



## DRIVING RANGE

## WELCOME TO DIY HEAVEN

The Flasher finally gets his driving gloves onto a Mercedes steering wheel!

I've found it at last! The quest for a car that actually lets you drive it is over – hats off to Mercedes-Benz for spotting the gap in the market. I've been looking high and low for a modern car that doesn't try to nanny you at every opportunity, and this M-Class fits the bill. I love it!

I've noticed that most car manufacturers seem to think maximum automation equals maximum driving pleasure. Many of them forget that when a car drives itself, it makes the driver feel useless, unwanted and deeply unhappy. Mercedes-Benz does have its share of virtually self-driving cars in its range, but I like the fact that the M-Class is an option. Here is a car that gives the driver plenty of credit – perhaps more than I deserve!

For example, this is one of few cars I've driven in which you can execute a proper handbrake turn. That's partly because the Merc has a real hand-brake

rather than a decorative switch on the dash. Alright, it's not technically a hand-brake, because it's a pedal, but you know what I mean. Give it the boot on gravel and the rears will lock up and send you sideways – just like the old days. As long as you can learn to release the brake quickly (takes practice), the possibilities are endless.

Also, when you switch this gearbox to manual, it really is manual. In other words, it'll let the revs keep climbing until you change up, rather than take over the shifting when it thinks you're being silly. Over-revving it would be a daft thing to do, but it's still nice to know the car doesn't think you're daft.

The recently-facelifted ML500 I tested was also able to raise and lower itself at the touch of a button. All told, there's some genuine off-road capability here, and yet it still manages to radiate all the elegance and class that a Mercedes-Benz must radiate.

It's a good-looking car, no doubt about it. If I was going to buy a car in this category on looks, I'd go for this one. Somehow it's just a cut above the rest; there's just something about that grille. And if I was going to buy on power, I'd probably choose this one too. Not only does the V8 go hard when you ask it to, but it actually gives you the feeling that it wants to be unleashed. On the highway, it can feel like you're sitting on a chained-up bison ready to charge. Lovely, but be warned that fuel consumption is around the 12-14 litres per hundred mark.

Other small touches I liked were the fact that you can close the boot on the remote as well as open it – always wondered why so many cars only want to do the opening part. You can also fold in the side mirrors while driving, which is useful for squeezing past taxis. There's also a ledge in the glove compartment which seems to be designed exclusively for a CD wallet! That means I can just chuck my music into its slot rather than have to re-arrange everything to fit it all in. That's the kind of nannying I like in a car!

There's also a massive array of settings on the driver's seat, with as many options for side and lumbar support as I've ever seen. The only drawback was one of the steering wheel controls. If you get excited about a song and push the volume control slightly too hard, the hooter goes off! Then again, maybe that's not a bad thing. People should know when the bison is coming... 🦏



**THE FLASHER**  
The jet-setting world of car racing is a distant memory for The Flasher now, but a year or so spent trying out all of South Africa's spanking new road machinery has eased the pain just a little. Especially that Aston Martin DBS. You might still find him pottering around at local racetracks, though – old habits die hard. Note to wealthy readers: he really wants a race drive again!

## THANKS TO...

Mercedes-Benz South Africa. Visit [www.mercedes-benz.co.za](http://www.mercedes-benz.co.za)

