

CLASSIC DRIVER

Road Test: Bentley Continental GT Speed



If any car personified the 21st Century new generation of 'affordable' supercars, it was the Bentley Continental GT. With only a few hours behind the wheel of a GTC, however, I was seriously lacking in seat-time until a GT Speed came my way last week.

The Continental GT 'Speed' (its name comes from Bentley folklore and harks back to a faster version of the 3-litre, first appearing in 1923) is the company's fastest, most powerful car to date. Previous Conti GTs had a manufacturer-quoted top speed of 198mph. Whereas in less honest times this would normally mean a good approximation (with the wind behind you, and travelling downhill), it was common knowledge that the new 'small' Bentley would comfortably exceed 200mph.

With various trickeries conducted on the 6.0-litre W12's internals resulting in a nine per cent increase in power and 15 per cent increase in torque, the latest Continental GT Speed will now crack 0-60mph in 4.3 seconds (0-100km/h in 4.5sec) and then power on to 202mph.



Such is the torque available at any engine speed (750Nm - that's 553lb ft - at 1750rpm, as an example) that a typical overtaking manoeuvre of 50-70mph is accomplished in just 2.3 seconds. It is a phenomenally fast motor car.

The company has reworked the regular GT, too, with all models in the range benefiting from modified steering and suspension, a slight reduction in weight (by 35kg) and other energy efficiencies that mean lower CO2 emissions of 396g/km, down from 410g/km, and even improved fuel consumption.

Facts and figures worth shouting from the rooftops of the famous factory in Crewe, I am sure, but meaningless unless translated into excitement behind the wheel.

First things first: it's not a big car in the way that a 612 Scaglietti or Aston DBS may feel physically intimidating on initial acquaintance. Wide, yes, but with good visibility from the superbly comfortable, Mulliner-spec seats, the car's size does not become an issue. Ours came with gizmos such as the keyless entry system and TV tuner that doubles as a rear-view parking device.





I liked both and, like all 'luxury' accessories, would say that once you've tried them it's hard to go back to a normal car with its humble, spiky key and 'you're-all-righting' passer-by.

The car rides lower than standard, on 9.5J x 20in wheels with bespoke Pirelli P-Zero performance tyres. Carbon/silicon carbide brakes are an option but not fitted to the test car. The largest available in any production car (as fitted to the [Bentley Brooklands](#) we drove earlier this year) they must be extraordinarily effective as the standard set-up is one of the best I have experienced.

The mind-blowing performance – and it really is devastatingly quick in any gear and at any speed – is matched to a surprisingly smooth ride and handling good enough to satisfy the most press-on. The driver can choose a suspension setting from 'Comfort' to 'Sport', with the mid-way point enough for most situations, and 'Sport' endowing the 2350kg GT with handling of the highest order.

And, as with all high-performance all-wheel-drive machines, ultimate grip in medium-speed corners is sensational – although you can at times feel the various electronics fighting each other, with a little shuffling of torque from back to front.



At speed, Bentley's fastest (a genuine four-seater, note, with one passenger hinting heavily that he "would be happy here all the way to Le Mans") is super-quiet, due to its standard double-glazing and damping improvements, with just a hint of turbocharged engine and an exhaust exiting in special-to-the-car rifled exhaust pipes.

It's a GT that you can use every day, too. I averaged 18.1mpg on a combination of local trips, traffic jams and high-speed motorway work. It was the car I used to view some of the significant pre- and post-War Bentleys in [RM Auctions' forthcoming London sale](#). It felt pretty well at home next to a Continental from a previous era, the [1953 R Type](#).



Given the stratospheric price of the older car when new, perhaps a [Brooklands](#) would be a better comparison, but let's be thankful that today's economies of scale and modern manufacturing techniques have meant that companies such as Bentley, Aston Martin and Maserati are still around.

The Continental GT Speed is a wonderful car and one I would be more than happy to own. Despite its *arriviste* image, the car is tastefully appointed and such good fun to drive.

However, irony of ironies, when evaluating the TV tuner, what should be the first programme materialising out of the ether? BBC One's *Football Focus*, of all things. Oh well...

The car tested was a Bentley Continental GT Speed in Moonbeam Silver, with Portland hide.

UK prices of the Bentley Continental GT Speed start at £137,500.

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