



THREE'S A MAGIC NUMBER

Motoring expert, Tim Barnes-Clay, takes a look at three of the most magical motors available today



New Bentley Continental GTC

Taking cues from its GT coupe sibling launched in 2010, the new Continental GTC builds on the highly successful foundation of the previous cabriolet, which premiered in 2006.

While the first Continental GTC was elegant and understated, the assertive stance of the new model delivers a more contemporary and muscular presence. Advanced manufacturing techniques produce aluminium front wings without the need for seams or welds creating the look and feel of a coachbuilt car.

The four-seater luxury convertible features a fresh, even more spacious and sumptuous hand-crafted

cabin, with soft-touch leather hides, an extensive range of wood veneers, cool-touch metals and deep-pile carpets. In addition, the GTC's fabric hood is complemented by acoustic glass and underbody panels, for optimum noise isolation.

Behind the wheel, a wider track, sharper steering and retuned suspension provide an exhilarating and class-leading drive. Bentley's advanced all-wheel drive system features a new 40:60 rear torque bias (compared with 50:50 of the original GTC) minimising understeer during hard cornering and allowing you to manage the car's line and balance via precise throttle control.

This compelling dynamic package is combined with a more powerful 6.0-litre, twin-turbocharged

W12 engine as well as a new QuickShift transmission, enabling faster gear changes up to a top speed of up to 200 mph.

Rolls-Royce Phantom II

From a breath-taking Bentley we move to a remarkable Rolls-Royce. The legendary company's Phantom Series II has been unleashed, with an even more sublime drive-train than the original model.

From launch in 2003, the Rolls-Royce Phantom quickly established a reputation at the very pinnacle of automotive excellence. Now, the addition of an 8-speed automatic gearbox perfectly





complements the V12 direct injection engine, improving exemplary dynamics, as well as the famous Rolls-Royce promise of a magic carpet ride. Fuel consumption improves by 10 percent on the combined cycle and CO2 emissions fall from 385 to 347g/km as a consequence. Top speed is electronically limited 149 mph.

'Effortless' is a word that perhaps best epitomises the Phantom experience, both for drivers and their passengers. So an improved user interface, as well as the addition of new driver assistance technologies, have been built on the foundation of a new electronics' platform for the Phantom Series II. Audio visual content, satellite navigation maps and driver information is presented on the Phantom's new 8.8 inch control centre display.

These significant changes add further substance to a reputation the Phantom has built since launch of the signature Rolls-Royce. It is a new world. But it's a world in which the Rolls-Royce Phantom family will occupy a pinnacle position for many years to come.

McLaren MP4-12C

And so we move from the ultimate in luxury car manufacturers to the high-octane team at McLaren.

With experience in developing successful Formula 1 cars, the company has launched a new type of sports car. The groundbreaking new MP4-12C features technology born on the race track, and for the first time available in a road car.

The 12C was conceived at the McLaren Technology Centre in Woking, under the same roof as McLaren Racing's Vodafone McLaren Mercedes Formula 1 team. It has a cheek-rippling 0-62 mph sprint of 3.3 seconds and a top speed of 205 mph.

The MP4-12C has a carbon chassis: the first in a volume production sports car below £200,000. The MonoCell is a unique one-piece moulded chassis that weighs just 75kgs (165lbs). The MonoCell concept required it to provide



the perfect combination of occupant space, structural integrity, light weight, and relatively low construction costs. And the ideal chassis from which to deliver ground-breaking efficiency and performance in the sports car market.

The unique new M838T engine powering the McLaren MP4-12C is a 3.8-litre twin turbo V8 engine, designed by McLaren Automotive. Weighing 199kg (439lbs), the M838T features a dry sump lubrication system and a flat plane crankshaft, which has allowed McLaren Automotive's engineers to place the engine extremely low in the chassis, lowering the 12C's centre of gravity and in turn optimising the car's handling responses.

High level exhaust pipes exit the car from a mixing box rather than a conventional silencer unit, saving weight, and mated to the engine is a dual clutch, seven-speed 'SSG' transmission. Using the Active Dynamics Panel situated in the centre console of the 12C's cockpit, the characteristics of the SSG transmission can be switched through three different settings: 'Normal', 'Sport' and 'Track' modes. Each provide a progressive immediacy of gear shift, operated through finger-tip controls mounted on a rocker behind the 12C steering wheel: upshift by either pulling with the right hand or pushing with the left, and vice versa to downshift.

This 'one-hand shifting' principal, and the satisfying mechanical 'click' on gearchange, is reminiscent of the shift mechanics introduced and still used in Formula 1 cars. 'Automatic' mode, 'Launch Control' and 'Winter' modes can

also be selected on the Active Dynamics Panel, the latter changing all electronic functions to suit low grip conditions and delivering maximum driver aid and support. There is no traditional manual transmission offered; it seems the two pedal layout offered better scope to create a narrow, lighter, and more comfortable car.

As with the transmission, but independent from it, the 12C also allows you to select 'Normal', 'Sport' or 'Track' settings for the suspension through the Active Dynamics Panel. Each mode is responsible for managing roll control system pressure, Adaptive Damping and Electronic Stability Control (ESC) settings. This ensures bespoke tuning between handling, ride and transmission for focused track activity, dynamic road driving, or comfortable cruising.

Ergonomically, the 12C delivers on its aim of making you feel as comfortable as possible, whether driving in town or on a track. The steering column is centred on you, and is parallel to your seat and shoulders. The brake and throttle pedals are also placed directly in line with you. All primary controls are within a hands-reach yet surfaces and switches do not intrude or interfere during spirited driving.

But the creativity of the interior design itself also sets new standards. The whole focus seems to be on making the 12C cockpit a uniquely comfortable and functional space. The design simply offers a symmetry that wraps around you and makes you feel not only physically, but also emotionally comfortable.

