

1. Mercedes-Benz B-Class MPV



ON THE ROAD

Performance ★★★★★

Although Mercedes calls the B-Class a 'compact sports tourer', it's far from a sports car. The B150 (1.5 petrol) has to make do with a rather paltry 94bhp, while the more powerful B170 (1.7 petrol) offers a more respectable 114bhp. The B180 CDI and B200 CDI 2.0-litre diesels (108bhp and 138bhp respectively) are both smooth and flexible.

Ride & handling ★★★★★

The B-Class's biggest flaw is its unsettled ride - this is made worse by the optional sports suspension. It's at its worst at low speeds around town, but settles down on faster roads. Enter a bend quicker than intended and the front tyres will lose grip sooner than you expect.

Refinement ★★★★★

Given the shape and amount of glass in the B-Class, this is one quiet car. It's particularly hushed on the motorway, with only a touch of wind and road noise, and all is quiet at lower speeds around town. Smaller engines need working hard to make decent progress, however, which raises noise levels a bit.

OWNERSHIP

Buying & owning ★★★★★

The B-Class is pricey compared with the competition. The entry-level 1.5-litre car looks especially dear, while the range-topper's price puts it well into executive-car territory. Running costs are reasonable, however, but, surprisingly for a Mercedes, its resale values are nothing special.

Quality & reliability ★★★★★

Mercedes has reacted well to criticism over the quality of its cars and the B-Class is about as good as it gets in the sub-£20,000 market. The cabin is smart and well constructed, while the bodywork has had similar attention.



Safety & security ★★★★★

Being a family-oriented car, Mercedes has made much of the B-Class's safety features. The 'sandwich floor' pays dividends in a front-end crash - the engine slides underneath the passengers. Six airbags are fitted as standard, as are electronic anti-skid systems, active head restraints and clever seatbelts, but there are no deadlocks to help keep thieves out of the cabin.

IN THE CABIN

Behind the wheel ★★★★★

A multi-adjustable driver's seat and steering wheel make it easy to feel comfortable behind the wheel, and all controls are conveniently sited. Visibility is good, but the steeply raked nose makes it tricky to judge space in front when parking.

Space & practicality ★★★★★

The B-Class has lots of rear legroom and, unusually, there's decent shoulder room for three adults in the back, too. Don't expect MPV-style cleverness, but the boot is big with the seats up and they fold easily to create a huge loadbay. Removable seats are a cost option, but with this much space, why bother?

Equipment ★★★★★

We wouldn't call Mercedes overly generous, but the days when you had to wind your own windows on entry-level cars are gone. All models get alloys, air-conditioning and a decent stereo. Options include satellite-navigation, parking assist, swivelling headlights and a full-length sunroof.

