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2005 Bentley Continental GT Review

Starting MSRP \$155,990



Test Drives

The Younger, Hipper Bentley

Drive one and you'll be everybody's new best friend.
by Nick Kurczewski

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The Bentley Continental GT will turn its driver into a de facto spokesmodel, with junkets lurking at every parking lot, gas station and red light. Passers-by insist on sitting in the driver's seat — bouncing with glee once inside, exclaiming, "I'm in a Bentley, I'm in a Bentley!" Fellow motorists shouting questions and compliments ensure that the windows stay down, even in a light drizzle.

Besides its inherent cachet, much of the fuss is over this Bentley's 552-horsepower engine and 198 mph top speed. Let those numbers sink in a moment. Starting at \$155,990, the Continental GT is arguably one of the best bargains on the market, undercutting such competitors as the Ferrari 612 Scaglietti (\$247,850) and Aston Martin Vanquish (\$234,260) by almost \$100,000. Only Aston Martin's new DB9 coupe (\$155,000) competes with the Continental GT on price — albeit with a 100-hp disadvantage compared with the Bentley.



Parent company Volkswagen deserves credit for offering more for less. "Without [VW's] backup and funding, it is very questionable whether Bentley could have ever brought a car like the GT to market," says David Goggins, Bentley's director of marketing.

Volkswagen has focused on promoting Bentley's core values of luxury and superior craftsmanship, while significantly boosting sales figures, since buying the company in 1998 — when it also tried to buy Rolls-Royce. Prior to the Continental GT's 2004 debut, only 300 to 400 Bentleys rolled off the company's assembly line in Crewe, England. By contrast, Bentley sold more than 2,000 GTs in the U.S. alone last year.

The Continental GT was designed for a "younger, more active" buyer than Bentley has traditionally targeted, Goggins says — typically in their late 40s and mostly men. Though still comprising only a fraction of total purchases, significantly more women buy Continental GTs (10% of total sales) than the larger, more expensive Arnage sedan (2%). Goggins figures the average age of Arnage buyers to be late 50s.

The Continental GT has a waiting list of about one year. Interest from tabloid boldfacers is helping Bentley become more relevant to younger generations. Paris Hilton, Elton John, Jennifer Lopez, Sharon Osbourne and Denzel Washington have all been photographed behind the wheel of the B-mobile. Bentley does not give away or discount cars for celebrities, Goggins says.

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