

AUTOMOTIVE

Maybach leverages legacy with exclusive Virgil Abloh footage

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A scene from the new Project MAYBACH film, showcasing Virgil Abloh and Mercedes' second and final iterative creation, an electric Maybach showcar. Image credit: Mercedes-Benz

By AMIRAH KEATON

German automaker Mercedes-Maybach is capturing luxury's future by looking back at the final remnants of one of its most prized creative projects in collaboration with the late Virgil Abloh.

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A new, documentary-style film reveals exclusive footage highlighting the minds behind "Project MAYBACH," the last of the luxury entity and artistic titan's deliverables. The project's second iteration, an electric showcar, pushes the limits of design with unparalleled innovation.

"Mercedes Maybach is the ultimate in luxury, style and fashion," said Lauren Fix, automotive sector analyst and industry expert at [The Car Coach](#) and Car Smarts Brands, New York.

"The alignment with famous and well-known designers is a wise collaboration." This will bring attention to their brand from the rich and famous and away from the other premium luxury brands.

Ms. Fix is not affiliated with Mercedes-Maybach, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Project MAYBACH

The never-before-seen video footage explores how a long-term partnership between Mr. Abloh and the luxury subsidiary, beginning in 2020, culminated with the release of a limited-edition S-Class and accompanying Off-White clothing capsule.

"It's clear Project MAYBACH represents the combination of two distinct mindsets, with traditional luxury car design colliding with creative and functional engineering," said Karl Brauer, Executive Analyst at [iSeeCars.com](#), Woburn.

"The result reflects the stark contrast in these mindsets, but in a way that is oddly compelling," Mr. Brauer said. "I've never seen a single vehicle that simultaneously pushes so deeply into the realms of luxury and utility, and while it may be too much conflict for some viewers I like the boldness of the approach.

Mr. Abloh's own voice opens "Mercedes-Maybach x Virgil Abloh Project MAYBACH", atop the display of a sentence

which will frame the moments following.

"Use two words to drive you a new action," the screen reads, before the tastemaker's classic "- V" signature appears underneath.

This sentence, and the two words in question utility and luxury contextualize Project Maybach's purpose in its entirety.

Mercedes takes viewers behind the scenes of the luxury collaboration.

A narrator kicks off with a briefing on the history of the collective's work.

Gordon Wagener, chief design officer at Mercedes-Benz, initially joined Mr. Abloh in conceptualizing Project Gelndewagen, a redesigned G-Wagon and contemporary art bastion. Mercedes-Benz's Vice President of Communications Bettina Fetzer supported the promotion of the duo's first drop.

Narration further pins the inspiration for Project Maybach as an effort to transition the luxury label out of its urban dwellings and into the wilderness, flashing images of tranquil seas and lush forests.

These scenes are preceded by studio shots featuring masked figures, a fitting reminder of the timeframe's larger global context, and perhaps the root of a desire to escape.

90s-style graphics and grained footage add Mr. Abloh's graffiti flair to the 4:41 visuals.

The extensive clip includes a prototype of the "Maybach by Virgil Abloh." The electric show car mock-up puts the Ghanaian creative's architectural background front-and-center, appearing in a shade aptly mimicking desert sands.

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"The solar panels, black. The exterior side body in dark, dark matte," explains Mr. Abloh, breaking down the vehicle's various stylistic adornments before recommending, with ready-to-wear expertise in mind, that the car be made available in a spectrum of colors.

Mr. Abloh's design world knows no bounds. Opposites attract, as sophisticated elements like an ultra-smooth, tonal grey glass exterior are topped with functional features like a roll cage in eye-catching bright orange, all started from scratch.

"The exterior roll bars are clearly a dominant exterior feature that speaks to the rugged capability of Project MAYBACH, and to see those features sitting right next to flowing contours of an elite luxury vehicle is an example of

the power of this design," Mr. Brauer said.

"We're taking something that is nearly an absolute iconography of automotive design and we're extending its definition and capabilities," Mr. Abloh muses on screen.

"The vehicle itself is unique with premium materials and style," Ms. Fix said. "Even the wheels are completely unique and stand out in the crowd. Using real wood, real leather and other materials makes the Maybach a special vehicle."

By bringing viewers in with this behind-the-scenes content, Mercedes hopes to offer an insight into the genius of the late designer, whose passion and talent had, and will continue to have, a lasting impact on creatives around the world.

A frame of Mr. Abloh centering an expansive web usurped with the words "Inspire Us Forever" in the artist's famed font, followed by a brand tribute in the same handwritten style, closes the video.

EV x luxury

Hybrid and electric vehicle options are on the up-and-up, in terms of popularity among the luxury sector.

Lower costs and environmental concerns are top motivators among the general consumer group when it comes to electric vehicles, and automakers across the cost spectrum are looking to fully convert their fleets.

Although Reuters reports that less than 1 percent of the 250 million vehicles in the U.S. are electric, times are changing, with several luxury automakers announcing plans to go fully electric in the next decade. Although the automotive industry has faced several challenges and constraints from chip shortages and beyond, sales of battery-powered electric vehicles hit a new record with a strong year-end finish in the fourth quarter of 2021 ([see story](#)).

Mercedes-Benz's own parent company, Daimler AG, is moving forward with a structural realignment and acceleration toward electric mobility. Last year, the automotive company outlined plans to expand its offering of fully electric vehicles with four new models, as well as two new concepts for electrified vans ([see story](#)).

"The appeal of alternative drivetrains continues to grow as consumers see more of these vehicles coming to market," Mr. Brauer said. "The growing prevalence of EVs and hybrids is soothing consumer concerns over the functionality and dependability of these newer drivetrain designs."

"While some luxury buyers are happy to embrace new technology, a substantial portion of that demographic takes a more conservative approach to innovation," he said. "But the increased presence of electric-powered models across luxury brands over the past three years has made this technology impossible to ignore, as it is in the midst of transitioning from new and eclectic to conventional and mainstream."