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Above Average: Mercedes C-Class Estate

When I was at school – which seems a lifetime ago now – achieving a C grade was average. I have no idea what getting a C means today as the mystery of the new educational marking system seems to have passed me by. In the world of motoring though letters of the alphabet have little significance when it comes to ranking.

Mercedes is a classic example; it uses A, B, C and E (all of which could feature on an exam result sheet) as labels for some of its models. Of course, there are also the S, M and R-Class vehicles but as they don't fit into this metaphorical whimsy of mine I'll just ignore them!

The point is C stands for average in my mind. At least it did, until I sat in a Mercedes C-Class Estate. Average is not a word that could be used to describe this car.

Following on from the launch of the C-Class saloon, the estate echoes the styling of its sibling. Remarkably, for an estate model, it manages to capture the sporty essence of the saloon helped by some very sweeping

lines and curves that would not look out of place on a catwalk.

Like the saloon, the C-Class Estate is up against some tough opposition from BMW, Audi and Jaguar. There is also strong competition from Volvo's V70 and Volkswagen's Passat. In a marketplace this crowded it's essential that you have a product that shines. So is the latest Mercedes model shiny enough?

There is no denying that the quality is there; Mercedes seems to have shaken off some of its past problems with the latest C-Class and produced a car that looks good and performs well... and the Estate version certainly seems to come from the same mould.

With eight engines to choose from, a capacious 1500 litres of cargo space and a host of electronic niks fitted such as the automatic powered tailgate which opens at the touch of a button, there is a lot of technology to play with.

Prices start at a reasonable £24,630 for a C 180 Kompressor SE and rise to £37,205 for the C 350

Sport. What you get for this outlay depends on the model of course and there are plenty of options to play with including intelligent lighting, leather electric seats with memory and enhanced audio options.

Behind the wheel it is not easy to tell this car apart from its saloon cousin. It handles well and is smooth over the bumps. The steering is light and can feel a little disconnected although there is the option of parameter speed-sensitive power steering for £205 which adapts to the degree of power assistance to the vehicle speed. And for those angling for a sportier ride the Dynamic Handling Package (£490) offers drivers a choice of additional driving modes – Comfort and Sport – depending on their particular needs.

As a package the Mercedes C-Class Estate offers something more than an average estate car... it combines space-lugging capability, sports styling and handling along with a more comfortable ride. Surely, that puts this car well above average, doesn't it?

Tony Meredith