

CLASSIC DRIVER

Mercedes SLS AMG: Design Analysis



Bullish, awe-inspiring, passionate and courageous is how Chris Hrabalek sees the Mercedes SLS AMG...

The recent announcement by **Mercedes** that it will return to **Grand Prix** racing in its own right – taking control of the current F1 Double Championship-winning team **Brawn** and thus reviving the full '**Silver Arrows**' legend – is as bullish and awe-inspiring as the decision to re-incarnate the iconic '**Gullwing**' masterpiece in the form of the **Mercedes SLS AMG**. Both actions show not only passion and courage, but give a strong indication that Mercedes was not just the first car manufacturer – it also intends to be the last.

At a time when automotive manufacturers are crumbling under the pressure of the global recession and steering aimlessly from one alternative fuel source to another, Stuttgart's finest seem more than keen to face a new challenge. One could certainly dismiss **Mercedes'** recent announcements as a new form of Seppuko-style management technique – and, ultimately, only time will tell. But in the meantime, the decision to drive against the market traffic and support F1 as a manufacturer, while launching yet another sportscar into an already overcrowded market, will surely raise an eyebrow or two with their cousins in Woking.



Looking at the new **Mercedes SLS AMG**, it becomes very clear from the start that the **SLS** will appeal to a larger crowd of existing **Mercedes** customers than the various SLR derivatives ever could. Gone is the phallic bonnet treatment and tacky detailing. The proportions of the **SLS** are classic, yet show modern styling themes and contemporary surface treatment. The revival of classic elements – such as the gullwing doors – do their best to seamlessly connect to black-and-white images of past personalities at the wheel of the **300SL** original; to a seemingly long-gone era of style, class and charisma.

The exterior styling of the **SLS AMG** is reminiscent of its **300SL** ancestor. There's a wide radiator with a prominent **Mercedes** star in the middle, held there by wing-shaped cross fins that also form the main theme of the interior, where air-outlets clearly took inspiration from aero jet engines. The gear selector, meanwhile, is not unlike the throttle control of a **Boeing 747**. Although the **Mercedes SLS AMG's** design themes often seem quite literal, the styling is never banal, as the classic is very well blended with the contemporary: an example is the introduction of vertically arranged headlights, adding visual drama.



Naturally, good design needs to be more than skin deep and a product can only be successful if its technological *raison d'être* is addressed. No such worries with the **SLS**, as it features an aluminium spaceframe body, powered by a 6.3-litre AMG front-mid-mounted engine, generating 571HP and 650Nm of torque. Coupled to a seven-speed dual clutch transmission in a transaxle layout configuration, the total weight is limited to 1620kg; a significant achievement, considering that the carbonfibre-bodied **SLR** was more than 150kg heavier. And this pretty much sums up the incredible achievement of the men at AMG.

While the previous decade represented an era of partnerships between brands such as **Mercedes** and **McLaren**, both on-track (in the shape of various **Mercedes-powered McLaren F1 racers**) and off-track (in the form of the above-mentioned **Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren**), the decade to come will be one of amicable competition on both levels at best. Judging from the first move, it seems that this was a wise decision on **Mercedes'** part.

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Photos: Mercedes-Benz

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