

Poor Little Rich Car

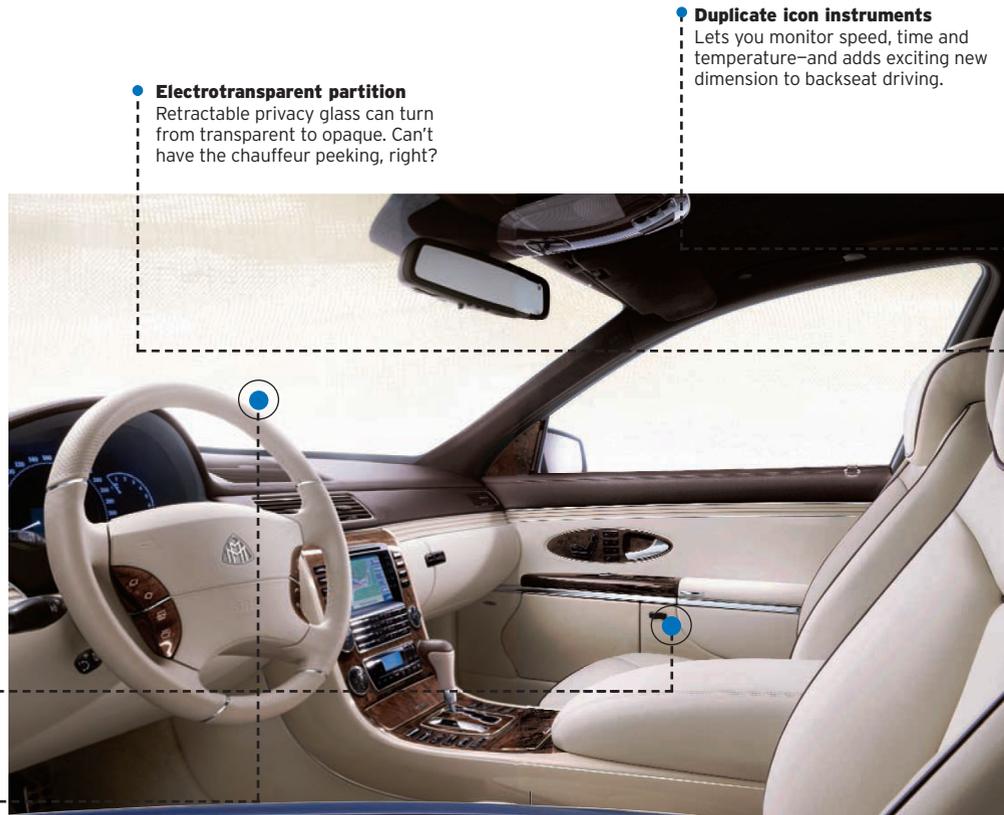
If there's any brand that ought to know how to market an ostentatious set of wheels, it's Mercedes-Benz, which, incidentally, is making its ad debut in the Super Bowl this year. Back in 2002, parent company Daimler AG put the likes of Rolls-Royce and Bentley on notice when it pulled the tarp off the new Maybach. The luxury German nameplate hadn't been seen for 60 years, but Daimler figured the timing was right for a comeback. After all, the economy was heating up, and even though the market for super-luxe wheels is only about 8,000 units a year, Maybach had all the perks—from a backseat bar to Hungarian goose down-stuffed headrests. Daimler only needed to sell 800 Maybachs a year to make a profit. Jay Leno bought one. So did Madonna and Jay-Z. ("Realst shit I ever wrote, chillin' in my Maybach," rapped Jay.)

But few others followed. Between 2003 and 2007, a mere 778 Maybachs purred out of showrooms. Last year, the U.S. buyer tally dropped to 63. (Meanwhile, Rolls-Royce sold 2,711 cars, most of them in America.) Daimler did not respond to our e-mails, but CEO Dieter Zetsche said earlier this month that when it comes to Maybach's fate, "everything is on the table."

So what went wrong? Well, the recession didn't help, and Maybach's inaugural marketing was sparse. And while all those interior perks were fab, the problem was on the outside. "It doesn't have pop and sex appeal, and in this class of vehicle, you need pop and sex appeal," says auto analyst Rebecca Lindland. The Maybach 62 looks an awful lot like a Mercedes S-Class, which can be had for a quarter of the price. "I drive a Mercedes S," adds auto industry consultant Chris Cedergren. "It's my mini-Maybach."

Now, word is that Aston Martin is kicking Maybach's tires, but the troubled brand may just disappear. So take a peek at the plush while it lasts.

—Robert Klara



• **Electrotransparent partition**
Retractable privacy glass can turn from transparent to opaque. Can't have the chauffeur peeking, right?

• **Duplicate icon instruments**
Lets you monitor speed, time and temperature—and adds exciting new dimension to backseat driving.

• **Perfume atomizer**
Optional flacon attaches here that fills the air with the perfume of your choice. Please, no Drakkar Noir.

• **Champagne chiller**
A 9.3 litre refrigerated bin is perfect for keeping your bottle of 1990 Cristal Brut suitably frosty.



• **Overview camera screen**
Lets passengers watch the car chew up the road via a camera mounted on the front end.

• **Hand-stitched leather**
The hide is harvested exclusively from a herd of "special South German breeding bulls." No, we're not kidding.

• **Heated steering wheel**
Jeeves' hands will stay nice and toasty thanks to this leather-covered wheel with an interior heating coil.

Height (in.) 62.0



Length (in.) 242.7

Width (in.) 78.0

SPECS:
Base price: \$368,750
Engine: 5.5 liter V-12
Horsepower: 543

Wheelbase: 150.7 in.
Drivetrain: rear-wheel drive
Fuel economy: 10 mpg city; 15 hwy
Curb weight: 6,340 lbs.

• **Four layers of hand-applied paint**
A "phosphating bath" and "cathodic dip priming" precede the color application and a clear coat. This ain't Maaco, kids.

• **'Parktronic' ultrasonic obstacle detector**
Computerized echo sounder calculates the distance to the nearest impediment and warns the driver.