



HERE'S TO BLUE EFFICIENCY

Tim Barnes-Clay, @carwriteups >

Mercedes-Benz felt a change of direction was needed for the B-Class.

The German manufacturer has made the car more agile and efficient by lowering its height. Also, as is the case with the 200 CDI on test here, a new diesel engine has been fitted alongside a more modern manual transmission.

So, what's the revised motor like? Well, it's a typical Mercedes sports tourer, offering bags of room, combined with the dynamic performance of a hatchback saloon. High-quality materials and finely structured surfaces abound.

The sitting position is now more upright in the re-born B-Class. This makes for good visibility when you're behind the wheel. Indeed, the more erect seating arrangement, in combination with a lowering of the vehicle's floor at the rear, leads to a degree of legroom which surpasses that of the S and E-Class.

On the move, the B 200 CDI BlueEFFICIENCY SPORT is nimble. You'd think that would make it pleasurable on twisty routes. Well, it does in a way, but it doesn't make for comfortable driving. You see, in 'Sport' guise the car's suspension is too harsh and, because it also sits on 18 inch alloys, it clatters over the slightest change of road

surface. Mind you, if you don't mind having your fillings rattled out of your molars then the car is great fun to throw around corners. It's also fantastic for motorway mile munching.

As well as being a lively, safe, family oriented car, the

B 200 never forgets it comes from pedigree stock. It offers internet access, voice control, sat-nav and MP3 connectivity. Oh, and there's one other advantage of driving a B-Class – it's easy to park!



FAST FACTS

Max speed: 130 mph 0-62 mph: 9.5 secs Combined mpg: 64.2
Engine: 1796 cc 4 cylinder 16 valve turbo diesel Price: £24,710

PROS 'N' CONS

✓ Agile ✓ Well designed ✓ Safe ✓ Good legroom ✗ Harsh ride

HYUNDAI I40 TOURER

Tim Barnes-Clay, @carwriteups >

Automotive Group now ranks as the world's fifth-largest automaker.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that it is capable of producing one of the best looking new estate cars available – the i40 Tourer.

The stylish and sporty motor is an uncompromised addition to the medium family estate car market. It offers remarkably low CO2 emissions and high fuel economy as well as an intuitive and contemporary

interior package, combined with an unparalleled level of standard equipment for its class. Sitting behind the wheel of the i40 Tourer is a very pleasant place to be. The controls are well laid out and the gloss black interior trim adds an air of sophistication.

With only a 1.7 oil-burner under the hood it is certainly not a performance car, but 0-62 mph in 10.6 seconds is not outrageous and the car cruises quite happily at motorway speeds, returning up to 62.8 mpg on the combined cycle.

In the countryside the suspension soaks up our



pothole-ridden British 'B' roads and the i40 has decent body control with light and precise steering. The almost weightless feel of the steering-wheel makes it tricky to know what is happening on the road surface but, to be honest, it makes for easy 'real world' motoring – especially when weaving

through traffic or parking in a tight spot.

FAST FACTS

Max speed: 124 mph
0-62 mph: 10.6 secs
Combined mpg: 62.8
Engine: 1685 cc 4 cylinder 16 valve turbo diesel
Price: £22,545 on the road



BENTLEY MULSANNE

Tim Barnes-Clay >

The new Mulsanne is the crème de la crème of the world-famous Cheshire based luxury motor maker.

Hung up in a giant art gallery, it'd be a masterpiece because the design of the car is a blend of sportiness, coach built elegance and solidity.

Inside, the aroma of leather and wood envelops you instantly. The scent is wonderful, yet almost overwhelming. And there's a reason for this: over 170 hours - that's almost half the entire build process – goes into crafting the interior of the Mulsanne.

Whether sitting in the back

FAST FACTS

Max speed: 184 mph
0-62 mph: 5.3 secs
Combined mpg: 16.7
Engine: 6752 cc Twin-turbocharged V8 petrol
Price: £225,900 on the road

or behind the wheel, you cannot ignore the pure punch of energy unleashed from the Bentley's 6¾-litre V8 engine. It guarantees huge power at low revs and self-possessed performance, while maintaining high levels of finesse at any speed.

Quite simply, the Mulsanne is as near to motoring perfection as you can get. The only thing that lets it down is a smaller than expected boot but, that aside, very few car manufacturers can offer such a concoction of performance and refinement in a single vehicle.

TOYOTA AVENSIS TOURER Tim Barnes-Clay >



T rue, not so long ago, the Avensis once looked bland and, more often than not, had a 'minicab for hire' sign glowing from its roof – but now the car is handsome enough for people to stop and ask what it is.

The pronounced snout, the wrap-around headlights with integrated LED strips, combined with the car's long, sleek body, make the Avensis Tourer one of the best looking estate cars on the market.

From a purely aesthetic point of view, little touches such as privacy glass at the rear and the sort of alloy wheels you'd expect to buy as an optional extra are the icing on the cake.

Inside, the car is a match for many German executive motors. Soft touch materials cover the cabin, complemented with a nickel and wood

effect centre console. A leather steering wheel, air conditioning, and automatic handbrake add another tier of quality, but Toyota's Touch and Go integrated multimedia and navigation system is the showpiece of the interior.

On the road, the 2012 Avensis is one of the best commuting machines out there. It glides over bumps and eats up motorway miles without any effort at all. And when it comes to loading up, the boot is massive (543 litres). It's low, wide and long, with lots of space for anything from exhibition display boards to the family's holiday luggage.

FAST FACTS

Max speed: 127 mph
0-62 mph: 9.8 secs
Combined mpg: 43.5
Engine: 2231 cc 4 cylinder 16 valve turbo diesel
Price: £29,205 on the road