

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

VOLUME 23 NUMBER 4
JULY-AUGUST 2024

Mercedes-AMG SL 43

VEHICLES • EQUIPMENT • TECHNOLOGY • PEOPLE • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS • ATTRACTIONS



Mercedes-Benz and -AMG SL have a rich history spanning 70 years and, in that time, just seven generations. Change comes both incrementally and sometimes dramatically. Among the most noteworthy changes this century have been in con-

tinual powerplant evolution. Gen five featured V6, V8 and V12 engines. Gen six dropped the V12, leaving V6 and V8. And now gen seven, since 2022, replaces the V6 with a 4.0-liter hybrid turbo-four.

This might sound like powering down, but the newest smaller engines largely match or exceed the output of those they displaced.

Mercedes overall has multiple lineups, of course—the base (if you can call them that) Mercedes-Benz models, the Mercedes-AMG performance set, in a few instances a Mercedes-Maybach derivative, and the growing EQ stable of EVs.

Simplifying (or to some people limiting) this matrix, the current SL

lineup is AMG-only, with three versions—Mercedes-AMG SL 43, SL 55 and SL 63. See sidebar specs for all. All are soft-top roadsters.

This new SL 43 base model bears a 375-horsepower handcrafted AMG 2.0L turbo-4 (rated 27 mpg highway) and the well-established 9-speed AMG Speedshift MCT automatic transmission. A prestigious breed, even this base unit has a base price in six figures—\$109,900—with ours out the door at \$125,835, thoroughly optioned and still well shy of the midrange V8 SL 55's base price.

There are generally multiple reasons to build with a soft top versus a retractable hardtop—cost, weight, complexity, security, time up and down,

durability, and even style. We're not sure which of these ruled the decision on this round, but they're not the only ones to go back and forth on it.

The soft top implementation still retains a little operating complexity, as there are minor body panels that fold open and shut, but all in all, it's very fast—we rough-timed it at about 14.5 seconds to lower and 13.5 to raise, including windows.

SL has also gone back and forth over the years between 2+2 and two-seater (or two-seater with 2+2 optional). This generation is all 2+2.

But aaaaaah, a convertible. Some people say they wouldn't even want one, but there's nothing like it. We were fortunate to have this as temperatures were just inching up into 90s, before summer heat pretty much ends top-down season here.

You are already shopping a pretty ethereal mar-

ket in these, and if you have the \$31,400 differential, you still may want to also look at the V8 SL 55, or for another \$41,700 the top V8 SL 63. Of course these price differentials could buy cars for your kids, but that's part of this whole game before you even get started. And remember, not that many years ago the choices were V8 or V12, making this new lineup's whole shift a relative bargain.

It's all part of big moves in the big picture, as Mercedes has migrated from V12 and V8 down to smaller powerplants, still with high output, handcrafted wonderfulness, while adding electrified assets for power, fuel economy and other plusses. From a standpoint within their overall lineup, the AMG lineup and the evolutionary timeline overall, the new turbo-4 SL fits a nicely defined spot.

(cont'd)

Entry level SL

Gotta-have-it factor is universal in the lineup, while economy is a relative thing.

BY JOE SAGE



The red soft top on our MANUFAKTUR Moonlight White Mango matte paint SL looks so sharp, you almost hate to put it down. But note that you get it with a Red Pepper interior.

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Bremen, Germany
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD	Germany / Germany
PARTS CONTENT	Germany 85% / US/Can 0%
ENGINE	2.0L handcrafted AMG inline-4 turbo w hybrid assist: comb dir gasoline inj and intake manifold inj, turbo via electric-assist gas turbocharger
HP/TORQUE	375 hp / 354 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.0:1
TRANSMISSION	AMG Speedshift MCT 9-spd auto w wet multi-disc start-off clutch
MODES	comfort, sport, sport+DRIVETRAIN
DRIVETRAIN	RWD
0-TO-60 MPH / TOP SPEED	4.8 sec / 170 mph
SUSPENSION	F/R: AMG multi-link
STEERING	electro-mech speed-sensitive var ratio rack & pinion, variable pwr assist
BRAKES	F: 15.4 compos, vented/perforated, 6-piston alum fixed caliper; R: 14.2 compos, vented/perforated, 1-piston alum floating caliper
WHEELS	(opt) 21-in AMG multi-spoke Y-design black; F: 9.5x21; R: 11x21
TIRES	(opt) Michelin Pilot Sport 4S F: 275/35 ZR21 / R: 305/30 ZR21 perf sumr
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	185.2 / 106.3 in
TURNING CIRCLE	42.1 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	tba / tba in
LEGROOM (F/R)	tba / tba in
CARGO CAPACITY	7.5-8.5 cu.ft
WEIGHT	tba
FUEL / CAPACITY	prem unl / 18.5 gal
MPG	21/27/23 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$109,900
PAINT: Manufaktur	
Moonlight White Mango	3250
AMG CARBON FIBER TRIM	2850
AMG NIGHT PKG	750
WHEELS: 21-in AMG multi-spoke Y-design black wheels	
.....	2450
AMG TRACK PACE	250
AMG HEADS-UP DISPLAY	1100
BLACK MICROFIBER HEADLINER	1600
RED SOFT TOP	n/c
HANDS-FREE ACCESS	100
LOAD COMPARTMENT PKG	485
DA2 DRIVER ASSIST PKG: (long list)	1950
DY1 TOURING LINE: illum doorsills, htd steering wheel, AMG light display, AMG Drive Unit steering wheel buttons, active LED headlights, surround view camera	
.....	n/c
DESTINATION CHARGE	1150
TOTAL	\$125,835

2023 MERCEDES-AMG SL LINEUP

There are (3) versions of SL, and all are AMG:

AMG SL 43 Roadster	2.0L handcrafted AMG inline-4 turbo w hybrid assist, 375 hp 354 lb-ft, AMG 9-spd auto, RWD, 0-to-60 in 4.8 sec, 27 mpg hwy	▼ \$109,900
AMG SL 55 Roadster	4.0L handcrafted AMG V8 biturbo, 469 hp 516 lb-ft, AMG 9-spd auto, AMG Performance 4MATIC+, 0-to-60 in 3.8 sec, 21 mpg hwy	\$141,300
AMG SL 63 Roadster	4.0L handcrafted AMG V8 biturbo, 577 hp 590 lb-ft, AMG 9-spd auto, AMG Performance 4MATIC+, 0-to-60 in 3.5 sec, 22 mpg hwy	\$183,000

Back in 2008, we drove the full SL lineup from Santa Monica up into the mountains, then down to Palm Springs. Our takeaway then was that we would covet the big V12 as much as anyone, but really liked the balance better with the V8—and for considerably less money. We haven't had the luxury of driving the new lineup back to back, but purely by the numbers, the relativity is similar, as the new era of 4-cylinder versus V8 echoes that era of V8 versus V12. The smaller ones still have plenty of power, along with light weight, precision performance and the highest fuel mileage of the set.

Weight is not stated for this vehicle, but it is certainly the lightest of the trio, and its 375 horses are more than up to the task. When you fire it up, the engine acoustics are very satisfying. Acceleration in the fours is impressive and instant (the other two SLs hit zero-to-60 in the threes).

Suspension is notably firm, which we like, and impressive for any open car with its inherent flex. It could be beyond firm at times, though, bordering on stiff, noticeable especially on speed bumps, which were abrupt and induced body noises.

Brakes are so good, they may feel excessive until you get used to them, but nothing beats good brakes, especially on a performance car.

Perhaps hand-in-hand with its suspension and huge brakes, the turning circle is quite large—42.1 feet—and sometimes required an unexpected three-point turn. It all adds up nicely, though, to what feels like a small sports car, but is also a great, comfortable long-distance cruiser.

We don't always get into modes—our philosophy has leaned toward the idea that everything

should be just right one way, out of the box—although we've been trying them more often. On this, we embraced them, via their handiest interface, a dial on the steering wheel (you can also do a screen deep dive). A key revelation was that we loved the high performance of Sport-plus (S+), but in town its acoustics could be a bit over the top. But with this control, it is so easy to switch from S+ to S and back on a moment's notice, it's no more disruptive (nor less appropriate) than dimming your lights for an oncoming vehicle.

One detail we do not like are the smooth membranes covering seat and mirror controls (as well as some steering wheel functions). Mercedes has implementations of this in a variety of current vehicles, versus discrete metallic switches in others. Try as we might, it is too easy to activate the wrong mirror function, or to turn on heated seats when going for memory or vice versa. Our vote is for the metallic switches in everything.

Seen as a whole, Mercedes-AMG SL remains one of the purest expressions of the brand: maximum sportiness, maximum luxury, maximum personality and expression.

The new series' downsized powertrains still offer a lot—in some ways even more—and we are grateful for what they bring to the table. At the SL 43's \$110k price, it will be natural for some people to spend the extra dollars and buy the V8. Others who want to save more may look at AMG's less pricey sedan-based cabriolets. But for the SL experience, at its lower price, with a bit higher fuel economy and delivering the essential SL roadster experience, the SL 43 sits in exactly that spot. ■



FYI: TWO NON-SL AMG CABRIOLETS

There are (2) other AMG cabriolets (plus two C- and two E-Class non-AMG Benz cabriolets):

AMG C 43 Cabriolet
 3.0L AMG-enhanced V6 biturbo, 385 hp 384 lb-ft, AMG 9-spd auto, AMG Performance 4MATIC, 0-to-60 in 4.6 sec, 27 mpg hwy\$69,250

AMG E 53 Cabriolet
 3.0L AMG-enhanced inline-6 turbo w hybrid assist, 429 hp 384 lb-ft, AMG 9-spd auto, AMG Performance 4MATIC+, 0-to-60 in 4.4 sec, 27 mpg hwy\$91,500

A roadster first and foremost, we're compelled to show our SL with the top down, although we really liked its red top. You can, however, get it with a red interior.

