



## IN THE THEATRE OF UNREPENTANT EXCESS

Brabus founder Bodo Buschmann had a maxim: 'Never work for money; work for passion instead.' So, naturally, **RICHARD WEBB** felt compelled to test drive one of their latest refinements, the G500, just to hear its Jurassic roar.



The G-Class was originally developed by Mercedes-Benz for the Shah of Iran and for military use in the '70s. But in 1979 it was made available to civilian buyers. Hand-built in Austria, the Geländewagen or G-Wagen was at first a basic off-roader, with a modest line-up of engines and body styles, but by the 1980s it was being sold as a status symbol to the wealthy.

At first glance, the 2019 model doesn't really look any different to its immediate predecessor. It's bulked up a bit but the basic boxy shape and utilitarian heritage remain. Inside, however, Mercedes-Benz engineers have redesigned things pretty much everywhere – it's all-new, with very few parts carried over.

For Brabus, 'refiner' of Mercedes-Benz vehicles, there was, however, still plenty that could be fettled and enhanced. Established in Germany in 1977, Brabus's mission has been to make fast and luxurious cars even faster and more luxurious.

My recent visit to the firm revealed a deep fascination for the unique. 'Cars are rarely fully individual. So we transform each one into something exclusive, a truly limited-edition luxury statement,' says CEO, Constantin Buschmann.

'We are at the interface of hi-tech and high-end luxury, which allows us to develop many more exciting business ideas, like our subsidiary Startech, which now applies the same magic to Aston Martin, Bentley, Land Rover and Maserati,' he adds.

I was let loose on one of their latest models – the Brabus Mercedes-Benz G500. I set the sat nav to the foothills of rugged Schöckl mountain near Graz, Austria, which took me through Cologne and Frankfurt. Slinking through these cities with ease, it burbled and crackled through the gears in Sport+ which, of course, fed my inner child to no end.

You sit very high, but with its adaptive dampers there's plenty of grip as you sweep through bends. Happily, for purists, none of its on-road manners will blunt its mountain-goat personality on Schöckl or, closer to home, in the Richtersveld.

Brabus has massaged power from the four-litre, eight-cylinder bi-turbo engine to make it even more compelling: up from 310kW to 368kW and from 610Nm to 710Nm of mountain-moving torque. An exclusive Brabus body design and 23-inch Monoblock-forged wheels create an even more extravagant appearance.

Inside, upholstery craftsmen have applied especially soft and breathable Mastik leather and Alcantara to offer plutocrats endless possibilities in terms of colour variety and design variants.

But rationalising the need for a €259,900, 2,500kg off-roader capable of 0-100 km/h in just 5.7 seconds is tricky. The thing is, this car defies logic in a devil-may-care display of granite-tough charisma.

What hasn't changed is that outrageous curb appeal. There's nothing else available quite like the G-Class, and whether you're buying it to cruise Camps Bay or ascend Sani Pass in the rain, it'll handle that and more, with sublime comfort and capability. So, if the standard G500 is not mad enough, then it's Brabus all the way. ■