



If the roof is down and the wind is gusting through the car Mercedes engineers have come up with optional, pivoting anti windshields. Normally the Plexiglas sits behind the roll over bars. These in seconds can be hinged forward to form a wind barrier behind the occupants' heads.

Three new engines were available at launch: the four cylinder cars displace 1796 cc and produce either 184bhp or 204 bhp. The SLK 200 Blue Efficiency has the lowest CO2 emissions in segment and with the optional seven-speed automatic transmission it consumes just 6.1 litres of fuel for every 100 kilometres enjoyed. She's a nippy little wench and in fact blasts up to 100km/h in just 7.0 seconds. This compares with 6.6 seconds for the SLK 250 BlueEfficiency, which came with the seven-speed automatic as standard but a six speed manual box will soon be available.

Top of the range is the dynamic true sports drop head coupe the SLK 350 BlueEfficiency which storms up to the magic ton in only 5.6 seconds, a true sports car performance with a combined fuel consumption of only 7.1 litres per 100 kilometres. This is really a great V6 engine.

Back to the drive. Obviously we drove with the top up and found the car has all the appeal of a really great fixed-head coupe. Of course with the metal-work neatly stowed below the hatch the SLK takes on an entirely new dimension and because the wind in the hair has been a personal source of great motoring pleasure since the spring of 1955, the current SLK, this

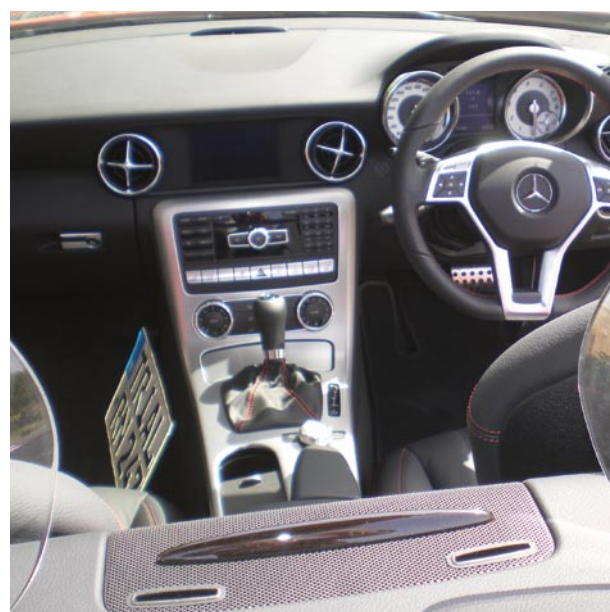
Any car as nimble, as fast, as potentially dangerous in the hands of novice or inexperienced drivers would be a potential and very quick death trap if it were not for the array of hidden electronic marvels that help out when things get fraught.

There are a great many marvellous fixed pieces as well as options available to help the driver recover from almost any unplanned deviation from the normal route, but, it was a great pleasure to see that the ultra packages are meant to help or will most certainly help, willy-nilly, the less enthusiastic motorists to enjoy the maximum potential that can be extracted from the drive. The SLK, as she comes from the showroom, has all the necessary bits and pieces like power steering, the Adaptive Brake System working with the ABS and Electronic Stability programme which helps drivers master critical braking manoeuvres and stops the car rolling backwards when starting on an incline and Attention Assist has been provided to help keep the driver awake on really exacting journeys. Obviously airbags are standard along with Neck-pro head restraints, and anyone unlucky enough to be clouted from the front by a pedestrian will benefit from the Active Bonnet which lifts the bonnet 8.5 cms, helping reduce the impact of pedestrians or cyclists at speeds of up to 55km/h.

The car in a simple phrase? Fantastic, everything for everyone. A true sports coupe in the European sense. 🚗

A truly glorious drive on a dreamlike summer's day, the very latest Mercedes SLK

words **Hugh Arnett**



I really consider myself lucky to have now driven each example of the SLK Mercedes as it arrived in Malta. This is in fact the third edition of the model since its launch in 1996, and it's even more beguiling now than it was in that earlier century. It really is a fabulous two seat sports Drop Head Coupe and in the glorious shade of red that the launch car sported it showboated Mercedes total supremacy to a thoroughly appreciative, if non Italian, gathering of knowledgeable Mercedes owners and potential owners as we all enjoyed a delightful evening of entertainment and fun, as the latest SLK was premiered at the royal Malta Yacht Club, down there in Ta Xbiex.

A few days later we were invited to take the car, test it, enjoy it and possibly write a few appreciative lines in an effort to summarise the excitement incumbent in driving such a magnificent example of the engineering skills found within the Mercedes works.

The first edition of this model came as something of a surprise as the metal roof folded down to allow a surprisingly large amount of crafted luggage to be taken on very decent long distance holidays. Nothing has changed on that count. The SLK is a remarkable two seat sports coupe that can accommodate two people and their luggage for a seemingly endless but obviously enduringly interesting motoring holiday.

The roof has been modified and now the owner can have a choice of three different 'tin' tops. The less exciting is a roof painted in the vehicle colour, then comes the option of a panoramic vario-roof with tinted glass, followed by a world first, the panoramic vario-roof with Magic Sky Control. This roof switches from light to dark at the press of a button. When the glass is clear it is absolutely transparent, ideal for cold winter motoring, whilst in the heat of summer the roof can be darkened to give an impression of cool and shade.

Or, at the touch of a button the roof can be folded into the boot, sun hats can be put on, the windows wound up, and the cooling system put on.

third edition of one of our favourite sporting cars really gets the adrenalin flowing with the roof either up or down. This great car actively enjoys being thrown around a bit, hunkering down in true sports car fashion as she blasts through corners. Obviously with low profile tyres there are few country roads that can be used with élan, but what the heck, a couple of days in rural Sicily every once in a while would provide all the dynamic excitement that the SLK promises especially if it has the optional AMG Sports package.

For various semi technical reasons this model, like the earlier SLK's on test, was driven just that little bit harder, and possibly faster than is normal over here, and equally obviously the hands off brake test from 80 km/h was enjoyed. Enjoyed? Yes, because there was no hint of deviation. The car simply screeched to a halt, ABS working overtime, in an absolutely straight line. It really did satisfy that sudden macho urge.

At a Glance.

As tested.

- Dimensions:** Length 4,134mm, Width. 2,006, mirrors extended. Height. 1,301mm
- Top Speed:** [SLK200] 237/240 km/h.
- 0-100km/h:** [SLK 200] 7 seconds
- CO2:** 142g/km.
- Engine:** 4 cylinders BlueEfficiency. 1796cc
- Power:** [SLK 200] 184 bhp
- Fuel consumption:** [combined] 6.1 litres/ 100kms.

