

Mercedes-Benz LifeJet

Auto Show Presentation Script

1998 Los Angeles Auto Show

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Los Angeles Auto Show. Don't let the vehicle behind me throw you -- this really is the Mercedes-Benz display.

Allow me to introduce the F300 LifeJet, a new concept vehicle from Mercedes-Benz. LifeJet -- as in a vehicle for active lifestyles and with jet styling.

Looking at the LifeJet, your first impression might be that the success Mercedes enjoyed with its M-Class in "The Lost World: Jurassic Park" went to their heads and they're gearing up for a "Bladerunner" sequel. Not quite.

And usually when you hear "concept vehicle," you think you'll never see one in showrooms -- especially something as radical as the LifeJet. Again, not quite.

If Mercedes sees a market for the LifeJet, they could build it in a few years. How much? Probably less than Mercedes cars, which start at \$30,450 for the C-Class. The LifeJet's got LA written all over it.

So maybe Mercedes will build it. The obvious question is -
- why?

Because Mercedes designers and engineers were asked to throw inhibition to the wind and invent a sports car for the 21st century. There is nothing inhibited about the LifeJet.

In designing the LifeJet, Mercedes wanted to push the boundaries of automotive design, engineering, handling dynamics -- and ... blah, blah, blah.

The real story is these guys are a bunch of motorcycle nuts, and they wanted to see if they could combine the fun of a motorcycle with the safety of a car!

The first thing you notice about the LifeJet ... well, I guess you notice a lot of things at once. Like the fact it's only got three wheels -- two up front and one in the back. Not so unusual, really. Karl Benz's first car more than a century ago was a three-wheeler. Sports car buffs might know about the three-wheel roadsters made in England by Morgan into the 1950s.

Like those little Morgans, the LifeJet has two wheels in front, which is far more stable than those custom trikes you see with two wheels in the back.

Stability is just one facet of safety in the LifeJet.

The body structure, together with a strong windshield frame and rollbar offer protection no motorcycle can. For night safety, special edge lighting defines the LifeJet's corners and sides.

You've no doubt noticed that the LifeJet does not resemble any Mercedes-Benz, or anything else. It looks like a fighter plane, and so does the interior. Even the steering wheel looks like it was lifted from a cockpit -- only this one's got radio and telephone controls on it.

The LifeJet is designed to be comfortable -- it is a Mercedes, after all. There's room for two -- the passenger rides directly behind the driver, with plenty of legroom.

There's a door for each rider. On the left side, the driver's door swivels up. On the right, the passenger door opens like most doors, but it's hinged at the rear. The arrangement makes parking in narrow spots easier, but even more important, you look really cool getting in or out.

Motorcycles have unlimited headroom, so Mercedes gave the LifeJet removable roof panels that stow in the back. Take 'em off, lower the power windows and you're nearly as open as a touring bike.

You're ready to roll. Turn the key and push a starter button -- just like a motorcycle. You fire up a 1.6-liter four-cylinder engine that's just ahead of the rear wheel.

A production LifeJet would be lightweight at about 1,300 pounds, but very strong -- it's made from aluminum, carbon fiber and steel.

With 100 horsepower, the LifeJet could zip from 0-to-60 in just over seven seconds -- quicker than a BMW Z3. And it would make a terrific commuter, getting over 40 miles per gallon.

There's a five-speed transmission, with a twist. You work the clutch like a car, but there's a sequential shifter, like a motorcycle or Formula 1 race car. Flick the lever forward to upshift, backward to downshift. Quick and fun. There's a smooth belt drive to the rear wheel, similar to some motorcycles.

OK, let's see what we've got...

The LifeJet's got a starter button like a motorcycle, a sequential shifter like a motorcycle and the riders sit in tandem like a motorcycle. Take the roof panels off and you've got all the air you want. Like a motorcycle.

But there's something missing, isn't there? Riding a motorcycle is a feeling -- gliding along a curvy back road, carving up canyon roads -- even on-ramps are fun on a motorcycle. If you ride, you can't really explain this feeling to people who don't.

That's the feeling Mercedes designers wanted to capture with the LifeJet, and the LifeJet driver will notice it in the first curve. Turn the wheel and ... the LifeJet **LEANS INTO THE TURN!** Like a motorcycle!

The LifeJet's got a computer controlled hydraulic system between front wheels that actually leans the body left or right as you take a turn.

A two-wheeler needs to lean, but with three wheels, you don't. So why bother? Because leaning makes the LifeJet feel like a motorcycle -- and that's the whole point.

Think about it -- it's a lot of fun to drive a sports car along the PCH -- fun for the driver. But as a passenger in a conventional car, you might feel less enthusiastic, because the turns whip you around. That side-to-side motion can make you feel queasy.

That's because you have to brace against the centrifugal force that wants to throw you through the door. You don't get that sick feeling on a motorcycle or the LifeJet, because you lean into the turn, you don't fight it.

Motorcycle riders know how much to lean by how fast they're going and the angle of the turn. In the LifeJet, a computer with three backup systems determines the precise amount of lean needed. The system is designed to respond naturally ... it controls lean like an experienced rider would on a motorcycle

On a motorcycle, leaning too much can cause a wipeout. Not in the LifeJet, where the maximum lean angle is 30 degrees. The LifeJet's tires are specially designed for leaning, and so is the headlight -- the internal reflector responds to the lean angle and lights up the turn.

So ... are you ready for a new concept in sports machines? You could find it in a few years with the LifeJet -- the feel and fun of a motorcycle, but -- thanks to innovative Mercedes-Benz technology -- greater safety and comfort.

Thank you.