

Mercedes-Benz C-Class



Featured model: Estate car



AT A GLANCE	
<i>considering size, price and rivals</i>	
Controls/displays	☆☆☆☆○
Handling/steering	☆☆☆☆○
Comfort	☆☆☆☆○
Space/practicality	☆☆☆☆○

THE C-CLASS ESTATE CAR RANGE

size and type upper medium (premium price) 5-door estate car
trim levels Classic, Elegance, Avantgarde
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/2.0 litre/129bhp (C 180); 4/2.0 S/charged/163 (C200K), V6/2.6/170 (C240); V6/3.2/218 (C320) diesel: Di turbo 4/2.15/143 (C220CDi); 5/2.7/170 (C270 CDi)
drive rear-wheel drive with six-speed manual gearbox; conventional 5-speed stepped automatic or "Sequentronic" 6-speed alternative (no torque converter)
notable features ABS with "brake-assist" and cornering stability controls; maximum speed limiter; under-floor aerodynamic/protection panels; use-related service-due display

YOU CAN'T BUY A FIVE-DOOR hatchback version of cars like the C-Class, or its domestic rivals from BMW or Audi. Instead, a "proper" estate car has always been an alternative to the prestigious but less-than-adaptable C-Class saloon.

This latest estate car, at a premium of about £1400, certainly copes with more domestic and leisure needs, without spoiling passenger comfort or the saloon's road-manners. Indeed, reversing one is easier as it's only fractionally longer and it's easier to see the rear extremities; (front and rear parking sensors are also an option if you're still unsure).

The 60/40 split back seats fold just like a good estate car's should and the clever headrests fold out of the way, too – you don't have to remove them. Yet this seat's posture support and legroom remain uncompromised compared with the saloons, headroom is better than the saloon's and it's a very cosy place to be – for two; unfortunately, this rear-driven model's centre tunnel intrudes significantly for a third. Neither is there a lot of load space behind – this estate has less width and load length than a Volvo V70, for example.

One of our test cars featured "Sequentronic" transmission. This is a conventional synchromesh (manual) gearbox, but it behaves as an automatic courtesy of electronic control and hydraulic shifting.

We've already seen Opel/Vauxhall and Alfa Romeo go down this route to provide auto-shifting without the power losses that compromise performance and economy. The trouble is that the culprit – the torque converter – is also a very user-friendly device. This Sequentronic's auto-shifts can be slow and prone to surge, if you're in a hurry; it performed better in manual mode.

Its worst hang-up isn't really its fault, however – Merc's insistence on a foot parking brake makes hill-starts a real problem unless the driver is adept at "two-footing", i.e. using the left foot on the brake pedal.

VERDICT

This estate car has no new tricks up its sleeve, neither is it particularly spacious. It merely follows established good practice flawlessly. If you need more adaptability than the C-Class saloon can offer, however, we can recommend it because it still seats four with as much comfort.

Mercedes Benz's attempts to infuse a more youthful, spirited image may well be more convincing to the eye than in the car's road behaviour. However, it simply oozes integrity and good taste.

LIKES ...

aerial integrated into rear side windows
 rear load blind "self parks"
 optional parking sensors (front/rear)
 effortless tailgate action

and GRIPES

steel spare only on alloy-shod cars
 gearchange elbow fouls centre console
 shallow height below load cover
 leather seat cushions too hard

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width (folded mirrors)	454x183
front- legroom	90-118
- headroom (no sunroof)	94-104
rear- typical legroom	98
- typical kneeroom	75
- headroom	97
- hiproom	130
load space (all seats in use) (litres/cu ft)	360/12.6
load length (seats up/folded)	93/168
load width	87-105
load sill height (inside/outside)	0/62
boot/load aperture height	39/71