



McLaren 650S

Come fly with me

Car review | Most airplanes are meant to transport holidaymakers comfortably over vast distances. Private planes are mostly used as toys to enjoy ultimate freedom. Most cars are meant for a daily commute from A to B. Sports cars are toys to enjoy sheer speed. McLaren now wants to show that things can be done differently with the "650S".

No, McLaren hasn't lost its faith. The "650S" isn't a family saloon. Quite the opposite! This two-seater sports coupé is a pure-bred racing car. Its looks are dictated by the wind tunnel, not by designers.

For maximum performance, weight has been saved wherever possible. That is why carbon fibre has been used as much as possible. To achieve an optimum balance, the heaviest part (the engine) has been placed exactly in the middle of the car. In fact, the engine is mounted so low that it hardly reaches the rims of the wheels. Underneath the glass "bonnet" only the air intakes can be seen.



Creature comforts

In the cabin it becomes even more clear how the McLaren 650S differs from its "hard core" rivals. Despite the use of carbon, the cabin isn't a bare box where parts of the construction are in plain view. Instead, the interior has been upholstered beautifully and minimalism has been turned into an art. For

example, the centre console is so narrow that the screen for the satnav has been placed vertically. It turns out that this works even more pleasantly than a traditional horizontal screen, since the driver wants to know the route ahead and not what's around the car.

Optionally, the 650S can be fitted with a high-end audio system by Meridian. The "monocell" of this car is almost a hostile environment for audio reproduction, yet thanks to countless hours of fine-tuning the sound quality is very decent indeed.



The seats are always tailor-made. The mechanics required for adjustable seats are just too heavy. Oddly enough, the steering wheel is (electrically) adjustable.

Perhaps the most outstanding quality of the 650S for a mid-engine sports car, is that both head and legroom are remarkably good! Under the front bonnet there's even a small boot that fits two small bags. Visibility is above average as well. The tiny rear window actually offers a rear view, and to make it even easier to park and manoeuvre there's a rear-view camera available.



Daily transportation

During the first, careful kilometres it isn't the performance but the enormous width and low ride that take some getting used to. The driver sits just a few inches from the ground while ground clearance itself is minimal. However, with a push of a button the bodywork can be lifted several centimetres in order to clear speed bumps. Suspension isn't rock hard, so this supercar can actually be used for daily transportation.



Let's fly

At low speeds the engine cries, hisses, nags and otherwise complains to encourage the driver to speed up. Well, okay then! When the accelerator is pressed just a little more, the 3.8-litre eight-cylinder bites, the occupants are pushed into their seats and the tension builds up like the apotheoses of a classical piece of music. The pace keeps increasing frantically and somewhere a high must be reached!

At first, performance levels seem to match those of an Alfa Romeo 4C, Nissan 370Z or other run-of-the-mill sports car. The difference is that the McLaren has only just begun! Now press the pedal to the metal and at around 5,000 rpm the engine positively explodes like no other! The speed increases so abruptly that it seems as if a film is played at fast forward all of a sudden. The driver can now only concentrate on the horizon, the pace keeps increasing, the other cars seem to slow down and the landscape passes by at surrealistic speeds.



Impressed? The McLaren 650S isn't. This was just a muscle flex in standard mode. Now engage "power mode", put the suspension in "track mode", say a little prayer and try again. The response to the throttle is now seriously fierce and all 650 horsepower jump for joy.



The pace increases so rapidly that the film that was in

fast forward before is now reduced to a blur. The occupants aren't just pressed into their seats, they're squashed to a pulp!

The 650S no longer accelerates, it bursts. After 3 seconds 62 mph is reached. While this may seem fast, the acceleration to 125 mph in 5.4 seconds is really crushing! And even above these speeds the 650S is more eager than the average hot hatch at 25 mph. The 650S is rear-wheel drive, but the extremely wide rear tyres (305/30R20) handle the power so well that four-wheel drive was never longed for during the test drive.



Technique

Thanks to bespoke technology McLaren manages to combine the excitement of a non-turbo engine with the lively character of a turbo engine. As a general rule the fun with a turbo engine is short but sweet. A traditional engine gradually builds up to a natural high. That's more exciting, but less intense. McLaren bridges the gap with a so-called "inertia push", which quickly increases the engine speed when the turbo doesn't.

On top of that, McLaren opted for a relatively small engine with a displacement of 3.8 litres. This is because it is quicker to rev than a large engine. Also, five- or six-litre engines are so big and heavy that their sheer weight will affect the performance of the car.



Handling

It is because of the lively engine that cornering is even more fun than usual. Except for the fact that cornering speeds are ridiculously high, once on the straight, speed is back up almost instantly.

The steering does require some getting used to. McLaren chose a traditional, mechanical steering. Yet, the feeling in the steering wheel remained awkward during the entire drive. This is partly due to some smart mechanics. All four wheels are connected, so that pressure on one wheel means release for the other, resulting in more stability when cornering. However, this also means the feeling in the steering wheel changes constantly.



The balance in the car is just about perfect. Thanks to the mid-engine architecture and the modest weight, the 650S feels very agile. Because of the carbon body

the 650S weighs just 1,330 kg; next to that a Golf GTI is a heavy weight! As the 650S is very communicative to the driver, even less talented drivers know instinctively where to brake, how to corner and when to accelerate.

The ceramic brakes also require some getting used to. These brakes can stand lots of abuse on the racetrack and will never "fade". The downside is that at first it seems like the brakes hardly work at all. When pushing a bit harder the braking distance from 62 mph is a mere 30 metres. At the same time the rear spoiler pops up to act as an air brake; just like on an airplane.



Conclusion

Does the McLaren 650S combine the thrills of a supercar with the practicality of a family saloon? Of course a basic family car is more practical and more comfortable. However, the 650S is just as exciting as other supercars while being more suitable for daily use. The 650S will clear a speed bump, offers some luggage space and does feature creature comforts like air conditioning and high-end audio. The engine noise is always present and the ride is firm, yet both aren't so tiring that driving long distances becomes an impossibility.

The lightweight build and ideal weight distribution mean that handling is sublime. The relatively small engine combines the excitement of an atmospheric

engine with the explosiveness of a turbo engine. This gives the 650S a unique personality. The McLaren isn't as cold and distant as a German or Japanese car, yet not as theatrical as an Italian. Only the gulwing doors are "planely" for showing off. ■



Specifications

McLaren 650S Coupe

Size and weight



Length x width x height	451 x 209 x 120 cm
Wheelbase	267 cm
Kerb weight	1.330 kg
Trailer	unknown
Trailer - braked	unknown
Fuel capacity	unknown
Luggage space	unknown
Tyre size	235/35R19

Engine and performance



Capacity	3799 cc
Cylinders / valves	8/4
Max power	650 PS @ 7250 rpm
Max torque	678 Nm @ 6000 rpm
Drive	rear wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	3 secs
Top speed	333 km/h
Average mileage	11.7 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	INF l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	INF l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	275 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 195,250
Price base model	Â£ 195,250