

Mercedes-Benz builds green diesel

The world's most advanced diesel technology combines several innovations to minimize emissions

By Barbara and Bill Schaffer



I suppose we've made disparaging remarks about a noisy diesel pickup sitting beside us at the stop light and we've complained about the stink of a big diesel truck as we followed it down the freeway onramp.

But after spending a week in the Mercedes-Benz E320 Bluetec diesel, we are putting aside our preconceptions, and that's not an easy thing for us to do.

This new diesel is quiet, powerful, smooth and economical.

Our favorite cars have always been comfortable midsize sedans that go fast and handle like sports cars. Those are still our favorites attributes, but we have added good fuel economy to the list. The E320 has all that plus a long list of comfort and technological features.

Being a diesel doesn't mean that the E320 looks any different from any other Mercedes. It still has the same classic contemporary styling, with the freshened look that adorns the other 2007 E-Class cars. The bumper is more aggressive, the front grille and headlights have been redesigned, but in general there is no mistaking its heritage.

The sweeping curves and soft surfaces of the interior are best described as organic and elegant, with high quality materials and impeccable workmanship.

We especially like the compact design of the dash, which doesn't feel as if it's intruding into the driver's space.

The heart of the E320 is the new 3.0-liter turbocharged V-6 diesel engine that produces only 208 horsepower, but 400-lb.ft. of torque. The engine uses four-valves per cylinder, piezo-electric injectors, third-generation CDI direct injection, a variable nozzle turbocharger and exhaust gas recirculation system.

The magic that allows this engine to be one of the cleanest diesels in the world and meet the emission requirements in all but five states is the Bluetec system. By injecting a water-based Urea solution called AdBlue, the system converts nitrogen oxides into harmless nitrogen and water. The AdBlue is carried in its own small tank and metered into the exhaust in such minute quantities that this tank only needs to be refilled during routine scheduled maintenance. With a little more refinement in the Bluetec system, Mercedes-Benz expects to be able to meet the most stringent emission requirements by the 2009 model year, so the car can be sold in all 50 states.

Generally diesel engines are expensive options; however the difference between

M-B E320 BLUETEC

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

16-Inch alloy wheels; burl walnut trim; power seats with memory; Harmon-Kardon Logic 7 audio with 6-disc CD changer; cruise; all power; power tilt and telescoping wheel; garage door opener; rain sensor wipers; Tele Air Emergency Communications; Electronic Stability Program; rollover sensor and more.

Base Price: \$51,550
Options:

Pewter paint.....\$700
Panorama sunroof\$1,000
Electronic trunk closer\$520
Premium II Package (DVD navigation, Sirius Satellite Radio, heated front seats, power rear window sunshade, hands free communications system, Keyless Go, bi-xenon headlights with active curve illumination, headlight washing system)

.....\$4,290
Total Options\$6,510
Freight\$775
Price as Tested.....\$58,835

DIMENSIONS

EPA SizeMid-size
Weight.....3,860 lb.
Wheelbase112.4 in.
Length.....192.3 in.
Width.....71.7 in.
Height58.4 in.
Fuel Capacity21.1 gal.
Cargo Capacity.....15.9 cu. ft.

MECHANICAL

Engine3.0L DOHC Turbo V-6
Horsepower.....208@3800
Torque.....400@1600
Transmission7-Spd. Auto
DriveRear wheel
BrakesDisc ABS
Tires.....225/55R16

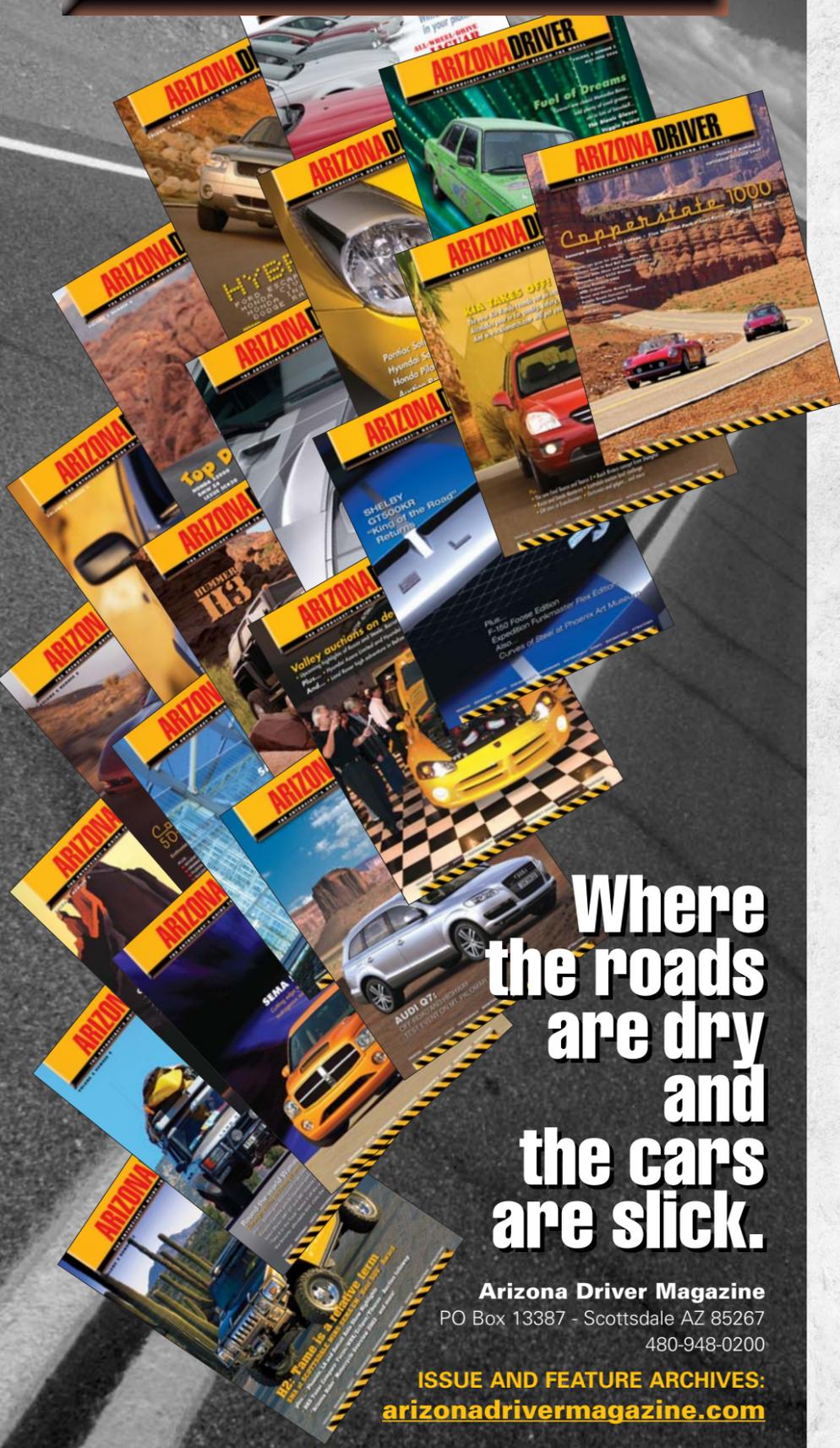
PERFORMANCE

0 to 60 mph6.6 sec.
Top speed(limited) 130 mph
EPA economy rating.....26/37 mpg
Our actual fuel economy32.7 mpg

COMPETITORS

None yet

KEEP RIGHT >>



Where
the roads
are dry
and
the cars
are slick.

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the prices of the E350 gasoline powered Mercedes and the E320 Bluetec diesel is only \$1,000. The \$52,325 base price of the E320 diesel includes shipping and all the comfort, convenience and safety equipment Mercedes-Benz vehicles are famous for.

Our test car had three options that put the icing on the cake, so to speak: panoramic sunroof for \$1,000, electronic trunk closer for \$520, and Premium II Package (DVD navigation, Sirius Satellite Radio, heated front seats, power rear-window sunshade, hands-free communication system, Keyless Go, bi-xenon headlights with Active Curve Illumination and headlight washing system) all for \$4,290. These features brought the as-tested price to \$58,835.

Driving this diesel is fun. There is no clanking noise, although the exhaust appears to be a little more pronounced than with the gasoline counterpart. The transmission is one of our favorites, a quick shifting seven-speed automatic that allows the driver to shift manually up and down by pushing the console-mounted shifter to the right or left respectively. There is also a switch to change the shift pattern from the smooth easy comfort to a sportier mode where the transmission shifts are quicker and at a higher RPM.

Performance levels are very impressive. When you floor the accelerator, the car jumps to provide excellent passing power. The 0 to 60 mph acceleration time is 6.6 seconds, and the top speed is electronically limited to 130 mph. What sets this car apart from the crowd, however, is the fuel economy. The EPA rates it at 26 mpg for city driving and 37 mpg on the highway. Our actual average during our time behind the wheel was 32.7 mpg, and that's with us demonstrating the great acceleration to each other on every on ramp.

Being frugal, the E320 Bluetec was our kind of car. We love all the comfort and convenience of the mid-size Mercedes-Benz, while using less fuel than most so-called economy cars.

Usually there is a tradeoff between good fuel economy and performance or luxury, but the E320 gives the owner the best of both worlds. We were just as comfortable throwing this car through some sharp corners as we were cruising down the freeway at 75 mph. ■

