

CLASSIC DRIVER

Mercedes-Benz G63 AMG 6x6: When too much is not enough

Lead

There are moments in life when four wheels just aren't enough. We take a tour of the wild mountains of the Engadine - in the incredible Mercedes-Benz G63 AMG 6x6...

St. Moritz is regarded as the world's top winter metropolis. Here, every year, international glitterati meet up to enjoy life to the full, from the Cresta Run to Gunter Sachs' legendary Dracula Club. Those who can afford it fly in by helicopter or private jet. A very glamorous mode of transport, certainly, but also a bit... boring? So we decided to conquer the mountainous Engadine differently this winter. Via a direct overland route. Across mountain and valley, hill and dale, through ice and deep snow. On our own three axles.

The monster G-class from Down Under



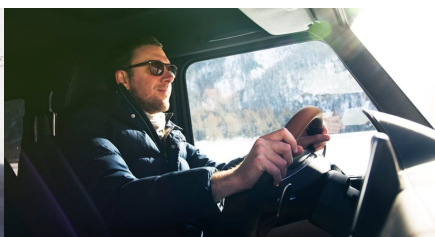
Until recently, this six-wheeled Mercedes-Benz G-Class was only available for Australian military use, where it proved the perfect tool to transport heavy loads through the Outback. A machine built for real men, the sort who wash the red dust from their throats with whisky at sunset. But now Mercedes-AMG has brought out a civilian version of the monster, in a small, strictly limited-edition series. Featuring hard-core rally technology. And a staggering 544 horsepower. Even more impressive than the performance of the twin-turbo V8 is the physical appearance of the Mercedes-Benz G63 AMG 6x6: as it booms and roars through Swiss mountain villages, cows are driven to panic and mothers pull their children tightly towards them. Add King Kong and Godzilla to our trip and we'd have a well-matched trio.

First Class travel on six wheels



At 2.30 metres high, 2.10 metres wide and 5.87 metres long, our German colossus dwarfs other SUVs until they look like mere toys in our wake. Climb up into the cockpit, trucker-style (the distance from the ground is huge, thanks to the almost metre-high off-road tyres), and one is suddenly in a different world. In the cabin of the six-wheeled off-roading behemoth, AMG has created a tough but elegant environment in Alcantara and carbon, with heated and ventilated seats lending a First Class ambiance. A large colour display reveals the topography of the mountain range, while the red light of the tyre-pressure control system on the rear-view mirror hints at the vehicle's military provenance.

Beware the bus



A slight pressure on the accelerator, however, is enough to leave your mental comfort zone well behind. AMG's massive 5.5-litre V8 bi-turbo engine pushes brutally forward with its 760Nm of torque, the seven-speed automatic blipping through the gears, and were it not for the local postbus, meeting us unexpectedly in a bend on the way to the Julier Pass, we would have clean forgotten the dimensions of our oversized cruiser. Time, then, to leave the roads and properly challenge the skills of the 'big G'. On desert sand, where a majority of AMG customers are most at home, the air pressure of the tyres drops in just 20 seconds from 1.8 to 0.5 bar, until the footprint of the 3.85-tonne brute is at its most effective. Beadlock wheels also ensure that the terrain can't tear the rubber away in even the most brutal terrain.

Deep snow instead of dunes



On the snow-covered forest paths, which we follow through the dark, evergreen woods, the high-on half-metre ground clearance proves essential: thanks to the military underpinnings, even the rocks we find hiding under the snow cover are no problem. Our dampers are Öhlins, combined with springs that can comfortably intercept every shock, and even in deep snow the five differential locks help us not to lose traction. We did spare ourselves a test of the impressive, one-metre wading depth – not because we doubted the G-Class’s ability, but because we felt we should leave the icy mountain streams to the trout.

‘The beast of St. Moritz’



Arriving in St Moritz, it was time to introduce our six-wheeled beast to high society. Wet and dirty from our adventures, our monstrous ride rolls into Badrutt’s Palace. You almost expect the suspension system to shake itself like a dog, to remove the dirt of the wilderness. The heavy machinery from Affalterbach proves a bit of a shocker for the jet-set winter guests, and even the hotel’s Rolls-Royce seems suddenly a bit ordinary. The liveried garage master, usually a picture of indifference, eyes the huge tyres in disbelief. If one judges the G-Class only by the attention it gets, the investment of

more than 400,000 euros has paid off. There only remains the question of how to beat this performance in the coming year. No doubt AMG has something new up its sleeve.

Photos: Jan Baedeker

Gallery

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