

## THE IMPOSSIBLE MADE PROBABLE

Not long ago most enthusiasts would have cringed at the thought of Porsche making an SUV. Then – horror of horrors – Bentley, Maserati, Lamborghini, Rolls-Royce and even Ferrari follow up with their take on the theme.

Now Mercedes-Maybach is at it. It's just a concept for now, and although it's likely based on the next generation Mercedes-Benz GLS, it will be a lot less ordinary. The Vision Mercedes-Maybach Ultimate Luxury, as it's called, will to some be a triumph of overstyling. The design team would like us to value its 'balanced proportions' and 'sensual purity'. For now, let's just say it has presence aplenty.

The affable Gorden Wagener, Daimler AG's design boss in Sindelfingen, AMG's headquarters, said recently, 'It is a totally new archetype. This concept has the DNA of an SUV combined with a saloon to create an ultra-modern SUV of three-box design.'

I blame China for all this. Buyers there have lined up to buy more than 500 Mercedes-Maybach cars a month, and is now by far the brands' biggest market.

Aimed squarely at billionaires, it includes a porcelain tea service embedded into an electric ebony-wood tray, while white nappa-leather lie-flat seats pamper plutocratic bottoms with aromatherapy and massage functions.

Whatever you think of its looks, it does reflect Maybach's design language, which will no doubt continue the marque's current renaissance.



WORDS: RICHARD WEBB, MIKE FOURIE. PHOTOGRAPHY: SUPPLIED

## SHARPENING THE SWORD

A crossover is a point of crossing from one side to the other. If that sounds tedious, it's because some crossovers are just that... Until Lexus pulled a fast one and lifted the veil on it Lexus LF-1 Limitless Concept. This crossover just upped a segment with some new thinking.

Apparently, Lexus found inspirational design cues from Japanese spiritualism to reflect 'molten katana', the creation process of the legendary samurai duelling sword. 'This is our vision for a new kind of flagship vehicle that embraces crossover capability without giving up the performance and luxury delivered by today's top sedans,' said Kevin Hunter of Lexus' California design studio.

Compared to current signature Lexus designs of the LS and LC, the LF-1 combines real drama without being over-the-top. Expect the LF-1 design language to shape the next-generation LX – and possibly the future of the Lexus range.



## CHURN UP SOME DUST

The Porsche Cayenne III is now available in South Africa and the line-up comprises three models. The Cayenne and Cayenne S are powered by turbo-charged petrol V6 engines (250kW and 324kW), and the Cayenne Turbo is said to be the first SUV to feature an adaptive roof spoiler for improved aerodynamics and braking. The Cayenne feels like an engaging driving machine from the moment you are ensconced behind its shapely wheel and acquaint yourself with its elegant, feature-rich 12.3-inch full-HD Porsche Communication Management touch-screen interface. And it can switch effortlessly from urban pottering to churning up dust on a rural dirt road, or from high-speed cruising to carving up a mountain pass.



## RANGE ANXIETY? NOT ME

I have a dog-eared copy of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends & Influence People* that exalts 12 ways I can win people to my way of thinking and six ways to make people like me. I needn't have bothered. I should have just bought a Tesla Model S instead. Everywhere I went, people talked to me about it, gave me their opinion, said 'well done for caring for the environment'. I won instant friends without the effort. Sorry, Dale.

Would I want to swap a hearty petrol engine for this soundless machine? I was hooked almost immediately on Tesla's turbine-smooth power, rocket-ship acceleration and that fighter-jet-like whine as it accelerated from 0-100km/h in under three seconds.

Off the motorway, on fast, sweeping 'A' roads and country lanes, it soon had me giggling in delight at its otherworldly performance. The interior is light and airy, with a giant touch screen for rich content and connectivity. With no gears to distract you, driving the Tesla is as simple as pointing this big, wide car where you want to go.

Despite remarkable efforts from other EVs, few offer a 450km range, sufficient for 'real-world' trips like my recent one from London to Rugby and back on a single charge.