

5 **2007 MERCEDES-BENZ GL450**

Hungrily eyeing America's seemingly insatiable appetite for large SUVs with luxury nameplates, Mercedes has put one of its own on the menu. Navigator, Escalade and Range Rover now have a new rival in the Mercedes-Benz GL450.

Despite the alphanumeric, the GL450 is motivated by a 4.6-liter, 335-horsepower V8. One of the new generation of V8 engines from Mercedes-Benz, the 4.6 delivers a 7,500-pound towing capacity. Power is transmitted by a seven-speed automatic transmission and Mercedes' 4MATIC full time all-wheel drive system. Suspension is Mercedes' AIRMATIC air suspension, which automatically lowers the GL for better aerodynamics and stability at speeds above 77 mph. The suspension can also be manually raised up to three inches above standard ride height for off-road usage.

Wood, brushed aluminum and leather comprise the interior décor. The driving position is excellent and comfort over the six hours we spent with the GL was abundant. On the road, the GL is smooth, quiet and

corners with minimal body roll. Acceleration is quite good. Mercedes claims 0 to 60 in 7.4 seconds, and we have no reason to dispute this.

The first Mercedes SUV to offer seven-passenger capability, the third row offers very reasonable legroom and is fairly easy to access. The rearmost seats fold flat at the touch of a button to enhance cargo space. A glass roof overhead keeps things airy for the passengers riding back there.

So will the GL resonate with the queens and kings of bling?

The outgoing Escalade had a pretty firm lock on that market and the all-new Escalade is the bling-iest one yet. Frankly, the styling of the GL is pretty conservative in comparison to the Cadillac and the Lincoln. The Mercedes has an air of quiet sophistication about it that will probably cause the gold-toothed hip-hop crowd to overlook it altogether.

If the 2007 Mercedes-Benz GL450 does score a hit, odds are it will be in the suburbs.

Pricing starts at \$55,675.



6 **2007 SAAB 9-5**

Frankly, we've always viewed Saabs with mild amusement. Their styling always made it kind of difficult to believe Saabs came from the same part of the world that gave us sleek Scandinavian furniture and household appliances.

Quirky appearance aside though, the 9-5 goes down the road as if it were America's Next Top Model. The Saab 9-5 delivers a smooth ride, accurate steering, powerful brakes, tenacious cornering, and ample acceleration from its 260-horsepower, turbocharged 2.3-liter, four-cylinder engine. Producing 258 foot-pounds of torque from 1,900 rpm, if things were based on ability alone, Tyra would be holding the 9-5's picture at the end of the show.

In all fairness, the new front end of the 9-5 does have a modicum of sleekness about it. The way the grille and headlights work together to give the car a bold face is quite remarkable. The interior is a model of ergonomic efficiency, gauges are easily deciphered, controls are logically arrayed and the seating is exceptionally comfortable over long distances.

The 9-5 delivers excellent visibility and headroom. And in the 9-5 wagon, that headroom also translates to loads (no pun intended) of cargo space. As a family ride, the 9-5 combines the best of all worlds. It's fun to drive, carries pretty much everything you want it to and it has the added distinction of looking like nothing else on the road.

Pricing starts at \$34,100 ■

