

CLASSIC DRIVER

Canadian Premiere: First drive in the new Mercedes S-Class

Lead

Canada is so sparsely populated, and its beautiful landscape so still and dramatic, we had to question Mercedes' decision to potentially spoil the idyll that is the Muskoka region with the worldwide launch of its new S-Class.

Fear not. While the surrounding countryside seems lifted straight from a BBC HD nature documentary, the latest technological masterpiece from Stuttgart is the kindest yet to the environment. And from the driving seat, the lush green trees, the dark, glittering lakes and circling birds of prey pass by undisturbed and in almost total silence. The latest (W222) S-Class is packed with over 20 assistance systems, a variety of cameras, cruise control, distance control, 500 LED lights, a Burmester 3D surround sound audio system (7500 euros, please...), massage seats and much, much more – many of which from the options list.

Not even an errant Canadian moose could outwit the exceptional safety systems found on the latest 'S'. 'Pre-Safe' would have warned the driver in time and intervened before the rear passengers spilt even the tiniest bubble of champagne. In the long wheelbase version those sitting in the back can enjoy a panoramic view of the Canadian night sky via the full-length, two-part sunroof. And they can do it from seats that can be reclined. Pity the poor executive forced to work upright at one of the car's rear tables.



There is something, though, that will stir the most sleepy S-Class passenger (let alone its driver), the performance from the top model's 455bhp V8. With 700Nm torque, the refined eight-cylinder propels the almost-two-ton limousine in the manner of the old 450 SEL 6.9. Hybrids will surely come in due course, but the performance of this petrol version is phenomenal, with its 7G-Tronic Plus transmission so totally seamless it appears to have just one gear.

The big car will sprint to 100km/h in just 4.8 seconds. 'Sprint' is not, perhaps, the best expression, and 'float' does not convey the way it glides over imperfections, all the while (if not in quite the same league as a BMW 7 Series) giving the driver total control. In fact, the optional Road Surface Scan and Magnetic Body Control systems 'see' the road ahead and virtually iron out any bumps.



To experience the Canadian wilderness you don't need an S-Class. But, with its endless, deserted roads it allows the new S-Class owner to really get to know his or her car.

In standard form the 2013 S-Class is still generously appointed and in short wheelbase its price in Germany is 104,600 euros. The long wheelbase car is 107,635 euros.

Gallery

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