

From

CAR and DRIVER 2017 Mercedes-Benz SLC-class: Wave Goodbye to the SLK

Fewer cylinders for the rechristened roadsters.

2017 Mercedes-Benz SLC-class Mercedes-Benz SLC-class 2017 0.0 1.0 5.0

After 20 years, the SLK moniker is history at Mercedes-Benz, but the vehicle to which it was attached will live on. The compact roadster, sort of a diminutive SL, henceforth will be known as the SLC-class and arrives this spring as a 2017 model. It's part of the renaming scheme that was announced just over a year ago, and it underscores the marketing position of the two-seater as the roadster equivalent of the C-class. In concert with the name change, Mercedes has given this model a facelift and new power trains.

The SLC remains close to its predecessor, which means the SL sports a vastly different look from its smaller sibling. But that's okay, as the styling of the SLK didn't really need to be fixed. On the new model, the grille is a bit more prominent, and you get the brand's new, diamond-mesh look. The headlights are new, with full LEDs available as an option; the SLK's overly wide taillights receive new inner workings and look slimmer than before.



The interior remains largely the same, with minor changes to the controls and the trim. An upgraded electronics architecture supports new assistance systems—some of them standard, such as the collision-prevention system. The SLC continues to offer two class-unique options: the Airscarf, a ventilation system that blows warm air at your neck, and a panoramic glass roof that changes its opacity at the push of a button. The retractable hardtop now can be operated while moving at speeds up to 25 mph, which will allow you to finish the mechanical ballet with grace, instead of turning into an obstacle when that traffic light turns green sooner than expected.

The biggest changes take place under the hood: The AMG version drops its V-8 in favor of a twin-turbocharged V-6, and the regular model will exclusively use four-cylinder power. The SLK350's

302-hp 3.5-liter V-6 is history; the previous SLK300 with its 2.0-liter turbo four returns as the SLC300, with 241 horsepower and 273 lb-ft. A nine-speed automatic is standard.

Purists will mourn the demise of the SLK55 AMG, which was powered by a naturally aspirated 415-hp 5.5-liter V-8 that was unique to this model. That engine was originally slated for a possible second application in the C-class; it never happened, and it was built only in small numbers. The SLK55 AMG is replaced by the Mercedes-AMG SLC43, which is powered by the ubiquitous twin-turbocharged 3.0-liter V-6 rated at 362 horsepower and 384 lb-ft of torque. This translates into a zero-to-60-mph time of 4.6 seconds, says Mercedes. Top speed is governed at 155 mph. Mercedes is quick to point out that the SLC43's 60-mph-sprint time is just 0.1 second slower than the SLK55's, but with 53 fewer horsepower on tap (and also less torque despite turbocharging), it's sure to lag behind its predecessor at higher speeds. Tellingly, Mercedes no longer will offer an optional higher top-speed limiter on this model; on the SLK55, buyers were able to order a package that increased Vmax to 174 mph.



In fact, some of the SLC43's technology is so close to lesser SLCs models that it seems a stretch to call it a full-fledged AMG. The nine-speed automatic is distinguished mainly by software changes, the engine is not built to the "One Man, One Engine" standard, and the body kit is nearly identical to the regular SLC's. At least the chassis of the SLC43 sports significant upgrades, with unique suspension tuning and increased negative camber. Adjustable damping is optional, as is a mechanical limited-slip differential.

Twenty years ago, the SLK played a major role in rejuvenating Mercedes-Benz and stretching it beyond its previously well-defined boundaries. Now the SLC enters a lineup that has expanded so much it needs a whole new naming system to help buyers make sense of its myriad models.