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CARS



Right side of the tracks

In Italy for the world-first test drive of the much-anticipated McLaren 720S

'Harder on the throttle,' calls pro driver, Mark Cole. The hairpin ahead appears within seconds. 'Now hard on the brakes and hug the chicane.' Hammering into the corner, I tap the throttle and feel the rear of the McLaren 720S softly drift out. 'Now hold that,' says Mark calmly as I travel sideways.

'Back on the throttle, 3rd, 4th, 5th.' I look down to see that I've accelerated to over 130mph in a flash. The 720S, I can already tell, is a stagger-

ing machine, especially on the sticky asphalt of the Vallelunga Circuit, 20 miles north of Rome.

As a car to replace the 650S, the 720S was understandably met with worldwide anticipation when it was revealed in Geneva earlier this year. It runs an upgraded 4-litre twin-turbocharged V8, which hurls out a massive 710bhp and a top speed of 212mph. What this means is that the 720S is not just quick off the mark, but

continues to pull, and pull, and pull. However, what most people have been salivating over is the Variable Drift Control (VDC). A world first, the VDC allows you to slowly increase the angle of drift around a corner, and acts as a track-training tool for the owner.

McLarens are cars for drivers, not posers, and the addition of VDC shows that McLaren truly understands its customers. It performs far beyond expectations on the road, too – its capability on the meandering roads near Rome is testament to its ergonomic usability. This is again furthered by how deftly the wheels grip. Dubbed with a suitably McLaren term, Pro-active Chassis Control II, each wheel is fed independent data of the surface beneath it, which not only gives you greater traction, but also greater confidence to push it harder.

For a supercar that comes in at just over £200,000, and rivals the much-loved Ferrari 488 GTB, McLaren has made a definitive statement with the 720S. Add to this that the brand is only seven years old, and you begin to understand just how special this marque is. And the reason it all works? A dextrously entwined combination of raw Formula One pedigree and an incredible level of engineering.

Intrinsically, the McLaren shape is already as iconic as its British and Italian rivals, but the 720S adds another layer to its precision. Its cooling air-intakes, for example, are vast scoops set into the doors, so from afar the body is uniform and seamless. Its headlights have swift cutouts to allow air to be drawn into the front-end for greater cooling of the engine and drivetrain. These "eye sockets" not only increase performance, but are an industry first and add to the allure. Of course, the butterfly doors always impress, but the all-new two-hinged dihedral doors incorporate a section of the roof, not only making entry and exit more graceful, but creating a piece of geometric art, too. The teardrop shape of the cabin and slim-line pillars allow for an enormous amount of glass to be incorporated into the canopy, which floods the cabin with light and makes the cockpit feel spacious. Achieving this in a supercar is an applaud-worthy feat.

But enough of the clinical chat, it's the raw passion of a supercar that attracts people to it, right? And that's something the 720S gives you again and again. On the open road, the first

OVERVIEW

710bhp
POWER

212mph
TOP SPEED

2.9 secs
0-62MPH

770nm
TORQUE

4-litre V8
ENGINE

£208,600
PRICE

thing you notice is just how responsive it is. A mere toe-tap on the throttle and you're propelled into oblivion. And then there are the whopping carbon-ceramic brakes that bring you to a halt just as fast. Toggling into track mode, I'm given unabated freedom on the sweeping bends. It puts you in a place of ecstasy, where you're purely in the moment. This is what a supercar represents; it's the frontier at which you're on the very edge, perpetually pushing the upper echelons of your comfort zone.

What McLaren Automotive has achieved in seven years is a testament to the racing team that Bruce McLaren founded back in 1963. The 720S begs the question, where do you go from here?

There are mutterings of the future; the BP23, which is a homage to the original McLaren F1, the 720S Spider, is expected in a couple of years. But then what? It's an exciting place to be, but crucially, with an assurance to produce no more than 5000 vehicles a year, McLaren promises to remain as exclusive as it is elusive. [G](#)



MAIN IMAGE:

With all-new two-hinged dihedral doors, the McLaren 720S is a piece of geometric art

RIGHT:

The bright and spacious interior, finished to the highest standard

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