



Mercedes-Benz C-Class Back on top

The Mercedes-Benz C-class has been around for a quarter of a century. Continuous improvements and innovations have ensured its success. However, recently the competition has not languished resulting in the C-class being relegated from forerunner to co-runner. It is now though the turn of the completely new C-class. Does Mercedes-Benz know how to safe-guard its position at the summit once more?

The title of the previous C-class test drive read "One of life's little luxuries". Back in 2000, it was unusual that a car from this class to be equipped with gadgets such as light and rain sensors, an auto dimming interior mirror and a navigation unit with traffic alerts. In the interim, even the simplest city car is fitted with such equipment. "Agility Control" and "Comand APS" are now essential.

Comand APS

The latter combines audio, video, with a navigation unit and climate control alongside voice activation in a one-touch multimedia system. It is logical, simple and intuitive to use. The graphic display is the most attractive of all the systems that are currently being used. The navigation unit system with its hard-disk recognizes all the roads of Europe; the maps are splendid and clear; the routes are calculated logically and extremely quickly.



Mercedes has swapped the Bose audio system of the olden days for a significantly more pleasant sounding model from Harman Kardon. Not only is the sound much better, but also the audio system source is truly modern. The C-class plays music from CD, DVD and CD-ROM. Music can be copied to the hard-disk of the navigation unit system, thus making CD's and memory cards superfluous.

The mobile telephone is connected via Bluetooth, thus allowing hands-free calling. During the test, it appeared that not all handset are supported as they should be. A Sony telephone was recognised and connected immediately, whereas it did not seem to work with a Samsung.

Note of Criticism

And that is not the only point of criticism. "Comand APS" is pure and simply a copy of BMW's iDrive. Mercedes has refined and embellished the system on a number of points; however it is neither original nor pioneering. To turn the debate around: imitation is the ultimate form of flattery and Mercedes has given its archrival BMW the greatest compliment.



Another point of criticism is the standard equipment. The standard C-class is still a very bare car. The options are what make this car really interesting and different. In many cases, another 6,000-10,000 pound would need to be added on top of the basic price in order to make a thoroughly complete car.

The interior space of the new C-class is restrained. Notably, the sunroof of the test car took a large chunk out of the already restrictive headroom. The space in the majority of rivals is quite considerable with several centimetres extra. Drivers six feet and over have no choice but to either sit or lie in a lower position similar to that in a sports car.

Also the space in the rear of the car is modest; some family saloons offer more room on the rear seat. With 475 litres, the luggage space is in fact the largest in its class.



Road warrior

The Mercedes-Benz C-class has known how to distinguish itself by emphasizing calmness and comfort. This newcomer is no different. The car has grown in all directions (55 mm longer, 42 mm broader, 45 mm longer in the wheel base). With the heaviest point more centrally placed, the weight distribution has now improved.

Due to these adaptations, the C-class feels larger, quieter and more stable than its predecessor. However at the same time, it is more dynamic and faster. This is the greatest plus point of the new C-Class in relation to its predecessor. In this range, the C-Class is the most comfortable road maniac at the moment.



Agility control

Road-holding is excellent. Even at high speeds, the car remains exemplarily neutral. According to the specifications, the C-Class is provided with the most advanced safety systems which would be able to save the driver in the stickiest situation. The chassis is however so balanced; that in practice these are seldom required.

It is extremely noticeable that the car has difficulty with fast tight movements. For example during slaloms, the agility control tries with all its might to maintain the tranquillity by slowing down the movements. Consequently, the car starts to shift enormously. The wheels remain safely on the road, but in this exceptional situation, the C-Class feels like a waterbed on wheels. The optional Advanced Agility makes the car more dynamic and, according to the manufacturer, solves this problem.

Engine

A new car means a new engine, and here is the greatest benefit. The engine delivers more power and provides better triumphs than before, whilst seeing consumption fall. The diesel engine is delivered standard with a particle filter. As expected, the four cylinder 2.2 litre diesel (c220 CDI) is the most popular, and consequently it is this model that was tested.

The engine starts with the push of a button (pre-heating is unnecessary) and is subsequently barely audible. With the five-speed automatic transmission option, the C-class is particularly relaxing to drive. The automatic understands the driver perfectly and shifts gear seamlessly.

The achievements of the 168 bhp/295 lb-ft strong 220 CDI are exceptional. Comfort is fundamental. When accelerating at full speed from a traffic light, the speedometer registers 60 mph eight and a half seconds later. The car reacts with such ease, that it is almost as if it driving away quite tamely.

Even mid-accelerations are completed without any strain. Acceleration from 40 to 50 mph requires as little effort as from 70 to 80 mph. Because of this ease, there is sometimes a great danger of unwittingly driving too quickly. In order to solve this problem, Mercedes has equipped the car with not only cruise-control but also, quite agreeably, a variable speed limiter. In spite of a predominantly composed driving style, the average consumption was 32 mpg, considerably higher than the promised 35 mpg.



Conclusion

The new C-Class can be summarised as great progress alongside the preservation of character. It feels larger, more stable and comfortable than its predecessor but still drives more dynamically. The engine is noticeably much stronger. According to the manufacturer, the consumption should be much lower, but this is difficult to achieve in reality.

The electronic equipment is seriously advanced. Safety is at an all-time high; although the C-Class is not as completely unique as Mercedes-Benz would like the client to believe. "Comand APS", which combines the navigation unit, audio and telephone system, is first-rate. In comparison to its predecessor, the new C-Class no longer reigns alone at the top, but with a narrow margin, it is the most comfortable and advanced cars in its class.



Specifications

Mercedes-Benz C-Class C220 CDI Elegance

Size and weight

Length	458 cm
Width	177 cm
Height	145 cm
Wheelbase	276 cm
Kerb weight	1585 kg
Trailer	750 kg
Trailer - braked	1800 kg
Fuel capacity	66 l
Luggage space	475 l



Engine and performance

Capacity	2148 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	170 bhp @ 3800 rpm
Max torque	400 Nm @ 2000 rpm
Drive	achterwielen
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	8.5 secs
Top speed	229 km/h
Average mileage	6.2 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	8.3 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	5 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	166 gr / km



Price

Price	£ 25,520
Price base model	£ 22,155