

Mercedes Benz A140

Featuring 1.4 Elegance



SCORECARD

- Overtaking / pulling power
●●●○○
- Fuel economy
●●○○○
- Handling / steering
●●●○○
- Comfort / ease of control
●●○○○
- Interior space / practicality
●●●●○
- Accident / injury avoidance
●●●●○
- Costs in service
●●●○○
- Depreciation prospects
●●●●○

AFTER YEARS OF SEEKING – AND MAKING – its fortune out of larger, conventional rear-wheel drive saloons and estate cars, Daimler-Benz has stood convention on its head. Why? This astute car maker clearly believes that future personal transport must be different, and the clean-sheet-of-paper A-Class is the result.

Like the Fiat Seicento, it takes up little kerb space and is a true sub-compact contender, but there the similarity ends. This baby Merc is wide for its class and inside, it's really a mini-MPV, with every seat except the driver's foldable and removable. It's also built tall, which means no door sills inside and easy entry and egress unless you're very short (when it's a big step-up from the kerb).

Lots of oddments cubbies, a surprisingly large (and beautifully trimmed) luggage platform behind the 60/40 split, sliding back seat (even in its rearmost position) all add up to a really impressive packaging job. The only snags are seats that are unwieldy to man-handle (most women can't) and indifferent seating support – the front seats, for instance, have height adjustment only for the cushions, which opens up a gap and affects lumbar support. All-round legroom is surprisingly generous, however.

So is the attention to safety and security – the high build and “sandwich” floor contribute towards a high score in the Euro-NCAP crash tests; for security, an alarm is integrated with the central locking, under handset-control.

On the road, this A140's manners prove somewhat disappointing. The 82bhp engine, pulling a quite long-striding top gear, acquits itself well in terms of refinement and its acceleration is that expected of a small car that is, nevertheless, no lightweight. We loved the automatic-clutch option on our test car and the all-synchro gears engage with silky precision.

Fuel consumption is disappointing, however, and this little Merc's deft cornering ability, now totally tamed by its standard electronic stability control, is accompanied by directional nervousness and a lot of bounciness over bumps. In terms of both ride and handling, there are better small cars.

If you're considering this A-Class Mercedes, it should be because of its engineering integrity, safety and ingenious packaging (quarts into pint pots and all that).

It's a trendsetting small car that proves you can be both stylish and secure – at a price.

HOW THE A140 COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cvl/cc/bhp)	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom - front (cm)	Typical leg/kneeroom - rear (cm)	Steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
MERCEDES-BENZ A140	4/1397/82	3025	13.3	36.4/23.3	37	25/25*	110	97/71	3.7/10.65	358
Toyota Yaris 1.0 (5dr)	4/998/68	3850	14.8	32.5/23.3	47	26½/12	105	102/70	3.3/10.1	362
Mazda Demio 1.3	4/1323/72	3450	14.4	32.1/24.0	39½	25/14	104	105/70	3.1/9.6	381
Vauxhall Zafira 1.6	4/1598/100	3630	13.1	27.0/18.8	36½	24½/18*	103	102/75	3.2/11.0	432
Ford Focus 1.6 (5dr)	4/1596/100	3150	10.8	29.1/20.1	40½	26½/15*	107	100/71	2.9/10.6	415
Hyundai Atoz +	4/999/55	4000	18.9	33.9/25.4	44½	28/18	99	101/62	3.0/9.6	350
						* with ABS			(p) all power-assisted	

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.1	4.7	8.9	13.3
IN 5TH GEAR		8.5	17.2	26.2	36.4
IN 4TH GEAR		5.6	11.1	16.9	23.3

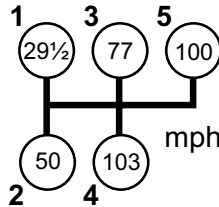
20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		17.2/11.4		17.7/11.3	
			17.2/11.1		19.2/12.0

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
	6000*	5650	4325		

* for best acceleration

Gearing gives 23.1mph per 1000 rpm in top gear = 3025rpm at 70mph



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade: unleaded 95 octane petrol

Type of use - air conditioning off*	mpg
In the city - heavy traffic	23
In the country - quiet driving	48
Typical mpg overall	37
Realistic tank range †	about 47 litres/380 miles

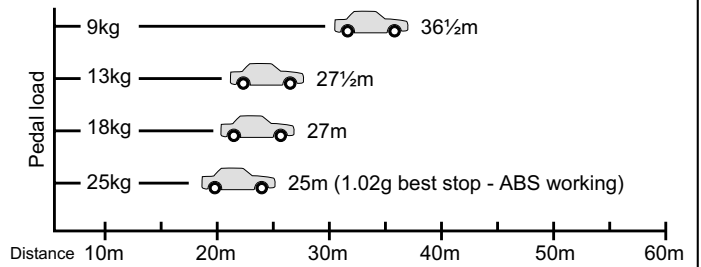
† based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience - not nominal tank capacity

*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2-4% in winter and 4-8% in summer

BRAKES

Pedal feel ●●●○○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●●○○ Handbrake ●●●○○

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)
(A good-to-average best stop is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load)

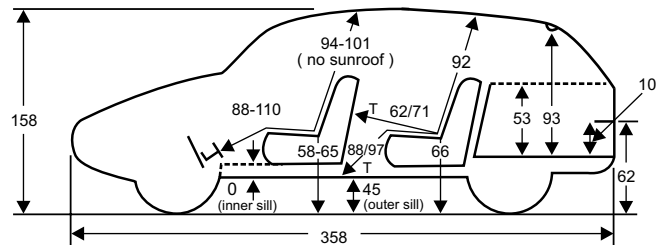


Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
9kg at start of test, 11 1/2kg at end of test (Ideal brakes show no change)

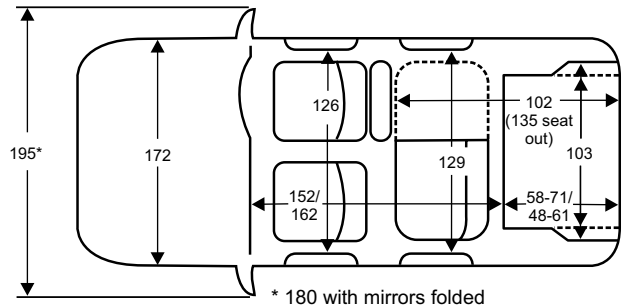
MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

Five-door hatchback



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants (seat forwards/backwards)



LIKES AND GRIPES

- Single stalk avoids confusion ... but rear window wash/wipe/heat controls obscurely placed
- Several useful oddment spaces ... but not all lined
- Full-sized spare tyre ... but only on a steel wheel (alloys used elsewhere)
- Handset locks everything with alarm set, too ... but key will not
- Short, squared-up shape makes reversing easy ... but quite wide with only partial mirror folding
- Always smooth auto-clutch ... but a "wrong gear" audible