

# All activity vehicle: power and grace

By Joe Sage

Mercedes-Benz SUV names correspond to the sedans: GLA, GLC, GLE, GLS as in A-, C-, E- and S-Class. There is also a GLB SUV, and there are both SUV and Coupe models of GLC and GLE.

Also in parallel to the cars, GLE is the biggest seller in their utility lineup.

Twenty-four years ago, there were first signs that SUVs were about to get a lot more exciting. One standout was the Mercedes-Benz AA Vision concept at Detroit in 1996 (AAV for All Activity Vehicle, before the SUV term took hold), with aerodynamic curves, sculpted sides, prominent wheel arches, and large tires and wheels for a bold, wide stance. Much of that did not make it into initial M-Class in 1997, though it has eased its way in more-so over its lifespan. GLE is the direct descendant of M-Class, and much of the early concept's spirit is now found in similar-but-for-size GLC and GLE. Joining GLS and G-Class, they are now well along the path to perfection. (They may be there now, shy of a couple of debatable interface details.)

The gen-four 2020 GLE was all-new, featured at launch in our Jan/Feb 2019 issue (where we also had a static peek at the AMG version to come later). Extensive new or significantly upgraded available features included all-new intelligent sus-

pension, gesture control, new engines with EQ Boost tech, elements from touchpad to shifter to panorama roof, and a new 9-speed transmission.

The wheelbase had grown by over three inches, providing for more second-row legroom and even an optional third row (suitable for anyone up to 5-foot-10, more generous than many full-size SUVs, and with easy second-row power access).

The GLE lineup starts with the GLE at \$54,750. Midyear last year, we drove the \$62,500 2020 GLE 450 4MATIC SUV for a week, the 362-hp top unit of AMG models, ours optioned up to \$96,320. AMG arrived later in the year as a 2020 GLE 53 model (\$72,350). New for 2021 are an AMG GLE 63 and the model we drive here, the 603-hp GLE 63 S.

And drive we did, taking a weekend cruise up the Beeline Highway to Bush Highway to Saguaro Lake and beyond. We had planned a much longer drive, but forest fire smoke from California largely filled the air, so such a trip would not be as photogenic as it would normally be. Even up by Saguaro Lake, local forest fires have hit much of that local landscape. But our drive itself was spectacular.

As we all know, 603 horsepower (or up to 624 as EQ Boost does it thing) and 627 lb-ft of torque (up to an incredible 811 with EQ Boost) are not for

drag racing on country highways. But on a climbing road, where cumbersome campers and struggling left-laners may box in a mere mortal, the AMG GLE 63 S has so much power on tap (and reasonable size, spacious inside, tighter outside), you can easily squirt through gaps most others cannot, and be well on your way. Its power curve is masterful.

We noted an impressively tight turning circle, one of our favorite features both in town and in tight remote spots, though a spec is not yet given for this (and sometimes we end up surprised).

Our sample had a great many options—some for looks, most for over-the-top creature comforts and features, one group for extensive drive assist technologies. There are few if any that you would not want. Some add more AMG branding (carbon fiber trim, engine cover, steering wheel, wheels, brakes), and on the one hand we philosophize that once you're already buying an AMG, you shouldn't have to buy any options that make it an AMG. On the other hand, the options and packages list on ours was remarkably extensive, yet did not really change the price that much, a tremendous amount of content for \$20,000, a 16 percent bump. (You could buy your kid a \$20,000-dollar car with that, but the typical AMG buyer can likely do both.)

In total, the Mercedes-AMG GLE 63 S is a zen experience. Whether it's a feature or power, if you think of it, you'll find it's all there. ■



Those debatable interface details? • Auto start-stop is conveniently right next to engine start-stop, a logical and welcome idea, as we have to hunt for this in most vehicles; but it's hidden behind the wheel and righthand shift stalk, all too easy to reach for at a red light, but turn the engine off. • A forward view camera (redundant to your windshield) blocks the screen at a stop, when you might be wanting to dive in for a quick change to climate, massage, heated-cooled seats or other features, though the big plus is that these features are so extensive. • Powerful 23-speaker Burmester audio is great, but equalizer, presets and other features are also arguably too deep in the system.

## SPECIFICATIONS

<b>BUILD</b> .....	steel unibody, five-passenger
<b>ENGINE</b> .....	handcrafted AMG 4.0L biturbo V8 alum alloy 32v DOHC w EQ Boost
<b>HP/TORQUE</b> .....	603 hp / 627 lb-ft
<b>EQ BOOST</b> .....	up to 21 hp / 184 lb-ft
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b> .....	4MATIC AWD
<b>0-TO-60 MPH</b> .....	est 3.7 sec
<b>TOP SPEED</b> ..(elec lim, summer tires)	174 mph
<b>TRANSMISSION</b> .....	AMG SPEEDSHIFT TCT 9-spd automatic
<b>SUSPENSION</b> .....	F: indep double-wishbone; R: indep multi-link; F/R: AIRMATIC air suspension & ADS+ adaptive damping system;
<b>STEERING</b> .....	speed-dependent electro-mechanical rack & pinion
<b>BRAKES</b> .....	F: 15.8; R: 14.6; (other info tba)
<b>WHEELS</b> .....	F: 10.0x21 cast R: 11.10x21 cast
<b>TIRES</b> .....	F: 275/45R21; R: 315/40R21
<b>LENGTH / WHEELBASE</b> .....	190.0 / 117.9 in
<b>TURNING CIRCLE</b> .....	tba
<b>HEADROOM (F/R)</b> .....	40.5 / 39.6 in
<b>LEGROOM (F/R)</b> .....	40.3 / 40.9 in
<b>CARGO CAPACITY</b> .....	33.3 / 74.9 cu.ft
<b>GROUND CLEARANCE</b> .....(max load, min)	7.5 in
<b>TOW CAPACITY</b> .....	tba
<b>WEIGHT</b> .....	tba
<b>FUEL CAPACITY</b> .....	22.5 gal
<b>MPG</b> .....	tba

<b>BASE PRICE</b> .....	<b>\$113,950</b>
<b>PAINT:</b> <i>designo</i> Diamond White Metallic.....	1515
<b>AMG CARBON FIBER TRIM</b> .....	1590
<b>CARBON FIBER ENGINE COVER</b> .....	1500
<b>STEERING WHEEL:</b> AMG Performance steering wheel in DINAMICA.....	100
<b>WHEELS:</b> 22" AMG cross-spoke, gloss black.....	1750
<b>BRAKES:</b> AMG high performance system with red painted brake calipers.....	nc
<b>AMG DRIVE UNIT</b> .....	nc
<b>REAR SIDE AIRBAGS</b> .....	420
<b>PANORAMA POWER TILT</b> .....	1000
<b>4-ZONE CLIMATE CONTROL</b> .....	760
<b>BLACK DINAMICA ROOF LINER</b> .....	1600
<b>INTERIOR ASSISTANT</b> .....	200
<b>BURMESTER SURROUND SOUND AUDIO</b> .....	nc
<b>HEATED REAR SEATS</b> .....	580
<b>MBUX TECH PKG:</b> MBUX augmented video for navigation; heads-up display.....	1450
<b>DRIVER ASSISTANCE PKG PLUS:</b> active lane keep assist, active distance assist DISTRONIC, active blind spot assist, active stop-and-go assist, active lane change assist, active steering assist, active emergency stop assist, PRE-SAFE Impulse Side, route-based speed adaptation, active brake assist w cross-traffic function, active speed limit assist, evasive steering assist, PRE-SAFE PLUS rear end collision protection, traffic sign assist.....	1700
<b>WARMTH &amp; COMFORT PKG:</b> rapid heating function, heated door center panels, heated front armrests, heated center console.....	1050
<b>ENERGIZING COMFORT PKG PLUS:</b> Air-Balance pkg, active multi-contour front seats w massage function.....	1650
<b>AMG NIGHT PKG:</b> high-gloss black trim on front splitter, A-wing, window frames, trim on rear apron, tailpipes and roof rails.....	750
<b>ACOUSTIC COMFORT PKG:</b> addtl cabin insulation, windshield w infrared-reflect film, side windows w acoustic infrared absorb film ...	1100
<b>DESTINATION CHARGE</b> .....	995
<b>TOTAL</b> .....	<b>\$133,660</b>

(Early specifications, subject to change.)