

## DRIVEN: BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT SPEED CONVERTIBLE

Spending some formative time behind the wheel of Bentley's roofless Continental GT - the most substantial Speed

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26 January 2015

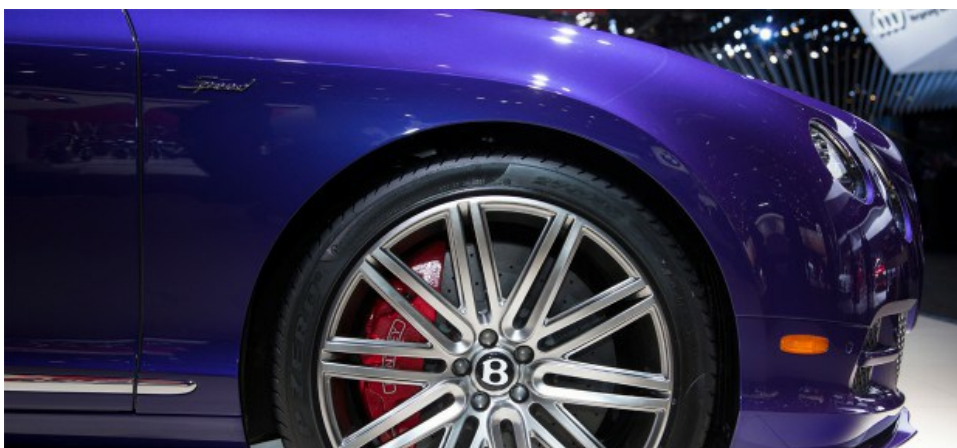


So many adjectives could be used to describe the open-air version of Bentley's top grand tourer. But if we had to pick one, we'd choose "substantial".

The Continental GT Speed has more substance in nearly every regard than its stable mates in the Continental family. More power, more speed and more opulence. In fact, the GT Speed coupé and convertible are the fastest, most powerful models in the entire Bentley line.

Generating a whopping 626 horsepower and 820 Nm of torque from a 6.0 litre twin-turbocharged 12-cylinder (W12) powerplant, the fixed-roof and convertible GT Speed can reach 332km/h and 327km/h respectively.

A lower ride height, re-calibrated air suspension, stiffer rear anti-roll bar/springs/bushings along with sharper steering and huge 53cm (21") wheels shod with grippy Pirelli P Zero tires promise higher cornering limits than all but the very limited edition GT3-R version of the Continental.



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Only if we understand the past can we move forward to analyse the present and, as the last stage, look into the future.

Alexander Mankowsky - Mercedes-Benz trend scout

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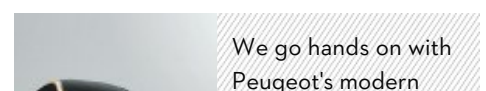


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So, we were substantially pleased when Bentley delivered a GT Speed convertible with less than 800 kilometres on its odometer to our driveway in the second week of January. With the thermometer hovering near -8°C it was certainly questionable convertible weather. But we asked ourselves, what would Woolf Barnato (famed “Bentley Boy” and later company chairman) do?

A push of the power operated roof control switch on the centre console opened the GT Speed to the heavens and the chill - something effectively combated via a combination of climate control, heated seats and a neck warming feature that channels a stream of warm air from a discreet vent just below the headrest.



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Sufficiently toasty, we drove for 30 minutes taking in the snow-covered landscape around the Washington D.C. area until an unseemly issue arose. Our GT Speed experienced some sort of software fault, causing it to rev slowly and shift reluctantly. The problem was only rectified after Bentley collected the car and reset its electronics, the automaker returning the now-fixed machine to us vaguely referring to the issue as a “communications problem”. Whatever the cause, it could be a substantially costly problem.

Top up or down, the GT Speed’s interior is an exceedingly pleasant place for two. On this particular vehicle, contrast stitching over diamond quilted leather on the seats and doors, burr walnut veneer on the dashboard and console, and “Speed” insignia embroidered in headrests and rendered in injection-moulded stainless steel on the dash impart a characteristically rich, special feel to the cabin.

The convertible’s standard “Cobra” seats are all-day comfortable and provide adequate support when the road winds and speed increases.



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However, in spite of all its power, the GT Speed is not a car that urges one to go fast. With its four-mode adjustable dampers in “comfort” and the car in “normal” driving setting, this immense two-door is almost lethargic.

Touch the throttle lightly and the 2,470 kilogram all-wheel-drive heavyweight takes a beat to overcome its substantial inertia. Coupled with its physical proportions, this make driving the GT Speed a bit more work than it should be in urban settings.

We found the car more nimble and responsive with the dampers dialled into the “Sport” setting with almost no penalty in ride comfort.

Nudging the knurled shift lever into Sport mode and putting one’s foot firmly down wakes things up, the twin turbo 12-cylinder delivering a deceptive swell of creamy-smooth power, effortlessly reeling in 100km/h in 4.4 seconds – a Bentley benchmark bested only by its GT3R brother.

Cornering is amazingly good for a grand-touring car of such substantial heft. Braking is good too, although we think the optional carbon-silicon-carbide brakes would be wise option for those planning to drive quickly.

Impressive, in most regards, the open-air GT Speed is undoubtedly the most substantial Continental yet.

**Visit the Bentley webpages for more**

*Images: Bentley Continental GT Speed Convertible at the **Detroit Auto Show***



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