

CLASSIC DRIVER

Road Test: Maybach 57 S



Maybach, the epitome of the ultimate limousine, has introduced a third version to its range. In addition to the chauffeur's Maybach 62, and the SWB Maybach 57, the 57 S presents itself as a sporty alternative. We tested the car in its natural environment - the hills surrounding Marbella in Southern Spain.

Our destination? The Ascari Race Resort, the 5,425 metre (longest in Spain) race track with on-site 20-room luxury hotel. We wanted to establish if the two-tone limousine really is a sporty 'self-driver'.



Just travelling through the hilly landscape of the Sierra de las Nieves it soon becomes apparent that the 57 S belongs to the inner-circle of absolute supercars. It leaves the motorway and enters the twisting curves of the narrow mountain roads with such composure that it may have been a compact GTi rather than a 5.5 metre long saloon. Throw the car into a corner, hold the power back and then release all 1000 nm/torque at the apex and the Maybach will catapult from hairpin to hairpin with effortless ease. Such is the power of the car that there's little time to enjoy the sensation - it's over so quickly. Like the veritable 'bullet from a gun', the car will cover any distance in an instant.



The passengers can make themselves comfortable in the easily adjusted multi-contour seats, and they and the driver can enjoy the interior view of carbon-fibre and piano-lacquered wood. The unusual combination of the two is a good one, as are the seats with contrasting piping. As the company says, "Only the best is good enough".



Arriving at the Ascari Race Resort, the second part of the miracle reveals itself. If the initial impression on the road are good, then through the curves of the race track the car shows its true colours. When the instructor says "Go!" the heavy car, that so far one had only thought suitable for the motorway, moves forward as if bitten by a tarantula and attacks the 26-corner race track as if born to it. Much of this is due to the special 20" alloy wheels with special Michelin tyres unique to the 57 S.



Applying the brakes, the generously-proportioned discs and callipers bring the big car down from high speeds with ease, and the adaptive-springing of the chassis (aided by a 15mm reduction in ride-height) ensures taut handling at all times, even on a circuit. The dampers have been similarly upgraded via the ADS II electronic system. The only criticism can be levelled at the steering that is somewhat imprecise at straight ahead.



But the world is not entirely composed of curves, and after the final corner the full power of the engine can be released. As soon as the tachometer reads 2,500 rpm it's all systems go. The hand-built (by AMG, with twin water-cooled turbos) V12 has a capacity of 6.0 litres and produces 615 HP to give the car an electronically-limited top speed of 275 km/h (171 mph), the fastest for a series-production German saloon. But the hard,

metallic sound of the motor wears a little on full throttle, an aspect that hardly suits the luxury side of the car.



The first lap soon comes to an end, and the instructor signals for me to return to the pits. It's time for a reappraisal of the car and its on-track behaviour. There's no doubt it's tremendously satisfying to drive, but it's also one of the safest cars in the world with its high-security bodyshell and ten airbags. With the chassis capable of handling four tons in the armoured version of the Maybach, it's still relatively unstressed in 'S' configuration.



All good things come to an end, and so does our visit to the Ascari Race Resort. The black and silver limousine glides us back to Marbella in discrete luxury. The on-board mini-bar looks after the passengers until we arrive at the Marbella Club Hotel, restful and relaxed. There's time to consider giving the chauffeur a day off again in the future to repeat the experience.

For more information on the Ascari Race Resort please visit www.ascari.net.

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