

Mercedes-AMG A45 S 4Matic+: So much muscle, but where to flex it?

 By [Alan Duggan](#)

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Ten years ago, I enjoyed a few laps of the circuit at Dunsfold Park Aerodrome in Surrey, England - better known as the playground of the *Top Gear* gang - in the cockpit of a McLaren MP4 12C. Seated beside me was racing driver Mat Jackson, an amiable and unflappable professional who told me when to brake, when to flatten the gas pedal and basically how to avoid veering off the track and crashing into the huge Boeing 747 parked nearby.



Image credit: Alan Duggan



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I loved it, partly because speed is a wickedly alluring thing - even more so in a supercar - but also because I knew my hooligan driving behaviour wouldn't risk a weekend behind bars, possibly in the company of a heavily tattooed gangster who fancied me as a friend with benefits.

Which brings me to my latest test vehicle, the rip-snorting Mercedes-AMG A45 S - South Africa's quickest and most expensive hatchback. With a claimed 0-100km/h acceleration time of 3,9 seconds and a governed top speed of 250km/h, this car is clearly designed for people who like to go fast. But where to do it?

There's a stretch of road somewhere up the Cape West Coast where staffers of a certain motoring publication feel free to drive at twice the highway speed limit - and sometimes even faster - with the tacit or explicit approval of the authorities.

Sign here, preferably in blood

The bad news is that the location is secret: when new recruits join this particular publication, they have to sign an oath, possibly using their own blood, never to reveal where it happens.

I worked down the corridor from these guys for more than 12 years and occasionally shared a teensy glass of wine, and still don't know the secret location, so I was obliged to test this very hot hatchback within the confines of the traffic laws. Okay, not really.

Unsurprisingly, it handled twisty mountain roads with aplomb, offering just enough steering feedback to inspire confidence and gripping the road as if glued there, although even the slightest bump could be unsettling. The car's driver assistance technologies work so well in the background that you forget how much they are doing to keep you planted and safe.

If you were wondering about the + symbol appended to the 4Matic badge, it refers to the extra differential at the rear, featuring a multi-disc clutch for each rear wheel. This works by directing the engine torque where it's most needed, whether to the front or back - for obvious reasons, the bias is to the rear - or side to side.

Many motoring journos are known to scorn the owner's manual, the idea being that their technical knowledge is so profound and experience so vast that they instinctively know which buttons to press. In the case of the A45 S, delivered to me sans instruction manual, I soon yielded to bewilderment bordering on utter confusion.

Keen to know if I was the only one to experience this, I asked a Mercedes-Benz salesperson how long it took him to brief a new customer. He did it in three stages, said the man: at the initial handover, the customer was generally so keen to get going that the information went right over his head. On the customer's next visit, they went through the workings of the myriad bells and whistles a second time, and there was usually a third conversation during which they ironed out any unanswered questions.

From normal to insane

Having familiarised myself with most of the dashboard controls and other functions, I was able to try the various driving modes (basically, normal to insane) and monitor absolutely everything the drivetrain and onboard systems were doing in real-time. Very cool.

Steep learning curves aside, it was loads of fun. This is not a subtle car: floor your right foot and you'll be pressed into your seat as the 2l turbocharged engine delivers 310kW (that's 421 old-fashioned horses) to all four wheels with only the slightest pause, the 8-speed AMG Speedshift DCT swapping cogs with seamless alacrity until you're travelling at a speed so illegal that it's silly. Oh, and did I mention the sound? It's wonderful.

Still with the shameless lack of subtlety, I should mention the huge wing at the rear, the winglets and air dams, the low-profile tyres, the four exhaust tailpipes, the very low stance and the unforgiving sport suspension setup, which lets you know

with every road imperfection that you're driving a serious car and you'd better learn to live with it, buddy. I tried Comfort mode, of course, but the jolts didn't really go away.

Of crackles, pops and eye contact

The aggressive message certainly wasn't lost on the various hot Golf drivers (that is, the cars were hot, not their drivers) who pulled up beside me at traffic lights and avoided eye contact while making their exhausts crackle and pop. I didn't respond to the provocation: when it comes to exhaust pops and humiliating eager VW drivers, this Merc doesn't need a robot-to-robot dash to prove itself.

There is no point whatsoever in listing all the features of the Mercedes-AMG A45 S; simply assume that it has everything, from ABS and stability control to every other driver and safety aid imaginable. What kind of person would be willing to shell out over a million bucks to own it? For starters, I would say it's aimed squarely at driving enthusiasts rather than show-offs, exterior hardware notwithstanding. Where to experience its full potential? Good luck with that.

Mercedes-AMG A45 S 4Matic+: Just the facts

- Price: R1,144m (base), or R1,4m fully specced
- Top speed: 250km/h (governed)
- Acceleration: 0-100km/h in 3,9 seconds (claimed)
- Engine: Two-litre, four-cylinder, turbocharged
- Power: 310kW
- Torque: 500Nm
- Transmission/drivetrain: AMG Speedshift DCT 8G, dual clutch automatic, all-wheel drive
- Fuel consumption: 8,4ls/100km (claimed, but considerably higher in the real world)

ABOUT ALAN DUGGAN

Alan Duggan was the founding editor of *Popular Mechanics* in South Africa and is a former motoring correspondent for the *Sunday Times* and other publications.

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