

Mercedes-Benz E240

Featuring Elegance



MAYBE IT'S THE GRILLE, OR PERHAPS it's the three-pointed star; either way the E240 has a presence about it. There's a justifiably expensive feel, too, from the "thunk" of the doors to the precision of the do-it-all column stalk. Try as you might, you won't hear a creak, let alone a rattle – just the powerful hum of the punchy new 170bhp V6 engine which replaces the old, uncouth 2.3-litre four-pot unit. It not only feels more refined, it sounds quieter, too. Its underbonnet hum turns into a muted growl when you let it rev its way up through the new five-speed automatic transmission which is now standard. Seamlessly smooth though the upshifts are, the 'box sometimes thinks twice before making part-throttle downchanges – at such times we wished it were more decisive.

The ride, although masterful on fast main roads and motorways, isn't quite as fluid and rounded as a BMW's and proves a shade firm and thumpy at low speed. But the Merc makes amends with responsive steering (with a tight turning circle) and Brake Assist backing the anti-lock system to give exemplary stopping power. We're not keen on the foot-operated parking brake, though. Other driver aids include traction control, cruise control and a neat Gatso-cheating speed limiter.

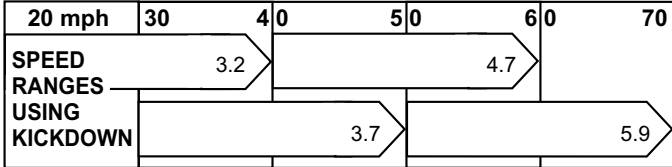
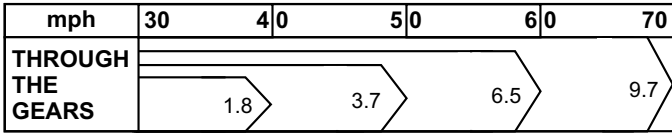
It's a pity there's no lumbar adjustment for the front seats, which are otherwise comfortable thanks to numerous settings and lots of leg-stretching space. Big switches and clever electronics abound, but some items (such as warning lights and map-reading lamps) have not been repositioned to suit right-hand drive. And, surprisingly, an adjustable steering wheel is, like an electric sunroof, a costly option.

Passengers in the back have superb all round seat support, acres of legroom and air conditioned breezes to faces and feet. They're also spoilt for choice when it comes to storage spaces. The roomy boot, with electric lid release, is wide and has very deep side wells, but it's not all that long because of the forward-mounted fuel tank.

Civilised, roomy and built to last, Mercedes hold their value, too – no wonder they're ten-a-penny taxis back home. Over here they're a costly luxury but, thanks to its super new V6 and automatic transmission, the 240 is significantly more refined. In fact it now represents a greater challenge to rivals in the executive class – particularly the BMW 523i, which it nevertheless still has to topple to be top dog in the top people's car park.

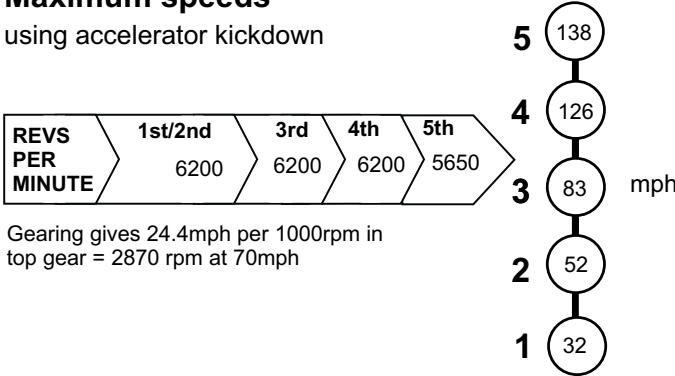
PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds



Maximum speeds

using accelerator kickdown



Gearing gives 24.4mph per 1000rpm in top gear = 2870 rpm at 70mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION

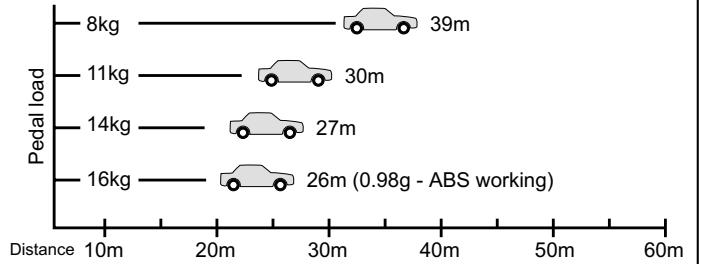
Fuel grade : unleaded Premium, 95 octane	
Type of use - air conditioning off*	mpg
In the city - heavy traffic	17
In the country - quiet driving	33
Typical mpg overall	26½
Realistic tank range † 57litres/330miles	

*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 ●●●●○ Park brake ●●○○○

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

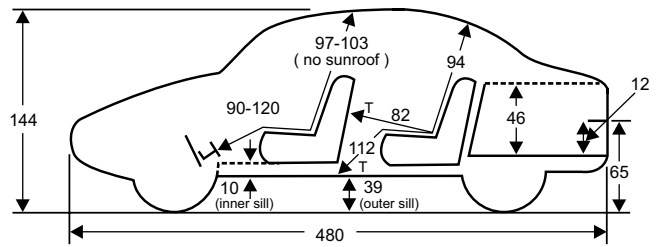


Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
11kg at start of test, 14kg at end of test (Ideal brakes show no change)

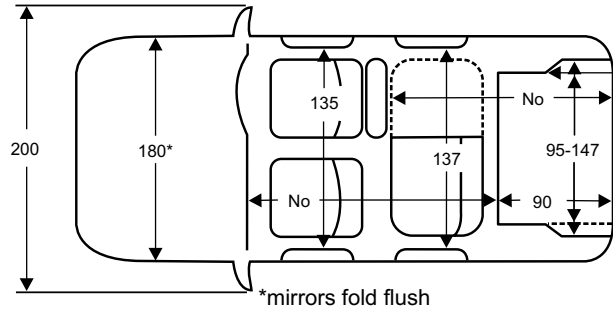
MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

4-door saloon



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



*mirrors fold flush

HOW THE E240 COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cyl/cc/bhp)	Revs at 30-70mph through 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes† best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom - front (cm)	Typical leg/kneerom - rear (cm)	Steering turns/ circle (m)	Overall length (cm)	
MERCEDES-BENZ E240 (AUTO)	V6/2398/170	2870	9.7	Auto	26½	26/16	120	112/79	3.2/10.6	479
Audi A6 2.4 SE	V6/2393/165	3100	8.8	21.6/15.2	30½	23/19	109	100/74	2.8/11.15	480
BMW 523i SE	6/2494/170	2980	8.1	24.1/16.9	30	23½/18	116	103/76	3.0/11.0	478
Saab 9-5 2.0t	4/1985/150	2350	9.5	30.7/16.3	31½	25½/32	110	103/79	2.9/11.0	482
Toyota Camry V6 (Auto)	V6/2995/188	2600	8.8	Auto	24½	26/18	107	109/79	3.1/11.6	476
Volvo S80 2.9 SE (Auto)	6/2922/204	2500	8.3	Auto	24	25½/20	112	114/80	3.0/11.6	482

† all with ABS