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## Driving the new GL450

**Mars:** At this year's North American International Auto Show Mercedes-Benz used former pro football star, and current *Dancing With The Stars* champ, Emmitt Smith to introduce their new Ocean Drive concept car. After spending some time with a GL450 I couldn't help but think that this must be the Emmitt Smith of SUVs. You come away wondering how something this large can be so nimble.

Not only was the GL nimble, I felt well connected with the road while driving it. Coincidentally, I spent the last week driving a 2007 Hummer H3. In that vehicle you always had the feeling that you were skimming the road and could never stop quickly in an emergency. Additionally, the Hummer's high belt line and narrow windows made you feel like you were driving while looking out through a mail slot. By comparison the GL's lower belt line and taller windows offered an excellent view in all directions.

**Venus:** I appreciated the great visibility as well. Visibility can sometimes be a challenge for me since I'm only 5'3". However, in the GL I felt that I could see well in all directions. By the time I got the very comfortable driver's seat adjusted to suit me I had already fallen in love with the GL's cockpit effect. Everything was close at hand to the driving position. I was happy to see that Mercedes is not as stingy with cup holders as they once

were. The GL contains no less than six, as well as two bottle holders in the front door pockets. At first I was a little leery of how useful and effective the headliner-mounted vanity lights would be but they proved to be just fine once it got dark.

**Mars:** Funny, I've never judged a vehicle by the merits of its vanity lights but I certainly appreciate the value of keeping you looking good. I was much more impressed with the 17.6 miles-per-gallon gas mileage that we were able to record while using the GL to run a variety of typical suburbia errands. On one trip we visited the chiropractor, grocery store, warehouse club and office supply store. Even the good doctor came outside, in below-freezing temperatures, for a sneak peek inside the GL.

**Venus:** The winter weather certainly wasn't that great while we were testing the GL and yet it handled so well that I quickly became confident driving it. The heated seats were an added plus because, unlike some others, they held their temperature until you turned them down. If there was one drawback to my test drive in the GL it was how well the vehicle handled the challenging weather conditions. How can that be drawback, you might ask? I found myself driving faster than I typically would in adverse conditions. It also took me a minute, but only a minute, to

become familiar with the GL's unique steering column mounted transmission shifter. After using it a couple of times however, I fell in love with it.

**Mars:** Yes, that is an unusual shifter, but it does free up some room in the console for those cup holders that you like so much. What it doesn't do is give you any control over the great 7-speed automatic transmission in the GL. You only have park, reverse, neutral and drive to choose from. Once you select drive the transmission takes care of the upshifts and downshifts. While it is a little unnerving for me to cede that kind of control I can say that the GL always felt like it was in the correct gear for the situation. I even tested the hill start assist one morning by coming to a complete stop halfway up my steep driveway, then trying to accelerate upward. The GL pulled away cleanly without even a trace of wheel slippage. The GL's 339 foot pounds of torque no doubt helped a lot in getting me moving that snowy morning.

**Venus:** Hey, hey that's all important, but I want to talk about the interior some more. The GL's attractive dashboard with its french-seam stitching in a contrasting color, provided just the right touch of class while the burl walnut with chrome trim was the icing on the cake. Come on now, what's not to love about the optional power tailgate



that opened with a push of a button? Even YOU appreciated that feature when you approached the vehicle with your arms full of groceries. At first I was a little concerned about the available space behind the third row seat but once I found the power reclining button for the seat my concern evaporated. The stationary glass sunroof over the third row seat was also a nice touch. It helps to minimize the claustrophobic feel that you can sometimes experience back there in vehicles like this.

**Mars:** I think that the power reclining third row seat sums up the entire GL experience. It has surprise and delight features at every turn. I particularly got a kick out of the in-dash electronic compass. Even things that you've seen before seem to be executed at a higher level in the GL. Naturally, we didn't program the integrated garage door opener or try the teleaid service during our test but I'm sure they would be handy in everyday use as well.

Our experience was quite a bit like what *Motor Trend* discovered. They named the GL their 2007 Sport/Utility of the Year over a strong field of competitors that included 22 candidates. And that was just for the GL450. I'm sure it won't be too long before there are AMG and BLUETEC versions of the GL that offer even more performance or gas mileage based on your preference. One thing that truly amazed me was the \$54,900 base price of a GL450, a figure that is lower than the E350 4matic wagon's \$56,475 MSRP despite a host of extra features and capabilities that the E wagon doesn't offer. In short the GL is shaping up to be a fantastic addition to the Mercedes-Benz family.

**Venus:** Even shorter, I want one in my garage. •

*Special thanks to Eric Mock, the Mercedes-Benz Sales Manager, at Betten Imports of Grand Rapids, Michigan, who generously loaned us our GL 450 test vehicle.*



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