Bentley Bentayga – Road Test

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Bentley Bentayga Speed
Photo: James Lipman / jameslipman.com

The Bentley Bentayga Speed luxury huge SUV…

…Test-driven by Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

The Bentley Bentayga Speed has ‘gold-plated’ the booming SUV sector.

Enthusiasts of the winged-wonder-cars thought Bentley was mad to add an SUV to its luxury saloon, convertible and coupé line-up, but of course this is no ordinary SUV.

Top end rival brands have gone down the performance route but Bentley has brought sophistication with speed, comfort with capability and created what can truly be described as a Grand Tourer.



If you have the wherewithal, the Bentley Bentayga Speed could be filled with bags and fuel, pointed towards the Mediterranean sun and the miles would roll by without stress or strain. Following the 18th Century Grand Tour of Europe so beloved of the rich and often infamous aristocracy would be very much on the cards with this car.



Taking its name from an iconic rock outcrop on Gran Canaria, a concept for the car was shown in 2012 before it went into production in December 2015, utilising a modular platform from parent Volkswagen Group – shared with the Audi Q7, Q8, Porsche Cayenne and Lamborghini Urus.

All Bentayga models are permanent four-wheel-drive while the latest top Speed edition is the most powerful and fastest in the series, and most expensive SUV fitted with the acclaimed 12-cylinder petrol W or double-vee design of nearly 6.0 litres.



That means its emissions are high and an owner pays a hefty bill in road tax and BIK for six years on top of a sky-high insurance premium and fuel bill. Some will definitely think that it’s worth the money for the luxury, refinement and enjoyment it delivers, along with the effortless performance.

Five models in the Bentley Bentayga series share the five-door body and all-wheel-drive transmission, from £130,000 to £182,200, depending on engines which comprise a 449 hp 3.0 V6 petrol-electric hybrid; 435 hp 4.0 V8 diesel; 550 hp 4.0 V8 petrol; 608 hp 6.0W12 petrol and 635 hp 6.0W12 petrol.

It is a very big car and it’s a matter of taste if you are a fan of the angular styling but it seats from four to seven depending on configuration and the bootspace is huge with a high flat floor, square sides and back.

At the other end the bluff front conceals a compact engine with very little to see despite its size because many plastic covers hide the working bits and only fluid fillers are visible.

Open the doors and the luxury immediately impresses with a few of our passengers expressing sharp intakes of breath at the leather and alcantara upholstery on the test model, the thick carpets with brightwork accentuated fascia, and a couple commented on the full length sunroof bathing the interior with light.






Speed





Access is very easy despite the high floor, and once inside the deeply padded but supporting seats with multi-adjustable sections on the front pair, are really comfortable mile after mile. Room is outstanding.

The high riding position not only gives a clear view of surroundings but with the deep side windows and low waistline it’s easy to judge parking and manoeuvring. Huge wipers both ends, powerful washers and extremely bright, long-range automatic headlights leave nothing out of sight.

For the driver, all controls immediately fall to hand or foot but I was surprised to see some stalks looked like they came out of a VW parts bin and their simplicity contrasted with the ornate controls on the fascia. The dials infront of the driver were huge, giving clear

indications of road and engine speed, fuel and temperatures. A multi-mode panel between the two main instruments covered status overall and live data and was pin-sharp in presentation. I liked the throw-back ventilation controls for the very efficient air conditioning throughout and the modern wifi remote for those in the back who have their own pad device.

The main infotainment panel was central, very big and clear for selecting media, navigation, communications etc. On the central console the eight speed automatic transmission lever had full auto or sequential manual, and was supplemented with up and down paddles on the column.

Behind the lever is the start/ stop ignition button and rotary selection for four ride and multiple traction modes. It defaulted to a standard Bentley mode for the ride offering the adjudged best compromise, but I usually went for the comfort as opposed to firmer sport or harder competition setting.

The engine made little noise upon starting and then ran almost silently at idle and up to the legal maximum a gentle throttle opening was accompanied by a pleasant ‘whooshing’ sound. Pressed harder or in the sport and competition settings and there was a throaty, rasping sound from the engine as the power poured out but it was never unpleasant. Gearchanges were silky in comfort mode but noticeably quicker and edgy when other modes were selected, but the responses were always instant with no delay.

I loved the huge, powerful and progressive brakes underfoot which undramatically slowed from any speed without fade or excessive effort, and the button parking brake securely held the 2.44 tonnes car on our usual steep test slope.

Turning to the steering, it was well weighted and finely varied with speed so it was precise at motorway speed and almost effortless to park – except the turning circle did not make it nimble.

Acceleration was so deceptive. Driven gently it was brisk but seek out the performance

modes and it transformed into a sports car, a 2.44 tonnes sports car, which could deliver stunning acceleration for a rapid getaway or overtaking in complete safety. All the time it was never showing or sounding stressed, remaining sublime and relaxed.



The Bentayga's adjustable suspension ranged from comfortably compliant through firm to hard and the road and tyre noise was ever present, but it was also useful to be able to raise it for rocky tracks or water wading and adjust for soft or low grip surfaces as well. Bentayga Speed uses an electrical anti-roll system to keep the tyres firmly on the road and putting down maximum grip.

The tyre noise was the most noticeable sound in normal driving, with engine muted and wind noise surprisingly low for such an upright design. It may have been helped by the aerodynamic skirts and rear wing guiding air around and over the body.

Handling was always delightfully controlled through the steering, brakes and suspension

and it could be hurried along winding sections with confidence as well as composure on motorways. Its size seemed to matter less the quicker we went, so responsive was the engine, gearbox, steering and brakes. Overall our economy was just under 20 mpg but we did see it stretch to 22 mpg at the steady motorway maximum, only to drop to about 18 mpg on a on-road cross country trip. Even idling it indicated the equivalent of 1.1 mpg.



Photo: James Lipman / jameslipman.com

VERDICT

Such a sophisticated car means a lot goes into it. Unfortunately during our test over a few days an oil warning light came on within hours of handing back but there was no apparent low level or high temperature and we believe it was a faulty sensor. It just shows that every car can be susceptible to sensor errors and is not perfect, but with the Bentley Bentayga

Speed it comes pretty close in my eyes.

The global sales of SUVs show no sign of slowing and with Aston Martin preparing to launch its DBX at the end of 2020 the competition will be intensifying. So it will be interesting to see how the Bentayga Speed will stand up in a very exclusive echelon of models.

For: Magnificent powertrain, performance, responses, brakes, very roomy, sublimely comfortable, highly refined and sophisticated interior, decent bootspace.

Against: High tax, insurance and BiK costs, high price, high fuel consumption, needs huge space to park with a big turning circle, occasionally jiggly ride, average warranty for the huge price.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Bentley Bentayga Speed luxury SUV.

Price: £182,200.

Engine/transmission: 635 hp 12 cylinder, 5.95 litres petrol engine, 900 Nm (664 lb.ft) at 1,500 rpm, eight speed automatic, all-wheel-drive.

Performance: 190 mph, 0 – 62mph 3.9 seconds, combined cycle 19.5 mpg.

Emissions: CO2 296 g/km,

Running costs: VED First Year road tax £2,135, Standard rate £465 for five years, BiK company car tax maximum 37% rate; Insurance Group 50E-T1.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 5.14 m (16.86 ft), W 2.00 m (6.56 ft), H 1.73 m (5.68 ft), boot space 430 litres (15.19 cu.ft), five doors/four to seven seats. Kerb weight 2,440 kg (5,379 lb).

Additional notes: £112 approx to fill the 85 litres (18.70 Imperial gallons) tank, each cylinder is approximately 500cc, the wheelbase is a tooth-brush width short of three metres or just under 10 feet.