

CLASSIC DRIVER

Bentley Brooklands - Driven in Tuscany



‘Riding the wave’ is how Bentley’s engineering supremo Dr. Ulrich Eichhorn describes the Brooklands experience. It’s a reference to the new coupé’s world-beating 1050Nm of torque and he’s not exaggerating: the 2655kg full four-seater will cover the vital 50 to 70mph ‘overtaking dash’ in just 2.4 seconds.

Top speed is 184mph (296km/h), and Eichhorn has a meaningful glint in his eye when he makes the point that ‘road testers usually manage to reach, or exceed, our quoted maximum’. Okay, message received...

With production limited to just 550 cars, and built as it is during the final years of the Arnage/Azure platform, it could well be the most exclusive, decadent and bespoke luxury car ever. Oh, and if you’re thinking of purchasing one, you’d better get your hand-crafted skates on – they’ve already sold 500, and the best you can expect is a delivery sometime towards the end of next year.



The car had debuted at Geneva in 2007, but the world’s press had to wait nearly 12 months to actually get behind the wheel of Bentley’s flagship model. Powered by the most powerful V8 in the company’s history (a twin-turbocharged 6.75-litre with 530bhp @ 4000rpm to accompany the aforementioned 1050Nm available at just 3200rpm), the big two-door promised much.

Sitting in late afternoon Tuscan sunshine, the Brooklands’ lines are clearly Azure-derived, with more than one hint of the 1950s/60s ‘notchback’ S2 Continental Coupé, as well as the late-1990s Continental R and S series. Two pairs of single headlamps flank the dark-tinted matrix grille (laser-cut, but assembled and brazed by hand), and the radiator is topped by an optional flying ‘B’ that will disappear into the radiator shell on impact.



The flawless paint finish is matched by all-stainless steel external brightware, and the bodywork – 130 hours of hand-construction that includes copper-brazed joints, 6000 hand spot welds and 15m of seam welding – personifies the coachbuilder's craft. It's big and, with the exception of just a slight excess in height towards the rear of the roof, works very well.

The upper side-profile is of course a function of the car's interior packaging, it having the largest rear seat area of any production coupé in the world and, trust me, I've covered considerable distances behind a front passenger with the seat on max – it's great.

Inside, no less than 16 hides trim the all-leather interior. The statistics are boggling: 484.5 metres of thread in 43,507 stitches, and 10m² of wood veneer. It takes eight man-hours to make a waist rail, with three days for the high-gloss lacquer to cure. And that's before any Mulliner or bespoke enhancements, as the average purchaser is likely to add an additional £30,000 to the car's UK price tag of £230,000 in this way.

Yes, yes, typical Bentley, and things I can have in my Azure or Arnage. But, styling apart, what's behind the monstrous power figures and can you *really* use that sort of performance?



We were fortunate to have Dr. Eichhorn as our personal chauffeur and technical guide for the first part of the test route. He is *very* good behind the wheel, and someone whose engineering skills make him a fine test and development driver, too. Leaving the gates of the hotel way behind, we're soon into the 'twisties'. Under Eichhorn's direction, all 5.4 metres of car skip from apex to apex with alacrity.

Time-travel apart, the Brooklands appears to defy the laws of physics. You never forget you have a big car around you but then you also have the benefit of superb suspension tuning, power, torque-converter automatic gearbox (with all six ratios locking further up in the rev-band, unique in the world and another benefit of the car's massive torque) and brakes that are an engineer's triumph of the human mind over an awful lot of matter.







Oh yes, the brakes. The Brooklands carries – as an option – the largest in the world: 420mm, cross-drilled, carbon/silicon carbide fronts with 356mm rears. At the business end, unique eight-cylinder Bentley calipers embrace the CCM discs, thus allowing owners fully to exploit the car's engine performance.

When I drive it, the first thing that exhibits itself is that low-down growling, rumbling get-up-and-go that Bentley Turbos are so well known for – except you need to multiply that by two. It's a deeply impressive performer with enough aural and sensual feedback, yet proving almost whisper-silent on the Autostrada. They've even managed to bring in a pre-War Bentley 'warble' that joins in with the whistling of the dump valve, and the V8 burble. They're a clever lot in Crewe.

You can switch into Sport, and that brings another three settings on the computer-controlled, electrohydraulic dampers, while turning off the ESP allows the car to be driven on the throttle, the Pirelli tyres – specially developed for the car – giving only a hint of protest every now and again. There's a winter tyre option coming soon, so Klosters, St Moritz and Gstaad can be programmed in to the satellite navigation, too.



My favourite trick with the Brooklands is to slip the gearlever over to Tiptronic 'manual' and hold it in 6th. The astonishingly flexible engine will pull all the way up to the maximum from country village speeds. Motorway work in Tiptronic 6th is a breeze; there's no changing down or hunting, and it's the nearest thing you can get to linear power delivery. I complimented Eichhorn about the lack of dive or squat, with roll only in extremis. "Yes," he replied, "but we do allow the car a little rise in the nose so that owners can experience the typical feeling of a Bentley 'taking-off'. That's normal."







No review of this car will be complete without the mandatory comment on global warming and the acceptability of these cars in today's ever 'greener' society. To any sane person, the environmental worldwide effect of just 550 cars will be infinitesimal, and the chance of similar machinery being developed in future years is slight.

It's a statement, an opportunity for the world's richest to say, "This is going to be **my** car. I'm going to enjoy every minute spent specifying it and driving it".



And they will, I can assure them of that. Go on, treat yourself - surf's up.

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