

Show the world you are on top.  
With the top down.

The new E-Class Cabriolet. At its very best.

Nothing turns heads quite like the dynamic lines of the new E-Class Cabriolet. Of course, it is so much more than good looks; revel in its substance with the automatic AIRCAP and a myriad of intelligent drive systems for a comfortable ride. While entertainment SPLITVIEW functions allows the driver and passenger to view different content on the same screen. All the hallmarks of a car that shows you have reached the top. In style. [www.mercedes-benz.com.sg](http://www.mercedes-benz.com.sg)



At Daimler & Co.

 Mercedes-Benz  
The best or nothing.

E 200 - Fuel consumption: 6.6-6.7 l/100 km; CO<sub>2</sub> emission: 154.156 g/km. E 250 - Fuel consumption: 6.8 l/100 km; CO<sub>2</sub> emission: 158 g/km.

Cycle & Carriage (Exclusive Dealer) Sales Enquiries: 6298 1818. Mercedes-Benz Centre, 301 Alexandra Road, Mon - Sat: 8.30 am - 7 pm, Sun & PH: 10 am - 6 pm.

## Cultural insights questionnaire – French market

*How does the headline & visual connect on your local market? Is this headline localizable for the target market?*

No. There are two reasons this pun does not work in French:

1) Linguistic constraints

The idiomatic expression "to be on top of the world" does not exist in the target language, and "top down" has no literal translation in this context.

In order to retain the pun, one would have to play with an idiomatic expression that works in French. For instance, "top down" is often translated as "à ciel ouvert" ("open sky") – which offers many creative possibilities, such as "toucher le ciel" ("touch the sky") or "tutoyer le ciel" (difficult to translate: the meaning here is close to "own the sky", but it also implies that one's status is high enough to use informal address with the sky, as if on an equal footing).

If luxury is to be insisted upon, one could play with ideas such as a room with a view (which tends to be the most exclusive in a hotel): "Escapade avec vue" ("escapade with a view"). However, while luxury may be emphasized, superiority may not (see "Cultural specificity" below).

## 2) Cultural specificity

French culture considers it improper to overtly display social superiority. Because of this, a direct invitation like "Show the world you're on top" would sound inappropriate and unappealing. (Please see question #5 below for details.) For this reason, on the French market, notions of luxury and superiority are conveyed in an indirect fashion, through lifestyle imagery.

From a French perspective, privilege and exclusivity are best symbolized by a sense of personal freedom. The capacity to enjoy life on one's own terms and at one's convenience is considered a direct benefit of higher social status. This explains why Mercedes-Benz and comparable premium automobile brands such as BMW & Audi, consistently market their products through the lens of classy hedonism.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbuU6fKaPoI>

*What segment of the target market would this ad resonate with?*

From a theoretical standpoint, the ad as it exists – with its original copy, setting and colors – might resonate with a hypothetical group of up and coming young men who have embraced americanized attitudes towards the display of self-made wealth (see question 5 below). The two youngest market segments – including people who still depend on their parent's income ("Dependents") and young adults entering into their life ("Pre-family") – are the only ones who rank cabriolets as the 2<sup>nd</sup> most desirable type of car and cite "to attract attention" as their top choice criteria.<sup>1</sup>

However, considering the advertised product is a premium convertible in the €60,000+ price range, I think socioeconomic realities must be taken into account. Even though Mercedes has been trying to reach a younger French audience since the 2010s (and has successfully done so, particularly with Class A)<sup>2</sup>, the brand still ranks in the top 3 when it comes to client base seniority (the average Mercedes customer in France is 57 years old, vs 51-52 years old for competitors BMW & Audi).<sup>3</sup>

What's more, the French market has increasingly been shifting towards used cars, with new cars representing only 45% of all purchases in 2019 – 18% of which

in the € 35,000+ price range.<sup>4</sup> The average age of new car buyers has been rising consistently for the past 30 years – both for economic and lifestyle reasons – with 66+ year old consumers accounting for more than a quarter of sales.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, it must be remarked that convertibles represented only 0.56% of new car purchases in 2019 – a 73% drop since the peak of 2004<sup>6</sup> – and that the role of the B2B sector, where most opportunities lay for premium automobile brands in France, is not significant in the case of cabriolets, which are ineligible as company cars (for regulatory reasons).

It may thus be deduced from the data that the French convertible market is a minuscule niche, with potential clients representing at most 0.04% of local demand. This is reflected in the fact that France is seen as a secondary outlet for cabriolet manufacturers, who primarily target British, German and American consumers.<sup>7</sup> Combining socioeconomic data and cultural specificities covered in question 5, one may also assume that the target customer belongs to the very highest percentiles of the French upper middle class.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, unless this campaign pertains to a very long term branding strategy focused on brand awareness and audience rejuvenation, the only realistic target for the product is a demographic labelled by Kantar as "Aged post-family" – the only segment to favor the cash purchase of new vehicles in France. This target is statistically indifferent to the idea of attracting attention and more sensitive to quality, security and comfort – values that correlate strongly with local brand perceptions regarding Mercedes-Benz.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kantarmedia.com/fr/blog-et-ressources/points-de-vue/comportement-d-achatles-francais-et-l-automobile>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.capital.fr/entreprises-marches/comment-mercedes-est-revenu-dans-la-course-1302439>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.caradisiac.com/Marche-automobile-le-nouveau-profil-de-l-acheteur-106366.htm>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/m-styles/article/2020/01/27/automobile-quand-le-neuf-prend-un-coup-de-vieux\\_6027399\\_4497319.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/m-styles/article/2020/01/27/automobile-quand-le-neuf-prend-un-coup-de-vieux_6027399_4497319.html)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.caradisiac.com/Et-si-acheter-une-voiture-neuve-devenait-un-luxe-reserve-aux-seniors-106365.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.largus.fr/actualite-automobile/mais-ou-sont-passes-les-coupes-et-les-cabriolets-10119392-12111436-photos.html>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/replay-radio/l-auto/l-auto-du-dimanche-le-marche-du-cabriolet\\_2211166.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/replay-radio/l-auto/l-auto-du-dimanche-le-marche-du-cabriolet_2211166.html)

<sup>8</sup> [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classe\\_moyenne\\_sup%C3%A9rieure](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classe_moyenne_sup%C3%A9rieure)

*Does the setting resonate with the target market and does it resemble the local setting?*

With the aforementioned sociodemographic data in mind, I posit that the setting would not resonate well with the local market.

The skyline, asphalt and neon/LED lighting effects are evocative of modern urban nightlife, calling to mind movies like "The Wolf of Wall Street", French stereotypes about Las Vegas, and new-rich party scenes such as Ibiza and Saint-Tropez.

However, as a higher-end premium model, the featured product appeals neither to the ultra-wealthy (who favor luxury cars) nor to the *henrys* ("high earners not rich yet", who have specific design expectations).<sup>1</sup>

As seen in question 2, the most likely local customer for a Mercedes Class E convertible is a high-income senior male who identifies with typical masculine fantasies about powerful sports cars (see question 6 for gender-related considerations). From this perspective, the setting does not resonate with the local target persona's expectations and context.

For well-off older males, the convertible roadster is a symbol youthful fantasies come true in the form of carefree pleasure-rides combining power, comfort and refined originality. In France, such aspirations are generally symbolized by remote country roads offering open views of nature – often featured in automobile advertising, including Mercedes-Benz's.

In order to facilitate viewer projection and identification, it is important that the idealized setting be consistent with local realities. The French street network follows historic routes, meaning roads are often narrow and windy, offering little leeway for performance driving – not to mention very strict speed limits (80 km/h national average on country roads). Similarly, French cities and towns are heavy in historical architecture, paved roads and reduced parking spaces.

Unless the brand is aiming for a disruptive approach, marketing cabriolets in this context should preferably involve *dolce vita* imagery – inviting easy, comfortable roadtrips amidst exclusive landscapes and retreats. While this approach is not novel, it seems to have become more relevant than ever, as the recent lockdown has confirmed and deepened the already well-established French ideal that true luxury and privilege are found far from the crowds, in the grand privacy of the countryside.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mohadel.com/henrys-the-millennials-that-matter-most-for-luxury-brands/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/05/10/tout-plaquer-pour-une-vie-plus-simple-le-confinement-declie-d-un-changement-de-vie\\_6039202\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/05/10/tout-plaquer-pour-une-vie-plus-simple-le-confinement-declie-d-un-changement-de-vie_6039202_3224.html);  
[https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/04/27/immobilier-le-confinement-renforce-l-appel-du-vert-et-le-desir-de-maison\\_6037839\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/04/27/immobilier-le-confinement-renforce-l-appel-du-vert-et-le-desir-de-maison_6037839_3224.html);  
[https://www.lemonde.fr/m-perso/article/2020/05/08/resilience-secondaire-le-fontasme-de-la-maison-de-campagne\\_6039082\\_4497916.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/m-perso/article/2020/05/08/resilience-secondaire-le-fontasme-de-la-maison-de-campagne_6039082_4497916.html)

*What impression do the colors used in this print ad produce at first sight? What is their local significance and what do they convey about the product?*

Instant impressions are dominated by the strong contrast existing between the bright red sunset (emphasizing power, energy and youth) and the lower half of the image, which accents typical Mercedes-Benz values such as quality and *savoir-faire* (silver, both on the car and the logo). The strokes of neon blue may be

interpreted as introducing a sense of modernity double with reliability, while the black upper left corner and city skyline add a touch of sleek luxury.<sup>1</sup>

While local perceptions of these colors are consistent with the ad's global intent, their use – along with the setting (see question 3 above) – is not suitable for the French target audience. According to color expert Pascal Marçon, a regular Pantone collaborator, the ad as it exists seems to be geared towards "Middle-Eastern, Asian or possibly American markets, dominated by visually impactful billboards in bright, LED-heavy environments. There, ads tend to be more colorful – if not glaring – appealing to assertively successful high-income youth."

In France, where advertising space is more regulated and American-style high-end shopping venues are scarce, print ads like this one are more likely to be featured in highly targeted lifestyle or motor magazines & brochures and at specialized events.

As seen in question 3, a more natural setting would be preferable, implying a somewhat neutral background, in line with the landscapes featured in the Mercedes-Benz France video ad. Two additional factors support this choice:

1) This model is only available in rather sober shades of black and grey (including two darker shades of blue and red), thus a lively, sunny environment risks drawing attention away from the car.

2) The French tend to regard vivid, high-contrast colors as lacking in taste, equating refinement with more conservative halftones (consistent with this model's color line).

These constraints still allow space for adequate use of silver and blue – two colors that correlate strongly with French perceptions about Mercedes-Benz as a reliable, trustworthy brand.<sup>2</sup> Red – a color associated with youth and power – may also be put forward in order to incite male customers to indulge their whim. In fact, blue and red have been shown to incentivize impulse buying and are both available with this model (meanwhile a grey car may be viewed as unoriginal and corporate).<sup>3</sup>

A 2015 automotive marketing matrix developed by French specialists may prove of use to orient color choices. Mercedes-Benz spreads across three quadrants: "Secure value – Risk-free purchase" (blue, silver) / "Unique value – Singular purchase" (black, red, blue) / "Uninhibited value – Guilt-free purchase" (red, black).<sup>4</sup> All options are compatible with the brand's renewed visual identity, which emphasizes dynamism and lighting effects.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://99designs.fr/blog/conseils-design/signification-couleurs/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.assurland.com/assurance-blog/assurance-auto-actualite/quelles-sont-les-marques-automobiles-les-plus->

[fiables\\_131414.html#:~:text=Les%20voitures%20premium%20trustent%20le%20top%2010%20%20C2%AB%20qualit%C3%A9%20%20BB&text=Elle%20est%20suivie%20de%20pr%C3%A8s,aussi%20dans%20le%20top%2010](#)

<sup>3</sup> <https://fouinetau.fr/psychologie-couleurs-marketing/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.offremedia.com/les-4-strategies-de-valorisation-publicitaire-des-constructeurs-identifiees-par-ipsos-dans-le-2eme-observatoire-prismautomobile>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.automania.be/actualites-marques/actualites-m/actualites-mercedes-benz-d/mercedes-benz-presente-la-nouvelle-identite-de-sa-marqu>

*Can any elements be considered offensive or inappropriate on the target market?*

As mentioned in question 1, the phrase "Show the world you're on top" – a direct allusion to the idea of superiority referred to in the brief – is inappropriate on the French market and could prove counter-effective.

As noted in a report published by Imperial College London: "Whereas some countries such as the United States embrace wealth (...) it seems that France is rather adverse to it." Indeed, due to "deeply intertwined mesh of cultural, historical, political and economic factors" reaching as far back as the French Revolution of 1789, "France is exceptional compared to other developed countries with regards to how it views wealth (...)".

According to Vincent Grandil, partner at a law firm specializing in wealth management: "French people have an uncomfortable relationship with money. Here, someone who is a self-made man (...) is viewed with suspicion." This explains why "France's wealthy tend to stay out of the public eye" and that "the rich in France seem to create animosity"<sup>1</sup> – a sentiment so ingrained that a 2011 poll pinpointed France as the most anti-capitalist country in the world, well ahead of China.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the ad's show of ostentation is culturally uninviting. With regards to the automotive industry, this is exemplified by a paradox: whereas premium vehicle ownership is usually correlated with a country's income per capita, this is not the case in France. While it is the 6<sup>th</sup> richest country in Europe, France features the lowest rate of premium vehicle ownership (12% of new sales vs 29% in Germany). Here again, experts at Xerfi – who authored a study on the subject – cite cultural attitudes towards wealth<sup>3</sup> as one of the primary reasons for such sobriety, along with factors such as speed limitations and taxation.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/blog/lifesciencesyearabroad/2014/01/15/how-france-views-wealth-culture-economy-and-government/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.latribune.fr/actualites/economie/20110125trib000595445/les-francais-champions-du-monde-de-l-anti-capitalisme.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.decisionatelier.com/Pourquoi-le-vehicule-premium-ne-trouve-pas-sa-place-en-France,13026;>  
[https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/2019-1-study\\_file.pdf;](https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/2019-1-study_file.pdf)  
<http://www.odoxa.fr/sondage/rapport-francais-a-largent-aux-riches/>



*Please offer suggestions as to possible amendments that could enhance the ads relevancy for the target market, while retaining the original message.*

As seen in answer to the five questions above, this print ad would need considerable amendments to be relevant for the French market. Most importantly, because of France's highly idiosyncratic attitude towards wealth (see question 5), the main message of "superiority and luxury" would need to be approached in a diagonal manner. This includes:

- a copy emphasizing freedom, such as "Tutoyez le ciel" ("Own the sky", see question 1) ;
- a compromise between the brand's intent towards younger audiences and the socioeconomic realities of the French market – while the ad may convey feelings of energetic youthfulness, it must do it in a manner enticing to well-off seniors (see question 2) ;
- a more natural setting, possibly open landscapes, in line with the ideal of freedom and with actual driving conditions prevailing in South-Western Europe (see question 3) ;
- a more subtle use of contrast and colors, in reference to French ideas of good taste and refinement (see question 4).

Two additional factors may be taken into consideration for the French market:

1) Women: it is interesting to note that, while the brief explicitly mentions a male target, the French video ad features both a male and a female driver. In 2004, 50 % of cabriolet owners in France were women<sup>1</sup>, and this model does have features that may be valued by female buyers (ie. four doors, spacious trunk, comfortable and secure driving).<sup>2</sup> Targeting a female audience does imply some choices regarding colors (French women tend to find grey unattractive and boring)<sup>3</sup> and features (French women value quality, comfort and security rather than technical performance and power).<sup>4</sup>

2) SUVs: high-end convertibles and their antithesis – the SUV –are currently competing for the same sociodemographic segment – with premium SUVs being particularly favored by both men and women. Following a decade-long upward trend, SUVs have reaped 38% of new car sales for France in 2019 (about half of BMW & Audi French sales, and 28,2% of Mercedes-Benz France sales).<sup>5</sup> Since SUVs are also marketed as outdoor vehicles and increasingly feature panoramic roofs, it is crucial that cabriolets be well differentiated (yet another reason to avoid conventional color choices such as grey and to bring forward a sense of epicurian uniqueness).

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.luxe-magazine.com/fr/article/353-](http://www.luxe-magazine.com/fr/article/353-salon_du_cabriolet_et_du_coupe_2004_ce_que_veulent_les_femmes.html)

[salon\\_du\\_cabriolet\\_et\\_du\\_coupe\\_2004\\_ce\\_que\\_veulent\\_les\\_femmes.html](http://www.luxe-magazine.com/fr/article/353-salon_du_cabriolet_et_du_coupe_2004_ce_que_veulent_les_femmes.html)

<sup>2</sup> <https://magazineprestige.com/Ces-voitures-de-luxe-que-les-femmes-adorent-et-achetent>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.alioze.com/couleur-marketing-web>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.assurland.com/presse/communiqués-de-presse-assurance/quelles-sont-les-voitures-les-plus-masculines-et-les-plus-féminines-en-france.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://blogs.alternatives-economiques.fr/chassignet/2019/01/17/le-monde-croule-sous-les-suv-pourquoi-c-est-un-probleme-et-pourquoi-ca-risque-de-durer>