up Julierpass, it's not the bull in a china shop that you'd think, but more of an agile mountain goat. Laws of physics can only be cheated to a certain extent of course, so the gigantic brakes, which usually sit enveloped in 22-inch rims (21 in this case, for the winter tyres we had on) do have to work overtime, especially when going downhill. However, even when pushed in a way that the Swiss rozzers wouldn't necessarily like, they give the driver plenty of confidence.



On an autobahn or in town, in comfort mode, the Bentayga S is as quiet as an electric car. Unless you want to blast The Game and 50 Cent’s greatest hits through the excellent Naim stereo, that is. In Sport mode things tighten up, but not to the extent that the car becomes too stiff; when going over speed humps or hitting a pothole it remains as comfortable as in all other modes, it just doesn’t wallow so much nor lean out of the corner. The boot is cavernous and the rear passenger space is better than a business class flight. If you’re older than 75 and developing hip problems — which let’s face it, you will be if you’re rich enough to be shopping for a Bentayga and aren’t a footballer — it’s also “extremely easy to get in and out of, don’t you know”.



Downsides? It took us 45 minutes to get out of an multi-storey car park as the turning circle wasn’t small enough to get the car down the narrow ramp. Apologies to the 10 plus cars that were stuck behind us. And then there’s the fact that even in a place like St. Moritz, it draws quite a lot of attention. Then again, just this once we really enjoyed being papped by spotters sitting in front Badrutt’s Palace.



What the Bentayge S clearly demonstrates is that it sometimes pays to step out of ones comfort zone. Bentley clearly has with this car and we decided to follow in their footsteps. We figured: everyone knows you can order any Bentley in any of the classic colour schemes mentioned above, but why not spec your car in any way you want. Why not have fun and go crazy while you're at it. Who cares what others think. In a Bentayga S they can eat your dust.

Photos by Błażej Żułowski for Classic Driver © 2023

Gallery

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