

New goalposts

The Mercedes-Benz and closely related Mercedes-AMG lineups include some two and a half dozen SUVs (add Mercedes-EQ electrics, and it's well over three dozen). Out of the total, over half of the trims and variants are GLC and GLE.

Some tastes or needs run in specific directions—say smaller or larger, like the GLC- or GLS-Class. Some seek extremes; for them there are the even smaller GLA and GLB, or the big G-Class. But many are happy in the all-purpose middle—and here sits the GLE-Class. Of over five million SUVs sold by Mercedes, the GLE (and its ML-badged predecessor) account for about 40 percent—their best selling SUV, inhabiting one of the hottest segments.

Here we drive the refreshed 2024 Mercedes-AMG GLE 53 SUV, with a 429-hp AMG-enhanced 3.0L turbo-inline-6 with hybrid assist, 9-speed AMG automatic, AIRMATIC-based suspension and AMG

Performance 4MATIC+ AWD. At \$86,750 base, our add-ons bring this sample to \$95,150. Built in Alabama, bearing a German engine and transmission, the current GLE was also largely developed in the US, to be well suited to our harsh road conditions.

We've had GLE variants in our fleet quite regularly. Our last, a year ago, was just like this one, other than its color, wheel size and a few options. All can be revisited in detail in our online archives.

Reviewing our impressions from those, fundamentals remain the same. Part reminder and part specific to this one, we have some updated notes.

CONTROLS: Mercedes has long been well ahead of the curve on development of systems and interfaces. A two-times-12.3-inch-screen doublewide but single pane instrument panel accesses an extensive set of features, with more creature comforts than average, more drive options than average—this one has a whole off-road section (despite pavement-oriented tires and wheels), as well as a whole AMG performance section—with fea-

ture-rich alternatives for many settings. Expect to spend time with this system, to master the details.

Seats, windows and some other functions are controlled via flat metal switches, welcome after black plasticky membranes on some others recently often triggered a neighboring button's actions.

We were unable to get AC out of the biggest vents up front, and at above 100°, we sure wished to. We'll seek an answer to this, if there is one.

DRIVE: At first, we found pedal response could be delayed, then abrupt, and steering jerky at slow speeds. But these perceptions faded quickly, so if you test drive, perhaps you'll note the same, perhaps not. Once acclimated, the power curve is strong and satisfying, with immediate response. Cornering and handling are superb, and U-turns seem even tighter than their admirable spec.

The former EQ Boost system is now known as a mild hybrid, more specifically 48-volt hybrid assist with electric auxiliary compressor, rebranding with upgraded engineering. It helps offset any thirsti-

ness in this AMG while delivering the engine's 429 horsepower plus another 21 hp of its own, along with 148 lb-ft of torque atop the original 413—all while delivering very decent fuel mileage.

We found comfort mode somewhat dull around town, so tried sport. We had set up preferences in Dynamic Select, which is easily confused with Individual, both of which we had trouble accessing freely for further experimentation while on the go. Sport was not wildly different, which we actually prefer in ways, but did seem generally better. And on this model, we still have Sport+ to go.

Something in the overall system does produce a massive hum at times, generally at startup, not ideal when setting out early. Then it (mostly) stops (a light hum remains) as abruptly as it had started.

Put it all together, and this AMG has power and precision to tackle local traffic tangles and the open road, both, with power and precision, all from within the comfort and confidence of a nicely appointed cabin, in a dominant size and format.

POSITIONING: We started out asking ourselves about the importance of this size in a compact-dominated era and within such a widely diverse lineup.

And we concluded that it is totally necessary. You can blend right in, or you can establish supremacy. As the industry produces more crossovers all the time—in different sizes, with more powertrains and performance alternatives all the time—this model remains. Nobody gets rid of this size. And the GLE itself is masterful, inside and out.

There are intriguing differences since our 2022 AMG GLE 53 a year ago, however. First, there was no V8 version that year, due to lockdown-related supply chain constraints, making the six-cylinder 53 the top dog—a chance to grab maximum bragging points at about \$40 grand lower cost. The AMG GLE 63 S has now returned, and with it that big decision for some. But pricing has risen notably. The AMG GLE 53 base price is up 18 percent, less of a bargain now, itself, though the GLE 63 S with its handcrafted V8 returns with a 12 percent bump since before its time away. The percentage differential is less now, but the dollar difference is still \$40 grand. Which is a better buy remains a personal call in line with the usual gotta-have-it factors. But if it satisfies your neighborhood pecking order, the AMG GLE 53 is plenty satisfying. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Vance, Alabama
ENGINE/TRANSMISSION	.....Germany / Germany
PARTS CONTENT	.....US/Canada 10%, Germany 25%
ENGINE	.....AMG-enhanced 3.0L inline-6 turbo w 48V hybrid assist & elec aux compress
HP/TORQUE	.....429 hp + 21 hp ISG 413 lb-ft + 148 lb-ft ISG
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....na
TRANSMISSION	.....AMG Speedshift TCT 9-spd automatic
DRIVETRAIN	.....AMG Performance 4MATIC+ AWD
0-60 / TOP SPEED	.....4.9 sec / 155 mph
SUSPENSION	.....AMG Ride Control+ based on Airmatic
STEERING	.....na
BRAKES	.....na
WHEELS	.....21-in AMG twin-5-spoke w black accents
TIRES	.....F: 275/45 R21 XL, R: 315 /40 R21 XL
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....194.4 / 117.9 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....na
TURNING CIRCLE	.....39.4 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....40.5 / 36.9 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....40.3 / 40.9 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....33.3 / 74.9 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....5236 lb
TOW CAPACITY	.....7700 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....premium unl / 22.5 gal
MPG	.....18/23/20 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....\$86,750
PAINT: Manufaktur Diamond White Met	.....1750
AMG CARBON FIBER INTERIOR TRIM	.....1750
STEERING WHEEL: AMG Performance in Nappa leather / microfiber	.....500
WINTER PKG: heated steering wheel and windshield washer system	.....450
WHEELS: 21-in AMG twin-5-spoke w black accents	.....1300
AMG NIGHT PKG: high-gloss black front splitter, front & rear apron trim strips, window trim, exterior mirror housing and roof rails; AMG exhaust system & twin tailpipes in black chrome	.....1150
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1150
TOTAL	.....\$95,150

(Note: available manufacturer specs are limited and are all from this generation, but not necessarily all from 2024 and not always from AMG.)

2024 GLE LINEUP

(all are 4MATIC)	
GLE 350 SUV	.....\$63,960
GLE 450 SUV	.....69,500
GLE 450e SUV (PHEV)	.....69,500
GLE 580 SUV	.....88,100
(all are AMG Performance 4MATIC+)	
AMG GLE 53 SUV	.....▼ 86,750
AMG GLE 53 Coupe	.....89,800
AMG GLE 63 S SUV	.....128,850
AMG GLE 63 S Coupe	.....129,050

(And then there are the full-EV Mercedes-EQ EQE SUVs, not to mention EQE Sedans.)

And just announced: arriving in 2025 as model year 2026

536-hp / 553 lb-ft plug-in hybrids (PHEVs), the AMG GLE 53 Hybrid SUV and AMG GLE 53 Hybrid Coupeprices tba