

Bloodlines

Always among the sexiest Mercedes-Benzes, the new E-Class Coupe amps up the family traditions by Joe Sage

Mercedes-Benz models have been working through a bit of a unifying and standardization scheme for the past couple of years. There are many variants, but C-, E- and S-Class are crystal clear, with sedans in the three usual sizes (compact, midsize, full-size), and utilities now in line with this (GLC, GLE, GLS). Each sedan also has a Coupe and a Cabriolet derivative. Alphanumerics still spell out engine pecking order (though they no longer necessarily reflect actual displacement).

The new E-Class Coupe comes with one engine (a 329-hp three-liter biturbo V6) that feeds through an all-new GEARTRONIC® 9-speed transmission—not only more fuel efficient, but also dropping a half second off zero-to-60 acceleration time—in one alphanumeric: E400 Coupe. Its single variant is the all-wheel-drive E400 4MATIC Coupe.

We flew to British Columbia for a chance to learn more about the new Mercedes-Benz E-Class Coupe and give it a significant shakedown drive from the Coast Mountains inland.

Luxury buyers were arguably a stuffier lot a few decades back, perhaps before the tech industry turned wealth on its head. Today, they are lively and engaged, as likely to be snowboarding in the Alps as to be hanging out at the banker's club in Bonn.

This is generation seven of the E-Class Coupe. Our introduction began with a look at those that have come before, which made us realize that even those from an earlier era had always caught our eye. Notables included the mid-80s-to-90s E-Class Coupes (upper right)—sleeker, leaner and meaner, more of a two-door vs four-door layout akin to that distinction in American cars of the '50s and '60s—and CLK (far upper right) from 1997-2009, which melded E-Class styling with a C-Class platform and basically held the lineup spot of an E-Class Coupe. E-Class Coupe and Cabriolet regained their E-names for 2010, though they were still C-Class-underpinned. These are the bloodlines. All new for 2018, they are now built on the E platform, starting with this new E400 Coupe, with a Cabriolet to follow.

Mercedes-Benz is on a roll. For 2017, they are introducing five all new products, two facelifts and 16 new variants, such as this Coupe and the upcoming Cabriolet. Popular models such as the CLA Coupe or GLA and GLC utilities are sold out. Potent

AMG vehicle sales are up more than 50 percent. Already this year, Mercedes-Benz has displaced BMW as the number one-selling luxury brand in the US. (The BMW 6 Series is stated as the main competitor for the new E400 Coupe—a smart move, as the BMW 6 Series starts at \$81,400.)

The new E400 Coupe comes not only in one single optimum powertrain configuration, but standard with creature comforts and tech including full leather, 12.3-inch COMAND® display with nav, power seats with lumbar support, a panoramic roof, even remote start so you can get the cabin ready on those really hot (or cold) days. "If you build the house right," says director of communications Rob Moran, "it does not need add-ons."

Beauty and power are themes of the new car. Its new body has strong shape and form, but gone are creases and folds that dominated the industry for the past decade. The Coupe gets its own aluminum hood, with a stylish power bulge, and its Panamericana-inspired grille gets diamond studs. The car maintains its pillarless side glass. A front fascia lip adds visual width, and the rear license plate moves down to bumper level, adding visual width and an uncluttered tri-star badge. The car is so sporty, it could start to compete with the SL, but product chief Bernie Glaser reminds us this is "a full-fledged four-seater."

KEEP RIGHT >>



SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	3.0L alum-alloy biturbo V6
HP/TORQUE	329 hp / 354 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	9G-TRONIC 9-spd auto w/paddles
DRIVETRAIN	RWD, 4MATIC AWD
STEERING	Electromech spd-sensitive rack & pinion
FORMAT	Two-door, four-passenger coupe
STRUCTURE	Steel unibody, aluminum outer sheet metal
SUSPENSION	F: Independent multi-link w/coils, single-tube gas w/variable damp, torsion bar R: same specs as front
ZERO-TO-60 MPH	(RWD) 5.5 sec 4MATIC: 5.2 sec
TOP SPEED	(elec limited) 130 mph
BRAKES FRONT/REAR	14.17" / 14.17"
WHEELS	8.0x18 (cast)
TIRES	(RWD): F: 245/45R18, R: 245/40R18 4MATIC: F/R 245/45R18
LENGTH/WHEELBASE	190.0 in / 113.1 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	(w/max load) 3.7 in
TURNING CIRCLE	37.52 ft
CARGO VOLUME	tba
FUEL CAPACITY	17.4 gal
WEIGHT	tba
MPG (city/hwy/comb)	tba

INCLUDES: Leather, 12.3" high-res COMAND® display with navigation (w/map updates & live traffic incl for 3 years), ambient lighting (64 colors), steering wheel touch controls, car-to-X communication, keyless entry and start, split folding rear seats (40/20/40), Dynamic Select, Pre-Safe and Pre-Safe Sound, active brake assist, power front seats w/lumbar and 3-position memory, panoramic roof, rear camera.

BASE PRICE	E400 Coupe (RWD)	\$58,900
	E400 4MATIC COUPE	\$61,400
DESTINATION CHARGE		995

OUR CARS: On our full drive day in British Columbia, we had one E-Class 4MATIC Coupe in the morning, another in the afternoon. Both had optional 19" AMG twin-spoke wheels (\$500), Burmester high-end 3D surround sound (\$5400), Premium 3 Package¹ (\$9350), AMG Line package² (\$2500), warmth & comfort package³ (\$800), massage seats (\$950) and rear side airbags (\$420). Both had paint and interior upgrades. One had Air Body Control air suspension.

- Our first car had elegant Lunar Blue Metallic (\$720) over Macchiato Beige and Yacht Blue leather (1370) with natural grain light brown elm wood trim (\$150) and standard suspension:**\$85,255**
- Our second car had deep and rich Selenite Grey Metallic (\$720) over Saddle Brown and Black leather (n/c) with Design® Magnolia Flowing Lines Wood (\$1300) and air suspension (\$1300):**\$86,935**

¹**PREMIUM 3 PACKAGE:** Active parking assist, inductive wireless charging w/NFC pairing, keyless entry and start, electronic trunk closer, SiriusXM all-access w/6-month trial, LED intelligent light system, adaptive highbeam assist, 12.3" widescreen digital instrument cluster, air balance cabin fragrance system, Power rear sunshade, active distance assist Distronic®, active steering assist, active lane change assist, active emergency stop assist, active speed limit assist, active brake assist with cross-traffic function, evasive steering assist, active lane keeping assist, active blind spot assist, Pre-Safe® Plus (rear-end collision protection), surround view system, heads-up display.

²**AMG LINE PACKAGE:** AMG body styling, aluminum sport pedals w/rubber studs, sport wheels.

³**WARMTH & COMFORT PACKAGE:** Multifunction steering wheel, heated armrests and rapid heating functionality for front seats.



Moving from C platform to E gives us a Coupe that is 4.8 inches longer than its predecessor, on a wheelbase 4.4 inches longer. Front legroom and shoulder width are each up by two inches. Track is increased by 2.7 inches, width by 2.9. Now about an inch taller and with 1.3 inches of increased rear shoulder room, the car welcomes rear passengers.

Or you can use the 40/20/40 rear folding seats to gain significant flat-floored space for your gear, on top of an already spacious trunk, which easily held suitcases, camera bags, computer bags and all the rest for two occupants' international trip.

Mercedes-Benz has long occupied the leading edge of driver assistance technology and often applies it to the popular E-Class first, which Glaser calls "the most intelligent car on the road," as he gives us a tour of the car's brains. The new Coupe has a full suite of Intelligent Drive features, including not only Pre-Safe collision avoidance, but innovative new Pre-Safe Sound, which (since the noise of an impact can damage hearing) emits a short interference signal that triggers a protective "stapedius reflex" in the human ear—unprecedented attention to detail. Also new is Car-to-X Communication, able to "see around corners and through obstacles." Currently working E-Class-to-E-Class, it will next apply to all Mercedes-Benz-to-Mercedes-Benz, then to any car-to-car. Feature buttons on the steering wheel are now touch- and swipe-sensitive, closely mimicking familiar smartphone functions. Some tech features are just for fun (and style), such as taillamps with a "welcome feature," lighting sequentially outward when you arrive and inward when you lock and leave.

The car comes standard with suspension featuring selective damping, lowered 0.6 inches from the E-Class sedan. A notable option beyond your RWD/AWD choice is Air Body Control, with multi-chamber air suspension at all corners. The car handles superbly with or without, but for \$1300, it provides an enhanced range of Dynamic Select options controlling throttle, steering and shift. Settings include comfort, sport, sport plus and eco, plus an individual setting where you can dial in and preserve your favorite elements of each. Air suspension lets you raise the car a bit for winter conditions or rough roads, and it will re-lower itself after awhile if you have forgotten about it.

Our drive route took us from Vancouver airport to a quick waterfront break (temps were about 55-60° F, but swimmers were abundant), then up into the Coast Mountains to the huge Whistler ski resort, base elevation 2,198 feet. In the morning, we pursued ever more aggressive mountain roads en route to Lillooet BC, elevation 821 feet, surrounded by dramatic mountains above 9,300 feet. (For perspective, some Colorado ski towns sit above 9,000 feet, next to 13,000-foot mountains,



so a vertical rise in Colorado as spectacular as that in Lillooet would require mountains almost 18,000 feet high, about a mile taller than they are, somewhere between the Matterhorn and Denali.)

Canada, a country as big and beautiful as the US, but with only 10 percent our population, is bound to have fewer roads and simpler budgets. As such, it doesn't seem to suffer the fate of roads in the US that get perpetually widened and straightened, year after year, reducing their enthusiast driver quotient. Our roads in BC were as twisty and steep as could be. It was wonderful. With mountains, valleys, huge rivers and lakes, hills, curves and tunnels, our full second day was about 300 miles—imagine more or less mixing our drive distance to San Diego with the terrain of Southwest Colorado. Canada is metric, so pumping the heads-up display to 100 while still going just 62 mph kept us on good terms with the Mounties and various flavors of local gendarme.



We had driven the Alaska Highway when it was 1200 miles of gravel, in an old pickup truck with not so much as an AM radio, which made for a long week. Much of our drive route in BC matched much of that drive's scenery. The Alcan is paved now, and if we could rock out the way we did for many happy highway hours in BC—with the new E400 Coupe's 590-watt Burmester audio cranked up in Live mode and 3D Surround, feeding 13 speakers, front body cavity low end and a clever ceiling speaker—every mile would go by fast and enjoyably. We could easily have gone all week.

The 2018 Mercedes-Benz E400 Coupe and E400 4MATIC Coupe start arriving at dealers this summer. The new E-Class Cabriolet—which will also offer 4MATIC for the first time and has a soft power top that opens in just 20 seconds and operates up to 30 mph—arrives this fall.

Watch for the Atlanta Falcons this fall, playing in new Mercedes-Benz stadium, which appropriately has the world's largest retractable roof. ■

