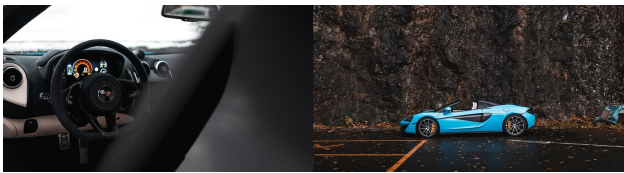


# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Real men — ahhh! — drive their McLarens open, even in winter

### Lead

Skinny dipping in the Arctic Ocean, yoga in an igloo — there are many ways to winterize your immune system. For me, I tried a late autumn ride in McLaren’s new 570S Spider — and caught a serious cold...



There’s no wrong weather, just wrong clothing — that’s how the saying goes, at least how it goes in my former home of Hamburg. In Switzerland, where I have now pitched my bivouac, there’s also a Protestant hardness towards the cold — one that is steeped in tradition, for nearly a century ago, anarchists, artists, and dancers hopped barefoot through the snow atop the Monte Vértita. Now, a select group of brave people from Zurich take a plunge in the ice-cold Limmat River with advent wreaths on their heads for the annual ‘Samichlausschwimmen’. Not to mention the Ironman expats, who sprint around snow-covered Lake Zurich in shirt and shorts. So, in keeping with tradition, I decided that this winter I would forgo wrapping myself in woollen blankets and laying on the couch, like a modern-day version of Thomas Mann’s sickly sanatorium regular Hans Castorp from his book *The Magic Mountain*, and instead build up my immune system right by tempting death and devil on my test drive with a McLaren 570S Spider and ride with the top down— despite the November weather and the years of haunting warnings from my mother!



The beauty of a modern sports car like the new McLaren 570S Spider is that, from the outside, you look like you are in control of a Starfighter, while inside the cockpit, it’s actually quite cozy and comfortable, thanks to a smooth-shifting gearbox, comfortable automatic suspension, multi-stage adjustable seat heating, and your Spotify playlist humming in the background via Bluetooth. And, thanks to turbo manners, the 570hp V8 is also very tame at first. The times when one’s back hurt from just getting into a mid-engine sports car and your fingertips throbbed with adrenaline from starting it up are finally over. In fact, this sports car can be so civilized while manoeuvring through the leisurely Swiss motorway traffic between Zurich and Lucerne that you sometimes forget why the children in the car beside you are staring with their mouths agape. Do I have something on my face? Oh no, I’m sitting in a bathtub blue McLaren.



Luckily, if honks at traffic lights aren’t exciting enough, and you’re really looking to exercise the car on the open road, the Spider is a sports car of Olympic perfection. The engineers in Woking have managed to fine-tune the engine, transmission, suspension, and steering so well that, while behind the wheel, you experience the punch of a Lamborghini, the handling of a Ferrari, and the precision of a Porsche all in a single sports car. And the ‘entry-level model’ is in no way inferior to its larger and faster model

siblings. The weight of the Spider is under 1.5 tons — just 50kg more than the coupé — while the carbon-fibre chassis is as stiff as that of a veritable McLaren race car. This, along with the bone-hard steering wheel, makes every combination of serpentine passes the McLaren tackles a real pleasure. And if you're courageous enough to really stand on the gas pedal, you can hit 100km/h in just 3.2 seconds.



The perfect conditions for this car would have to be empty, dry mountain passes, on which its agility really can be experienced. But this is November, and most passes are already covered in snow. From the forests around Lake Lucerne, the fog starts to roll in, with rain gently pitter-pattering off the McLaren's roof, and on the wet asphalt, the fall foliage provides a second layer for the already critically limited traction to work through. So, I concentrate on my initial goal — to get my immune system going — and open the little rear window. In one fell swoop, the roar of the eight-cylinder engine fills the cockpit, and it smells of forest and snow. Fifteen seconds later, the hardtop in the rear is tucked out of sight. I pull up the zipper of my vest, lower my cap on my head, and turn up the heater in hopes of counter-acting the cold. I make it up two more curves in the mountain and see the first signs of snow in the meadows.



To roar along the Mediterranean coast on a mild summer day in this McLaren must be a wonderful experience — but even in the wet, cold transitional period between autumn and winter, open-top driving in Switzerland has its own appeal. Sharp blows of the icy wind in your face when accelerating, your fingers tingling as you grip the steering wheel, and the rushing oxygen waking you up like a triple espresso all allow you to keep control of the wide tyres, even if they start to slowly lose grip on the slush-covered road. At a quick roadside stop with a view over the lake, where the clouds float in and out of the mountain peaks, I swing up the doors, get out, warm my hands in the hot air above the engine, and look out over the landscape one more time, before its immersed completely in the white of winter.



It's days like these that will remain imprinted in your memory long after the Mediterranean picture-book scenes have blended in with all the rest — automotive experiences with rough edges. The fact that I write this wrapped in woollen blankets and curled up on my sofa, with a pot of ginger tea and a packet of handkerchiefs in hand, only makes these exploits more heroic, right?

Photos: Alexander Schlosser for Classic Driver © 2017

Gallery











































