

AUTOMOTIVE

Mercedes-Maybach GLS SUV joins ranks of ultra-luxury, high-margin sports utilities

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Mercedes-Maybach GLS 600 exterior. Image courtesy of Mercedes-Benz

By STAFF REPORTS

Germany's Mercedes-Maybach has joined the ranks of automakers with ultra-sports utility vehicles serving wealthy consumers who prefer higher rides than offered by saloons or sedans.

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The Mercedes-Maybach GLS600 4MATIC will enter the market in the second half of 2020, adding company to the saloon that already accounts for one in seven S-Class models sold last year. Plush interiors, seat height, cabin technology, clean design and retracting running boards have been touted as selling points.

"The SUV vehicle concept has a major advantage for the luxury segment: the high seating position," said Martin Hlder, head of product management at Mercedes-Maybach, in a prepared interview. "In combination with the running boards, this makes access and egress outstandingly easy and convenient."

"Furthermore, the raised position in an SUV gives the occupants a different perspective of the surroundings, and many Mercedes-Maybach customers greatly appreciate this," he said.

"Incidentally, a raised seating position is nothing new in the luxury segment. The grand luxury saloons of the 1930s, such as the Maybach Zeppelin, had a similar seating height for the driver and passengers, and very similar proportions."



Mercedes-Maybach GLS 600 front seats. Image courtesy of Mercedes-Benz

Height of fashion

Following various limited-edition small series by Mercedes-Maybach such as the SClass Cabriolet and the G-Class Landaulet, the GLS SUV will sit alongside the Mercedes-Maybach S-Class in the brand portfolio.

The Maybach SUV launch comes soon after troubled British automaker Aston Martin Nov. 20 debuted its DBX SUV ([see story](#)).

Incidentally, both Mercedes-Benz and Aston Martin unveiled their SUV models in China, highlighting the importance of that market to automakers' bottom lines. The DBX had a reveal in Beijing and Mercedes-Maybach GLS600 in Guangzhou.

First introduced in the 1930s, the Maybach fell to the wayside until Mercedes-Benz parent Daimler revived the brand more than a decade ago. But the marque did not meet with much success.

In 2014, the Mercedes-Maybach was made a sub-brand of Mercedes-Benz. That brand re-alignment seems to have worked as more than 45,000 Mercedes-Maybach S-Class cars have been sold since 2015.

The [Mercedes-Maybach GLS](#) will compete with swish rivals such as the Rolls-Royce Cullinan, Bentley Bentayga, Aston Martin DBX, Lamborghini Urus and family member Mercedes-Benz G-Class.



Rolls-Royce Cullinan SUV flanked by other offerings from the carmaker, with the infinity sign in the background. Image credit: Rolls-Royce Motor Cars

A tier below those ultra-luxury vehicles are SUVs such as the Porsche Cayenne, Tesla Model X, Range Rover, Jaguar F-Pace and models from Mercedes-Benz and BMW.

Driving factors

Each ultra-luxury SUV has its own shtick.

The Rolls-Royce Cullinan and Bentley Bentayga seemingly chase the CEO/oligarch/billionaire for the weekends. The Aston Martin DBX and Lamborghini Urus transfer the illusion of muscular sports cars to family-friendly SUVs.

Other SUVs in the same set pander to similar requirements of exclusivity in a plush seating environment with a soothing drive and in the illusion that the cars are as good on road as off-road.



Bentley Motors' new Bentayga V8. Image credit: Bentley

But ego is certainly the biggest motivator for these purchases, as well as their high-quality material, aesthetics, daring colors and grilles, and advanced technology.

A whole new line of accessories, such as will be offered for the Mercedes-Maybach GLS, complete the lifestyle push.



Mercedes-Maybach GLS 600 rear seats. Image courtesy of Mercedes-Benz

Responding to market needs, many automakers are working on electric variants of their SUVs.

But the plethora of launches acknowledges a simple fact: profit margins on SUVs are way higher than those of saloons or sedans.

CANNIBALIZATION the SUV stealing share from the saloon is also another fear that has been brushed away.

"We are convinced that there will tend to be a distinction in demand rather than a substitution," Mercedes-Maybach's Mr. Hlder said in the prepared interview. "The differences in design and vehicle concept are simply too great for that."

"We therefore see the SUV as a supplementary offer," he said. "Our customers normally own several different vehicles and if they drive an SUV, we want them to drive a Mercedes-Maybach that offers them the luxury they expect from the brand."

Mercedes-Maybach GLS 600 model launching in 2020

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