



## Mercedes-Benz A-Class

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Quality cars are identifiable straight away. Even if a premium vehicle had its badges taped over, all you'd need to do is sit in it. Instantly you'd sense the difference between an 'average' and a top class motor. Take the latest Mercedes-Benz A-Class. Inside, it's positively palatial.

The German brand is famous for its refinement, but the A-Class is almost the runt of the litter - and therefore you might expect a more undeveloped set up inside and out. But that's not the case at all. It may well have been the argument when the old model first appeared on our roads. It was upright, careful and dull. It certainly wasn't a car you'd list as captivating. Nonetheless, it did sell - and that's because it was affordable - for a Merc - and practical for parents on the rug-rat run desperate to roll up outside the school gates in a Benz.

Then the A-Class was completely re-thought for 2013. It rolled off the production line a totally different car - not just one that had undergone plastic surgery - it was poles apart from the old version.

The entry-level Mercedes is now truly enthralling and a machine you want because of its alluring aesthetics. In some ways it's lost its no-nonsense practicality because the boot, although conveniently rectangular, is nothing to shout about space-wise. But brush that aside and take a test drive, because the new model will seduce you - especially if you go for the A 200 CDI AMG Sport.

This is a real driver's car and includes a dynamic handling package with sports suspension, perforated disc brakes and cruise control. As well as this, the Merc has athletic body-styling, 18 inch alloy wheels and a silver grille. Additionally, in A 200 CDI guise, it comes with a gutsy turbo diesel powerhouse. It also has a flat-bottomed leather steering wheel, red stitching, sports seats, rain sensors, ambient lighting and a stereo system boy-racers would be jealous of.

On the move, the A 200's oil burner gets you to a respectable speed quickly, if not sensationally. Road holding, however, is phenomenal. Steering is well-weighted and precise, and the six speed gearbox is slick, quick, and easy on your left hand.

At the same time, the A-Class reinforces that safety is the priority for Mercedes-Benz. In addition to having an 'electronic stability

program' (ESP), which detects and reduces loss of traction, it has adaptive brakes with hill-start assist. Standard specification also includes radar-based 'collision prevention assist', which can reduce the risk of nose-to-tail collisions, or minimise their effects.

The safety on the baby Benz isn't just clever; it's potentially life-saving. I certainly found the gadgetry helped to alert me when everything on the motorway ground to a halt without warning. The 'collision prevention assist' gives you visual and acoustic warnings if it senses an accident is likely to happen. It also primes the function called 'brake assist' to ensure maximum stopping power as soon as your foot touches the brake pedal.

The A-Class has the vim and vigour that's required to punch its weight in a highly competitive market. It's an all-round performer and just the car that Mercedes-Benz dealers need to tempt new customers into their showrooms.

### PROS

- Athletic • Attractive
- Great grip • Safe

### CONS

- Small boot

### FAST FACTS

- Max speed: 130 mph • 0-62 mph: 9.3 secs
- Combined mpg: 62.8 • Engine: 1796cc 4 cylinder 16 valve turbo diesel
- Max. power (bhp): 136 at 3600-4400 rpm
- Max. torque (lb/ft): 221 at 1600-3000 rpm
- CO2: 121 g/km • Price: £25,110

