

# glorious

BY JOE SAGE

The Mercedes-Benz SL has graced our roads for 70 years now, with a variety of iterations since the original Gullwing coupe in 1954 and first open roadster in 1957, with two-seaters and 2+2 four-seaters, soft tops, removable hardtops and retractable hardtops, and a variety of powertrains along the way. The lineup was simplified for 2022—after skipping the 2021 model year. (Unchanged for 2023, our sample here is a still-new 2022.)

One big change in this seventh generation is the discontinuation of the V12 version (most recently the Mercedes-AMG SL 65). As lineups are impacted by big-gasoline-engine angst industrywide, we can be glad this existed, providing headroom for this adjustment at the high end, while (for now) leaving the V8 models intact. In fact, some have preferred the V8, anyway, as its front/rear weight distribution is more balanced than with a V12.

Removable hardtops create their own stowage and ready convenience issues and were replaced on the SL in 2001 with a retractable hardtop, which has been a feature over two generations, through 2020. A second big change is that this has now been replaced with a power-retractable soft top. As with all such things, some may celebrate this, some may lament it, some may call it a tradeoff. It is marketed as the return of a roadster to its roots, and we agree—lighter, with a lower center of gravity, less complex by far, and quicker up and down.

A third big change is that SL is now all-AMG, comprising a Mercedes-AMG-two-digit-only lineup, with no more Mercedes-Benz SL three-digit versions. Tending toward a biggest-is-best mindset, we are okay with this. But someone with SL desire, yet watching their budget, may miss the others. Again, though, this is a chance for the company to respond to market or regulatory pressures, while keeping a purist core alive and well.

What's more, just as we ended our week with this one, they announced a new addition to the lineup—a Mercedes-AMG SL 43, arriving this summer. This has a 375-hp turbo-four and 4.8-second zero-to-60 time (weight and fuel mileage yet to be

announced), and of course provides a lower-cost starting end, while also buffering the lineup further for regulatory survival. (Also arriving in the near future will be an SL E Performance hybrid.)

A fourth big change is that the two so far—the AMG SL 55 and 63—are 4MATIC+ all-wheel-drivers. The AMG SL 43, however, will be a rear-driver. This generation remains a 2+2 four-seater.

New through and through, the gen-seven SL is an AMG lightweight composite aluminum build, with an aluminum space frame and self-supporting structure, optimizing rigidity, precise driving dynamics, comfort, vehicle packaging and proportions. The new body shell is a clean sheet design, with not a single component from the prior SL or any other model (such as the AMG GT Roadster).

Optimized materials and shapes create space for components delivering advanced performance, comfort and safety—as well as the soft top. Materials include aluminum, magnesium, fiber composites and steel. The windshield frame works with a roll bar system behind the rear seats, which can extend at lightning speed if needed, for roll-over protection.

Torsional rigidity of the body shell (itself weigh-

ing about 595 pounds) is increased by 18 percent, and transverse rigidity is 50 percent higher than the already highly advanced AMG GT Roadster, with longitudinal rigidity 40 percent higher.

Like the Mercedes-AMG EQE Sedan in this issue, our SL came in MANUFAKTUR Magno flat-appearance paint, though a different shade of grey, and with a red soft top. These paints have an unmatched presence, telegraphing the feel of a solid cast ingot (which is a neat juxtaposition of experiences if you inadvertently rap a knuckle on one of the composite doors).

This is a \$200,000-plus car (as ours was outfitted, with fairly irresistible options). And it's a beauty, inside and out—and in motion. Expense is easy enough to achieve; expense you can see, feel, touch and appreciate from first sight is a significant accomplishment, and they have succeeded. The immediate and lasting conclusion: "worth it."

The SL has long benefitted from a long, wide, ground-hugging stance. The aforementioned lowering of the center of gravity, along with the move to 4MATIC+ all-wheel drive, makes it all better than ever—the car tracks and corners just perfectly at any speed. It's a platform that could be ideal for a wide variety of vehicles, with the small yet commanding cabin of this 2+2 performance roadster perhaps the optimum of all possibilities.

The soft convertible top (which removed about 46 pounds from the upper half of the car) raises or lowers in about 15 seconds—our benchmark for a quick top on even a two-seater, and this is a 2+2—and can be done at speeds up to 60 km/h (about 37 mph). The top also lies flush when retracted, no longer gobbling up about half the trunk volume, as the retractable hardtop did. The trunk's nicely rectangular volume, by the way, is far more spacious than its specification suggests. The trunk lid itself also accomplishes its final close electrically, an assurance that the rear spoiler's conditions-contextual smart operation will not be interfered with by any careless closing.

Drive modes include Sport, Sport+ and Track Pace (each with a distinct binnacle instrument layout). The two sport modes offer a blip-shift feature for rapid (yet dramatic) downshifts, a feature found with some performance manuals. We didn't use these, as performance was stellar in default mode. Track Pace provides a range of race engineering and performance log features we would not be trying during our public-road-oriented week.

Instrument and feature setup in the driver interface is unusually straightforward for today's complex systems, one of the more complete, yet intuitive minimal-step systems we've seen. The main



## SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY.....	Bremen, Germany
ENGINE/TRANSMISSION ..	Germany / Germany
CONTENT.....	78% Germany / 0% US/Canada
ENGINE.....	handcrafted AMG 4.0L V8 biturbo, diecast alloy block/heads
HP/TORQUE .....	577 hp / 590 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO .....	8.6:1
TRANSMISSION .....	AMG Speedshift MCT 9G 9-spd auto w wet multi-disc start-off clutch
DRIVETRAIN .....	AMG Performance 4MATIC+ fully variable all-wheel drive
0-TO-60 MPH.....	est 3.5 sec
SUSPENSION.....	F/R: AMG Active Ride Control w semi-active anti-roll stabilization, aluminum dbl wishbones, anti-dive control, coils, adaptive adjustable damping
STEERING .....	electromech speed-sens pwr w rack & pinion, var ratio, var pwr assist
BRAKES.....	hydraulic dual-circuit system: F: 390mm composite, vented & perforated, 6-piston aluminum fixed caliper; R: 360mm composite, vented & perforated, 1-piston aluminum floating caliper
WHEELS.....	F: 9.5 J x 20 H2; R: 11 J x 20 H2
TIRES .....	F: 265/40 ZR 20; R: 295/35 ZR 20
LENGTH / WHEELBASE .....	185.2 / 106.3 in
GROUND CLEARANCE .....	na
TURNING CIRCLE.....	42.1 ft
HEADROOM (F/R).....	TBA
LEGROOM (F/R).....	TBA
CARGO CAPACITY .....	7.5-8.5 cu.ft
WEIGHT .....	TBA
FUEL / CAPACITY .....	premium unl / 18.5 gal
MPG .....	14/21/16 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE.....	<b>\$178,100</b>
PAINT: Manufaktur Monza Grey Magno.....	3250
RED SOFT TOP .....	nc
LEATHER: black Nappa .....	nc
CARBON FIBER TRIM .....	2850
AMG AERODYNAMICS PKG .....	2850
AMG NIGHT PKG .....	750
EXTENDED NIGHT PKG .....	750
AMG DARK LIGHT PKG .....	550
BLACK MICROFIBER HEADLINER .....	1600
FRONT SEATS: multicontour w massage .....	nc
HEATED/VENTED FRONT SEATS.....	nc
AUDIO: Burmester high-end 3D surround .....	4500
WHEELS: 21-in AMG forged, black.....	3300
LOAD COMPARTMENT PKG .....	485
DRIVER ASSISTANCE PKG: Active assist: DISTRONIC distance, steering, lane keep, lane change, emergency stop, speed limit, brake w cross-traffic, blind spot; evasive steering assist; route-based speed adapt .....	1950
PERFORMANCE LINE: front axle lift, illuminated doorsills, hands-free access, heated steering wheel, AMG light display, AMG drive unit steering wheel buttons, active LED headlights, surround view camera, heads-up display, augmented nav video .....	1800
GAS GUZZLER TAX .....	1300
GUARD 360 VEHICLE PROTECTION .....	50
DESTINATION CHARGE .....	1050
TOTAL.....	<b>\$205,135</b>

## 2023 AMG SL ROADSTER LINEUP

AMG SL 43.....	375 hp.....	\$109,900
AMG SL 55.....	469 hp.....	137,400
AMG SL 63.....	577 hp.....	178,100
AMG SL E Performance hybrid.....	coming later	

(cont'd)

screen—blessedly not overly large—is positioned atop the forward area of the console, where it features another delight, power-angling forward and back through just enough range to optimize its visibility, notably making it super easy to eliminate the downside of every other screen, sunlight glare—just power it forward or back a couple of degrees. Loved this.

We often wear light leather gloves when temps ease above 100 degrees, at least until the interior cools down (which of course is pretty quick in this smallish cabin), and we did find those especially essential when first starting out on our hottest days, as the metal bits on the steering wheel can be blisteringly intense after sitting in the sun.

We had a long, winding, twisty, open road drive planned for our last couple of days, but our week was unexpectedly cut short without that session. Nonetheless, ever moment and every mile within an hour or so of our home base was exquisite. Someday, we'll do the rest.

Give it a spin, and anybody and everybody will surely want to own this AMG SL. Pricey it is, but if you have a quarter-million dollars in your new car budget, you'll still have plenty left over. And seriously, the SL 43 and even 55 must be tremendous values—we'll have to give them a spin sometime, too. ■

