

AUTOMOTIVE

McLaren creates open cockpit car to promote "unparalleled driving pleasure"

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McLaren's Elva. Image credit: McLaren

By SARAH JONES

British automaker McLaren is looking to connect drivers with nature through a new design that takes the roof off the roadster.

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By removing the barriers of a windshield, windows and roof, the upcoming McLaren Elva is intended to immerse consumers in the driving experience. Part of McLaren's Ultimate Series of supercars, the Elva reflects McLaren's racing heritage in name and design.

"Specialty supercars with or without windshields are a win-win-win for exotic brands like McLaren or Ferrari," said David Undercoffler, editor in chief of [Autolist](#), San Francisco. "Customers love them, it gets the company heaps of press internationally and they also generate significant profits at the same time.

"By going this open-topped route, McLaren can generate considerable excitement and attention both in the press and among car enthusiasts and McLaren's own customer base," he said. "An open car like this also pays homage to McLaren's considerable racing heritage, as cars with a similar silhouette raced in a partnership McLaren had with a racing outfit called Elva in the 1960s."

Mr. Undercoffler is not affiliated with McLaren, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. [McLaren](#) was reached for comment.

Removing the roof

McLaren is looking back at its own history with the Elva. The model takes its name from customer versions of the M1A racecars developed by Bruce McLaren in the 1960s.

After the M1A showed its speed on the race track, consumers asked to order the car. McLaren only had seven employees at the time who were focused on the racing team, so it outsourced production of the cars to Sussex-based Elva Cars Ltd.



McLaren Elva with its predecessor. Image courtesy of McLaren

"McLaren continues to push the boundaries of supercar and hypercar development in pursuit of outstanding and unparalleled driving experiences for our customers, and the McLaren Elva epitomizes that pioneering spirit," said Mike Flewitt, CEO of McLaren Automotive, in a statement.

"The McLaren-Elva M1A [Mk1] and its successors are in many ways the true spiritual forerunners of today's McLaren's superlight, mid-engined cars with the highest levels of performance and dynamic excellence," he said. "It's fitting that the new McLaren Ultimate Series roadster a uniquely modern car that delivers the ultimate connection between driver, car and the elements and with that new heights of driving pleasure on road or track acknowledges our rich heritage with the Elva name."

Aside from being McLaren's first open car, the Elva is also the lightest road car model from the marque, partly due to the missing roof. The Elva also does not typically contain an audio system to pare down the weight, but consumers can request a complimentary sound system.

Courtesy of its lightweight frame, the car can accelerate from 0 to 124mph in 6.7 seconds.

Consumers can get an optional windscreen put on the car, but the car has been designed to divert air away from the passengers without it. In what McLaren is calling an Active Air Management System, air is pushed from the hood of the car and up around the riders.

The AAMS is off at lower speeds, but it automatically engages once the car reaches greater velocity. Drivers who want to experience the wind can opt to turn the feature off with the press of a button.

While the Elva was designed to safely carry passengers without a roof, riders may choose to wear helmets to protect themselves.

New for McLaren, the driver's controls are located either on the steering wheel or on an eight-inch touchscreen.



Cockpit of the McLaren Elva. Image courtesy of McLaren

"Our mission with the McLaren Elva was to create an open-cockpit, two-seat roadster that delivers the most elemental of driving experiences," said Rob Melville, design director of McLaren Automotive, in a statement.

"Formula 1-inspired shrink-wrapped volumes create a technical sculpture that is as striking as it is remarkable, the exterior flowing into the interior in a stunning example of a new and unique McLaren blurred boundaries' design principle that has allowed us to seamlessly bring the outside in to further enhance driver engagement while remaining true to our philosophy of making no compromises."

Keeping the model exclusive, McLaren is limiting the Elva to a run of 399 cars. Customers will need to custom order the car, with pricing beginning at 1.425 million pounds, or about \$1.8 million.

Sports cars

McLaren recently unveiled an earlier supercar through a sleek digital marketing campaign aimed at portraying its unconventional spirit.

Orders for the new 720S Spider opened as soon as the supercar convertible was revealed on the automaker's Web site on Dec. 8. A relative newcomer to the luxury automotive world, McLaren has high ambitions for its vehicles, as often reflected in its marketing initiatives ([see story](#)).

McLaren's headquarters in Woking, Britain, also houses its Formula 1 team. The brand's racing ties influence its automotive design, as it puts the function and performance of its vehicles first.

For instance, its P1 car was designed to be the fastest production car on road or track, leveraging the brand's understanding of aerodynamics ([see story](#)).

"This Elva reflects McLaren's ability to use its existing design language on a variety of different models, from fixed-roof grand tourers to drop-top supercars to this roofless and windshield-less model," Autolist's Mr. Undercoffler said. "It also allows McLaren to flex its creativity in creating a car with no windshield that is capable and enjoyable to drive at extremely high speeds.

"The Elva will likely sell out quickly, if it hasn't done so already," he said. "McLaren knows that if it offers a car like this in very limited quantities globally, it will have no trouble selling each copy, no matter the \$1.8 million starting price. Its ultra-wealthy fan base is always looking for the next ultra-exclusive model to use as bragging rights."

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