

Car Reviews Mercedes-Benz E Class

CAR REVIEW

# Mercedes-Benz E-Class review



£57,240 - £78,780

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Top Gear Team

Published: 13 Dec 2023



Overview



Driving



Interior



Buying

Specs & Prices

**“A fine, relaxing executive saloon. Provided you’re able to ignore the distracting tech. And coarse four cylinder engine”**

### **GOOD STUFF**

Supremely quiet, composed road manners, so comfy you’ll want to park it in your living room

### **BAD STUFF**

Harsh four cylinder engine, spongy brakes, tech often overwhelming, no air suspension for UK, price

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## OVERVIEW

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It’s the sixth-generation Mercedes E-Class saloon. Or not, if you want to be pedantic and include the 50-odd years of Merc’s ‘upper mid-range’ history before the E-Class name was coined. In which case you’re looking at more than 16 million sales and a longer origin story than some religions.

This latest E-Class is up against familiar foes; chiefly the [BMW 5 Series](#) and to a lesser extent the (much older) [Audi A6](#) and (much cheaper) Jaguar XF. You thought half of them had disappeared from showrooms didn’t you? They haven’t (well, the [S90](#) has), it’s just the sales figures are much uglier than they used to be and the cars themselves feel like they’re biding their time until the axe falls.

## **BUT MERC IS SERIOUS ABOUT THE NEW E-CLASS, WHEN IT ALREADY HAS THE EQE?**

It is. The [EQE is all electric](#), the E-Class is primarily internally fed on petrol or diesel (all are at least [mild hybrid](#) though). Important to remember that these cars are designed for global sale, not just UK or even Europe and what may seem puzzling here might not elsewhere.

Nevertheless it’s got to be an expensive strategy, building two platforms for one body size, and it’s resulted in both cars being slightly bland and unmemorable. It also contrasts with BMWs one-platform-any-powertrain approach for the 5 Series.

## **IS IT AS GOOD AS A NEW BMW 5 SERIES?**

Depends how you want to frame it. The BMW drives more engagingly, but Mercedes’ big draw over the competition is comfort, and it’s wisely avoided the trap of chasing tauter dynamics and performance at the cost of keeping you relaxed and happy.

Don't get us wrong, the E-Class grips plenty hard enough, steers fluently and is nicely composed on bumpy roads, but it won't invite you to leather it along a country road. That ain't its vibe. The nine-speed auto gearbox is occasionally indecisive and often sluggish to shift, the suspension is hardly crisp and the brakes – especially in the [heavily-regenning](#) PHEV models – are softer than camembert. More on all that in the Driving section.

## YOU MENTIONED ENGINES. WHAT CAN I HAVE?

At launch the UK gets three powertrains: a 2.0-litre turbo petrol with 201bhp (E 200), a 2.0-litre turbo diesel with 194bhp and 325lb ft (E 220 d), and the [PHEV](#) which marries a 127bhp motor and – you guessed it – a 2.0-litre turbo petrol for a total of 308bhp. The latter is the quickest, hitting 0-62mph in 6.4 seconds. Its 25.4kWh battery is rated for 62 miles of electric-only range. Anything that isn't a PHEV is a mild hybrid, courtesy of an integrated starter generator and 48-volt tech. You know the drill.

The trouble is that the four cylinder engines aren't smooth or refined enough to match the rest of the E-Class. They're fine at low revs and cruising, but get raucous and nasally higher up, which doesn't align with the car's otherwise fine road manners. All of which might mean that the engine to have is the one almost no-one will buy: the E450 d with its straight six 3.0-litre 385bhp diesel.

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More engines are on the way, but another miss is that the UK won't be getting Merc's impressive air suspension (except on the forthcoming [E-Class Estate](#)) and rear-wheel steering looks out too. The latter's not a big loss but the former is a weird omission. We suspect it has something to do with most cars going to company purchasers who don't tend to fit options as it drives up their costs (whereas the estate is likely to be popular with private buyers). The passive set-up is

actually very good, if a long way from feature packed. No fiddling with adaptive dampers and so on here.

## ENOUGH SUBSTANCE, LET'S TALK STYLE.

Inevitably the new E-Class borrows some of its styling from Mercedes' electric EQ line-up, and while those slippery bars of soap aren't the most inspiring source material, the E-Class does do better. It's understated but has a certain stateliness and presence to go with its low 0.23Cd drag factor and careful visual positioning between [C-Class](#) and [S-Class](#).

The three-point-star brake lights look weird to us, but if they're your sort of thing you might also want the illuminated grille surround as well. Customer research says buyers like that sort of thing. Clearly they can't be trusted.

## IS IT AS TECHY AS THE S-CLASS?

Feels like it. Mercedes has made a big fuss about the latest E-Class's ability to keep you and your offspring in a state of perpetual awe between A and B. Which is fine provided you're not the one driving. When the driver's in awe, the car's in trouble. And the problem with the E-Class is that it doesn't so much bathe you in tech but try and drown you in it.

Seriously, even the passenger gets a screen now, turning the entire dashboard into a scaled-down, slab-fronted Piccadilly Circus (a la [EQS](#)). See that camera atop the dash? That's for taking selfies (really - TikTok is among the apps) and holding Zoom calls over 5G. While stationary, mind. The E-Class will even overtake for you, so advanced is the ADAS now. And no, you still can't trust it.

The vents are mechanically driven and can be aimed via the touchscreen; a front-facing camera feed is overlaid with nav graphics telling you where to go; the HUD rivals an Ordnance Survey map for detail. It's overwhelming. And highly distracting.

## YOU SEEM ANNOYED.

Look, it's all well and good being comfort focused, but Mercedes has made the same mistake as so many other carmakers by assuming more must mean better. How are you meant to relax into a drive when you've got this much info being thrown at you and so many fiddly haptic buttons to interact with it? It's like there's been no editing, no-one's asked what can be left out or done without. Merc certainly isn't alone in this, but the E-Class' terrible steering wheel buttons (as fitted to many other Mercs) do make it awkward to operate.

All of this falls against a backdrop of what's going on in the car industry right now: supply issues and rising costs are pushing everyone upmarket in search of healthier margins. So the E-Class has less room for manoeuvre now and its shortcomings are more obvious than ever.

Simply being a smaller, cheaper S-Class was enough for the Mk5 and it probably still will be for most buyers of the Mk6. But this is likely the last ever combustion-driven E-Class and we're a

little sad it's not finishing with more of a flourish. Maybe [the next AMG E63 S](#) will make a better fist of it.

## WHAT'S THE COST?

Too much, arguably. Prices start at £55,290 for an entry level E200, and if you want the E300 e - the car that allows you to have your e-cake and (hopefully) not choke on it - you're in for at least £68,020. That big E450 d? It starts at £80,640. And yes, if you're thinking these prices seem more S-Class than E-Class, you're not alone.

## OUR CHOICE FROM THE RANGE



MERCEDES-BENZ

E200 AMG Line 5dr 9G-Tronic

£57,240

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## WHAT'S THE VERDICT?

“It's more impressive at a standstill - where you can coo over its screens and functionality - than it is on the move”

The Mercedes E-Class rightfully shuns a lap-time battle with the 5 Series and focuses on the thing it's best at: keeping you comfortable. At that one job, the E-Class is still extremely good. It'll purr through big distances with ease and not consume too much in the process. Having tried Merc's clever air suspension in Europe, we're a bit miffed it's not available in the UK, but have to admit the coil spring set-up is good. The thing that lets down the E-Class' luxury vibe is the harshness of those four cylinder engines.

The bigger issue for us is more existential: what is the E-Class for these days? The S-Class exists so big-hitting execs can make their flights on time, but the aspirational qualities that underpinned the E-Class in previous generations aren't there any more. This is Merc going through the motions because it doesn't want to take the risk of repositioning a long-time favourite.

The result is a car with little character or sense of itself as anything more than a purveyor of massive cabin technology. This is a car that's more impressive at a standstill - where you can coo over its screens and functionality - than it is on the move, where much of that is infuriating and at odds with the luxury vision Merc is trying to pitch. It's a good E-Class, but the question is, who now wants an E-Class?

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## THE RIVALS



### BMW 5 Series

£25,807 - £65,725



### Audi A6

£38,675 - £79,415



### Jaguar XF

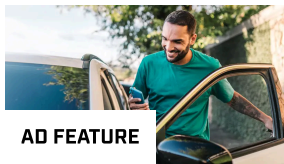
£32,315 - £52,125

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