

MOTORING



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Question: why? Answer: why not?

An electric G-Wagen. I never thought I'd see the day...

THE Mercedes G580. Curious car. Big, bold and very, very blue. 100% electric. The thing is, I am still not sure why it exists.

When it was launched last year, the electric G seemed to be a weird choice from Mercedes. The G had quietly become an icon of the brand in the last four decades, a must-have for all kinds of celebrities, football players, musicians, etc. Real Mercedes aficionados love it too and it is one of those cars that does not seem to age.

The G was created as a utility vehicle and its image has always been associated with roughness, indestructibility, go anywhere, anytime, in any conditions.

To make it electric seems, well, curious. The internal combustion engines do appear to be an integral part of its appeal, and the sales mix reveals as much: the German constructor sells just 15 electric variants for every 100 units sold. The rest are V6 and V8 powered.

Does this make the G580 a kind of a flop so far? That's a pertinent question, obviously, but I cannot answer it. I don't know what Mercedes' expectations were, I don't know how much it cost to develop and I don't

know how much of the budget allocated to electrifying an icon is put under 'marketing investment'; 15% may be a good number.

From my perspective, driving the electric G is quite the appealing prospect. There is a lot to say about the engineering behind such a car.

The ladder-frame chassis, built using 4mm-thick steel, had to be adapted to receive the battery pack without compromising off-road ability. The 116kWh, 12-modules of the battery are stacked on top of one another, with cooling on both sides. To make it fit exactly where they needed it to fit, Mercedes had to remove three cross braces. To counterbalance that, the super-strong casing became an integral part of the frame. This is (much) harder said than done.

Although the G is not as big as it looks at a smidge over 4.6m, it is very wide: 2.19m. It's almost a square block. The petrol variants are not light, but this electric G580 is something else. At 3140kg, it is the heaviest car I have ever driven, with a weight distribution of 48:52 front to rear.

That makes for some funny comparisons. For



It's a G. It's electric. It's big and it's very blue. Yes, you can have it in another colour, but you will never go by unnoticed in one of these.'

instance, one G580 is precisely the same weight as two Ferrari Romas. The rear axle is heavier than a current Porsche 911 Carrera S. You could put three Abarth 500 on a scale and they would still be lighter than the Mercedes. I could go on.

There is one electric motor per wheel and, whereas that does not help with weight, it gives the G a surprising dynamic ability – and incredible off-road capability. When you forget you are driving an electric car – and yes, that did happen to me many times – this feels like a normal G. It has a lot to do with how the car rides, the immense torque and the way the familiar interior plays games with the mind.

It really is a great place to spend time in. Quality abounds, materials look great and the Burmester sound system is amazing. Mercedes' MBUX infotainment comprises two 12.3in screens: a simpler display behind the steering wheel and the touchscreen in the middle. Works really well too.

Seats are quite good and the G580 would make for an incredible travelling companion – if you can plan the recharge locations. The seating position is as high as it gets in a normal car, and you even look down

on bus drivers. That's kind of cool in a guilty-pleasure sort of way.

It has a slightly raised bonnet, compared with the ICE versions, in order to improve aerodynamic efficiency, there are vents in the rear wheel-arch flares, a small leading-edge roof spoiler and some plastic strips on the A-pillars. Changes are minimal, of course, because the G's appearance is not to be messed with.

Mercedes say it will do 468km in one charge. I say 370-380km is more realistic in normal driving. On the motorway in particular, the G580 is so inefficient it was averaging double what I had managed the week before in an EQA. Planning is key for someone who is thinking about road tripping in this.

However, I don't think that matters much to any potential buyers of this car. This is bought on an emotional level, much like the regular petrol versions. And it has one great trick up its sleeve: provided you have a wall-box at home or in the office, and you can fathom the size, this is an absolutely brilliant everyday car. Fun, funky and, as always, enormously characterful.

With 587 horsepower, 1164 Nm of torque (!) and a 4.5 second time to 100km/h, performance is also definitely worthy of the badge. Prices start at €147,500. Expensive? Maybe. I don't know. Probably not for those who will buy it.

The G580 is an experiment, and I like that Mercedes took the risk and built it. To the question 'why?', I say: 'why not?'



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