



Leather made the cut as one of the “exquisite materials” Mercedes-Benz incorporated into the Vision Mercedes-Maybach Ultimate Luxury concept car it unveiled at Auto China 2018.

A luxury statement

The Beijing International Automotive Exhibition (otherwise known as Auto China) sits alongside its counterparts in Geneva, Paris and New York as the most important events for the world’s carmakers, giving them the chance to showcase their technological prowess, their design skills and their penchant for flair.

This year’s show, which took place in April and May, was no exception, with the leading automobile manufacturers travelling to Beijing to unveil their latest offerings to the market. Daimler-owned Mercedes-Benz was among them and it took advantage of the industry spotlight being fixed on the city to hold the world premiere of a new concept car from the Mercedes-Maybach luxury sub-brand.

The Vision Mercedes-Maybach Ultimate Luxury is a crossover vehicle modelled on Mercedes-Maybach’s S-Class vehicles. The brand describes it as a hybrid of a high-end saloon and an SUV, saying it combines “the comfort and typical strengths of both body styles”. Daimler’s chief design officer, Gordon Wagener, has said the company sought to blend the DNA of an SUV with that of a limousine, which, in his opinion, resulted in “a timeless vehicle” that confirms Mercedes-Maybach is “the ultimate luxury brand”.

Mercedes-Benz chose Beijing as the location for the big reveal of this model as China is the most important market for Mercedes-Maybach. It was no coincidence that the physical example on show bore red paintwork, given that in Chinese culture this colour is believed to symbolise good fortune.

Shared history

Daimler acquired the majority stake in the Maybach brand in the mid-1960s, but



Sitting in the Vision Mercedes-Maybach Ultimate Luxury is supposed to be a luxury experience, with leather one aspect of this. ALL CREDITS: DAIMLER

the relationship between the two groups dates back more than 150 years and their respective histories are intertwined on a much deeper level than it might appear at first glance.

The founder of Maybach, Wilhelm Maybach, was one of the two men responsible for the creation of the original Daimler group. He first met Gottlieb Daimler, the other, in the early 1860s. They went on to work together within a number of organisations, with Mr Daimler as factory/production manager and Mr Maybach his right-hand man in the role of technical/design director.

After opting to go it alone, the two industrial pioneers successfully designed and built new engines for a variety of purposes, a venture that eventually led to the founding in 1890 of the Daimler Motor Corporation. Initially dedicated to the construction of internal combustion engines for land, water and air transport, the company did not sell its first

automobile until 1892.

Gottlieb Daimler died in 1900, but Wilhelm Maybach remained at the company they had created for a further seven years. When he did depart, it was for a prominent German zeppelin manufacturer, where he was charged with developing an improved airship engine. While working on this project, he was in charge of the engine subsidiary of the zeppelin group alongside his son, Karl.

Maybach Motorenbau (‘Maybach Engine Construction Company’) was launched in 1912 as a developer and manufacturer of diesel and petrol engines, first for zeppelins, and later for rail cars. It built its first concept car in 1919, introducing the Maybach W3 production model at the Berlin Motor Show two years later. Over the next two decades it released a range of luxury vehicles, continuing to operate after Wilhelm Maybach passed away in 1929.

By the early 1960s, Maybach had



become a close collaborator of and engine supplier for the group which was by then known as Daimler-Benz. The aforementioned takeover occurred in the middle of that decade. The Maybach name was briefly revived as an ultra-luxury car brand towards the end of the twentieth century, but with limited success. It ceased to exist in 2012, with manufacturing of the last planned Maybach model completed in December of that year. That was not the end of the story, however. In November 2014, Daimler decided to revive it as a sub-brand of Mercedes-Benz and it has since released models like the S560 and S680.

Interior comforts

Back in Beijing, Hubertus Troska, Daimler board member responsible for the Greater China region, described the modern-day world of Mercedes-Maybach as one of "utmost perfection". He also revealed that the "unusual idea" for the

Vision Mercedes-Maybach Ultimate Luxury had in fact come from designers at the group's advanced design studio in the Chinese city. Their investigation into whether it was possible to blend the elegance of a sedan with the strength of an SUV led to this concept car, which is conceived as an electric vehicle.

Mercedes Benz has said it has been designed to "give rise to a luxury experience at the highest level". It claims to have achieved this thanks to the raised seat position, the elegant design and the incorporation of what it calls "the finest materials". It is in this area that leather finds its role.

The vehicle on show in Beijing had crystal white nappa leather seats, enhanced by rose gold diamond stitching. Traditional craftsmanship is one of the core values of the Mercedes-Maybach brand and it is clearly demonstrated in the beauty of the car's interior. Mr Troska said it is intended to be "reminiscent" of the

traditional Chinese home, where it is customary to have a special seat reserved for honoured guests.

The Vision Mercedes-Maybach Ultimate Luxury is imagined as a chauffeur-driven car, so much of the focus has been on providing superior comfort and a relaxing ambiance for those seated in the rear. Its creators have explained that the aim was to transport the passenger to "an unprecedented world of luxury".

One of the car's more unconventional features is an integrated, heated tray in the centre console. Accompanied by a white porcelain tea set and variety of flavours of tea, the brand has said it allows for "exquisite tea-drinking enjoyment while on the road". It serves as another tribute to Chinese culture and is just one example of how Mercedes-Benz has attempted to blend Eastern and Western influences in the new car. It may never make an impact in a commercial sense, but it certainly created a buzz in Beijing. ★



The concept car is a cross between a high-end saloon and an SUV.