

# Beasts

## WITH CLASS AND STYLE

Jaguar and Mercedes Benz have strayed from conservative design to produce models that have both elegance and performance.

BY DEREK WATTS

Rihanna is a hit machine churning out more number one songs in the charts than any other artist. Sometimes I feel that the world's manufacturers churn out motor vehicles sticking to a formula and are too scared to rock the chassis.

Rihanna's secret is that she and her producers know how to reinvent her vocal and, of course, physical attributes on a regular basis.

Recent proof was her rendition of *Four Five Seconds* along with 72-year-old Paul McCartney wearing no make-up. Rihanna that is – I think Paul had been touched up a tad.

I am inspired by two brands that have taken that leap from mahogany road, overstuffed seats and polished hubcaps to leading the way in design and performance without sacrificing their iconic image.

Not that long ago, when I was rather disappointed that a certain manufacturer didn't seem to be embracing the modern era, I was curtly reprimanded. "Our customers don't like to lose the identity of previous models."

Really? Is that emanating from solid market research or a bunch of dinosaur designers not willing to stray from the well beaten path of history?

But there are some brave creative souls who are proving that even dramatic design changes do not have to harm brand identity in any way – and are being rewarded at the dealerships.

A decade or so ago, Jaguar and Mercedes Benz were the flagships of the successful executive – a bold presence, but overly solid, conservative, regal and the antipathy of a performance car.

There had been the major sporting exceptions of course, the stunning E-Type Jag, the revolutionary Merc 300SL Gullwing in the fifties... but they did little to change the 'senior citizens only' image of the badge.

Fast forward to March this year. A standard Jaguar F-Type R V8 (limiter off) smashes the South African land speed record on the Upington Airport runway. The timekeepers settle for a split of 294.68km/h although the supercar reaches over 300 on one of the runs. And the 13-year-old boast of the Porsche 911 GT2 is a distant echo because nothing on earth has the auditory snarl and crackle of the top of the range F-Type.

While Rihanna sings about *Four Five Seconds*, the F-Type blurs to 120km/h in just four seconds and with the Dynamic Mode switch flipped back it is a ride

that stirs the adrenal glands like very few mechanical steeds can.

I did say standard – but there is very little about this Jag that is standard as it has transmogrified, along with sister company Land Rover, from British aristocracy to adopted Indian parents Tata Motors.

It is, in my (and my wife's!) not always humble opinion, one of the best looking sports cars on international shopping lists and has managed to pull off that most difficult of design challenges – jaw dropping looks that retain all the elements of class and style.

And the muscular and raunchy front end is matched by a menacing rear with four trumpeting chrome-embellished



PHOTO BY BETTO RODRIGUES / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

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**JAGUAR F-TYPE R:**

**0-100KM/H: 4.1 SECONDS**  
**TOP SPEED: 300KM/H**  
**CAPACITY: 5,000CC**  
**8 CYLINDERS**  
**POWER: 405KW**  
**MAXIMUM TORQUE: 680NM**

PHOTO BY JOE SEER / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



exhausts that show that this car means business. But unlike the Alfa 4-C which is never happy poodling along suburban lanes, the F-Type doesn't show withdrawal symptoms when idling to the corner shop for a pint of milk.

And while mahogany has long given way to carbon fiber and burnished metal, the interior is neither flashy nor contrived. A symphony of red and black leather delicately stitched throughout, an electronically adjustable flat bottomed steering wheel that seems built for your sweaty palms and controls that don't need an MBA course to understand. The infotainment touch screen is relatively basic but superbly user friendly.

It is no wonder that the F-Type, which made its grand entrance as a convertible, has helped to keep Jaguar sales stable despite the economic downturn and collapse of car sales in Europe.

In South Africa, you can step in to a F-Type Coupe for less than \$80,000 but the beast, the supercharged 5.0 liter V8, is going to set you back around \$130,000.

It's not just Jaguar who has been pushing the boundaries in the 21st century. Mercedes Benz has disposed of stuffy design and average performance, to the extent that AMG, once the rebels who souped up the basic Benz, have

been fully incorporated into the brand since 2005.

The latest AMG offering is set to accelerate pulse rates on the highways and racetracks of Africa. It is the metamorphosis of the 2015 World Car of the Year into a BlitzBenz which must be about the best performance per dollar that you can get.

While the C63 AMG it is far too classy to be called a wolf in sheep's clothing, it is a four-second sprinter that will compete with most of the supercars selling at multiples of the price. And the S variant is even a shade quicker!

Despite the overwhelming accolades, some found the look of the new C-class to be more mini-executive than sporting, but it lends itself gloriously to the traditionally aggressive AMG styling. And at a smidgeon over \$80,000 it is a package that is going to be very hard to beat.

One of the most surprising developments in the second generation of Merc's most popular AMG is under the bonnet. The truth is that the '63' is a bit of a misnomer.

The 6.2-liter engine has disappeared and in a Houdini-like maneuver been replaced by a 4.0-liter twin-turbocharged V8.

If, like me, you are something of a technophobe, the simple end result is improved performance, torque and fuel efficiency. These fellows seem to have mastered the technique of downsizing far better than a lot of European governments!

Mercedes Benz South Africa were brave enough to let the local writers put the C63 AMG through its paces at Zwartkops Raceway where they have shown enough confidence in the track to build a world class driver training

academy run by the ebullient and skillful Clint Weston and his team.

With racing techniques being analyzed on two in-car cameras by Adrian Burford and his bewildering computer system, and laps being timed to the split second, it was white knuckle time for the scribes.

But the latest performance Merc showed that it is as comfortable and forgiving around the track as it is on a meander through the Cradle of Humankind.

So... am I leaving you with a V8 problem? Jaguar F-Type R or C63 AMG?

Not at all. If you are married with kids, or even own a miniature Yorkie that has to get to the park, it's the Merc. If it's just you and your partner, and you don't need to pack for long holidays or both play golf, it's the Jag.

Either way I'm jealous. 

