

Mercedes-Benz GLA

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This Mercedes-Benz is zippy on country roads and dynamic and frugal around town or on the motorway.

But this isn't just your standard high-quality Merc. The GLA is the first Mercedes-Benz compact sport utility vehicle (SUV) to be available with the company's new-generation permanent all-wheel drive system, 4MATIC.

The GLA is less imposing than many SUVs, and therefore it fits perfectly into the day-to-day urban lifestyle. At the same time the 4MATIC all-wheel drive system, fitted to my GLA 220 CDI model, guarantees plenty of recreational enjoyment. So, once you're away from the daily routine, the car could tackle, say, rough terrain, the beach, and loose ground without a problem.

As a composed everyday companion the GLA has a flexible interior. The rear seat backrests can not only be folded down completely, but are also adjustable for angle if required. In addition, the liberal luggage compartment can be loaded without difficulty thanks to a low sill and wide hatchback.

The dashboard consists of an upper and lower section, allowing surface structures that are different in look and feel. Matt and glossy graining creates an attractive light effect and five round air vents are integrated into the dashboard.

The Mercedes' seats are sporty and supportive and controls for the electric seat adjustment are arranged on the interior door panels. These panels are of extremely high quality, having a soft, plush feel about them. The GLA has a large, free-standing display set in the middle of the dash. It serves as a

sat-nav and as an information source. But it has the unfortunate appearance of being stuck on at the last minute. A more integrated system would complete an otherwise perfect cabin.

This SUV features a fuel-saving ECO start/stop function; and the engine on the 220 CDI GLA is combined with a dual clutch automatic transmission, which marries efficiency and sportiness to an outstanding level.

The set-up of the car's chassis means you're guaranteed a comfortable commute. And, compared with conventional systems, the GLA's power steering provides brilliant feedback. →

The power steering also allows various assistance functions. These include counter-steering if the vehicle oversteers; steering corrections when braking on surfaces with different levels of grip; reducing the effects of front-wheel drive on the steering and compensation of cross-winds and road camber.

This technology gives you the confidence to turn hard into bends because you can sense exactly what's happening beneath the tyres. The four wheel drive obviously adds to this assurance and fuels a belief that the Merc will grip to pretty much anything at any speed.

Numerous safety systems also offer support in the GLA and reduce your workload. Features include Attention Assist drowsiness detection and radar-based Collision Prevention Assist with adaptive Brake Assist, which helps to protect against collisions from a speed of only 4 mph.

So, if you're a bit of car badge snob and you fancy yourself as fair-weather off-roader, then this could well be the motor you've been looking for.

At over £31,000 the GLA 220 CDI 4MATIC AMG Line, reviewed here, is not cheap, but it's one that you'll be proud to own - and able to play with safely on days away from the office.

PROS

• Cabin • Handling • Flexibility

CONS

• Display screen • Expensive

FAST FACTS

- Max speed: 134 mph
- 0-62 mph: 8.3 secs
- Combined mpg: 55.4
- Engine: 2143 cc 4 cylinder 16 valve turbo diesel
- Max. power (bhp): 168 at 3400 rpm
- Max. torque (lb/ft): 258 at 1400 rpm
- CO2: 132 g/km
- Price: £31,035 on the road

