

# Mercedes-Benz C-Class

*Featured model: C200 Kompressor Saloon*



**L**IKE ITS BAVARIAN ARCH RIVAL, the Mercedes C-Class trades on its image to justify its asking price, although superb engineering and build quality certainly help. Nevertheless, this object of admiring glances from the neighbours here, queues in taxi-ranks back home. So, if you put the latest C back-to-back with the current-crop of upper-medium two-litre saloons costing around £15,000, is it worth the extra 50 per cent?

In purely objective terms, the answer is a qualified "no" – although, without doubt, this latest Merc bristles with immensely reassuring constructional and safety details. It also accelerates, corners and stops with impressive alacrity, but the modified suspension's reaction to poor surfaces, though insular, provokes some side-to-side rocking, as if the dampers don't exert sufficiently firm control. Wind and road noise are remarkably absent and nothing inside frets or fidgets.

The supercharged engine's vivid response is matched by its amiable lower-speed manners. OK, so it's not quite as smooth as a six, but it would get our unstinting approval – if we hadn't also driven the diesel. This offers a delightful way to economise, totally free from uncouth noise or the low-speed vibes that beset the BMW 320D.

Despite its longer wheelbase, the new C-Class still offers only modest space to back seat passengers, although a tall

driver does well. The fixed rear backrest is good for luggage security, but restricts functionality; the split/fold arrangement costs extra.

In fact, there are many desirable convenience features available on the new C – but you have to pay extra for them. Safety and security is assured at the standard price, however – no complaints on that score.

We could have wished for the upgraded climate control, however – ours performed disappointingly, struggling to prevent the windows misting up and leaving one rear footwell unheated.

As a driver's car, the latest C-Class is much more convincing than the old C or 190 ever were, but ultimately, it still lacks the road manners of an Alfa (dare we say it?) the new Mondeo.

## VERDICT

**If you're prepared to pay the extra for a Miele washing machine or a Dyson floor cleaner, then the C-Class will make perfect sense. Car testers, as opposed to prospective owners, have to be objective, however, so we can't say this Merc is value for money. You can get more accommodation, versatility and comfort for a lot less outlay. However, if you want something that will survive high mileages, will help your survival and will grow old gracefully, you won't go far wrong with the C-Class.**

## AT A GLANCE

*considering size, price and rivals*

<b>Overtaking ability</b>	★★★★○
<b>Space/practicality</b>	★★★○○
<b>Controls/displays</b>	★★★★○○
<b>Safety</b>	★★★★★○
<b>Handling/steering</b>	★★★★○○
<b>Comfort</b>	★★★★○○
<b>Fuel economy</b>	★★★★○○

## SPECIFICATION

**engine** 1998cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 163bhp at 5300rpm, 170 lb ft at 2500rpm – supercharged; chain-driven twin overhead camshafts, 16 valves  
**transmission** 6-speed manual, rear-wheel drive; 24.8 mph/1000rpm in 6th, 20.8 in 5th  
**suspension** front: independent damper/struts, integral coil springs  
 Rear: independent multi-link with coil springs. Gas filled dampers and anti-roll bars all round; electronic stability system (ESP)  
**steering** hydraulic power assistance; 2.9 turns lock-to-lock; 10.4m diameter turning circle between kerbs (15.15m for one turn of the wheel)  
**brakes** ventilated discs front solid discs rear, with standard anti-skid (ABS) and "brake-assist" variable pedal response  
**wheels/tyres** 7in alloy with 205/55R16 tyres on Avantgarde test car; 195/65R15 on 6in steel rims on Classic; full-size spare

## LIKES ...

electric, self-folding door mirrors  
diffuse cold air from facia top vent  
"3-wink" lane change indicator position  
... and GRIPES  
foot-operated parking brake  
laborious "library book" owner's manual  
wiper stops too soon after washer

## THE C-CLASS RANGE

**size and type** upper medium (premium price 4 door saloon)  
**trim** Classic, Elegance, Avantgarde  
**engines** petrol: 4 cylinder/2.0 litre/129bhp (C180); 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; C240 and C320 – 5-speed stepped automatic

OVERTAKING ABILITY <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>						
<i>Our table below shows that the faster it goes – the faster it goes! Instant squirt supercharger, but very refined with it</i>						
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ <sup>th</sup> gear	⑤ <sup>th</sup> gear	⑥ <sup>th</sup> gear		
20-40mph	2.8	6.9	9.6	13.5		
30-50mph	3.6	6.4	8.6	11.7		
40-60mph	4.3	6.3	8.3	11.1		
50-70mph	4.4	6.2	8.2	11.0		
<b>30-70mph</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>22.7</b>		
max speed in each gear (*using 6000rpm for best acceleration)						
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤*	⑥
speed (mph)	28	47½	72½	100	125	143

SAFETY <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>	
<i>Not a foot put wrong here, with generous standard inventory. "Brake assist" reduces emergency stop pedal load by a further 4kg. Parking brake a bane with a manual gearbox</i>	
<b>braking</b>	<b>dry road stopping distance</b> <i>from 50mph (with standard ABS)</i>
pedal feel <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>	
in emergency <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>	
parking brake <span style="float:right">★○○○○</span>	
	pedal load   distance
	10kg   30½m
	19kg   23m <b>best stop</b>
	+4kg ie 23kg   23m <b>ABS on</b>

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
New C Class not yet tested

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY <span style="float:right">★★○○○</span>			
<i>With even a tilting back seat as an extra, not very adaptable or spacious – except for the driver; rear centre hump, too. Excellent turning circle</i>			
<i>in centimetres (4-door saloon)</i>	<b>inside</b>	<i>(† without sunroof)</i>	
<b>outside</b>	front - legroom	90-118	
length	- headroom	94-104†	
width - <i>inc mirrors</i>	rear - typical leg/	98/	
- <i>mirrors folded</i>	kneeroom	75	
height (no roof bars)	- headroom	93	
load sill height	- hiproom	130	
<i>(inside/outside)</i>	<b>load space</b> (all seats in use)	<i>(litres/cu ft)</i>	
<b>steering</b>	load length	94	
turns lock-to-lock	full length to fascia	No	
turning circle (metres)	load width	105-142	
easy to park/garage?	load height (to shelf)	46	
★★★★○			

SECURITY FEATURES			
central locking	✓	alarm	✓
remote control	✓	immobiliser	✓
auto window closure	✓	luggage security	★★★★○
deadlocks	✗		
✓ standard	0 factory option	✗ not available	

HANDLING AND STEERING <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>
<i>New rack and pinion steering a big plus, but still obliging rather than eager in its responses</i>


COMFORT <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>
<i>Very quiet, insulated progress, but some waddle over wavy surfaces. Back seats lack cosiness and air conditioning tempermental</i>

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS <span style="float:right">★★★○○</span>
<i>Arc-type dials plus complex fifty-item display panel. Hard but therapeutic seat and smooth pedal action – lighter than before. More gears than you really need, but only one column stalk</i>


FUEL ECONOMY <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>			
<i>Respectable for such a vivid performer, though the six-speed gearbox must help. Trip computer 5 per cent optimistic, but excellent range</i>			
<b>AA test results (mpg)</b>		<b>official figures (mpg)</b>	
worst (hard/urban)	22½	urban	20.3
best (motorway - 70mph)	36	extra urban	40.9
<b>overall mpg on test</b>	<b>30½</b>	<b>combined</b>	<b>29.7</b>
realistic tank capacity	63 litres	CO <sub>2</sub> emissions	228g/km
typical range	420 miles	car tax band	D

HOW THE C200K COMPARES	engine cyl/cap/power (no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes – best stop from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
<b>MERCEDES-BENZ C200K</b>	4/1998/163	2820	8.0	16.8/12.6	30½	23/19	118	98/75	2.9/10.4	453
<b>BMW 320D (diesel)</b>	4/1951/136	2400	9.5	22.8/14.7	49½	24/17	112	98/74	3.3/10.6	447
<b>Rover 75 2.5 V6 (auto)</b>	V6/2497/177	2540	9.3	Auto	28	24½/22	114	100/77	3.2/11.3	475
<b>VW Bora 2.3 V5</b>	V5/2343/150	3220	8.5	18.8/14.0	32	24/17	109	93/65	3.0/10.5	438
<b>Peugeot 406 2.0 16v</b>	4/1998/135	3210	10.5	27.2/17.6	32½	25½/36	111	99/74	3.2/11.0	456
<b>Alfa Romeo 156 Twin Spark</b>	4/1970/155	3310	7.8	22.6/15.7	31	26/22	106	95/76	2.2/11.4	443