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# Robb Report

FOR THE LUXURY LIFESTYLE™

## Unique Machines

Saleen's S7  
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Plus

New Bugatti Veyron, Y2K Turbine Superbike,  
Grand Touring Hovercraft, & SEAmobile Personal Sub

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In less than two years, however, the marque, purchased by the Volkswagen Group in 1998, will return, and its flagship model won't be your grandfather's Bugatti. The Bugatti EB 16/4 Veyron, a sleek, powerful, supercar capable of over 250 mph, will go on sale in 2004. Only 50 of the models will be produced.

The 1,001-hp (yes, one thousand and *one*) machine is a polar opposite of the stately classics—the Type 41, Type 57S, and Type 32 that are car connoisseurs' dreams—that produced Bugatti's reputation for excellence. But the company is attempting to entice both high-performance aficionados and traditional Bugatti enthusiasts with the Veyron, which will be available for one million euros (not one million and one), or approximately \$940,000.

"There will be owners who have followed the marque," says Georges Keller, head of communications for Volkswagen's luxury brands. "Others are who we call the hard core of the luxury car segment. I have rarely met seriously interested customers who are not already driving a Bentley, Rolls-Royce, or Ferrari."

The car, named after former Bugatti racing team driver Pierre Veyron, requires future owners to sign commitment contracts and place down payments of 300,000 euros (approximately \$282,000). The Veyron, with its stylish windswept profile, has a Formula One-style carbon fiber chassis that safely houses the car's occupants—and its power. The centerpiece of the Veyron is its 16-cylinder, 8-liter engine. To cool the bulky block, the Veyron's front end was designed with enough intake apertures to push air through the engine.

The Veyron will require an expert driver to handle its power, especially when the needle is at the far end of the speedometer. The car's 7-speed gearbox, operated by F/1-style paddle shifters, allows for gear changes in

two-tenths of a second. Bugatti can reserve racetracks for Veyron owners and will also provide proper racing tires for those who plan to push the car to its limits. "You need to be fairly experienced to dare to drive at that speed," Keller says. "Of course, some of our customers have driven in races."

To an F/1 driver accustomed to the confines of his racecar's cockpit, the Veyron's spacious and lavish cabin would feel like a mansion. The interior features a Dieter Burmester sound system and a one-carat diamond mounted on the speedometer needle. The company also placed a one-carat diamond, cut with 16 sunray facets to represent each of the Veyron's cylinders, on the center of the powermeter dial, which displays what percentage of the engine's power capacity is being used.

For all of the Veyron's groundbreaking characteristics, Bugatti does not foresee the car's becoming a staple of the automotive world. After all, there are only a small number of drivers who have the skill to operate the Veyron to its full capabilities. "I don't think it's going to be trendsetting," says Keller. "I can't speak for the other carmakers, but it's a matter of whether somebody wants to compete on that level. But for Bugatti, this is always what the company aimed to be." —FLUTO SHINZAWA

Bugatti, [www.bugatti-cars.de](http://www.bugatti-cars.de)

#### CHOPPER POWER

If the notion of riding a 460-pound motorcycle powered by a turbine engine that lifts 10,000-pound helicopters seems implausible, ask Jay Leno what it's like; he's one of the few riders who has experienced the sensation. "It feels like the hand of God is pushing you," Leno says.

Leno owns a Marine Turbine Technologies' Y2K Turbine Superbike, a motorcycle with an Allison Rolls-Royce

diesel engine. More people have flown into space than have ridden the jet-driven motorcycle. Marine Turbine Technologies has built only seven of the machines so far, with three more on order.

A turbine-powered \$150,000 motorcycle capable of 260 mph might seem like a novelty machine—a bike to be ridden several times a year to draw oohs and aahs from gawkers—but the Y2K bike is a practical, street-legal motorcycle that can be ridden comfortably every day. “It’s the fastest motorcycle in the world, and it is as simple to ride as a moped,” says Mark Ghiglieri, a Portland, Ore., resident who owns a Y2K.

Throw a leg over the bike, reach forward to grab the low handlebars, and turn the key to light up the dash. Push the starter button, and the engine awakens with a whirring that grows in volume and intensity as the turbine speeds up. At 15,000 rpm, the igniter starts to burn the fuel, and the loud whine morphs into a gentle roar. When the tachometer reaches the 23,000-rpm idle speed, the engine shouts a high-pitched blast that causes onlookers to peer toward the sky, searching for the helicopter they expect to land nearby.

The bike, which averages 5 mpg, has only two gears, making the Y2K easier to ride than a 5-speed 125cc starter machine. The turbine doesn’t offer compression braking, so it takes some time to get used to the bike. Three large disk brakes bring the bike down to normal speed, and the clutch slows the engine output shaft. Originally, the Y2K was designed as a single-speed motorcycle, but the second gear was added so the rider wouldn’t need to ride the brakes in traffic—which is exactly what Ghiglieri finds himself doing, thanks to curious onlookers. “When we ride down the street in Portland, every single person comes out into the middle of the street to see the bikes,” says Ghiglieri, who rides with his friend, Matt Sandstrum, another Y2K owner. “They come out of restaurants, stores, and parks to look at us. People go absolutely crazy around these bikes.”

Ghiglieri, chairman of a Portland biotechnology firm, has owned seven Ferraris, three Lamborghinis, several Porsches, a Learjet 35, helicopters, and boats. “Of all the toys, this is the coolest toy man has ever invented,” he says. “I’ve been Turbine-ized.” —JAMES HESKETH

## SPLASHY SL

On the gray water of Venice’s Grand Canal, gondolas bob, speedboats slash, and a lone 1953 Mercedes 300SL Gullwing sputters along the waterway at 7 mph. It should be noted that the Mercedes in question is made almost entirely out of walnut and pine. Livio de Marchi, the creator and driver of the Mercedes, grips the maple steering wheel and pilots the car toward a swell, which swamps the front of the Gullwing. “I hope you can swim,” jokes de Marchi. “Don’t worry, I put Scotch tape over the cracks, and there are 800 kilos of wood in this car. It won’t sink.”

The buoyant Mercedes in which I am riding—to my pleasure and to the befuddlement of onlookers—is just one element in the wooden world that de Marchi has created. De Marchi, a graduate of the Accademia di Belle Arti in Venice, is an Italian sculptor who specializes in woodwork. He has built wooden houses shaped like books, a wooden Vespa, and several water-bound automobile replicas, including the Mercedes, a Volkswagen Beetle, a Fiat Topolino, and a Ferrari F50 Spider. His work has appeared in museums worldwide, including the *Ripley’s Believe It or Not!* Museum in St. Augustine, Fla., where the Fiat Topolino is displayed.

Lately, speedboats blasting through the Venetian canals have been blights on the city, as their wakes have threatened to erode foundations of historic buildings. De Marchi built cars like his canal-going Mercedes not merely as pieces of art but as alternative methods of transportation—and statements of protest against fast-moving, destructive craft—that produce far less wash than speedboats.

A Yamaha single-stroke engine, with a phut-phut cadence, powers the Mercedes’ propeller. The small engine limits the SL’s speed,

and the car bobs more than thrusts forward, allowing the Mercedes to cruise while leaving the faintest of waves in its wake. “Look, look!” shouts de Marchi, pointing at a water taxi that zooms past. “There are no cars in Venice, but the canals are becoming like the autostrada. There is no peace anymore, and soon the wash will destroy the buildings.”

We putter past the Piazza San Marco, where a wary seagull, bobbing close by, creates a greater wake than the Mercedes. I sit back in the passenger seat and admire the perfectly crafted cherry air vents and the gleam of the wooden dashboard (unfortunately, there is no radio in the SL). De Marchi sculpted the walnut-and-pine exterior to match every detail of the car’s terra-firma counterpart, while shaping the underside of the Mercedes into a



The Bugatti EB 16/4 Veyron (left) and the Y2K Turbine Superbike (above) are both capable of 250-mph speeds.