

'A-B' COMPARISON WITH SOME 'S' THROWN IN

BY JOE SAGE

GLA and **GLB**, Mercedes-Benz's two compact utility offerings, share much in terms of sizing and pricing. The biggest distinguishing feature between the two is GLB's third row, a rarity among compacts, though our sample is the two-row.

Third row aside, Mercedes describes the GLA as tending toward sporty looks and lifestyle, the GLB toward function and space. The GLA's style is more like the in-between-sized GLC and GLE, especially the coupe versions offered on some variants.

GLB's name and smaller size might also evoke the B-Class, a global model we sometimes see up from Mexico, but they're basically unrelated.

GLB may be the closest they've come to a "baby GLS," a compact version of their longstanding full-size utility. An earlier GLK (photo, upper right) had been intended as exactly that (when the big one was simply GL). GLK was discontinued in 2015, with the GLC (new as a 2016 model) declared its successor by some at the time, while GLB arrived in 2019. Now that they're all here, GLB strikes us as a more direct successor to GLK. Not that it matters, but it gives insight into what may appeal to you the most today, and perhaps why.

In key ways, GLA and GLB are far more similar than a first look might suggest. Comparisons and tradeoffs abound between GLB and GLA, and between the GLB two- and three-row variants. Both are front-drive-based, unusual for Mercedes-Benz, though most have 4MATIC all-wheel drive.

GLB is a foot longer than the GLA, on a wheelbase four inches longer. Its turning circle is almost four feet larger. GLB has roughly an inch and a half more headroom. Legroom is virtually the same on the GLA and two-row GLB, while a three-row GLB sacrifices some second row legroom for its third row (geared toward the kids, at 29.1 inches).

A wild card: GLB's wheelbase is actually about four inches longer than the larger GLC, though its overall length is nine-tenths of an inch less.

Overall cargo volume for the GLB two-row is 12 cu.ft or so more than the GLA, but this drops several cubic feet in a GLB three-row, as seats take up space when dropped (and leave just 5.1 cu.ft when up). GLA has almost a half-inch more ground clearance and is about 500 to 600 pounds lighter, while the GLB has a 3.2-gallon larger fuel tank.

Another note: while both are built in fully Ger-

MERCEDES-BENZ & AMG GLA-GLB LINEUP

GLA (two-row compact)	
Mercedes-Benz GLA 250 (FWD)	221 hp\$ 36,230
Mercedes-Benz GLA 250\$ 38,230
Mercedes-AMG GLA 35	302 hp\$ 47,550
Mercedes-AMG GLA 45	382 hp\$ 54,500
GLB (three-row compact)	
Mercedes-Benz GLB 250 (FWD)	221 hp\$ 38,050
Mercedes-Benz GLB 250\$ 40,050
▼ Mercedes-AMG GLB 35	302 hp\$ 49,500

All are 4MATIC unless noted as FWD

man-engineered and -machined facilities, the GLA is assembled in Germany and the GLB in Mexico.

Of fully 29 utilities in the wider Mercedes-Benz lineup, GLA and GLB together comprise a set of seven at the base of the matrix, by price (with overlap throughout the full family, e.g. AMG models of GLA and GLB cost more than non-AMG models of GLC, ditto GLC to GLE, and so on up the ladder).

GLA and GLB pair up across the board, 250 to 250, AMG 35 to AMG 35 (see chart), with one glaring exception: there is an AMG GLA 45 with a 382-hp handcrafted AMG engine, but there is no parallel AMG GLB 45 model. The front-drive GLA 250 (also in this issue) is the base model of all 29 and of the GLA-GLB subset, while although any GLB is priced about two grand higher than the corresponding GLA, the lack of an AMG GLB 45 makes this AMG GLB 35 kind of the top dog and kind of not.

(Note that Mercedes-Benz recently announced they will be simplifying their entire lineup.)

GLB buyers will be driven to the model either by its third row and cargo volume, or its style (however you interpret their effort to distinguish the two, looks are a tossup). Compared with GLA, you gain or lose incremental differences in specs, but GLB's tendency toward GLS little-brotherhood means you get a decent share of the prestige and utility of the GLS for somewhere around just half its price.

We put the AMG GLB 35 through many miles—freeways, local streets, and a back-way two-lane run to Tucson. Its 302-hp "AMG-enhanced" engine was smoothest on freeways and open roads (we didn't even particularly bother with drive modes), more of a busy gear-churner in traffic, regardless of mode. Perhaps the transmission is better matched to the 382-hp "handcrafted AMG" engine on a GLB 45, if there were one, or GLA 45. We may have time with the latter soon and can report back on this.

In daily use, GLB's maneuverability and tidy parking footprint are very welcome, while its added height is great for a tall person's ingress and egress.

The Mercedes-Benz GLB family delivers just as it intends: great utility at considerable value. Add a layer of AMG, and it delivers some decent performance. The more we drove it, the more our perceived experience continually improved.

Of course, we wouldn't mind seeing an AMG GLB 45 added to the lineup at some point. ■



Mercedes-Benz GLB family evolution: above upper: the prior 2009 GLK 350; above lower, the current 2021 GLS 580; at left, the new 2021 AMG GLB 35.

2021 Mercedes-AMG GLB 35



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Agua Calientes, Mexico
ENGINE/TRANSMISSION	Germany
ENGINE	AMG-enhanced 2.0L turbo inline-4, 16v, aluminum alloy
COMPRESSION RATIO	10:1
HP/TORQUE	302 hp / 295 lb-ft
ZERO-TO-60 / TOP SPEED	5.1 sec / 155 mph
DRIVETRAIN	AMG Performance 4MATIC variable AWD
TRANSMISSION	AMG Speedshift DCT 8G dual clutch; paddle shifters
SUSPENSION	F: indep MacPherson strut w coils, dbl-tube shocks & tubular torsion bar; R: indep multi-link w coils, single-tube shocks & tubular torsion bar
STEERING	speed-dependent electro-mechanical rack & pinion
BRAKES	F: 13.8; R: 13.0 (other info tba)
WHEELS	std 8.0x19 cast
TIRES	235 / 50 R19
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	183.1 / 111.4 in
TURNING CIRCLE	(wall to wall) 41.0 ft
ROWS/SEATS	2-row, 5-passenger (3/7 avail)
HEADROOM (F/R)	40.7 / 39.3 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	41.4 / 38.1 in
CARGO CAPACITY	27.0 / 62.0 cu.ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	4.8 in
WEIGHT	(5-passenger) 3871 lb
FUEL CAPACITY	15.9 gal
MPG	21/26/23 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE \$49,500

INCLUDES:	twin 10.25" touchscreens, Apple/Android, Bluetooth, ambient lighting, power front seats w lumbar & memory, split-fold rear seats, rain-sense wipers, keyless-start, dual-zone auto climate, Mercedes me connect services w trial, power liftgate, 115V AC power outlet.....included
PAINT:	Galaxy Blue Metallic720
INTERIOR:	Titanium Grey/Black leather1450
AMG NIGHT PKG:	front splitter, grille trim & louvers in outer air intakes, AMG side panel inserts, beltline & window line trim strips in high gloss black, exterior mirror covers and tailpipe trim in black750
WHEELS:	20" AMG twin 5-spoke, matte black1050
EXTERIOR LIGHTING PKG:	active LED headlamps, adaptive highbeam assist900
STEERING WHEEL:	AMG performance steering wheel in Nappa leather400
PREMIUM PKG:	Keyless-Go, hands-free access, auto-dim rearview and driver's side mirrors, power fold-in side mirrors800
AMG DRIVE STEERING WHEEL BUTTONS400
HEATED/VENTED FRONT SEATS950
PANORAMA SUNROOF1500
MULTIMEDIA PKG:	MB nav, nav services incl map updates for 3 years, MBUX augmented reality for nav, speed limit assist1295
AUDIO:	Burmester surround sound850
SIRIUSXM	w free trial period460
WIRELESS CHARGING200
USB-C ADAPTER CABLE25
DRIVER ASSISTANCE PKG:	active brake assist w cross-traffic, Distronic active distance assist, active steering assist, evasive steering assist, active blind spot assist, active lane keeping assist, active emergency stop assist, Pre-Safe Plus, route-based speed adaptation, extended restart in stop-and-go traffic1700
DESTINATION CHARGE1050
TOTAL	\$64,000