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JUNE 2021

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# JUNE



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Hermès' haute interiors for  
McLaren's Speedtail hypercar





# FAST FORWARD

Hermès hits hyperdrive with a one-off design for McLaren's futuristic Speedtail

PHOTOGRAPHY: OSKAR PROCTOR WRITER: JONATHAN BELL



The bespoke car's interiors and matching fitted luggage all feature soft fawn leather, signature saddle stitching and seam detailing





The association between the automobile and fine leatherwork is long and distinguished, but it's not always been about luxury. Many of the earliest high-end automobiles used leather for the exposed chauffeur's seat, with the enclosed passenger compartment featuring a more precious – but not so weather-friendly – fabric finish. Hermès understands a thing or two about weatherproofing. The grand exterior luggage for cars and carriages, first created by Émile-Maurice Hermès at the beginning of the 20th century, as well as the company's experience in the nautical world, demanded leather of the highest grade and strength, as well as quality tanning and finishing skills. Those elements combined were the foundations of the company's definition of luxury.

In recent years, Hermès has increased the focus and profile of its bespoke services. Under the directorship of the designer Axel de Beaufort, who joined the brand's Bespoke and Special Projects Department in 2012, the sky is literally the limit, as the company has transferred its unique skills to practically any object you desire, whether it's static, wheeled or winged. De Beaufort's experience in naval architecture instilled in him an exceptional attention to detail, a skill he brings to the wide variety of Hermès' special projects. 'Every bespoke order comes through us, from interiors to aircraft to cars,' he says from the workshop just outside Paris. 'Other manufacturers don't necessarily know that we have the experience to work on their products, but as soon as they visit, they understand.'

The latest project to cross the atelier's threshold is this spectacular transformation of a McLaren Speedtail. There's nothing remotely off-the-shelf about the Speedtail, the current flagship of McLaren's Ultimate Series of hypercars. McLaren has decades of experience of handcrafting the fiendishly complex and advanced components that go into a Formula 1 car; its Ultimate Series translates that know-how into a machine for the road. Following on from the first Ultimate Series car, the Senna, the Speedtail is a limited-edition, hand-built, hybrid-powered three-seater, with just 106 units going into the garages of well-established collectors around the world. Hewn from carbon fibre and with a list price of £2.1m, the car doesn't come with any optional extras – McLaren simply assumed that every customer would want to add their own personal touch.

Hermès' treatment adds another dimension to what is already intriguingly rare and distinctive. 'We've always worked on cars here at Hermès Bespoke and we're increasingly working at the very high end of the market,' says de Beaufort. 'A client told us that he'd ordered a Speedtail from McLaren and that we could have a look. It's a dreamlike sports car that looks as if it has just emerged from a science-fiction movie, so of course we were interested.' »



Above, the Speedtail comes with a teardrop-shaped cabin, a dramatically elongated tail and a pair of dihedral doors

Opposite, the soft fawn leather is paired with hints of the blue and orange that have become McLaren's signature colours



## 'Back in the 19th century, the Hermès family was known for being very high-tech, making extremely light harnesses for carriages'

De Beaufort and his team visited McLaren's Technology Centre in Woking, UK, the Foster-designed HQ and factory where it designs and builds all its cars for road and track. 'I loved the heritage of the brand,' the designer says, emphasising that although on the surface this might look like a marriage of old and new, Hermès has always been at the cutting edge of its craft. 'We also have a very strong heritage,' he acknowledges, 'but back in the 19th century, the Hermès family was known for being very high-tech, making extremely light harnesses for carriages. Hermès has a strong link to innovation – we are not just adding our leather to every single object, there is a process of research and reflection behind it. We have engineers on our team, for example.'

That said, the Speedtail project was still immensely complicated. 'Usually we go to a manufacturer, look at the design, create a scheme and once the vehicle is in build, we are sent the pieces to finish in our workshop. Then they are returned for final assembly,' says de Beaufort. 'With Speedtail, McLaren sent the car here and it was in the workshop for several months. It was quite complicated for them because, once it returned to their factory, all the certification had to be redone. But they were amazing,' he says. 'Normally, only vintage cars come into the workshop. Having a car here means we can push things a bit further with the designers and craftsmen – it gives you more ideas about details.'

The three-seat interior of the Speedtail is finished in a luscious, rich and inviting Hermès leather.

'I wanted to make this fully carbon-fibre machine feel warmer and more welcoming by putting fabric and leather elements where they wouldn't normally be found,' explains de Beaufort. 'We can produce very thin leather, working with tenths of millimetres. We had to look at things like the ventilation grille – many small details that had to be very carefully considered so as to not affect the performance of the car.'

'Our leather will get better and softer over time. It is difficult to get this kind of leather in a contemporary car,' he continues. 'Manufacturers usually want a totally consistent colour. Of course, we have extremely high expectations of our leather, but very slight imperfections are part of its charm. This is what is so interesting with McLaren – they are on the edge of industry and craft.'

Hermès tans and processes its own hides. 'We're constantly learning and trying to perfect the process. Every single bespoke project has its own leather – nothing is off the shelf.' De Beaufort is adamant that such collaborations are in keeping with the spirit of Hermès. 'This kind of project takes us a step ahead,' he says. 'It shows that our craftspeople can build up great relationships with very high-tech manufacturers, which is really exciting. Maybe one day Hermès will be involved in the creation of rockets, at the forefront of new technology, just as it was over a century ago with bridles and carriages.'\*

[hermes.com](https://hermes.com); [mclaren.com](https://mclaren.com)



For making-of images, see [Wallpaper.com](https://Wallpaper.com)

Left and opposite, leather and fabric are intended to bring softness and warmth to the three-seat interior of the hypercar's carbon-fibre shell

