



a new 7-speed automatic transmission, showcasing a Direct Select lever (similar to the one found in the BMW 7-Series). The transmission also provides Touch Shift, allowing for manual gear changes at the touch of buttons on the back of the steering wheel.

Obsidian Black metallic paint encased our test car, while a Savanna cashmere leather interior delighted occupants. The base price was set at \$85,400 while optional extras elevated the final tally to \$103,895 – considerably more than the Bimmer. A wealth of features and amenities comprise the standard menu. An equally impressive list of available options are offered, designed to meet individual needs and satiate desires for personalization. Mercedes-Benz's 4MATIC all-wheel drive system will appear as an option later in the Fall on V8 powered models, with an AMG S-Klasse bowing later as well.

While the major emphasis is on enveloping inhabitants in plush surroundings that pamper the senses, the 2007 Mercedes-Benz S550 luxury flagship sedan behaves and performs more on the level

of a highly tuned sports car than its predecessor. Acceleration is very impressive, accompanied by a sweet engine and exhaust tone. The new 5.5-liter V8 engine delivers 26 percent more output than before, generating 382 horsepower and 391 foot-pounds of torque, capable of accelerating the S550 from 0-60 mph in 5.4 seconds. Transmission activity is so refined, it is barely discernible.

Handling response and characteristics are superb, but not as definitive and planted as those exhibited by the BMW 750i. It remains flat and stable, even under the most severe scenarios, such as attacking the twists, turns and elevation changes offered by the most challenging roads, while the active side bolsters automatically hold both driver and front passenger supportively and firmly in place. The Direct Shift, with Touch shift feature allows driver induced gear changes at will.

The S-Class is not a sports sedan per se, but rather focuses on comfort and luxury. It is however,

capable of turning in performance on par with the best, while transporting one in surroundings that are superlative indeed.

### 2006 BMW 750i

The esteemed Mr. Voss is not to be disputed in his overall assessment of the 2007 Mercedes-Benz S550. The car is a technological tour de force, the likes of which have not been seen since, well, the last S-Class. Mercedes has long incorporated all of the latest automotive features into one car and slapped a chromed alphanumeric on its butt that begins with an S.

The content level of the Mercedes is so deep that even the staunchest owner's manual thumbing gadget fiend will still be finding new features two to three years into ownership of this car. However, the same can be said of the 2006 BMW 750i that we drove in this comparison test.

BMW's 750i and Mercedes' S550 are the two pinnacles of German automotive engineering. That they are both endowed with

an extraordinary array of luxury features all designed to get you there in supreme comfort is prerequisite to their positions at the top. To coin a well worn marketing phrase, "when you absolutely have to be there overnight," an open highway and a high speed run in either one of these will get you there – both relaxed and refreshed.

For my money though, I'd prefer to go in the BMW.

If that highway has some twists and turns to it, the BMW will flat run off and leave the Mercedes. The handling of the BMW enables you to forget you're piloting a five-passenger luxury sedan and rip along as if you were behind the wheel of one of BMW's much vaunted 3-Series cars. The Mercedes on the other hand, while it definitely has chops in this area, is much more prone to understeer when it's time to dive deeply into a corner before changing direction quickly.

Many of you might be saying, well who would want to do that in one of these cars?

My response to that is for the money they're charging, you should be able to do



pretty much whatever you want to do behind the wheel. European manufacturers long ago established the fact that a car has to do more than demonstrate competence in a straight line. It has to have excellent dynamics when the art of driving becomes an issue too.

In the BMW 750i, you can attack nearly any circumstance with ease, just drive right into the situation and "git 'er done". In the Mercedes, you can attack too – after you've paused to select the sport setting for the adjustable suspension system, switched on the active bolstering in the seats, made sure the ESP is properly set...and etc...etc....

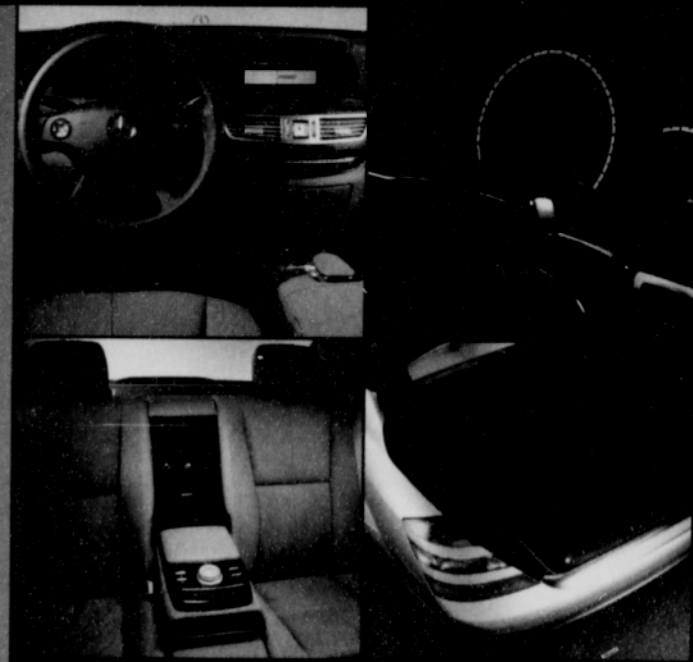
That the BMW goes on to provide palatial accommodations and a comfortable ride to accompany its stellar dynamic capabilities is for me, what a German luxury sedan should be all about. When you wish to be thoroughly engaged, there should be superlative execution at your beck and call, without having to adjust anything. And when you're just going down the road, the car should fade

into the background. The S550 relies heavily on driver-selected electronic aids to provide its over the road competence, where the BMW is more "just hop in and drive" in its approach. Ultimately, the overall quality of the 2007 S550 (when compared to the 750i) is well, soft. In terms of driving dynamics, in the S550, we have a car that is working hard to occupy the upper ground and is relying on a battalion of programmable software crutches to make it happen.

Bottom line, the BMW 750i and the Mercedes S550 – while technically in the same category, are really aimed at two very different drivers. If they were movie stars, the 750i would be the "action hero", while the S550 captures the "matinee idol" role.

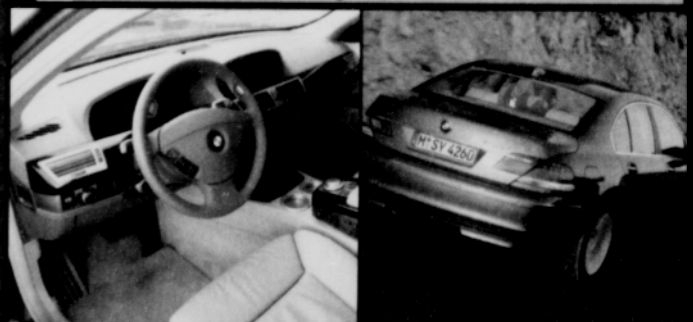
Like Jackie Chan, the BMW does all its own stunts, while the Mercedes, like Denzel Washington, captivates with its sophisticated good looks and charming mannerisms.

Yes, both do really well at the box office, but you'll definitely find a different set of fans out in front of the theater. ■



### 2007 MERCEDES-BENZ S550

Base Price:	\$86,175
Engine Type and Size:	5.5-liter, 32-valve V-8
Horsepower (bhp):	382 @ 6,000 rpm
Torque (ft./ lbs.):	391 @ 2,800 rpm
Transmission:	Seven-speed automatic
Drivetrain:	Front engine / Rear-wheel drive
Fuel Economy:	16 city / 24 highway



### 2006 BMW 750i

Base Price:	\$71,800
Engine:	5.0-liter, 32-valve V-8
Horsepower (bhp):	360 @ 6,300 rpm
Torque:	360 @ 3,400 rpm
Redline:	Six-speed automatic
Transmission:	Front engine / Rear-wheel drive
Drivetrain:	17 city / 25 highway
Fuel Economy:	5.8 seconds