



Mercedes-Benz A-Class (2012 - 2018) Different

Review | Mercedes-Benz has manufactured cars in all shapes and sizes. However, those who just wanted a base model still had little choice. The Mercedes A-Class was a compact yet tall family car. Although it offered all luxury and safety of a true Mercedes-Benz, its awkward looks made many choose another brand. This is why the all-new A-Class is different. It's even the first hatchback Mercedes-Benz that has introduced in its 125 years of existence.

The A-Class wants to differ from the other Mercedes-Benz models. That starts with its looks. To attract younger customers the new A-Class isn't a tall family car, but a curvey hatchback. As if the designers wanted to compensate for the previous generation, the A-Class is muscular and all male. The strong stance and powerful rear give the A-Class something of a bodybuilder.

As it should be with a young, cool car, the A-Class is available in many trims. For example, there are packages to customise both its looks and its spec level. The A-Class can be conservative and elegant, so that it offers the same luxury that makes the larger models so attractive.

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However, that's what defines the "old" Mercedes. To be different, the test vehicle is fitted with an "AMG Sport" line for a sporty character (sports suspension), 18 inch rims, sublime sports-seats with beautiful upholstery and a "Night" package for eye-catching looks. The latter comprises of the black grille, black mirrors and dark glass as shown in the pictures. The test car was painted in "Designo Magno Grey", which makes the whole package look even more exciting (and very pricey).

Another highlight is the Kevlar trim on the dashboard,

which goes all the way behind the dials. Wood trimming is not on the list, that's too old-fashioned for an A-Class.



Luxury and safety

To emphasise the difference with the previous A-class, the driver doesn't sit high and upright but instead low and laid back. Just like in a sports car the driver and co-driver are covered by metal up to the shoulders. The layout of the dashboard has been inspired by Mercedes Benz' own supercar: the SLS. Compared to its main rivals the atmosphere in the A-Class is exceptionally sporty and even exclusive. Even without driving, the occupants feel privileged to be in this cabin. Despite this, the space is about the same as in competing models.



With a younger audience in mind, the A-Class will integrate with mobile devices. This isn't just limited to making hands-free phone calls or playing music stored on a mobile phone. Smartphones can act like a bridge to the outside world. While driving, e-mails, Tweets and Facebook messages can be sent and received. On

receiving, messages can be read out loud by the computer. For safety reasons, only messages from a template can be sent (with added info from the satnav). Listening to webradio is also possible.

For now, this only works with the iPhone 4 and 4S. Mercedes-Benz promises it will support older iPhone models as well as Android phones in the future.



As to luxury and safety, the A-Class can be fitted with just about every feature available on the larger models. "Collision Assist" comes as standard on every new A-Class. This system warns the driver when the gap between him/her and the car in front gets dangerously small. The A-Class will never brake by itself; a spokesperson stated that Mercedes-Benz always wants the driver to be responsible not the car.

Handling

Whether the A-Class drives differently, strongly depends on the chosen suspension. The underpinning comes in three tastes: standard suspension, sports suspension and an extra sporty suspension (only on the "A250 Sport"). There's also a choice of standard power steering and "Direct Steer". Like the name implies, the latter makes the car respond more directly to the input from the steering wheel.



As far as Autozine is concerned "Direct Steer" is worth every penny. The standard steering lacks feeling and therefore trust in the car. Direct Steer is such an improvement that it even makes sports suspension obsolete, although it certainly does improve handling.



Diesel

The A-Class doesn't just share its platform with its big brother (the B-Class), it also shares its engines. First the "A200 CDI" was driven. Despite the name, this is not a 2.0 litre engine. The A200 CDI is propelled by a 1.8 litre, 136 PS / 300 Nm diesel engine.

This diesel engine is a true all-rounder. No matter what engine speed, there's always extra power on hand. The CDI gives the superior feeling that characterises driving a Mercedes-Benz. The brochure states that the A200 CDI has an average fuel

consumption of 69 mpg. Even with sporty driving on a highly demanding route (mountains, city traffic) the test car did 54 mpg.



Petrol

The "A200 BlueEfficiency" is said to combine high performance with low emissions. The way this 1.6 litre engine accomplishes this is unusual. At very low engine speeds (1,250 rpm) its maximum torque of 250 Nm is already available. In theory this means the A200 could be very powerful and dynamic.

To reduce fuel consumption, the first and second gear are extremely long. In real life this combination turns out bad. To keep up with traffic, the A200 really has to be provoked and by doing so fuel consumption rises. Instead of 52 mpg, like Mercedes-Benz promises, the test drive took as much as 36 mpg.



Sport

The sportiest A-Class is the "A250 Sport". It doesn't just boast the most exciting looks of the lot, it also has the firmest suspension and produces a mighty roar from the exhaust. These looks are matched by a 211 PS / 350 Nm strong two-litre petrol engine. The sprint from zero to 62 mph takes just 6.6 seconds. The A250 performs this trick without any aggression or drama.

Both steering and suspension are obviously more sporty than with a regular A-Class, but not as edgy as with hot hatches by other brands. This makes the A250 more of a Gran Turismo than a GTI. This is a logical choice by Mercedes, because by mid 2013 a 250 PS strong "A45 AMG" will be added to the line-up.



Conclusion

Mercedes-Benz introduces the new A-Class and it is different in many ways. The previous A-Class was a family car with a high seating position. The new A-Class is a flashy hatchback with a sporty cabin. As to build quality and trim levels, the new A-Class is still a true Mercedes-Benz.

The character of the A-Class can be decided upon by the customer. However, the A-Class is still a Mercedes-Benz which means comfort always comes first. Even the sportiest version is less sporty than similar models from other makes. Other brands also offer more innovation in the field of infotainment, safety and efficiency.

In the end the biggest charm of the A-Class is the fact that it is a Mercedes-Benz. This car is chosen with the heart rather than the mind. This means image, looks and character come first. In this respect the A-Class is more appealing to a young audience than ever before and that makes it truly different from the rest. ■



Specifications

Mercedes-Benz A-Class (2012 - 2018) A200d DCT

Size and weight



Length x width x height	429 x 178 x 143 cm
Wheelbase	270 cm
weight	1.475 kg
Trailer	720 kg
Trailer - braked	1.400 kg
Fuel capacity	50 l
Luggage space	341/1157 l
Tyre size	205/55R16

Engine and performance



Capacity	1796 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/
Max power	136 PS @ 3600 rpm
Max torque	300 Nm @ 1600 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	9.2 secs
topspeed	210 km/h
Average mileage	3.9 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	INF l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	INF l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	102 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 24,665
Price base model	Â£ 21,065