

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## [Five questions to: Dirk van Braeckel, Bentley's design chief](#)

### Lead

The Bentley EXP 9 F concept is probably the most controversial unveiling of the 2012 Geneva Motor Show. The vehicle polarised opinion – so we spoke to Dirk van Braeckel, head of design at Bentley, about the latest creation from Crewe and its design philosophy.

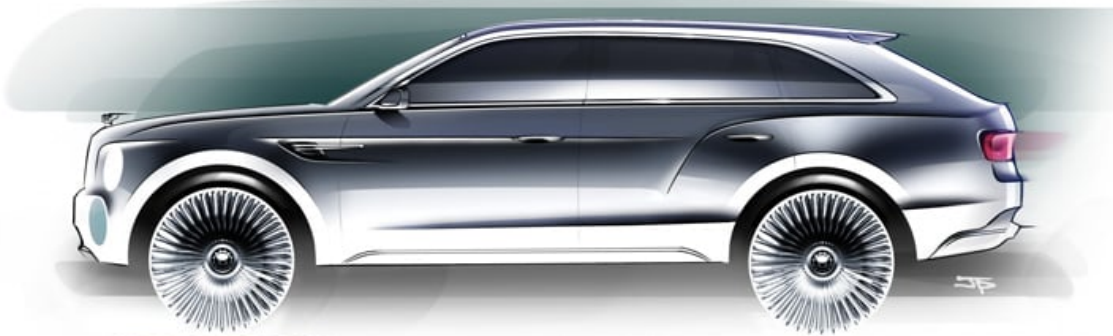
***Mr. van Braeckel, are you fully satisfied with the concept, and how long have you been working on it?***

Well, we were able to start work on the [EXP 9 F](#) in July 2011. We went through the usual process of first drafts, sketches, drawings, models – and then a full-size clay model. It wasn't until the end of December that we had a final decision on the look of the exterior. Only then could we begin the construction of a real vehicle. The show car is, in the best sense, a genuine hand-made one-off. But I also think that in many ways it is already very 'realistic'. Large-scale production has not yet been confirmed. As for an assessment of the concept – I leave that to you.

***Tell us a little more of the background. In true Bentley tradition, you seem to have paid great attention to the details, is that correct?***

That's right. We have placed great emphasis on the details, and have pushed things to the limit here. If you open the doors, look, everything is already very close to production standard. And the interior will be typical of a Bentley – with the greatest attention to small details, materials and workmanship. We have worked in shifts on the EXP 9 F – 24 hours a day, seven days a week.





***Have you ever designed an SUV, Mr. van Braeckel?***

No, I have not yet designed a full SUV, although I have participated in the development of off-rovers. However, a new vehicle in a segment new to Bentley proved to be a bigger challenge - a challenge that required us to translate the typical characteristics and values of the Bentley brand. The car must be immediately recognisable as a Bentley. It needs to express the sporting image of an SUV while, at the same time, not being "overstated". The interior should also be distinguished by typically Bentley qualities, such as materials that allow for passenger comfort in the second row. All these things were in the specification and were not open to negotiation; this was a huge challenge to implement.

***In your opinion, what is the highlight of the EXP 9 F?***

If you press me to answer that, I'd have to say that the interior is very 'fluid'. I think you'll see what I mean when you look at the car, or climb into it. The exterior, however, provided us with exciting questions. I'll give you an example: you want to sit relatively high in an SUV - the so-called 'commanding driving position'. But how high? If too high, the vehicle's sporting character is lost. It's all about balancing the individual attributes.

***Which classic Bentley features should we recognise on the exterior?***

There is the typical Bentley matrix radiator grille, and the car also has four round headlights, which have become a definitive part of the Bentley brand image. On the EXP 9 F, the headlights are arranged vertically, with the bottom lights including the daytime running lights. This is reminiscent of the classic R-Type Continental, although in that case the lower circular openings were air-intakes. The EXP 9 F doesn't, in fact, look much like a Continental or Mulsanne - it's a very independent creation. Yet this is a concept vehicle. Should there be a production model, it will include the feedback we get from today. For us, Geneva is the beginning of an exciting journey into new terrain.

Photos: Bentley / Dirk Michael Deckbar

**Gallery**



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