

CLASSIC DRIVER

E-Motion



With a nod to a previous model of the 1960s, DaimlerChrysler introduces a top-of-the range car to its recently revitalised E-Class - the E 63 AMG. Whether it's worthy of the name originally given to the legendary 300 SEL 6.3, some brisk road-testing will soon establish.

In days gone by, the extraordinary creations by Hans-Werner Aufrecht were reserved for a discerning business-class elite, to be found in the best office car parking worldwide. Since AMG's incorporation into the DaimlerChrysler empire things have changed a little. The styling excesses of the '70s have been replaced a more conservative tone, yet retaining just a little embellishment to stand out from mainstream M-B production. Translating this into the facelifted E-Class means, in comparison to the outgoing model, a slightly different version of a slightly different car with its spoilers and enlarged front and rear valence plus new 18" alloy wheels and a chromed four-pipe exhaust to hint at the power contained within.



Inside the car the AMG version carries the revised interior of the newest E-Class, with notes of its own such as the aluminium paddles to operate the (conventional auto) gearbox replacing buttons on the previous car and excellent sports seats - however the fabricated aluminium pedals look slightly out of place in a sophisticated executive saloon. But of course the big change is up front in the engine compartment where there sits an all-new V8 built exclusively by AMG carrying the magical capacity - 6.3 litres.



Pressing the 'Start' button atop the gear lever brings forth promising growling noises, and a toe on the accelerator soon eliminates any doubts that this car is not a 'true' AMG, unworthy of inheriting the great tradition of the mighty 6.3. Without a sign of hesitation, two tons of rear-driven saloon is catapulted forward with such force that the seat construction is tested to its limits. It's an Apollo moon mission launch all over again.



Let the figures do the talking; 630 Nm torque propels the car from rest to 100 km/h (62 mph) in 4.5 seconds. Top speed is limited to 250 km/h (155 mph) but any reading up to that is available at the merest depression of the pedal. The perfectly designed V8 never loses its composure with a total absence of tonal imbalances, drones or vibration. Road noise is non-existent, there's just the hint of a hum from the tuned exhaust. Daily

city traffic, the everyday stop and go of city life, is a breeze and even the fuel consumption of 14/15 litres/100 kms is acceptable for such a missile.



With its AMG Speedshift 7-speed transmission mated in perfect harmony to the engine, and the steering working well with a superbly tuned chassis, the car's size seems to melt away and either on tight side streets or out on the open road the E 63 AMG is easy to place and guide. Despite the very wide and low profile rubber (8.5" and 9.0", 245/40 and 265/35) the Airmatic suspension provides a very comfortable ride – testimony to the quality or workmanship and engineering at the Affalterbach factory.



And once you've wound the big car up to terminal velocity you don't need to worry about the braking. Slowing from speeds above 180 km/h is of the order of racing cars from just a few years ago. Eight-piston light alloy callipers at the front working in co-ordination with the very latest DaimlerChrysler electronics ensure the finest stopping power around. When the car detects an 'emergency' level of braking it will activate the hazard warning lights too.

In addition to the various AMG tuning parts the second-generation E-Class carries many improvements over the outgoing model such as the Intelligent Light System. This is based on bi-xenon headlamps, and adjusts to suit the relevant driving and weather conditions. New lighting functions such as country and motorway light modes increase the driver's range of visibility by up to 50 metres. Another new feature is the Active Light System and cornering light function.



There's also the standard inclusion of PreSafe, the preventive, award-winning safety system offered exclusively by Mercedes-Benz. The system will recognise critical situations as they develop: if braking deceleration exceeds a certain level or the vehicle threatens to develop a skid, the system tensions the front seat belts as a precaution, adjusts the position, height and cushion/backrest angle of the front passenger seat, and closes the side windows and sliding sunroof to leave only a small gap. With its eight airbags and active and passive safety systems it's one of the safest cars in the world.

Chairman of the Board of Management at DaimlerChrysler, Dieter Zetsche has said "2006 will be the year of the E-Class." He's certainly got it right with the E 63 AMG.

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