

## Driven: Bentley Continental Supersports

Bentley delivers a knockout



**“Champions aren't made in the gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them - a desire, a dream, a vision.”** That’s Muhammad Ali talking and if you can imagine a lithe Ali in his prime, mixing ballet dancers’ footwork with steam-hammer hooks and jabs, you are half way to understanding what it’s like to be behind the wheel of a Bentley Continental Supersports.

Yes, at 621bhp it’s 3.5 per cent more powerful than a **Continental GT Speed**, produces more torque (800Nm vs. 750Nm, both from around 1700rpm) and is 110kg lighter. All of this — and some subtle bodywork revisions — has the effect of dropping the 0-60mph time down to 3.7 seconds and raising the top speed to 204mph. Amazing, astonishing even, but it’s the way this Bentley — the latest to carry the 1920s **Supersports**’ name — covers the road that impresses the most.



The UK was still in the grip of winter last week, so the decision was taken to run our test car on the excellent **20in 275/35 R20 Pirelli Sotto Zero** winter tyres. I drove a **Ferrari 599 GTB** to Geneva on these last year. They're good. So, factoring in the Supersports' all-wheel drive, you've got a pretty useful package to cope with 600+bhp in sub-zero temperatures.

As part of the weight-saving exercise, the latest car is a two-seater. The more-than-occasional rear seats have been replaced by a beautifully finished luggage shelf, a carbonfibre cross bar arresting any errant coats or bags. Of course, as with anything from Crewe, I expect if you *really* wanted rear seats...



The carbonfibre, 'clam shell' **Sparco** bucket seats in the front are brilliant. Beautifully trimmed in leather and **Alcantara** at **Crewe**, with just fore-and-aft plus backrest manual adjustment, these provide one of the most comfortable driving positions I've experienced. It's a classic case of 'less is more'; get the position spot-on to start with and you can dump the weighty electric adjustment for good.

From standstill to 40mph and any multiplication thereof, the car's ride is classic

Bentley: the oft-used description 'gliding' isn't a good word, implying as it does a floatiness bereft of feel. No, it's as if you have your own little man, spreading perfectly laid asphalt ahead of you as you drive. Maybe, for £173,600, you do.



Push on and the big car will dance on its 20in 275/35 ZR20 Pirellis, any input from the well-weighted steering allowing exact positioning on the road. The 40/60 rear-bias torque split of the all-wheel-drive transmission aids this, knocking out any incipient understeer yet providing the reassurance of ultimate grip. Forget dive or squat, and although the engineering team under the redoubtable **Uli Eichhorn** has retained the trademark 'distant gunfire' Bentley exhaust rumble, it's resisted the temptation to allow the nose to rise on acceleration.

And what acceleration. All **Bentley Continentals** are terrifically fast cars with a nigh-on 200mph capability. The **GT Speed** raised the bar and the **Supersports** has vaulted over it, **Bob Beamon**-like, into the record books. The car really does feel lighter and the revised, '**Quickshift**' six-speed transmission (unique to the car) reduces gearchange times to a mere twitch of a synapse.



Cross-drilled, carbon/ceramic brakes (420mm diameter discs at the front) work as well in stop-start traffic as they do hauling the car down from three-figure speeds. These brakes are standard, and are identical to those available as an option on the **Speed**, by the way.

Visually, the Supersports runs on all-new 20in alloys and the wider (by 50mm) rear track requires the regular Continental bodywork to be teased out a little to suit. New vertical grilles flank the familiar 'letter box' at the front, while the rear valence now has two elliptical exhaust outlets. All brightwork is now, er, 'Physical Vapour Deposition'-work, as the technique often used in the luxury watch industry has been employed to give a highly durable, smoky finish to the grilles and trim. It suits the car's character.



We ran through quite a few litres of **BP Ultimate Super Unleaded** (at 15mpg, or around 19 litres/100km) but this is the first '**Flex Fuel**' Bentley, so we could have used **petrol**, **E85 Biofuel**, or any mix of the two. By 2012, the company's strategy is to make the entire fleet capable of running on renewable fuel.

Looking at the opposition, the Supersports is a worthy competitor to anything in the **Ferrari 599 GTB/Aston Martin DBS/Audi R8 V10** segment. I'd love to drive it on a circuit, as snow-blanketed Britain wasn't ideal - but it did show off the merits of 4wd and the terrific winter tyres. This is a car that will do any Alpine run with ease.



However, when you think about it, it's in a class of its own: an outright sports car that's more Grand Tourer than hard-core, a coupé for commuting and competing, with usability and desirability in equal measures.

Worth buying over a **Speed**? Probably, unless you really need the rear seats — and specifying CCM brakes on a Speed halves the difference in price, anyway.



Returning to the great **Ali**, he once referred to himself as “The astronaut of boxing. **Joe Louis** and **Dempsey** were just jet pilots. I'm in a world of my own.”

In a way, the same can be said of the **Continental Supersports**.



The **Bentley Continental Supersports** costs, as tested, £173,600 in the UK (base price £166,600). Extras fitted were:

*Alloy Fuel Filler Cap (£170); Naim for Bentley Premium Audio System (£4950); Power Boot Opening and Closing (£630); Reversing Camera (in addition to standard ultrasonic Park Distance Control front and rear) (£800); 3-Spoke Dual-Tone, Hide-Trimmed Steering Wheel and Hide-Trimmed Sports Gear Lever (£320); Space Saving Spare Wheel (£300).*