

AUTOMOTIVE

# Mercedes-Benz, Lexus go off-roading with latest SUVs

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*New, unrelated initiatives center on the outdoors and rugged terrain. Image credit: Mercedes-Benz*

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By ZACH JAMES

German automaker Mercedes-Benz and Toyota Corp.'s Lexus are taking a similar approach to platforming their new vehicles.

In new campaigns, the companies spotlight their latest SUVs and their respective off-road capabilities. Both longstanding and storied nameplates, the Mercedes-Benz G500 part of the G-Class line and Lexus GX are heading into the unknown, potentially drawing in a crowd of aspirational and non-traditional luxury consumers who typically rely on dependability in all situations rather than comfort.

"Most cars, especially luxury cars, drive the same on roads and highways; they all have similar quiet, smooth rides and standard luxury features, from surround sound to heated seats and the latest technology," said Allen Adamson, cofounder and managing partner of [Metaforce](#), New York.

"But off-road is the torture test, even though only a tiny fraction of drivers will go beyond a dirt driveway in Greenwich," Mr. Adamson said. "It's more about what the off-road design and features signal about the buyer...it says, I am an adventure-seeking cool person, or I lead an exciting life."

"It's the confidence it gives buyers as being a differentiator just in case they need it in an emergency or storm."

Mr. Adamson is not affiliated with Lexus or Mercedes-Benz, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

## **Off the grid**

The great outdoors, desert landscapes and uneven terrain create parallels between the otherwise unrelated marketing endeavors.

As Lexus and Mercedes-Benz are both coming off of strong financial showings in 2023 ([see story](#)), the duo are also seemingly at the front of the pack when it comes to meeting the growing demand for electric vehicles. These campaigns platform the other side of the brands' offerings, uplifting gasoline-powered drivetrains and powerful performance over comfort and city trips.

*Lexus' initiative is wide-ranging, with creating memories being a constant throughout*

The Toyota-owned company seems to be targeting a large swath of the population, casting a diverse group of drivers and

passengers for its "Live Up to It" push, as children, millennials and older members of the populous are spotlighted within the specialized GX model. Released last year, the GX 550 Overtrail in its earth-toned colorway stars alongside the actors.

In the six short films released this week across television, streaming, social media, print, digital, audio and out-of-home placements families, single men and adult friends partake in various adventures within the vehicle. Some meet friends in the desert for off-road fun, others take a day trip from the city to visit arid landscapes and some divert from traffic, opting for non-traditional routes to reach their destinations over-the-top natural and computer-generated visuals become the norm.

"For more than two decades, the GX has proven that you don't have to choose between sophisticated luxury and undeniable capability," said Cynthia Tenhouse, VP of marketing at Lexus, in a statement.

"Live Up to It" inspires GX drivers to refuse to compromise, embrace their passions, and explore the exceptional."



*Fun voyages are at the core of the campaign, as Lexus plans to host a content hub titled "Extraordinary Adventures" to spotlight the excursions. Image credit: Lexus*

Meanwhile, Mercedes-Benz's approach follows a similar line, though with vastly different results.

An adult-contemporary cover of "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" originally sung by American singer-songwriters Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell scores the video, titled "The Gelndewagen." Dramatic shots of the G500 in a rocky landscape are interspersed with interior showcases of craftsmanship and technological advancement.

Other short films promoting the model, such as a walkthrough of its features, platform it as an off-road beast.

Although both companies' pursuits are centralized on off-roading and adventure, the German automaker takes a more subdued and serious look at the subject matter, seemingly aiming for the core luxury consumer rather than Lexus' broader appeal.

*Actors are outfitted in apparel specifically crafted for harsh conditions within the advertisement*

"This rugged imagery has driven the Toyota Land Cruiser and Land and Range Rover brand appeal for years," Mr. Adamson said.

"If it's good enough for a safari adventure, it will be cool to drive to my country club," he said. "These brands play off the original Toyota Land Cruiser and Land Rover DNA."

### **Spring shine**

Visuals included in the Mercedes-Benz and Lexus campaigns seem apt for the current season, as plant life, the outdoors and trips are on the minds of audiences everywhere.

Other automakers in the luxury space have also taken to this aesthetic.



*The G500 can be customized with options specifically suited to rugged terrain. Image credit: Mercedes-Benz*

Italian automaker Lamborghini verged off the beaten path in multiple ways, entering the Middle East and promoting its offerings to women in the region ([see story](#)). Meanwhile, fellow Italian automotive manufacturer Maserati stayed on the road, positioning its GranCabrio Trofeo convertible as a driver of summer fun ([see story](#)).

Nature also centered the latest campaign from German automaker Audi, which depicted the soon-to-launch Q6 e-tron model all over the globe ([see story](#)).

“Spring is when you make your summer plans, so it’s the perfect time to use exciting imagery to leverage a lifestyle option and image appealing to luxury buyers,” Mr. Adamson said.

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