

On Test **Mercedes E-Class**



Can it really be only a 'saloon'?

HUGH ARNETT

Fangio and Sir Sterling Moss, the two drivers that drove in worlds apart in the 1950s, both performed in Mercedes cars. In fact, Fangio was presented with a Gull Wing sports model, a car way ahead of its time, but if matched against the 2,143cc E220 CDI [New E Class] would have been evenly matched on acceleration and would have lost out in road holding because of the enormous advances in traction control, tyres and suspensions that have taken place over the past half century.

I was frankly amazed that this car reaches 100km/h in only eight seconds, pokes out 400Nm of torque, develops 125Kw of power from between 3,000-4,200 rpm, drives the rear wheels, has a four-cylinder diesel engine and averages about six litres of fuel for every 100km driven.

The test car, a total delight, was to my mind enormously helped by the AMG Sports package which among other delights includes 18" twin-spoke light alloy wheels, AMG body styling, front apron, rear apron and side skirts, front axle with perforated brake discs, AMG three-spoke fully adjustable sports steering wheel in nappa leather, brushed stainless steel sports pedals with non-slip rubber studs and Direct Select shift paddles and manual [M] shift mode in conjunction with automatic transmission.

There is absolutely no way that the diesel engine intrudes, annoys, or even lets on that it's not a petrol model. There is absolutely no way, when sports mode is selected, that the driver can mistake this vehicle for a run-of-the-mill saloon from a rival, if there is one, marque.

I used the paddle change for much of the drive as I really do enjoy changing gear when I want to, rather than when the remarkably efficient electronic gubbins decrees that a gear change will be made.

However, I did enjoy the park assist. This does not park the car for you, but assists in advising the driver how to park in restricted areas.

At the moment, thanks to the incompetence of managers among those that supply diesel fuel there are lines of diesel on all our roads, and if the road is damp the surface may become a lethal death trap.

The test afternoon was dry. However, in order to enjoy the drive, a degree of caution was thrown to the four winds and the rear-driven wheels, were allowed to slide gently as adhesion was lost at remarkably low speed on most of our

roads [those constructed without a non-slip surface]. Never fear, as long as the driver is versed in elementary skid control, a presumption that goes with the territory because all Mercedes drivers should have mastered the different techniques required to keep a rear-driven vehicle on the black-top, even when the rear end tries to overtake the front.

To say that the E Class is a comfortable way to waft five people round Maltese roads, is but the tip of the iceberg. Any Mercedes is magnificent; however, the latest in a range of cars that started with the 170V in 1947 is a fantastic solo drive, a great business chariot and a wonderful family car.

Five people can drift around the countryside safe in a vehicle with superb in-built safety, both passive and active. Electronic aids straight from Formula 1, and with a keen enthusiastic pilot of either sex at the wheel, all passengers will be left in absolutely no doubt that this car is one of a very short list of desirables that will fit the bill entirely as an everyday motoring extravaganza.

This is the ninth generation of E-Class and although instantly recognisable as a Mercedes the design features make even those suffering from motoring ennui look most carefully at the lines, curves, the sheer athleticism of the flanks, the front end that sweeps back and allows the driver to place this large car exactly where he wants it to point, and the masculine rear end, the most familiar sight for most local drivers.

As a design exercise the E-Class is superb, as a driving experience almost on a par with out-and-out sports machinery, and lets face it, with the full racing engine and suspension modes very few cars beat Mercedes on the racetrack.

Truthfully if you blast around in the E 500, the same car in its ultimate [for me] road trim, you get to 100km/h in only 5.2 seconds, and peak out at 250km/h., pretty darn good.

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VERDICT

COMFORT



In class it gets no more comfortable than this.

PERFORMANCE



You can get to 100km/h more quickly with different engines, but do you need to?

COOL



Not a word to apply to a classic marque.

QUALITY



Everything you would expect from a Mercedes.

HANDLING



Handling is subjective, and this E-Class provides me with the wherewithal to drive hard and fast.

PRACTICALITY



All things to all drivers.

RUNNING COSTS



A relatively cheap vehicle to use.

AT A GLANCE



PRICE

Starting from €54,000.

TOP SPEED

229-231km/h.

0-100km

0-100km/h. 8.6 sec manual. 8 sec automatic.

ECONOMY

Combined. 6.0-6.2 litres/100km.

CO₂

159-164 g/km combined.

ENGINE

Four cylinders, in line.

POWER

125kw at 3,000-4,200 rpm.

TRANSMISSION

Automatic.