A Tale of Two McLarens

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McLaren GT. Photograph copyright Ant Henson.

Ant Henson test drives the McLaren GT back to back with its big brother, the 720S, to find out if it's a true grand tourer, a full-on

supercar, or something else entirely…

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Picture the scenario. You've a couple of hundred thousand pounds burning a hole in your pocket. You're keen to insert yourself into a low-slung, mid-engined, 200mph+, British supercar. You decide that the mighty McLaren might have just what you need in stock…
On opening up the McLaren website to take a deeper look, however, you realise that there are two closely related models on sale that could both capably fulfil the remit required of them. Both are built around spectacularly stiff and lightweight carbon monocoques, both are fitted with a twin-turbocharged, four-litre V8 engine mounted behind a pair of comfortable and supportive seats, both look dramatic enough to turn heads on any street on the planet, yet sophisticated and elegant enough not to attract accusations of showiness or boastful attention-seeking (depending on the colour…). These models are the McLaren GT and the McLaren 720S.
The two vehicles share a lot of common DNA and, some might argue, an overlapping sense of purpose, but McLaren themselves insist that, as opposed to the viscerally thrilling supercar experience we might encounter in a 720S, the GT really is a genuine grand tourer that can hold its own against the more luxurious end of the segment, and are keen to differentiate these models by more than just power and price point. As a result, they invited a slew of motoring journalists (myself included) to Millbrook Proving Ground in Bedfordshire to test them back to back in order to show the world that the differences are more than just skin deep…



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A TALE OF TWO MCLARENS

Firstly, a bit of background. Out of the two cars, the 720S is perhaps more of a known quantity. It's a direct successor to the 650S which itself followed the 12C (formerly known as the MP4-12C). The basic engine has gained 200cc and other improvements over that time and the performance, technology, styling, and interior quality have all evolved with each model but the basic formula has remained the same; a boosted V8 powers a carbon-tubbed supercar. The "Super Series" models have been highly successful as fully-grown, high-performance machines. They have sat below the upper echelons of McLaren hypercars (P1, Senna, Speedtail, and Elva) and spun off outstanding track-focussed variants (675LT and 765LT), all while being supported by the recently retired but supremely talented "Sports Series" (540C, 570S, 570GT, 600LT, 620R).



720S; copyright photograph from McLaren.

Even while juxtaposed against the obvious (and extremely adept) competition from Maranello, the 720S stands out as a deeply rewarding driver's car and a bona fide supercar. Naturally, 710bhp (720PS) at 7,500rpm dragging around less than a tonne and a half would never feel sluggish, but when coupled with the beautifully weighted and communicative electro-hydraulic steering (a McLaren trademark that is set to continue, even with next year's 671bhp, hybrid Artura), the steadfast torsional rigidity, and the trick chassis control system, the 720S delivers automotive thrills absolutely befitting its £218K+ price tag.
So where does that leave the GT? Ostensibly, with additional storage and a greater attention paid to cabin isolation and comfort, it should offer a more sophisticated long-distance experience to the 720S. On paper, at 612bhp (620PS) power is down by 98bhp (100PS) on its faster sibling and it is priced from £165,300, a not-inconsiderable saving of over fifty-two thousand pounds. Even though that figure can be rapidly inflated by the dazzling array of

big money options to tick on the spec sheet, there's clearly a lot of clean air between the models as far as pricing is concerned. Does that mean that the GT is a performance bargain? Or does the compromise of whittling a more softly-focussed grand tourer from the bombastic underpinnings of the McLaren range leave this car in an automotive no-man's land, serving neither duty as completely as could either its stablemate or the more traditional GT cars on offer from rival manufacturers?



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INSIDE AND OUT

I turned up at Millbrook on a frosty December morning to find out how these two models really compare, and to see if the GT could offer a unique value proposition of its own. After a short briefing from the McLaren team, we were sent out with members of the professional

driving team alongside us. The first car to go under my microscope was the GT. At first glance, the design is comparatively restrained, the car featuring traditional headlights rather than the “eye-socket” intakes afforded the 720S. The proportions are 100% supercar – low-slung, sleek, and perfectly balanced – but the details are unfussy and the lines clean. Given the enormous Senna-aping side intake ducts behind the doors, it’s obviously no shrinking violet but it does offer a more subtle first impression compared with the lairier models in the line up. The front quarters roll back dramatically from the nose of the car to produce a classic tear-drop shape, these lines then flow along the length of the car to meet up with the swooping rear roofline further back. It’s perhaps a cliché to say that the GT looks as if its moving quickly even when it’s standing still, but it’s an entirely justified cliché. Both the GT and the 720S could be described as looking “purposeful”, but said purpose for the GT might be to make rapid progress with minimum commotion. The 720S looks as if it wants to make rapid progress and (especially in the more luminous paint shades) make everybody within eye- and earshot know about it. Appearances are of course subjective but, to my eyes, the GT has a classic, resolved beauty about it. This is far more noticeable “in the metal” where the coherent harmony of the various styling elements can be observed in three-dimensions as you move around the car. In my opinion, it’s a styling triumph from every angle.


GT07 MCL

McLaren GT rear view. Photograph copyright Ant Henson.

Ingress is facilitated through McLaren's trademark dihedral ("butterfly") doors which hinge forwards and up from the base of the A-pillar. In the case of the GT these are frameless so there is no cut out aperture in in the roof itself to accommodate entry for taller drivers (or those wearing helmets) as there would be in the fixed roof version of the 720S. That said, the sills are low enough and the seats behind them are high enough for relatively easy access, at least for a flexible-ish thirty-something like myself. The only issue I noted was that the seats are just low enough, the A-pillars set back enough, and the sills just high enough that there is not a huge amount of room when swinging your outside leg into the car, so caution is advised not to whack your boots against the bottom of the dash as you do this. It shouldn't be a huge issue for most people of average height but there were a few marks visible in that area in the test cars I drove, and I had to pay attention not to add to the collection myself

The cabin materials used in the GT are a few notches along the luxurious scale compared to the 720S. Make no mistake, there are no walnut inlays to be found and there is nowhere near the opulence of an Aston Martin DB11 or Mercedes-AMG GT Coupé, let alone a Bentley Continental GT (which are arguably the McLaren's closest rivals in the "Grand Tourer" category at this price point), but the carpets are sufficiently thick and the harder surfaces clad in enough soft-touch leather to give the impression of a much more comfortable cruising environment than in the racier model. Particular highlights include the knurled aluminium knobs attached to various controls, although these are attached to slightly less premium feeling plastics as, for example, is the case with the air vents themselves. Aluminium features a great deal in the cabin and the light-weight brushed structure of the steering wheel (carbon fibre in the 720S) is a fitting statement of intent from a manufacturer that tends to value pure function over pure aesthetic form. The aluminium theme continues with the grilles covering the Bowers and Wilkins speakers in the doors, the single-piece "flappy paddle" gear selector unit, and the trim strips that also incorporate selectable mood lighting (perhaps a slight deviation from the function over form ideology but a pleasant touch nonetheless). The centre console eschews the aluminium in favour of

piano-black plastic and looks nice enough, although I would have personally preferred a more robust-feeling metal finish.



McLaren GT interior. Photograph copyright Ant Henson.

The seats are particularly comfortable. Far from being plush armchairs to sink into, they're much firmer and more supportive, yet despite the useful bolstering at the edges they are pliable and relaxing, all while snugly holding the driver in place on fast corners. These are the kind of seats that I would happily ensconce myself into to see off a cross-continental blast, and yet offer more than enough support to inspire confidence on the hairpin bends and mountain passes at the far end of the trip. Adjustment can be fiddly as the buttons are tucked away under the front corner of the seat by the central tunnel. With ownership comes

familiarity but on hopping into the car for the first time it takes a few attempts to figure out where the control for each mode of adjustment is situated. The adjustable lumbar support is particularly good, with a wide range of alteration possible. The seats in the 720S are a little more spartan and deeply bucketed for hard cornering but they also feel comfortable enough for daily use. After comparing them back to back, I'd pick the GT's seats over the 720S's for a long run any day but, when viewed in isolation, both offer sufficient cushioning for ordinary motoring purposes while being sporty and supportive enough to chuck the car into a tight corner without being thrown around yourself.

Once in place, the visibility and ergonomics are both excellent. The GT features an extensive glass house, including transparent C-pillars (also seen on the 720S) and an optional electro-chromatic roof that can tint or un-tint itself at the press of a button. The front of the car is incredibly easy to place, a fact that becomes even more relevant and evident when on the move. The only slight drawback to those dramatic side air intakes and broad three-quarter haunches is that they do give an illusion in the door mirrors that the back of the car is nearer to the driver than it actually is, in reality the rear end extends a long way further back than is immediately apparent. Any problems here are mitigated by a reversing camera assisted by additional 360 imaging to gain an idea of exactly where the tail is going when reversing. Due to the shape of the rear wings, the mirrors on the 720S give a much clearer visual indication of where the rear corners are at any given time. When moving forwards, it's as easy to place and pilot as any modern, mass-market car. In fact, the low position of the dashboard makes it easier than many, which really does inspire confidence to use the GT in everyday scenarios such as navigating crowded car parks or threading it through narrow city backstreets. All of the controls are within reach of the driver without needing to leech away concentration from the road ahead. The central, seven-inch touchscreen features a prominent (and beautifully machined) dial and smattering of physical buttons for common commands at its base, a welcome presence in an era of fully touchscreen-based controls that offer zero haptic feedback (although the GT and 720S share a very similar ergonomic layout, in the 720S the controls and touchscreen are all angled towards the driver, whereas in the GT they are much more neutrally positioned for use by the lucky passenger. Another notable omission in the GT is the 720S's trick rotating instrument binnacle that, when in track

mode, reduces the display to a bare minimum of speedometer, tachometer, and current gear). The drive mode selectors for the drivetrain and chassis are located just beneath the central panel and are easy to adjust on the fly without taking your eyes off of the tarmac disappearing under the front wheels. The pedal position is straight ahead of you allowing for complete alignment of your arms, body, legs while driving. The gear selector paddles have just enough weight to them and, being machined from a single piece of metal, respond to both forwards and backwards touches on either side (you can change up by either pulling the right paddle or by pushing the left paddle instead, and vice versa for changing down). The paddles are easy enough to reach without shifting hand position on the wheel, but those with longer fingers might find themselves occasionally touching the control stalks behind them when in a hurry. Small, measured movements are the order of the day here. The wheel itself is devoid of any buttons, which McLaren themselves have stated is a very deliberate decision to keep the driver’s main interface with the machine as uncluttered as possible.



McLaren GT front boot. Photograph copyright Ant Henson.


GT07 MCL
UK

McLaren GT rear boot. Photograph copyright Ant Henson.

Dotted around the cabin are numerous clever storage spaces (most of which are conspicuously absent in the 720S). In addition to the netting behind and between the seats to stow small objects, there is also netting on the central tunnel in each footwell, door pockets with covers that ingeniously prevent all of your belongings falling out when opening the butterfly doors, a glovebox, and a prodigious (although very shallow) 420-litre rear boot, that is accessible from the cockpit. Although obviously not suited for furniture or guitar amps, this boot can accommodate skis or a golf bag with ease. It is acoustically and thermally isolated from the engine beneath it by a highly durable cover, and items can be secured by yet more netting to prevent them flying forwards under heavy braking. The more you plonk in this boot, the less you can see through the rear window, but it does hold more than the average mid-engined supercar. The 150-litre front boot is a better option for your picnic hamper, as it provides a much deeper, squarer shape. Altogether, the boots provide a grand total of 570 litres, which is actually more than some small estate cars. It's clear that McLaren have gone out of their way to offer a truly practical alternative to their other supercars.

ON THE MOVE

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

When setting off, the car is as docile and obedient as a Ford Focus or Volkswagen Golf. The seven-speed dual clutch gearbox switches cogs swiftly but undramatically (McLaren have dubbed this an "SSG" or "Seamless Shift Gearbox"), which is to be expected from any modern dual clutch set up. The pedals are also progressive and undramatic in their operation at low speeds. The brakes and accelerator may be connected to immense stopping and going capabilities when required, but this is really the kind of car that absolutely anybody with a driving licence could just hop into and drive away without any unwanted theatrics, be they tragic or comical. Once on the move, the transmission in auto mode continues to change smoothly, but its willingness to hold onto gears is determined by the setting on the drivetrain mode selector. Both "Comfort" and "Sport" allow you to make rapid

progress (the latter more so than the former) without wringing the engine's neck too much. "Track" mode adds more urgency and seeks to extract every last horsepower from the V8 behind the seats. It's worth noting here that even in manual mode, the gearbox will shift up or down if it feels the engine is operating outside of a reasonable rev range. Likewise, even in auto mode it's possible to shift gears yourself using the paddles. There is so much torque from the four litre engine, even from very low driving speeds, that I found it possible to save first gear only for pulling away from a complete standstill. Even in fourth gear the car will pull strongly at suburban speeds. The engine only really "comes alive" and shows its character as you increase the revs but it's an immensely tractable unit in all conditions. The exhaust note is more of a deep "woofle" than a screaming howl, even when approaching the redline, but it has enough gruffness to make it deeply satisfying. In "Track" mode the powertrain appears to provide a more characterful soundtrack, especially on a crackly downshift, but the difference is much more subtle than I had expected. In all modes, the turbos give an endearing whistle as they build boost and chatter in an addictive fashion as they release it. It's a rarity to find a turbocharged powerplant with the intoxicating aural capabilities of a naturally aspirated equivalent and the engine in the GT is no exception. It does, however, fulfil its purpose well. Crucially, there is no noticeable exhaust drone while cruising at speed, which is essential given the market positioning that McLaren are aiming for.

MILLBROOK PROVING GROUND

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Out on the various track sections at Millbrook it became possible to evaluate the individual facets of the driving experience. I had the opportunity to drive both the GT and the 720S (in quick succession) to get a feel for straight-line acceleration, hard braking from 120mph, and handling (via Millbrook's challengingly technical "Alpine Hill Route" road circuit).

With the steering wheel centred, both cars (perhaps unsurprisingly) accelerate with gusto. The GT is a quick car, with the 0-60mph dash disappearing in a mere 3.1 seconds. From a standing start, 124mph appears after just nine. These are incredible figures, although the

aim of the drive was not to match them but to get a sense of the ease with which the car can carry out such feats. The power delivery is smooth and measured, the chassis compliant, and the traction control (when turned on) transparent yet reassuring. Although there is a definite shove in the back, the somewhat subdued exhaust note belies the rate at which speed accrues. It's a very easy car to floor it in without the fear of lighting up the rear wheels on every downshift. The track surfaces at Millbrook were still glistening with frost when I took each of the McLarens out so that forgivingness was more than welcome. The GT still commands the respect that any 612bhp supercar should be afforded, but it's also important to state just how approachable it is to a relative supercar novice. I'm personally more accustomed to piloting vehicles with few hundred fewer horsepower driving the wheels and yet it was – at the risk of repeating myself – as confidence-inspiring as a fast Golf of Civic. Braking is equally impressive with the car quickly slowing from 120mph to a complete halt. The official distance for a 124-0mph stop is 127m (417ft, or just over 11 new Routemaster buses), which is entirely believable. More important than the numbers is again the manner in which the GT achieves this. The nose dives a little as the pedal is slammed into the floor but the car remains balanced and composed throughout the process, with each of four tyres feeling as wedded to the tarmac as they had been on the move. There's no twitchiness or obvious sense of immense weight shift between the axles. This is partly down to the innate balance provided by the position of the engine but credit must also be given to McLaren's chassis and damping work. The GT feels as neutral while braking on frost and small bumps as it does on a perfect surface. The confidence that gives the driver should not be underestimated.



720S; copyright photograph from McLaren.

To continue on the theme of how the softer GT sits in the range against its more powerful sibling, there's no doubt that the 720S both is and feels much quicker. The acceleration is nothing short of savage and the increased connection with (or perhaps "reduced isolation from") the world outside makes for an altogether more visceral experience. The shove in the back becomes a Bruce Lee roundhouse kick to the spine, and the world appears to fray a little at the edges as it rushes past you at an increasing rate. This might sound rather hyperbolic, both McLarens are extremely fast cars in their own right and there are "only" 100 or so horses dividing them, but the 720S does deliver its thrills in a more frenetic fashion. Whether shifting manually or leaving the box to its own devices, there is a noticeable thump through the drivetrain as the ratios progress under heavy throttle. With the drivetrain in track mode, even with the traction control doing its job, the rear tyres were more than happy to light up and send the rear of the car into a little shimmy at 100mph… Of

course, it was probably my lead foot that signalled too much enthusiasm to the throttle as the engine speed dropped from redline to power band on the upshift, but it underscores a fundamental difference in character of these two driving machines. With its TCS enabled, the GT is more or less accommodating for any level of straight-line exuberance. The 720S, although also effortless to pilot casually at highway speeds, demands additional respect when pressing on. The acceleration stats are relatively close but, in the 720s, 60mph takes 2.8 seconds from standing, 124mph requires only 7.9 of them. If there was ever a case for disregarding figures on a spreadsheet, this would be it. The 720S *feels* much faster. Does that mean that a prospective buyer might feel shortchanged by the gap between them? Fifty-two grand says probably not. They sit at different price points and exercise different remits. The 720S *should* feel much faster and more manic. The GT *should* feel more docile and more serene. In my opinion it's a balance well struck.

On the Alpine Hill Route the frostiness becomes somewhat more unnerving. It's a challenging layout, designed to test a car's handling characteristics with hairpins, adverse camber, blind summits, and uneven surfaces. It's the perfect place to uncover any foibles in a newly-designed chassis but it's also the kind of route that will quickly show up any deficiencies on the driver's part. Thanks to tree coverage and with it being December, a lot of the road was still in shadow, and any run off between £165k worth of McLaren press car and solid metal barriers was all but non-existent. It was my first excursion to Millbrook and, truth be told, I was a little nervous. I needn't have been. The GT not only rides and handles exquisitely, it also gives you the confidence to fling it around even the most daunting looking bends. Naturally, a pro driver will get orders of magnitude more out of this car in terms of cornering speed than I could hope to, but the combination of immense levels of traction, predictable power delivery, and beautiful damping makes driving this car on this kind of road a profoundly satisfying experience. Like the 720S, the GT features electro-hydraulic steering, a trend-bucking rarity in the increasingly fully-electrified market. This provides supreme feedback with a connected sense of weight while also providing as much deftness and precision as you would ever need. In both cars, the steering is fantastic, but even in the slightly softer GT the turn in is sharp and certain, aided in no small part by the low centre of gravity, weight distribution, and longitudinally-central positioning of the

driver's seat. The excellent visibility also builds confidence and placing the front wheels is much easier than I had anticipated, despite the car being 2.095m (6'10.5") wide.
The GT and 720S both benefit from McLaren's innovative "proactive" damping systems. The 720S uses "Proactive Chassis Control II", a horizontally- and diagonally-linked system of hydraulically-connected, adjustable dampers that replaces anti-roll bars altogether. The GT has "Proactive Damping Control", which combines traditional anti-roll bars with sensors that can assess the interactions between the car and the road over time (less than a second) and use that data to intelligently predict the likely road surface ahead and thus prime the car's adaptive dampers to best react to the tarmac. These adjustments are incredibly rapid and can tweak the damping rate in around two milliseconds. By comparison, traditional "reactive" systems (that respond to what the wheel is experiencing in the immediate moment) can take 10-20 times as long to react. Both systems are astonishingly good at combining a smooth response over rougher surfaces with exquisite body control in corners, but the GT's Proactive Damping Control is primarily set up to optimise ride and minimise NVH (noise, vibration and harshness), whereas the 720S's Proactive Chassis Control II is more concerned with reducing body roll and improving grip by maximising tyre contact with the road. In both cars, the dampers are inverted (with the spring at the bottom) to reduce unsprung mass. After driving both cars on the same course on the same day, I have to say that both systems do a remarkable job of controlling the movement of the chassis in corners and keeping intrusive NVH from the road to a minimum, while simultaneously and cleanly communicating the state of play between tyres and tarmac to the driver with all finer details intact. The 720S is ultimately more rewarding in an out and out sorting sense but the GT is, hands down, the smoother cruiser. It flows between bends in an unflustered fashion yet always feels ready to be pushed a little harder and show off its myriad talents. Both cars will crash a little over larger bumps with the suspension in "track" mode, but even then the ride is surprisingly compliant. In both "comfort" and "sport", the two models both felt highly composed yet malleable (with the GT slightly more towards the latter end of the scale). The adjustment on offer between suspension modes is more about shifting up and down a subtle spectrum than negotiating a jarring Jekyll and Hyde shift in character, and perhaps the same could be said of the cars themselves…

In addition to the Alpine Hill Route and the straight-line acceleration and braking trials, the other proving ground experience on offer was to take the GT around the high-speed bowl. We were restricted to driving a couple of laps at 100mph but it was enough to gauge just how well McLaren have done with the acoustic isolation of the cabin. At 100mph there was some wind noise but not an overly intrusive amount. It's difficult to give a truly objective appraisal as the relative quietness of the unstressed V8 running through its seven speed gearbox made 100mph a quieter experience than it would have been in the average car anyway. In psychophysics, Weber's Law states that "the minimum increase of stimulus which will produce a perceptible increase of sensation is proportional to the pre-existent stimulus" or, to put it simply, you're more likely to notice an increase in wind noise in an already quiet vehicle than you are in an already loud one… The aforementioned lack of exhaust drone combined with the comparatively low engine speed makes any wind and road noise stand out more than it might have done otherwise (remember, the same seventh gear that took the car around a high-speed bowl at 100mph could have done the same at double that speed). The road noise from the Pirelli P-Zeros was also noticeable. While not surprising (the GT runs 225s at the front and a pair of meaty 295s at the rear), more deeply-carpeted and thicker-glassed rivals would sit happily on the ton all day with even less commotion. That all said, it is clearly insulated enough to make for pleasant high-speed cruising. Unfortunately, the chance to make a direct comparison with the 720S was not on offer, but the rest of the driving day indicated that the GT provides a significant improvement when it comes to NVH.

ON THE ROAD

Millbrook allowed the GT to be explored in conditions atypical of a British public road and against the backdrop of the more raucous 720S, but to really get a sense of what kind of value proposition the GT offers to a buyer in Britain, it has to be examined under less exciting conditions too. I signed one out and headed off into Bedfordshire in search of real-world scenarios that could deliver some insight into how this beast might fare in the wild. The three challenges I chose for our Hercules were as follows: rural, urban, and motorway driving.

It’s one thing to launch a supercar around a controlled environment like the Alpine Hill Route, it’s quite another to deal with the potholes and patches of mud and manure (and the oncoming tractors that probably left them there) that can be found on a typical B-road. Again, the outstanding visibility really shines here; it’s supremely easy to perceive where the front corners of the car are at all times. Apexes can be hoovered up like spilt cornflakes and there’s no momentary panic as a poorly-piloted Range Rover comes barrelling around a bend towards you. Rather than coming across like a wide car, it feels compact and absolutely wieldy at all times. It’s so easy to hug the hedges when required that it’s possible to completely relax and almost forget that you’re behind the wheel of a six-figure McLaren (sporting proportionately expensive door mirrors). When the Range Rover becomes but a dot in the rear-view and the road ahead is open for business, the GT turns its damping talents to full effect and allows for liberal application of the right foot without the fear of lumps, bumps, and crevices impeding progress or upsetting the flow mid-corner. With the suspension dial set to “Track”, this assuredness is weakened somewhat, with a mild twitchiness over more sudden disturbances that is to be expected, but the car still remains far more composed than (the apparent laws of physics seem to infer) it has any right to. In “Sport” and “Comfort” the fluency and poise over tricky undulations is exceptional. The body control is also so accomplished in “Comfort” that on a country lane “Sport” is almost rendered redundant. The “Sport” setting *does*, however, sharpen things up enough to be worth the effort of twisting it, while also remaining comfortable. It’s a testament to the broad capabilities of this car that in each mode I rarely found myself yearning to be in the other. The “Sport” mode is so comfortable and the “Comfort” mode so sporting that they are both eminently usable on the Queen’s twisty backroads and/or highways. The drivetrain mode is also flexible. The car is still very drivable when in “Track” mode, which can be combined with “Comfort” or “Sport” on the suspension dial to get the ultimate in motive urgency and aural excitement while staying cosily glued to even uneven surfaces. Speed builds progressively but with almost 400bhp/tonne it’s clearly easier to exploit the most scintillating areas of the rev range on more open and less populated roads than the extended London commuter belt has to offer. Even holding on to low gears will cause speed limits to be exceeded with no deliberate effort at all.

After several blasts around the countryside it was time to take the GT into a more urban setting. Note that this review doesn't extend to sitting in a two hour queue on the Euston Road in Central London, which would be a hateful experience even while sat in the back of a long wheelbase Rolls Royce Phantom while receiving a foot massage and knocking back Dom Pérignon. Even in a small town, though, it's possible to experience high kerbs, mini roundabouts, pedestrian crossings, and sleeping policemen. All of which are dispatched with aplomb by the GT. The ground clearance is ample, the turning circle is tight, and I've already banged on about how easy it is to keep the wheels from hitting anything they shouldn't hit. On the point of ground clearance it is also important to note that although the GT *does* have a nose lift, it is not required over smaller road humps. Fortunately, I didn't encounter any traffic-calming monsters so I wasn't forced to risk my invitation to the next McLaren press event by testing the limits of this clearance, but the subtle additional ride height over the 720S is a very welcome nod to practicality that pays dividends when out in the real world. Despite a few double takes from schoolkids and the occasional thumbs up from a white van driver, the GT felt surreally incognito a lot of the time. When it wailed under a railway bridge or through narrow streets between high shopfronts and houses it commanded attention with the soundtrack but the "Belize Blue" paint of my particular GT, while gorgeous, allowed it to blend in when pootling quietly. There's no way that the car lacks in visual drama when you really focus on it, but its styling is so classically smooth and uncontroversial that it attracts attention in a less shouty way than more striking or "blingy" alternatives would. It has the paradoxical ability to go unnoticed when passing by in the corner of the eye while being equally difficult to look away from once you have registered that it is there.

Out on the clogged M1, another perspective on the GT comes into view. All of the positive points mentioned previously align together and it becomes evident that this really is a liveable high-performance car. The noise isolation is effective against the rumble of HGVs in a manner that I doubt the 720S could match. Sitting low in the car is no barrier to safe manoeuvring at speed as the glazed C-Pillars add to the already-impressive visibility over the rear haunches. The steering feels relaxed with no jitteriness and the damping allows you to settle into the journey without any rude interruptions from the fickle changes in road

surfacing techniques that might disturb a more highly-strung vehicle. Both the infotainment display and the Bowers and Wilkins sound system do their jobs well and offer no indication of irritating peculiarities (although, as in any car, such niggles may well make themselves known in long-term daily use). I could choose to focus on the slickness of the sat nav or the clarity and rich bass response of the speaker set up but it's nearly the end of the article and I feel that to do so would be to miss the point of this car, despite its "GT" moniker. That all functioned very well without causing annoyance is sufficient, in my opinion, as nothing the real world can throw at the McLaren GT is enough to distract from its incredible endowments as a driving machine. Not every car of this caliber can say the same, and yet the GT is *so* capable as a supercar that most would expect any compromises to have been much greater.



Copyright photograph from McLaren.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up the GT's place in the line up I think it's fairest to simply state that while the 720S is far more accommodating and approachable than a car of such ferocity has any right to be, the GT is far more competent and enjoyable to drive than a car of such refinement has any right to be. There is overlap, but as the famed American sexologist Alfred Kinsey once wrote, "The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects". The GT and the 720S, while closely related and similar in many ways, occupy different spaces on the McLaren continuum. The price difference between them makes, in my mind, the GT all the more of a relative bargain.

When taken in the context of the wider Grand Touring segment, the McLaren GT is clearly not up to the same level of refinement as many of its rivals; but those rivals are also not a dynamic match for the McLaren GT. To quote Kinsey again, "The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. Not all things are black nor all things white." The McLaren GT might not be the perfect supercar, nor might it be the perfect GT, but it makes no sense to view it through the lenses of such strict categories. It is, in and of itself, an awe-inspiring machine. It's an old cliché that Americans tend to view "compromise" as a dirty word, whereas Europeans are more willing to embrace it positively as "the best of both worlds". The McLaren GT undoubtedly offers a compromise between a more hardcore supercar and a more laid back tourer, but I will happily take the "European" view that this compromise works entirely in its favour. It's the whole point of the car… And what a car it is.

WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC IN BRIEF:

McLaren GT

Engine: M840TE engine, 4.0 litre twin-turbo V8, 3,994cc

Power: 620PS (612bhp/456kW) @ 7,500rpm

Torque: 630Nm (465lb ft) @ 5,500-6,500rpm

Transmission: 7 Speed Seamless Shift Gearbox (SSG), Comfort, Sport, and Track modes

Steering: Electro-hydraulic; power-assisted

Chassis: Carbon fibre MonoCell II-T monocoque, with carbon fibre rear upper structure and aluminium crash structures front and rear

Suspension: Double aluminium wishbone; independent adaptive dampers with Proactive Damping Control. Comfort, Sport, and Track modes

Brakes: Carbon Ceramic Discs (390mm front; 380mm rear); Aluminium Calipers (6-piston front; 4-piston rear)

Performance:

0 – 60 mph (97km/h): 3.1 seconds

0 – 62 mph (100km/h): 3.2 seconds

0 – 124 mph (200km/h): 9 seconds

Quarter Mile (0-400m): 11 seconds

124mph–0 (200-0km/h) braking: 127m (417ft)

62mph–0 (100–0km/h) braking: 32m (105ft)

Top speed: 203 mph (326 km/h)

Fuel efficiency (Official figures):

Combined: 23.7mpg (11.9l/100km)

Low: 12.7mpg (22.2l/100km)

High: 30.4mpg (9.3l/100km)

CO2 Emissions (WLTP): 270g/km.

Dimensions: Length 4,683mm (15.36ft), Width (with mirrors) 2,095mm (6.87ft), Height 1,223mm (4.01ft), Wheelbase 2,675mm (8.78ft), Track (to contact patch centre) Front: 1,671mm (5.48ft); Rear: 1,663mm (5.46ft), DIN kerb weight (fluids & 90% fuel) 1,530kg (3,373lb), Luggage capacity 570 litres (Front: 150, Rear: 420)

McLaren 720S Spider

Engine: M840TE engine, 4.0 litre twin-turbo V8, 3,994cc

Power: 720PS (710bhp/530kW) @ 7,500rpm

Torque: 770Nm (568lb ft) @ 5,500-6,500rpm

Transmission: 7 Speed Seamless Shift Gearbox (SSG), Comfort, Sport, and Track modes

Steering: Electro-hydraulic; power-assisted

Chassis: Carbon fibre Monocage II-S, with aluminium front and rear crash structures

Suspension: Double Wishbone, Adaptive Dampers, Proactive Chassis Control II, Comfort, Sport, and Track modes

Brakes: Cast iron discs (367mm front; 354mm rear) and calipers (4-piston front & rear); (optional) Carbon ceramic discs with forged aluminium calipers

Performance:

0 – 60 mph (97km/h): 2.8 seconds

0 – 62 mph (100km/h): 2.9 seconds

0 – 124 mph (200km/h): 7.9 seconds

Quarter Mile (0-400m): 10.4 seconds

124mph–0 (200-0km/h) braking: 118m (387ft)

62mph–0 (100–0km/h) braking: 30m (98ft)

Top speed: 212 mph (341 km/h)

Fuel efficiency (Official figures):

Combined: 23.3mpg (12.2l/100km)

Low: 12.1mpg (23.3l/100km)

High: 30.7mpg (9.2l/100km)

CO2 Emissions (WLTP combined): 276g/km.

Dimensions: Length 4,544mm (14.91ft), Width (with mirrors) 2,161mm (7.09ft), Height 1,194mm (3.92ft), Wheelbase 2,670mm (8.76ft), Track (to contact patch centre) Front: 1,650mm (5.41ft); Rear: 1,612mm (5.29ft), DIN kerb weight (fluids & 90% fuel)

1,468kg (3,236lb), Luggage capacity 208 litres (Front: 150, Rear: 58)