

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Bentley Continental GTC V8: Into thin air

### **Lead**

Winter holidays in the Swiss Alps: whether it's for the skiing, riding the Cresta Run or partying, a trip to St Moritz is always memorable. We took Bentley's latest convertible for a drive through the famous passes of the Engadin.

Albula, Julier, Maloja: many routes lead to St. Moritz. The Flüela Pass to Davos, at 2383 metres, is as dramatic a journey as you could wish for, connecting Davos and Susch in the lower Engadin. Providing it's not closed for avalanches, of course. It's also used by many manufacturers to test new models as its remoteness and challenging conditions are perfect for the final sign-off of their prototypes, far away from the lenses of the proving-ground paparazzi.

We are lucky today, as the pass is open, though the conditions are a little tricky – we soon come across a Passat firmly stuck in a rock wall, its occupants patiently waiting for rescue.

At least they have a nice view.





But there are no dangerous roads, only unsuitable cars. With its roof down, the all-wheel-drive Bentley, lighter now thanks to the 6-litre W16 making way for a V8, is the perfect car for the conditions: good visibility, compact dimensions and state-of-the-art traction. Despite having only four litres, the twin-turbo V8 produces 500bhp, with 487lb ft torque available at 1700rpm. On snow, with its weight (60kg lighter, much of that from the front of the car) more evenly balanced thanks to the smaller engine, it feels agile and ready for action.

The 8-speed gearbox adds to the sporting experience and, above 5000rpm, we worry that the roaring V8 might cause an avalanche.







Sunlight dapples snow-laden trees. Clouds of fresh, white snow billow behind the red car as it makes its way through the mountains. The roof is still open but we have the neck-level heating on 'max'. Like the carriages that brought the early British pioneering sportsmen to the area in the 19th Century, it is stately and, at 2295kg, still quite heavy. That's a lot and, even in the snow and ice, for Alpine driving we recommend specifying the optional carbon ceramic material brakes.

As it was, we just about stayed clear of the Swiss Mountain Rescue service... and the blades of the next snow plough coming round a blind bend.







While drifting in the manner of Walter Röhrl might impress spectators, it's difficult in the GTC as the complex computer systems do the job all too well. We would suggest another car for this, probably from an older era. Perhaps it's better for the Cresta rider travelling to St Moritz for the new season to save his sliding for Shuttlecock, one of the most famous corners on the Run.

And it's at the familiar white building that is the Clubhouse of the St Moritz Tobogganing Club that we finish our journey. Driving through the town, with its Christmas decorations twinkling in the early evening lighting, we can't help feeling that the Dragon Red Bentley fulfils every possible requirement of a perfect winter sports car: it gets you to the destination safely and in style. And that's whether it's the Cresta, the most convenient ski lift or the après-ski disco.



Not even Father Christmas driving his sleigh through the centre of St Moritz would have made a more sure-footed entrance.

Photos: Jan Baedeker

Gallery

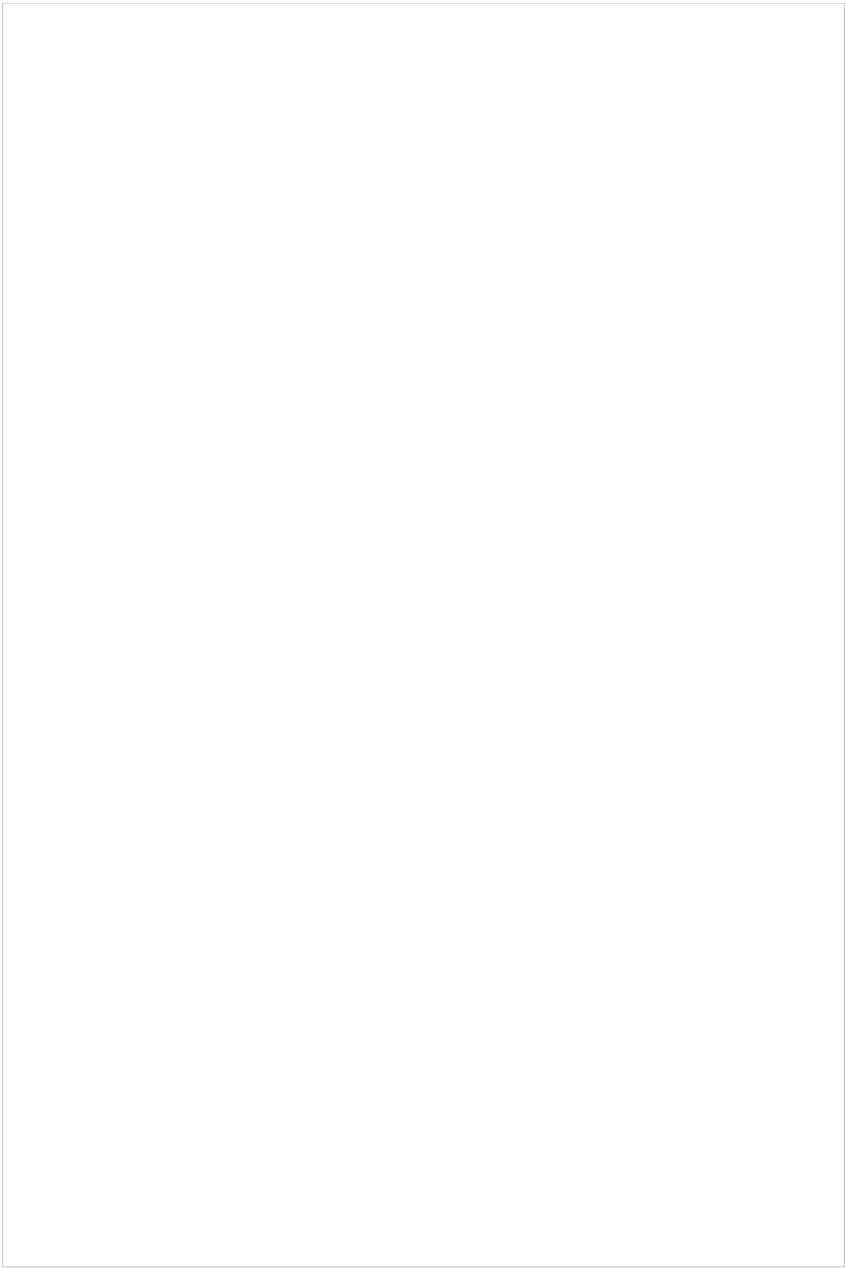
















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