

UNASHAMED *luxury*

The chance to get behind the wheel of the Bentley Mulsanne, a car that's been eighty years in the making was just too good to miss.

Displayed in an art gallery, the new Mulsanne would be a masterpiece - a blend of sportiness, coach built elegance and solidity. Echoing the Bentley S-Type of the 1950s, the car has a bold front, dominated by the traditional Bentley matrix grille and prominent, classic round inner headlamps, flanked by two, smaller outboard lamp clusters, all featuring the latest in lighting technology. The lengthy bonnet, short front overhang and long rear overhang help to express a sense of might and

movement, reinforced by burly haunches and sharply sculptured lines which flow charmingly from the front wings to the rear. Uniquely designed 20-inch (and optional 21-inch) wheels reinforce the Mulsanne's commanding, sporting stance.

Inside, the aroma of leather and wood envelopes us instantly. The scent is wonderful, yet almost

overwhelming. And there is a reason for this - over 170 hours, almost half the entire build process, goes into crafting the interior of the Mulsanne.

Each steering wheel apparently takes fifteen hours to hand-stitch while stainless steel brightware gleams so perfectly, thanks to an intensive ten hour finishing process. The wood veneer takes five weeks to turn from a rough root ball into a full set of mirror-matched, fine-polished leaves - and a time-honoured tanning process is even employed for the leather.

The entire cabin is also encased within a 'ring of wood' waist rail with an unbroken panel of wood gracing the Mulsanne's dashboard. Inverted dial needles within the instrument cluster are reminiscent of early Bentleys, while the whole



dashboard and console design is a subtle reminder of the Bentley wings motif.

Naturally, sitting in the rear of the Bentley Mulsanne is the best place to comprehend the sheer graft that goes into creating the cabin. Amongst all the glossy wood and lavish leather, you also start to appreciate how the latest in-car technologies have been cleverly and unobtrusively placed within the lush interior. A multimedia system drives satellite navigation, audio/video, personal data, telephone and Bluetooth connectivity. The upper dashboard houses a multimedia screen, positioned discreetly behind an electrically operated veneered flap, while below sits a chic, leather-lined media player stowage drawer with connectors for iPod, USB and much more.

However, it's the pure punch of energy unleashed from the Bentley's 6¾-litre V8 engine that really clinches it. Affording huge power at low revs and self-possessed performance, while maintaining high levels of finesse at any speed. The powerplant, mated to an eight-speed automatic transmission with steering-wheel mounted paddles, delivers 505 bhp - and vast torque (752 lb ft) is delivered at 1750 rpm. This spectacular pulling power from just above idle and right across the rev range ensures that with a simple tap of the accelerator you are instantaneously rewarded with that distinctive, sonorous V8 burble as well as exceptional acceleration.

Quite simply, the Mulsanne is as near to motoring perfection as you can get. The only thing that lets it down is a smaller than expected boot but, that aside, very few car manufacturers can offer such a concoction of performance and refinement in a single vehicle.



FAST FACTS

Max speed: 184 mph

0-62 mph: 5.3 secs

Combined mpg: 16.7

Engine: 6752 cc Twin-turbocharged V8 petrol

Max. power (bhp): 505 at 4200 rpm

Max. torque (lb/ft): 752 at 1750 rpm

CO2: 393 g/km

Price: £225,900 on the road

