

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Mercedes-Benz CLS 55 AMG



Or 'Interstellar Overdrive' for that matter. Everyone knows Mercedes make some of the best cars for covering big distances. They also, via AMG, produce one of the world's finest performance engines, the supercharged 5.5 litre V8. Add the 476 HP motor to the four-door coupé styling of the CLS and you have what might be the most 'complete' car out there, and ours - with nearly £15,000 of extras - was certainly the mostly 'comprehensive'.

It's a slightly strange sensation settling into the driver's seat for the first time. The 'is it?/isn't it' saloon/coupé styling makes for a cab-forward side profile that translates into a driving position close to the screen and rear-view mirror. One is also conscious of the rear seat passengers' comfort so is disinclined to push the seat too far back. In actual fact, rear legroom is pretty good and Mercedes have cleverly used a more sloping than normal rear backrest to get the necessary space astern, although this does have the effect of the moderately tall *just* grazing their heads on the rooflining.

The interior is up to Mercedes-Benz AMG's usually high standards, albeit borrowing generously from its other models for switches and layout. There's none of the extra-special design touches of (say) a Bentley Continental GT. But then that's 50% more expensive, and the Stuttgart firm has gloried for years in its sense of discrete (with odd moments of madness) 'European old-money' functional styling.



Outside, the CLS is elegant (in a slightly quirky way), and the AMG additions of wide alloys, spoilers and badges make for a more purposeful car than standard, yet not too 'bling'. In fact pretty 'bling-less' really, and one of the best views of the CLS is from a first floor window where the lines take on a smoother, more balanced aspect than directly front- or rear-on (its weakest angle).

It's difficult to know when to start mentioning the electronics either standard on the car or as part of the extensive options list, but how about the **Keyless-Go** that lets you open the door and push the starting button on the gear lever without removing the key from your pocket? Like so many other things that we'll come to later you don't really *need* that £880 extra but it is a rather nice thing to have.

Anyway, keyed-up or not, the 5,439 cc V8 fires straight away and once warmed up a little will produce the

sort of performance akin to shackling the front towing eye to an F16.







The power maxes at 6,100 rpm but it's the 700 Nm of torque from 2,650 - 4,500 rpm that produces the performance truly making the supercharged V8 engine one of the best out there. It's never very noisy, but burying the foot to the floor will elicit a droning roar akin to a WW2 fighter on overboost.

For those who think the best thing about a modern Grand Prix is the noise of the AMG safety car, this is the vehicle for you.

And the **Airmatic DC** suspension, specially tuned by AMG, together with this car's optional 19" multi-piece twin spoke wheels (8.5 x 19 255/35R19 front, 9.5 x 19 285/30R19 rear) will glue the CLS AMG to the road to most people's satisfaction. The handling is not in the outright sportscar (F430) or even GT (DB9) league by virtue of the car's size and saloon underpinnings, but for those used to no-compromise long-distance driving it's near perfect. Braking (always a Mercedes strongpoint) is beefed up with optional (again) composite front discs that you know will stand up to repeated applications into Alpine hairpins from very high speeds .

So going 'à la carte' from the options list, what's worth specifying? The **Distronic** (radar-assisted distance control, £1,310) really does work, is great fun on cruise control and avoids the irritation of braking and re-setting the speed all the time. The ventilated, **Driving Dynamic multi-contour seats** (£550 + £530) border on the novelty, although the cooling would be quite nice on a long Southern European journey. I'd pass on them. **COMAND APS** (the Sat-Nav and Hi-Fi for £1,990)? Well, I'm surprised it's not standard but it's pretty well essential nowadays so let's have that. Other bits and bobs like **Linguatronic** (voice-actuated cockpit functions, £320) and **Tyre Pressure Monitoring** (£245) I could live without.



The **Performance Package** is the biggie, weighing in at £6,800, including as it does the aforementioned composite brakes and wheels and tyres, together with a limited slip differential, an AMG leather/Alcantara wheel and the maximum speed limiter increased to 300 km/h (186 mph). Would I specify it? Yes, go on - you know you're worth it.

Behind the wheel, the car delivers performance aplenty, with as much (or as little) driver input as you like. The gearchange, a 5-speed automatic with locked-up torque converter from 1st gear and the ability to hold a gear in 'manual' with no up- or down-shifting, is great to use, although I was not impressed with the 'shift' buttons on the steering wheel. Due to the typical M-B practice of storing a variety of levers and wands

behind the wheel it was clearly not possible to add another couple of 'up' and 'down' paddles. The resulting plastic buttons on the back of the wheel feel low-rent, and the way the actual gear lever can be nudged left and right to change gear is a delight that renders them somewhat superfluous.



Conclusion? Awesome performance from a stylish four-seater, including a well-sized boot for a few days away. It's not going to break down, it's reasonably economical (17 - 19 mpg in my hands) and its acceleration, handling and braking dynamics are up with the best of them - at the price (even including the crazy extras list we had) of a pre-owned Aston or Bentley,

More mass-market perhaps, but no less satisfying - and a great deal more practical.

*The Mercedes-Benz CLS 55 AMG has a base price in the UK of £70,595. The extras fitted to this car, some of which are detailed above, made the total price £85,020.*

*This test car is finished in Iridium Silver with Anthracite Nappa Leather interior.*

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