

Mercedes' McLaren SLR convertible says it all

by *Mark_Maynard*

I drove six hours up and back to the Beverly Hills Hotel last Thursday to get behind the wheel of a \$500,000, 617-horsepower McLaren SLR convertible for four hours.

SUPERCAR, SUPERSTAR - The Mercedes \$500,000 McLaren SLR convertible says 'I have arrived and I have money.' CNS Photo courtesy of Mercedes-Benz. Is that stupidity, professionalism or self-indulgence?

Yes.

There are just three of these high-performance two-seaters in the United States now and all were staged at the storied hotel for a media event by special invitation.

Only 150 roadsters will be available for the next two years. So this is not a model commonly available in the fleet for media evaluations.

The starting price of the 2008 Mercedes-Benz McLaren SLR roadster is \$495,000, not including the \$2,750 freight charge from England. Rounding up, that comes pretty close to a half-million dollars. Special leather colors can add \$9,900, and there are other options, such as contrasting stitching for \$600 or red or gold brake calipers for \$840, to buoy the price.

The roadster - a euphemism that conjures images of jaunty British sports-car motoring - is preceded by the McLaren SLR coupe (\$450,000), which debuted in 2006. About 445 have been sold.

For 2007, Mercedes-Benz honored veteran SLR racer Stirling Moss by offering the McLaren SLR 722 Edition. It cost \$480,000, had 650 horsepower and just 24 were built. The 722 recalls Moss' 7:22 a.m. start time for the 1955 Mille Miglia, the open-road endurance race through Italy that Moss won with co-driver Dennis Jenkinson.

The 2008 roadster is not about jaunty motoring. And the news angle isn't so much about what the car is, but why it is.

It creates "a sense of occasion," Mercedes-Benz spokesman Geoff Day said.

The car is not about performance, he said. It's not about the ride. It's not about comfort.

"It's about saying, 'I have arrived and I have money,'" he said.

SPECS

2008 Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren roadster

Body style: two-door, two-seat carbon-fiber monocoque convertible with power top

Engine: aluminum, SOHC, 24-valve, 5.5-liter V-8 with belt-driven supercharger and dual intercoolers; two spark plugs per cylinder

Horsepower: 617 at 6,500 rpm; maximum engine speed, 7,000 rpm

Torque: 575 at 3,250 to 5,000 rpm

Transmission: five-speed AMG SpeedShift with Comfort, Sport and Manual programs with manual shift settings for Sport, SuperSport and Race

Acceleration: 0-60 mph, 3.8 seconds; top speed, 206 mph

EPA fuel economy estimates: 12 mpg city, 16 mpg highway; premium fuel recommended

Length/wheelbase: 183.3/106.3 inches

Curb weight: 3,779 pounds

PRICING

Base: \$497,750, including \$2,750 freight charge

Final assembly: Woking, England

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