

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## New Mercedes SL revealed ahead of 2012 launch



**Just in time for Christmas, Mercedes has revealed images and details of its long-awaited SL roadster, with a wealth of new technology concealed beneath the long bonnet proportions it shares with its ancestors.**

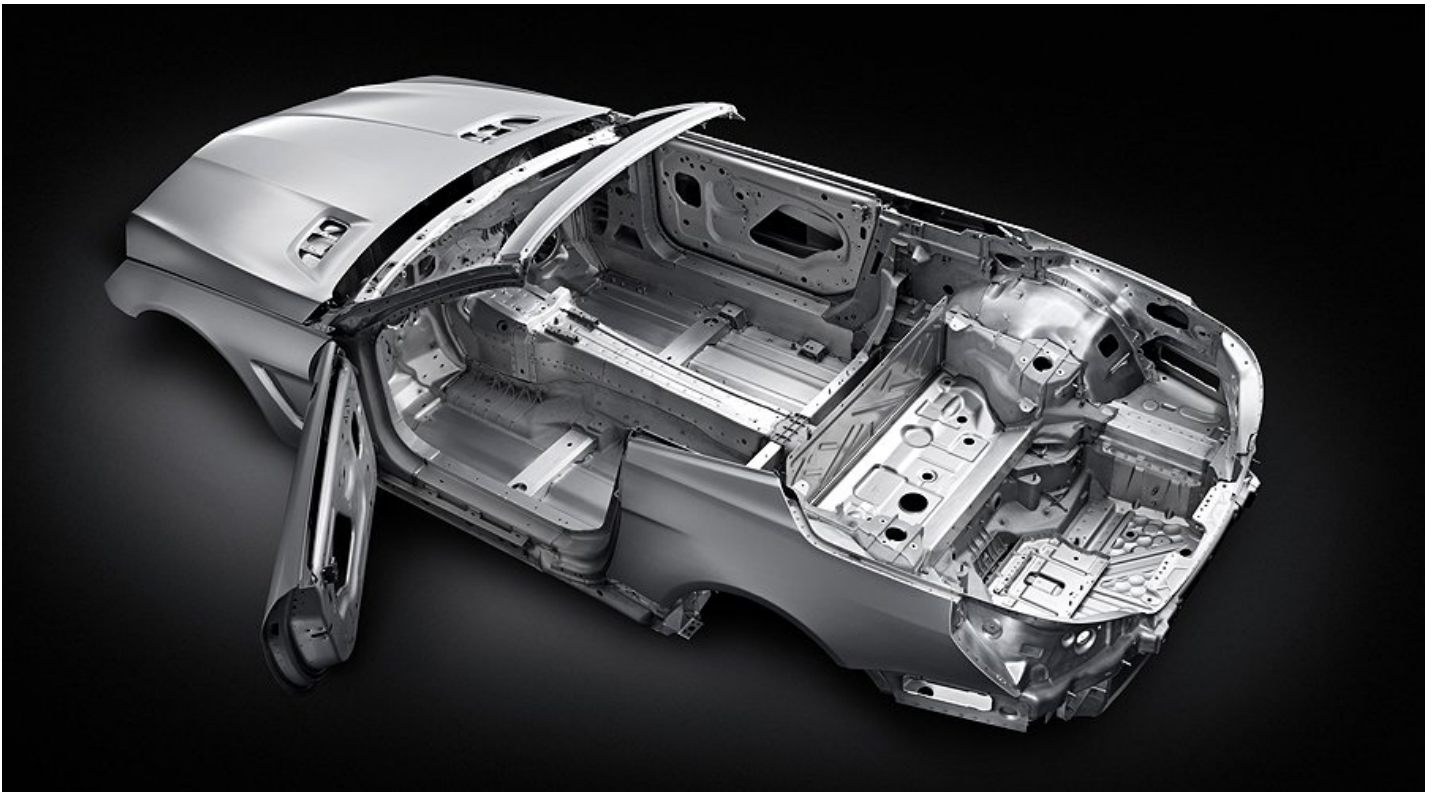
World premieres of new Mercedes SLs come few and far between: in current R230 form, the roadster has lasted almost a decade, while the two models prior to that spanned an impressive 30 years between them. In contrast, the average modern car lasts six or seven years before a ground-up redesign.

The new R231 continues the long bonnet, rearward cabin silhouette of its forebears. Styling-wise, though, the roadster adopts a development of Stuttgart's current design language, instances of which have already been seen on the CLS and B-Class. The sleek front end of the previous SL has been cast aside, with Mercedes instead opting for a more masculine appearance provided by the upright headlamps and proud, vertical grille. At the opposite end, the rear deck is flatter and squared off – seemingly referencing the R107 and R129 generations – though the back lights do share a similar shape to those of the previous model.





While the aesthetics may split opinion, the changes beneath the skin will undoubtedly receive a universal welcome. The body is now almost completely composed of high-strength aluminium, helping the new car shed up to 140kg against its predecessor: "The effect is rather as if a heavyweight-class passenger had got out of the car and taken his heavy flight luggage, too," according to Dr Thomas Rudlaff, in charge of the development of the bodyshell. And as we all know, a lower weight equates to better handling and faster acceleration, as well as improved fuel consumption.



The latter topic has also been addressed by a new range of engines: the SL350 makes use of Mercedes' new naturally aspirated 3.5-litre V5 with 302bhp and 41.5mpg, while a 429bhp 4.7-litre twin-turbo V8 (used in the current S-Class) is nestled into the SL500. Both are coupled to a seven-speed automatic gearbox and will be available from launch next Spring, followed by an AMG version and, for the first time, a diesel-powered offering. A V12 engine is also being considered, although Mercedes has been gradually phasing twelve-cylinder engines out of its line-up in recent times – so there's no guarantee that the SL's substantial engine bay will be filled to capacity.



Rounding up the new developments boasted by the popular roadster is a new 'Frontbass' speaker arrangement, and 'Magic Vision Control' windscreen wipers. The latter incorporate the washer jets in the wiper itself, meaning water is delivered as required, just in front of the leading edge of the wiper, without disrupting the driver's field of vision. It might not be 'magic', but it also means the bonnet surface is uninterrupted by the washer jets like it is in a conventional system. 'Frontbass' relocates the subwoofers from the doors to the footwells, thus resulting in a cleaner, crisper sound and improved acoustics with the roof down.



And that roof – it's the traditional folding hardtop arrangement pioneered by the SL's predecessors, but now has the Magic Sky Control that first appeared on the car's baby brother, the [SLK](#). This optional feature changes the opacity of the roof at the touch of a button, with transparent, light shade and dark shade settings available to suit conditions. Of course, there is a fourth option available when the weather gets balmy: the magnesium-framed glass structure folds away completely in 20 seconds.





Also available on the options list will be a self-levelling, height-adjustable, hydraulically controlled Active Body Control chassis, as well as a heating system for the wiper blades, fluid supply lines and washer fluid tank for peace of mind in the winter. The new Mercedes SL will reach UK showrooms in July 2012.



Text: [Joe Breeze](#)  
Photos: Mercedes

## Gallery









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