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Estate Of The Art

Or should that be art of the estate? It may not be available for another few months, but the estate version of the E-Class is already making waves. Whether you are looking to complement an all-Binz fleet with a multiple purpose vehicle, or are simply finding that there are some areas where even a Vito retrieval vehicle is just not discreet enough, the new E-Class estate is well worth a look.

And for private hire operators seeking that little bit extra load space without the utilitarian stigma that so easily attaches itself to an MPV, now at last is a vehicle that manages to combine taste with space. Here's what Mercedes-Benz themselves have to say about the car:

The new Mercedes-Benz E-Class Estate

From early 2010, Mercedes-Benz is launching the Estate version as another highly distinctive member of the E-Class family. Like the Saloon and Coupé, the Estate combines its own, elegant design with leadership in safety, comfort, quality and practicality. A number of technical innovations have entered series production in the E-Class which no other car in this class is able to offer -- from drowsiness detection to automatic emergency braking when an accident is recognised as imminent, and from Adaptive Highbeam Assist to the active bonnet. Naturally the Estate also features all these innovations. Air suspension with self-levelling at the rear will be standard as will unique new load compartment management features, including an EASY-PACK automatic powered tailgate and EASY-PACK Quick Fold rear seats.

The E-Class Estate is seen as the founder of the premium lifestyle estate segment with a history spanning over more than 30 years. Since the launch of the first Estate in 1977, more than one million customers have discovered their enthusiasm for this practical way of driving a luxury Mercedes-Benz. This success story is set to be continued by the fifth generation of the E-Class Estate -- at the same time following up on the successful launch of the Saloon. Launched in Europe in spring 2009, the E-Class Saloon had already achieved worldwide market leadership in its segment by May 2009.

The performance of the Saloon and Coupé in the 2009 *AutoBild* Design Awards shows how well the striking lines of the E-Class have been received: more than 100,000 readers of this German motoring publication recently voted the four-door model the most beautiful car in the world, and gave the two-door model first place in the Coupé/Convertible category.

Design: Mercedes-Benz 'handwriting' combined with E-Class styling features

The new Estate immediately makes an athletic and practical, but also serene and safe impression. Its distinctive design character is based on the new Mercedes-Benz style, which had its debut in the S-Class and is now also represented in the C-Class. One of its characteristics is the interplay between concave and taut surfaces, which are met by dynamic edges and structured contours.

The side view reveals many new features, leaving no doubt about the identity of the new Estate. The B and C-pillars appear to merge into the background thanks to glossy, black trim panels, making the entire side window area look like a single unit. This leads to an expressive arch leading from the A-pillar to the dramatic roof line and the downward-tapering D-pillar, all resting on the athletic shoulder-line of the Estate. The intriguing design of the door sill panels, which are visually understated in the centre but feature a prominent light-catching contour towards the wheel arches, accentuates the dramatic overall effect of the side aspect. This is additionally emphasised by the muscular, sweeping line on the rear section in front of the rear wheel.

When forming the rear end, the Mercedes-Benz designers took care to give expression to the great practicality of the new model. They did this by emphasising horizontal lines, for example the band formed by the tail lights and the chromed tailgate handle. The new LED tail lights are of two-part design, and create a visual continuation of the side wall into the tailgate itself. Both by day and night, their distinctive design is a major recognition factor for the E-Class family. This is the largest estate car in the premium segment, and it makes no secret of the fact.

Top marks for load capacity and ease of operation

The innovative "quickfold" system enables the rear seat backrests to be folded down from the load compartment, using two operating handles, one on the left and one on the right. The two backrest sections are unlocked and folded down by a bowden cable, creating a level loading surface. As another useful feature, either the left or right backrest sections, or both together, can be folded down. This enables the rear seat unit to be used by passengers even when long and bulky items are being carried. An unusual aspect of this system is that unlocking and folding down is also possible from the side.

With a load capacity of up to 1950 litres, the new E-Class Estate (length/width/height: 4895/1854/1471 millimetres) sets the standard in its class. Apart from the load compartment capacity itself, other dimensions of great practical importance, such as the rear aperture, rear sill height or maximum load length, demonstrate the expertise of Mercedes-Benz in estate car engineering.

It is not only in the load compartment that has seen an improvement in the already generous dimensions of the preceding model, there are also improvements in other respects as well. Two examples in the interior illustrate this: the elbow width in the rear has been increased by 50 millimetres to 1505 millimetres. Rear headroom with the large tilting/sliding sunroof installed has also improved by 50 millimetres to 1010 millimetres, and is almost as generous as in versions with no sunroof (1012 mm).

An exemplary load management system is on board as standard. Features include the automatically opening and closing EASY-PACK tailgate with automatic raising of the load compartment cover and the EASY-PACK folding load compartment floor. The latter considerably increases the usable height of the load compartment. It can be folded up and secured in various positions. Standard equipment also includes the EASY-PACK load compartment cover with a load securing net. When extended, the load compartment cover can be hooked into electrically powered carriers on the D-pillars. When the tailgate is opened, the load compartment cover is automatically raised to allow unobstructed loading and unloading. The optional folding bench seat for the load compartment is also a unique feature in this vehicle segment.

Nine airbags as standard, plus innovative driver assistance systems

Mercedes-Benz has consolidated its leadership in safety even further with the new E-Class. Around one dozen new or improved driver assistance systems help to prevent accidents or at least reduce the severity of the impact. These include the standard ATTENTION ASSIST drowsiness detection system, the optional DISTRONIC PLUS proximity control and the PRE-SAFE Brake, which is able to initiate partial and full emergency braking autonomously. For the first time, PRE-SAFE is also able to use only the information received from the short-range sensors in the front bumper to tension the front seat belts at the last moment before an accident recognised as unavoidable, thereby reducing the loads on the driver and front passenger during the crash.

With nine airbags fitted as standard, four seat-belt tensioners and belt-force limiters plus NECK-PRO crash-responsive head restraints, the new E-Class offers an even more extensive package of safety equipment than its predecessor. The airbags, which can deploy in a matter of milliseconds in the event of an accident, include two adaptive airbags for the driver and front passenger, a kneebag for the driver, two sidebags in the front-seat backrests and two large windowbags which extend from the A-pillar to the C-pillar during a side impact. Pelvisbags for the front occupants are also included for the first time. These reduce the loads acting on the torso and pelvic area during a lateral collision.

Sidebags for the rear seat passengers can also be installed on request. As a further safety innovation, Mercedes-Benz also offers optional, self-adaptive belt force limiters for the rear. These adjust to the size and weight of the passengers, and also become available for the Saloon with the introduction of the Estate.

Automatic self-levelling suspension at the rear as standard

Outstanding comfort on long journeys in the Estate is ensured by the newly developed DIRECT CONTROL suspension, which features the adaptive damping system as standard. The standard self-levelling rear suspension ensures that the Estate always remains at the same level, even when fully loaded. The suspension setup of the Estate has also been adapted to suit the modified body geometry, with slightly stiffer shock absorber settings and torsion bar stabilisers. Without any penalty in road roar and tyre vibration characteristics, making the Estate just as agile as the Saloon.

In the interests of favourable axle kinematics, superior vibrational comfort and improved safety, the lower link of the three-link front suspension with MacPherson struts consists of two separate elements which act as torque and cross struts. In addition to precise wheel location, this design has the particular advantage of compensating vibrations caused by tyre imbalances or fluctuating brake forces better than rigid wishbones.

In the interests of greater comfort and agility, the multi-link independent suspension successful for more than 25 years was re-engineered for use in the new E-Class. Modifications included the front cross-bar of the axle housing, which is now supported by the vehicle body over a wider area. This reduces the forces transmitted into the passenger compartment, a comfort feature that is particularly noticeable when crossing transverse joints in the road surface.

Reductions in fuel consumption and emissions across the range

The fuel consumption and emissions of the new Estate have been considerably improved by new engines and numerous detailed improvements (aerodynamics, weight, energy management, reduced resistances). One good example is the E 250 CDI with an output of 204 hp and 500 Nm of torque, with an impressive combined fuel consumption of 48.7 mpg whilst emitting just 150 g of CO₂ per km.

The range of engines available on the launch of the new Estate comprises six units developing from 170 hp to 387 hp. Though lower displacement, the new and improved engines generate more output than their predecessors while impressing with fuel consumption figures that were previously only found in the compact class. This was made possible by numerous innovations, for example the petrol model E 350 CGI BlueEFFICIENCY with spray-guided direct injection. The four-cylinder CDI engines partly owe their exceptional status to newly developed piezo-electric injectors and two-stage turbocharging. All the engines meet the EU5 emission standards.

The following engines will be available from launch:

Diesel

- E 220 CDI BlueEFFICIENCY: 4 in-line, 2143 cc, 170 hp, 48.7 mpg, 150 g/km, 6-speed manual transmission
- E 250 CDI BlueEFFICIENCY: 4 in-line, 2143 cc, 204 hp, 48.7 mpg, 150 g/km, 6-speed manual transmission

Petrol

- E 200 CGI BlueEFFICIENCY: 4-cylinder in-line, 1796 cc, 183 hp, 36.7 mpg* CO₂ 179* g/km, 6-speed manual transmission
- E 250 CGI BlueEFFICIENCY: 4-cylinder in-line, 1796 cc, 204 hp, 35.3 mpg, CO₂ 185-191 g/km, 5-speed automatic transmission
- E 350 CGI BlueEFFICIENCY: V6, 3498 cc, 292 hp, 32.8 mpg, 200 - 208 g/km, 7-speed automatic transmission
- E 500: V8, 5461 cc, 388 hp, 25.4 mpg, 258 - 260 g/km, 7-speed automatic transmission

(* provisional figures)

The number of Estate engine variants will increase to eight soon after the launch with the introduction of the E 350 CDI BlueEFFICIENCY and E 63 AMG Estate. In the UK three trim lines will be available, as with the Saloon. They will be SE, Avantgarde and Sport. UK Pricing and specifications are still to be confirmed.

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