All Grown Up

The totally redesigned 2015 Mercedes-Benz C-Class is ready to take the company's best-selling sedan into new territory

ARTICLE MICHAEL SALEMI | IMAGES COURTESY DAIMLER AG
he all-new 2015 C-Class was introduced in January to an excited crowd at Detroit’s North American International Auto Show. The all-new model represents breakthroughs in luxury and efficiency not previously seen in this market segment. Your eager Star editors were there.

The new C-Class has been completely re-engineered. The most significant structural change is the extensive use of aluminum in the all-new unibody chassis. With the introduction of the SL-Class in 2012, Mercedes-Benz has made significant advances in using aluminum as a structural component of the chassis. A complex configuration of castings, stampings, extrusions and forgings are joined with an intricate combination of welds, rivets, screws and chemical bonds heralding highly advanced manufacturing prowess.

Today, just two years later, engineering, design, and manufacturing lessons learned on the SL have allowed Mercedes-Benz to raise the bar for its mid-range premium car by introducing many of those same aluminum innovations on this new model. The weight reduction – almost 220 pounds – is a significant contributor to the nearly 20-percent increase in fuel economy. Take note: The C-Class is the company’s volume leader, with more than 2.4 million units sold since 2007, a timeframe that included challenging years. With the lightweight body and improved power-train technology, the future of Mercedes-Benz is looking brighter than that of OPEC.

Although aluminum content increased from 10 percent to nearly 50 percent, this advance was detailed as just one in a series of innovations that should maintain the status of the C-Class as the leader in its segment.

What we will initially see in the United States are two models that will be built at the Alabama plant, both 4Matics with turbocharged, direct-injection engines: the C300 with its 2-liter inline-4 rated at 241 horsepower and 273 pound-feet of torque and the C400 with a 3-liter V-6 at 329 horsepower and 354 pound-feet of torque. Both engines mate to the 7G-Tronic Plus automatic transmission with all-wheel drive. Overseas markets will be offered additional power trains, including BlueTEC diesels, a hybrid, and 6-speed manual transmissions, and AMG and other variants are anticipated for the North American market in future model years.

In addition to the weight savings from the body structure, aerodynamic drag has been lowered over previous models, enhancing fuel efficiency and user comfort with reduced noise levels. Engineers also improved noise characteristics from the HVAC motor, power windows, seat adjustment motors and other actuators, resulting in another benchmark.

This quieter ride will be enriched with improved handling and unparalleled comfort from the all-new suspension. This suspension features a newly designed four-link front axle decoupled from the spring strut, affording more grip and higher lateral stability. The improved suspension responds more sensitively to steering movements, allowing for a robust driving style. Rear suspension is a five-link design with improved straight-line stability. Those demanding additional performance can opt for the sport suspension, lower by 0.6 inches.

Additionally, Mercedes-Benz offers the optional Airmatic air suspension – derived straight from the S-Class – with electronically controlled and continuously variable damping on all four wheels that provides outstanding comfort and performance. The five Airmatic settings are Comfort, Eco, Sport, Sport+, and Individual, the last being customizable to the driver’s preferences. Airmatic is self-leveling for optimum ride comfort, even when the car is fully loaded. This is the first air suspension available on this class of vehicles.

The electromechanical Direct Steer system combines speed-dependent Power Assist with a variable steering ratio set by the steering angle. Power assistance provided by the rack and pinion gear is controlled on demand, thus contributing toward overall efficiency.

Mercedes-Benz has developed the most comprehensive package of both standard and optional safety features in the industry. No longer limited to the high-end vehicles, the new C-Class incorporates almost all of these systems with a host of enhanced functions that premiered in the S- and E-Class just months ago. These systems that enhance comfort and safety are called Intelligent Drive. Some you’ll just love to see work; others you hope you’ll never need.

Highlighting this package is the adjustable Attention Assist, which tracks driver time at the wheel since the last break and prompts the driver when it senses drowsiness. When combined

NEW MODEL

**The Star** 
MARCH-APRIL 2014 | 33
The Luxury interior displays materials and components that evoke the S-Class. The main differences in the Sport interior are the well-bolstered performance seats and the sport steering wheel. The rear seats, enlarged from the previous model, can accommodate three passengers. The center console with circular vents, simplified controls, infotainment display, and console control unit. Seating controls are on the door, of course, and the optional high-end audio system comes with engineered speaker grilles. The touchpad on the central console responds to finger-stroke movements, including tracing the alphabet.

with the optional COMAND system, it flags nearby locales for resting stopovers, making this a great co-pilot for long solo trips.

Adaptive Brake Assist offers collision protection from speeds as low as 4 mph. Moreover, the standard Collision Prevention Assist Plus can respond to potential collision dangers by automatically braking at speeds up to 124 mph, reducing collision severity by slowing or stopping the vehicle. It also responds to halted vehicles and pedestrians by braking while traveling up to 31 mph and can help prevent rear-end collisions at speeds up to 25 mph.

The optional safety systems that Mercedes-Benz now offers on the new C-Class include:

- Distronic Plus with Steering Assist, a semi-autonomous assistant in stop-and-go traffic jams that operates at speeds below 37 mph, following the vehicle ahead even where lane markings are indistinct or lacking, providing a safe and easy means of following the flow of heavy traffic.
- The BAS (Brake Assist System) Plus detects cross traffic and boosts braking if the driver fails to brake sufficiently. The PRE-SAFE® Brake system detects stationary vehicles as well as pedestrians, braking automatically if the driver fails to react, and prevents accidents up to 31 mph and lessens the severity of collisions up to 45 mph. In moving traffic, it assists according
to the same mode of operation throughout the speed range between 4 and 124 mph.

* Enhanced Active Lane Keeping Assist now prevents the vehicle from unintentionally drifting out of a lane, even when road markings are intermittent, and a risk of a collision arises.

* Active Parking Assist offers automated parking with active steering and brake intervention in parallel and end-on parking tasks. Four cameras provide a 360-degree view of the vehicle and surroundings, including a virtual bird’s-eye perspective. Active safety features also include three-point seat belts with pyrotechnic belt tensioning and belt force limitation for all but a center rear passenger. The airbag complement includes pelvis bags in the front, a newly developed window bag, side bags for the outer rear seats, and a knee bag for the driver. The front-passenger seat airbags are fitted with weight-sensitive activation.

Climate-control performance, efficiency and air quality have been improved. First-in-class tunnel detection uses GPS data to close the air-intake flap when the vehicle enters a tunnel, reopening it when emerging. As another innovation from the new S-Class, a feel-good atmosphere is offered with the optional Air-Balance package that provides air ionization and improved efficient filtration, and dispenses your choice of fragrances.
All this safety, technology and comfort is wrapped in an evolutionary but striking new style that evokes the corporate philosophy of sensual clarity inspired in part by the Streamliners of the 1930s. A long hood, a passenger compartment set well back, and short overhangs telegraph a stylish and sporty character. The new car is longer and wider than its predecessor, offering unmatched comfort in the class. In keeping with convention, the C is available in a sporty look with the three-point star set in the grille or the more traditional luxury look complete with the star on the hood. At the introduction, journalists were equally polarized as to which looks best, validating Mercedes-Benz’s decision to make both styles available.

When you first sit in the driver’s seat and take stock of the cabin design and appointments, we think your impressions will be those intended by Mercedes-Benz: this is a classy upgrade with style and quality rarely seen even in higher priced vehicles.

The interior design draws its inspiration both from Mercedes-Benz sports cars and limousines, with a new large one-piece center console featuring flowing lines that sweeps elegantly from the center air vents to the armrests - seamless clear-cut lines creating a sense of open space and delivering a pure, modern feel. The central freestanding infotainment display (7 inches or 8.4 inches if the Multimedia Package is selected) is the main eye-catching...
feature across the console. Featuring the FrontBass Sound System from the SL-Class and utilizing the body shell as resonant chambers for a concert-hall sound, the resonance will impress. And that's standard; add the optional Burmester® surround sound system – well, even discriminating audiophiles will be pleased. Bluetooth connectivity is, of course, standard.

Five round air vents offer a cool look in contrast to the warmth of other interior materials, including wood and leather. Truly innovative is the touchpad in the center hand-rest, an automotive first. This provides simple, intuitive input using the fingers – with clear feedback – for all head-unit functions, and permits handwriting entry.

Also new is an optional heads-up display that places important information on the windshield in front of the driver, ensuring that the driver's eyes stay on the road. The system provides information on vehicle speed, speed limits and navigation instructions along with messages from DISTRONIC PLUS. This will be a welcome addition we can't wait to try out.

The C-Class is scheduled to be available in U.S. dealers showrooms in the third quarter of 2014 and the press drive is anticipated for late summer. Your Star editors look forward to reporting this car’s most important characteristic: how it performs on the road.