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TEST DRIVE

Grand Tourer

2017 Mercedes-Benz SL450 Roadster

DAN LYONS | text and photos
Special to the Times Union

It's an automotive irony. Many vehicles are never used to do what they were designed to do. Pickup trucks are built to be able to haul heavy loads, yet most are filled only with people. And the only time most SUVs venture off road is when the driver misjudges a U-turn and plows through the neighbor's petunia patch.

Sports and high performance cars often fill this bill as well, with their drivers only scratching the surface of the car's potential.

While that's undoubtedly true of the Mercedes-Benz SL450, there's no irony here, because performance is

2017 Mercedes-Benz SL450 Roadster

MSRP: \$87,050 · As Tested: \$101,935

only part of the car's job description. The SL450 is part of a series of Grand Touring cars that also includes the SL550 (\$110,800), AMG SL63 (\$151,350) and AMG SL65 (\$219,850) roadsters. GT cars are designed to cover ground briskly, in luxurious surroundings. Style is as much a part of the bargain as is speed.

In a top-down tourer, part of the challenge is to make the transition as painless as possible. Mercedes pioneered the retractable hardtop segment, with the 1996 SLK. Hardtop and soft-top convertibles have their respective advantages and drawbacks. "Rag tops" have a timeless, traditional look. Hardtops are more snug and



IN ADDITION TO STYLE AND LUXURY, the 2017 Mercedes-Benz SL450 Roadster is also a performance car. Its 3.0 liter biturbo V-6 with new nine-speed automatic transmission effortlessly hits 60 mph in less than five seconds.

secure, but they eat up more trunk space when stored. The SL450's retractable top raises or lowers in the now-familiar mechanical ballet that takes one button and about 20 seconds.

The glass top design of the SL's hardtop makes it seem less enclosed in the cabin even when the roof is in place (and the degree of tint can be adjusted via optional (\$2,500) Magic Sky Control). It's snug as any coupe with the lid on, though the trunk space shrinks from a generous 13.5 cubic feet to 8.5 cubic feet. The main luxury lost here is the luxury of over packing.

In big ticket convertibles, wind flow management is no small matter. With windows down at highway speed in the SL450, there's moderate turbulence inside, as you would expect. Roll up the front windows and deploy the pop-up wind blocker in back, and air flow is cut

back appreciably. Just enough breeze here to make your hair look smashing as you pass by others (your hair, mind you, not mine). The middle ground (windows up, blocker down) is my preferred compromise, with a manageable amount of wind, but without the fenced-in feel of glass all around and blocker in back.

Raising or lowering the SL450's retractable top takes one button and about 20 seconds.

It's a short season in the northeast for convertible lovers. When fall arrives and you want to extend your top-down time, two onboard features can lend a hand. One is the standard, heated seats. The second is AIRS-CARF, which is a neck-level heating system, that wafts warm air from the head restraints on driver and pas-

senger side. There are three fan levels, and the system compensates automatically for changes in vehicle speed. It's a wonderfully decadent feature, as befits a luxury automobile.

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