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McLaren 650S Spider Road Test

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'If you want a convertible McLaren road car then there is only one option - the £220,000 650S Spider and Chris Adamson has had the privilege of driving one'.

Words and all photos by Chris.

The McLaren name will always be associated with motor racing, historically that has been through Formula One although, at the moment, the Woking team is struggling at the back of the grid.

But the brand has been hitting the headlines elsewhere in the sport by winning this year's GT3 world championship with the 650S Coupé.



While the 650 Coupé has been taking the plaudits on track it is its convertible sibling, the 650S Spider that is capturing the buyer's interest - three out of every 650s sold (and that's around 1,147 a year) is the drop-top version.

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For a relatively small production car-maker (last year McLaren sold 1,654 units and closer to 3,000 this year - while making a healthy £120 million profit), McLaren has a wider than expected model range; the 650S Spider sitting in the mid-range Super Series where prices start at £200,000.

Until a convertible version of the entry-level Sport series arrives next year (one of 15 new cars McLaren is promising by the year 2022) the 650S Spider is the only open-air experience you can have in a McLaren.

All McLarens use the same mid-ship, longitudinally mounted, twin-turbo, 3.8 litre, in-house designed V8 engine (built by Ricardo in Shoreham) with power outputs ranging from 540 to 737 PS - the amount of power determining the name of the model, in this case 650 PS.



With its race-car looks, low snout, cut-in door panels and flat topped haunches, it's hard not to stare for a very long time at the 650's purposeful panel work - but now it's time to get on-board.

There is an art to getting in and out of the 650S that involves putting your left leg into the foot well, sitting on the side-sill (to avoid clouting your head of the exposed edge of the scissor door) and then sliding sideways into the seat.

I had been expecting the seating position to be a typical sports car compromise, all sculptured figure hugging materials and no allowance of variation in the adult human form -



but not a bit of it, instantly you feel perfectly comfortable and supported and that's even without the optional racing seats.



Electrically operated seats and a moveable steering wheel allows the ideal driving position to be reached - you are going to have to be over 7 ft tall not to be able to get settled in here.

Surrounded by acres of Alcantara leather and lashings of carbon fibre trim this isn't the Spartan environment you might have anticipated, it's actually rather civilised for a race-bred piece of machinery.



The kit you get includes a Meridian four-speaker sound system, Bluetooth, USB and iPod connection, efficient dual-zone air conditioning and a satellite navigation system – my example also had the optional rear view camera and rear parking sensors.

Although the starting price is £220,000, the range of extras and bespoke options such as carbon fibre trim, racing seats, carbon roof and your own colour scheme means that no-one is going to walk out of a showroom unless they have signed a cheque in excess of £250,000.

For the practically-minded, the Spider does have some luggage space, a surprisingly generous 250 litres (8.83 cu.ft) tucked under the bonnet at the front. This location means the two-piece retractable roof has no impact on cargo capacity when it folds neatly beneath its body coloured tonneau cover incorporated into the twin rear buttresses.

Another practical consideration is fuel consumption and here McLaren has almost pulled off the impossible by squeezing out over 24 mpg with a gentle right foot.





On the Road

One of the added benefits of the Spider is that you get the best seat in the house to appreciate the wonderful bark that emanates from the eight cylinders pounding away just behind your head – this can be increased by lowering the heated rear screen that efficiently acts as a wind-stop when the roof is down.

Close the roof, an all-electric operation that takes 17 seconds and can be achieved at speeds up to 30mph, and the noise is muted and far less visceral – it's then that you pity anyone who has opted for the Coupé.

Having already glanced at the statistics, such as 62 mph in three seconds and a top speed in excess of 200 miles an hour, I was anticipating that the Spider would be quick, what I hadn't anticipated was the smooth and linear fashion in which the dual-clutch, seven-speed semi-automatic transmission achieves this.

Unless you are extremely gung ho then acceleration isn't brutal or head bashing, just sustained ground coverage that continues unabated the longer you keep the loud pedal depressed.

Flipping through the paddle shifts there is hardly a hesitation, turbo lag has been all but



eliminated and the power just keeps going and going.

What is even more surprising is that in auto mode the Spider will happily dawdle around town all day long. Gently burbling at under 2,000 rpm the mighty V8 cruises the streets in sixth gear....yes sixth gear, I had to check several times to make sure.

See an open stretch of road (rare in the UK these days) hit the throttle and it bursts into life with a gentle shove rather than a kick in the back and very, very soon you are in licence-losing territory.

McLaren adds to the fun with a Sport setting which firms things up a touch, hardly noticeable, and tweaks the throttle responses so that more of the horsepower is thrown into the equation a lot sooner.

This is probably of more use across the English Channel where the roads are less congested and where you can fully appreciate the 650's capabilities.

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And then there is Launch control and a Track button (I was advised to steer well clear of this one) that switches off much of the high-tech safety wizardry such as traction control.

A large proportion of McLaren customers do take their cars to track days and when you buy one you can sign-up for a track package which McLaren will organise for you - this is the time to turn the dial one more notch.

The fast and furious nature of the Spider I had been expecting based on the bare statistics, but what the written word can't tell you is just how great the ride quality is.

With a vehicle that seemingly sits just millimetres/inch fractions off the ground (and with the vagaries of Britain's road surfaces) I had been expecting to be booking a visit to the dentist after my 90 minutes behind the wheel.



Not a bit of it, the McLaren has one of the most comfortable and forgiving rides I have ever experienced and that includes some top end brands.

How the McLaren boffins have achieved it I am not entirely sure because it really shouldn't work this well smoothing out the road imperfections while, at the same time, losing none of the sure footedness and feedback of a true sportscar.

I'm told it's all down to the rigid but lightweight carbon fibre construction and all round pro-active hydraulic suspension ...that means that each wheel rides independently of its companions and the system can compensate enough to keep the cabin isolated from the lumps and bumps.

The only irritation is that when you run over something like a cat's eye there is a slight knock that momentarily judders through the steering from the Pirelli P Zero tyres set into the forged alloy wheels but it quickly readjusts to keep the momentum going.



Thanks to the carbon fibre MonoCell chassis of the 650S the Spider needs no additional reinforcing compared with the Coupé (the only extra weight is the retractable roof mechanism at 40 kg or 88 lb) so there is little or no detrimental effect on performance compared with the Coupéso why wouldn't you buy one.

Sitting so far forward in the cockpit means that you feel totally in control with the pin-sharp steering offering a nice weight and feel, certainly for my taste, although some might find it a tad firm.

For those worried about the increasing propensity of local authorities to install speed



bumps, McLaren has thought of that – a button raises the ride height just enough to get over sleeping policemen and then automatically lowers when you reach 40 mph.

Reining in any exuberant excess are carbon ceramic disc brakes with forged aluminium hubs that offer masses of stopping power without unsettling the handling.

To improve the aerodynamics the huge automatic rear wing (that can be deployed manually) improves the airflow and down force to the rear wheels where all the power is being concentrated.

Verdict

If you have a spare quarter of a million in your pocket to spend on a dynamic yet totally civilised two-seat sports car, then find one of McLaren's six UK dealerships and be prepared to wait for eight months for yours to arrive from the production facility sitting alongside the McLaren F1 team at Woking.



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Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Vehicle: McLaren 650S Spider

Engine: 3799cc Twin-Turbo V8

Transmission: Seven speed semi-automatic

Power: 650 PS (641 bhp) @ 7,600 rpm



Torque: 678 Nm (500 lb/ft) @ 6,000 rpm

Performance:

0-62mph: 3.0 seconds

Top Speed: 205mph

Fuel Consumption (Official Figures):

Urban: 16.1 mpg

Extra-Urban: 33.2 mpg

Combined: 24.2 mpg

CO2 Emissions: 275 g/km

Price (On the Road), from: £ 218,250

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570GT, report by David Miles, [PLEASE CLICK HERE](#) to take you there.