

Precision control

BY JOE SAGE

GLS is the flagship of the Mercedes-Benz SUV lineup (at least its gasoline models), descending from the longstanding GL when its first two letters were applied to all the SUV models. The 2024 Mercedes-Benz GLS 580 4MATIC we are driving here is, in turn, the upper trim of two mainstream luxury Mercedes-Benz versions. (There are also top-top-performance Mercedes-AMG and top-top-luxury Mercedes-Maybach iterations—see sidebar chart—though ours does pick up a number of features from each.)

The GLS 580 is a powerful beast, with a 510-horsepower 4.0-liter biturbo V8 mild hybrid system with 538 lb-ft of torque (or up to 531 hp and 722 lb-ft with Boost) and 4MATIC all-wheel-drive, good for zero-to-60 in just 4.7 seconds. How's that for a

big three-row SUV that can tow 7,700 pounds and also has an off-road mode?

The off-road mode may seem a bit of a surprise in a vehicle with 22-inch wheels standard (or 23-inch on our sample), with an urban executive flair. Then again, this vehicle is big enough to have what appear to be healthy sidewalls on those big wheels, so although no-one is likely to take this rock-crawling, it seems to be capable of escaping the office for a good dirt road tow of your boat or horses to your favorite remote lake or trail (we did not take this sample off road at all). Ground clearance is not stated, but it does have AIRMATIC air suspension and should have impressive numbers at any setting. Our sample also had high-performance summer tires, as do the standard wheels,

something you would likely want to revisit for dirt.

To its highly equipped \$112,000 base, ours adds \$16,000 or so in options and packages, as most will—on ours, those wheels, Nappa leather, a Premium Plus package, Burmester 3D audio, handsome MANUFAKTUR Alpine Grey paint and more.

As always, we started by adjusting the seats and mirrors, and best of all, the GLS has discrete metal buttons, as opposed to the plasticky continuous membrane that interconnects them on some other models, which can trigger the wrong function. (We've seen both for awhile, so don't know if it indicates they've figured this out. Or maybe it's evolving the other way. Time will tell.)

While thinking about the seats, we went for the massage feature. Whether for bliss, therapy or both, Mercedes has some of the best massaging seats in the business, with a wide range of regions and motions, but you do have to navigate into the

screen to set them. But unlike some, they do run indefinitely, plus we soon realized that when you return to the vehicle and restart, they briefly come up on the screen, ready for another go, so you learn to seize the moment and fire 'em up again.

With its size, height and almost-three-ton heft, the GLS felt a little ponderous at first. But as we have been increasingly using drive modes, we switched to sport—which surely benefits from the range and adaptability of its air suspension—and from there forward, it always felt neat and trim, with firmer steering and its high center of gravity largely erased. As with most, you do have to switch to your preferred mode every time, but by about your first turn, you'll remember to reach down to its well-placed and easy control and kick it back into sport. As clean, modern and fully-featured as the instruments are in the GLS, we came to enjoy that—sort of like a pilot doing routine pre-flight.

(A side note: having said that, we researched a bit, and if there's a pattern at all, it seems some hybrids do allow you to stay in eco mode.)

It seems a given that sport mode, along with a 510-hp V8 and sophisticated suspension, will power you smoothly through freeway flyovers and such. While wondering what this actually does to fuel mileage (rated 20 mpg combined, not bad for such a hefty machine), we perceived that in many conditions, the engine wasn't working as hard in sport mode—child's play, like asking a weight-lifter to take out the trash—and may just as likely be preserving fuel economy in its own way.

The weather turned nasty during our week, but we had our heated massaging seats, and we continued to fall for sport mode. Even in stop-pause-go traffic, we had such tight control, we could do whatever we wanted or needed. The powertrain of the GLS was serving our whims and needs, not the other way around.

If you have the price of entry, this big SUV is hard to beat. And don't forget—though we haven't driven them back-to-back lately, in addition to the AMG and Maybach versions, there's also the 375-horsepower GLS 450 4MATIC for \$25 grand less. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| ASSEMBLY | Vance, Alabama |
| ENGINE/TRANSMISSION | Germany/Germany |
| CONTENT | US/Canada 10% / Germany 25% |
| PASSENGERS | six (captain's chairs, opt) |
| ENGINE | 4.0L V8 biturbo mild hybrid |
| | diecast alloy block/heads |
| HP/TORQUE | 510 hp / 538 lb-ft |
| ADDTL OUTPUT (BOOST) | +21 hp / +184 lb-ft |
| COMPRESSION RATIO | 10.5:1 |
| TRANSMISSION | 9G-TRONIC 9-spd auto |
| DRIVETRAIN | 4MATIC® AWD |
| 0-TO 60 MPH / TOP SPEED | 4.7 sec / 130 mph |
| SUSPENSION | 4-wheel indep |
| | w self-leveling AIRMATIC® and |
| | Adaptive Damping System (ADS Plus); |
| | F: dbl-wishbone; R: multilink |
| STEERING | rack and pinion, electro-mech |
| | power assist |
| BRAKES | (no info or specs) |
| WHEELS | (opt) 23-in AMG twin 5-spoke, |
| | black (staggered; no dimensions avail) |
| | (std: 22-in AMG; F: 9.5x22; R: 11.5x22) |
| TIRES | (opt) F: 285/40 R23; R: 325/35 R22 |
| | summer high-performance |
| | (std: F: 285/45 R22; R: 325/40 R22 |
| | summer high-performance) |
| GROUND CLEARANCE | (not stated) |
| TURNING CIRCLE | 41.0 ft |
| LENGTH / WHEELBASE | 205.2 / 123.4 in |
| HEADROOM (F/2/3) | 39.4 / 40.2 / tba in |
| LEGROOM (F/2/3) | 40.3 / 41.9 / 34.6 in |
| CARGO CAPACITY | 17.4 - 84.7 cu.ft |
| WEIGHT | 5820 lb |
| TOW CAPACITY | 7716 lb |
| FUEL / CAPACITY | prem unl / 23.8 gal |
| MPG | 14/20/16 (city/hwy/comb) |

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| BASE PRICE | \$112,000 |
| PAINT: MANUFAKTUR Alpine Grey | 1750 |
| LEATHER: black exclusive Nappa leather | 1370 |
| WOOD TRIM: natural grain grey oak | 160 |
| WOOD/LEATHER STEERING WHEEL | 600 |
| EXCLUSIVE WOOD TRIM PKG | 450 |
| NIGHT PKG | 400 |
| ACOUSTIC COMFORT PKG | 90 |
| PREMIUM PLUS PKG | 1800 |
| WHEELS: 23-in AMG twin 5-spoke, black | 1900 |
| MB-TEX DOOR TRIM | 350 |
| REAR SIDE AIRBAGS | 700 |
| TRAILER HITCH | 600 |
| GLASS: heat, noise insul, infrared reflect | 1010 |
| AUDIO: Burmester high-end 3D surround | |
| sound system | 4550 |
| DESTINATION CHARGE | 1150 |
| TOTAL | \$128,880 |

2024 MERCEDES GLS LINEUP

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|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|hp+boost ... 0-to-60 | |
| GLS 450 4MATIC | 375+20 ... 5.8 ... \$ 87,000 |
| GLS 580 4MATIC | 510+21 ... 4.7 ... 112,000 |
| AMG GLS 63 | 603+21 ... 4.1 ... 145,850 |
| Maybach GLS 600 | 550+21 ... 4.7 ... 174,350 |