

CLASSIC DRIVER

Mercedes G55 AMG Kompressor



First impressions are deceptive. It looks almost innocent, this supercharged 5.5-litre, V8-engined machine, with its 493bhp and 700Nm of torque. It's those round bi-xenon headlights that do it, their peaceful gaze replacing the more open-faced stare of earlier models. We are in Affalterbach, at the Mercedes AMG customer centre, and before us is the latest high-performance G-class, the current G55 AMG Kompressor.

This G55 packs enough power and torque to turn the four-wheel drive transmission, in inexperienced hands, to dust – so the vehicle trusts instead an extremely robust 5-speed automatic gearbox to help propel the 2,550kg (when empty of fuel) along smoothly. If we add fuel, a heavy load, and the maximum trailer weight, then the G55 faces a challenge of some 6.5 tons. That would usually require a truck. Usually. Not so the G55 AMG which also, unloaded, offers the performance of a rather good sports car: 0-62mph in just 5.5 seconds.





I press unlock on the remote key. "Click, click!" answers the driver's door with a solid, metallic sound. The build materials, the clear arrangement of the instruments – nothing is playful or over-designed. It is timeless: the familiar levers and switches in the places one intuitively expects.

Ahead of me is the name sign of Affalterbach, crossed with a red bar to show we are leaving. We're off: and those eight cylinders respond loudly, flogging the crankshaft 40,000 times per minute as the rev-counter reaches 5,000. The large G-class surges forward and the speed grows to three figures as, sitting upright as in a truck, I struggle to hold our course straight over the bumps.

We're in our element on the highway to Stuttgart, the G55 greedily devouring the bitumen to the accompaniment of the AMG 500 tuba player. The explosive acceleration must lead passers-by to think there's now a nitrous-powered G-class... but this Mercedes is nothing if not reliable. A new sump ensures the supply of lubricant in all driving conditions. One intercooler on the engine side and two low-temperature radiators control heat, while an efficient electrical suction fan keeps the coolant temperatures within the correct range.



The landscape flies past, an indistinct blur of hills, and I skim along the highway at well over 100km/h. Suddenly there's a roundabout and I step sharply on the brake pedal. And hang weightless in the seatbelt. But all is safe. The current model has a completely revised chassis and brake assembly, with higher spring

rates at the front and dampers adjusted to give the typical Mercedes long-distance comfort. The AMG braking system has large, ventilated discs all round giving precise braking with impressive stability.



Directly before us is the Mercedes-Benz museum in Sindelfingen. And this year, Mercedes celebrates the 100th anniversary of all-wheel drive, which began in 1907 with the so-called 'Dernburg' car. I have no reason to doubt the off-road abilities of this G-class. The first Mercedes-Benz G-Class of 1979 was designed with tough terrain in mind and, over the many years of its production, Mercedes engineers have continuously improved its prowess with the addition of the latest electronics.



It seems something of a miracle, in fact, that you can get behind the wheel of the G55 AMG with a normal driving licence. Because it's very much more than an ordinary automobile.

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