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Mercedes offers buyers power, sport and color choices

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CHICAGO — Super, sporty and custom styling summarize the trio of vehicles shown by Mercedes-Benz this afternoon at the 91st Chicago Auto Show. Despite its late entry into the sport utility segment with the M class in 1997, Mercedes is working hard to become head of the class: Two of the three vehicles shown today were sport utilities. The automaker recently confirmed that the [ML55 AMG](#) high-performance sport utility, which was introduced as a design study in Detroit last month, will become a 2000 production model. It also announced that a Sport edition upgrade will be available for the ML320 and [ML430](#) utes in 2000.



2000 Mercedes-Benz ML 430 Sport

The 2000 ML55 AMG super ute is powered by a 5.5-liter V-8 that can propel it from 0-60 mph in less than seven seconds, faster than any currently sold SUV. As Mercedes-Benz's Joe Eberhardt described it, "Not only does it haul a lot of stuff, it hauls ass." The AMG-customized vehicle also boasts four-wheel drive, a five-speed electronic automatic transmission and horsepower in excess of 340. The SUV will be available in early 2000 and should be priced in the mid-\$60,000s. Eberhardt said that 2,000 units should be made for the U.S. market next year, quadruple the amount that Mercedes usually produces of an AMG vehicle. German-based AMG is Mercedes' motorsports partner and now a wholly owned subsidiary.

The second ute shown this afternoon was an ML430 equipped with the Sport package, which will be available on the ML320 and ML430 in 2000. Vehicles equipped with this roughly \$4,000 upgrade will sport 17-inch wheels, integrated fog lamps and side body cladding. The ML430 Sport on display had a teal exterior and gray leather interior with wood accents.



For those who think that owning a Mercedes isn't distinction enough, two "designo" editions will be



1999 Mercedes-Benz SLK230 designo

available for the S-Class this summer and for the SLK- , CLK- , SL- and E-Class vehicles this fall. Each designo edition features special paints, leathers and interior trim items not available separately on any Mercedes. On display in the Mercedes-Benz booth were one

SLK230 copper edition and a CLK320 slate blue edition roadster. The copper edition is quite distinctive — some might think too much so — with the interior and steering wheel covered in copper-and-charcoal-colored leather. The seats resemble a patchwork quilt with orange stitching on charcoal leather. The slate blue, which closely resembles Chanel's metallic vamp cosmetic color, is accompanied with a dark blue and charcoal nappa leather interior. Other editions available are silver, espresso, black diamond and electric green.

Mercedes was also celebrating record U.S. sales in 1998. The automaker sold over 170,000 passenger vehicles here last year, nearly three times the amount sold in 1993. It also confirmed that pricing for the 2000 S-Class vehicles will be several thousand dollars lower than the cars they are replacing. The S430 will retail for \$69,700, or \$5,000 less than the outgoing model; the S500 has a suggested price of \$77,850, or \$10,000 lower than its predecessor. Both are V-8 powered, long wheelbase sedans.

Reported by [Mary S. Butler](#), ***cars.com***; photographs by [Eric Johnson](#), ***cars.com***

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