



2016 BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT SPEED

Tim Barnes-Clay feels the need for speed
in this blistering Bentley

The modernised 2016 Bentley Continental GT Speed has only had a few visual tweaks. Blink and you might miss them.

Externally, there is the new Bentley family front bumper, but the Speed's has been fashioned to look sportier. At its tail, the athletic British-spun brand's model integrates a new diffuser, and rear spoiler, adding credence to the latest chrome-effect eponymous badges on the front wings.

Step inside, and alterations involve different seat quilting, bigger paddle shifters and some fresh dials. The diamond shaped leather trim design is similar to a tailored jacket – and it feels and smells good, too. The wood is so shiny it is like a mirror – only slightly spoiled by easily seen smudges from curious fingertips.



FAST FACTS
Max speed: 206 mph
0-62 mph: 4.2 secs
Combined mpg: 19.3
Engine layout: 5998 cc, 12 cylinder, twin-turbocharged petrol
Max. power (bhp): 626
Max. torque (lb.ft): 607
CO2: 338 g/km
Base price: £168,300 / £195,595 as tested.

But the biggest change isn't visible. The car is now faster. In fact, it is the quickest production GT model to be made at the Crewe-based Bentley factory in Cheshire. Its newly tuned 6.0 litre W12 lump produces 626bhp and is paired with an eight-speed automatic gearbox. This equates to a zero to 62mph time of 4.2 seconds and a top speed – if you dare – of 206mph. That is mind-blowing, given the bulk of the GT Speed.

Behind the wheel, the brisk Bentley is as awe-inspiring to drive as ever. The engine's pulling power – almost enough to yank a fully grown tree from the ground – radiates a deep and rich soundtrack. Indeed, the fruity notes can be felt in your rib-cage. That said, the GT Speed is tremendously polite, whether going hell-for-leather or moseying through country villages.

You are not always aware of the Bentley's rapidity, though. Briefly dip the accelerator to get by that dawdling car you've been stuck behind for five miles and 50mph can turn to 90mph all too quickly. It is because the well-insulated cabin can distance you from reality, so that pink rectangular piece of card permitting you to drive is always in danger of being taken away.

The car's velocity is intensified if you keep the transmission in Sport mode. The magnificent machine becomes even mightier, cutting a swathe through the air as though wind resistance was butter and the GT Speed was a hot, hefty knife. It is not easy to become unstuck, but push into twisty sections of road too enthusiastically and the Bentley's 2320kg weight becomes obvious, with the suspension springs stretching to their limit as the 21 inch alloys bite into the bitumen.

You can ratchet the suspension from comfort to sport mode at the touch of a button, but most owners won't bother. For the majority of the time, the car wafts so beautifully around the British countryside and hammers so muscularly along motorways that fiddling with the tech seems too wearisome to contemplate.

This model year's Continental GT Speed is a roving instrument of epic proportions. With four cylinders more than its V8 sibling, the W12 Speed is, without doubt, superior in terms of clout. The smaller engine is not short of extravagant pace, but the 12-cylinder variant makes you wonder if size does matter after all.

The 2016 Bentley Continental GT Speed is a dazzling treat to drive – or be driven in. The ability to burn rubber while surrounded by opulence still seems to be a cocktail that works for those who can afford it. And, despite being around for well over a decade, there is no sign just yet of the model's appeal waning.

