

There are some 450 to 500 different vehicles in the US market—not trim levels, completely different vehicles—from over 40 brands. As for brand lineups, Mercedes-Benz has some of the greatest variety and complexity.

It used to be simple to follow—C, E and S sedans (compact, executive and full-size). Then came a subcompact A. Then SUVs were renamed to follow suit—GLA (or GLB), GLC, GLE and GLS. Joining the parade along the way have been a variety of two-door and four-door (two-letter and three-letter) coupes, plus GT models, AMG variants and the EQ lineup of full EVs. Complexity has grown.

We drove the CLA four-door coupe in our previous issue. Finding it on the small side, at least if you're tall, led us to revisiting the alternatives, and—although we are fairly immersed in the full line-

up and its evolutions—we were somewhat surprised to realize a larger alternative did not exist. The CLS had been discontinued just the prior year, and there never was a CLE four-door coupe.

Three-letter (CLx) naming, though, is expanding from four-door coupes to two-door coupe-cabriolet pairings. This is the case with the new CLE, a two-door combining aspects of the C-Class and E-Class coupe and cabriolet into one new model series.

The Mercedes-Benz CLE 300 4MATIC Coupe we are driving here is the base of four versions—or five counting AMG, or seven adding two Cabriolet versions (see chart in sidebar).

The first thing we wanted to experience was its size—is it noticeably larger than the A-sized CLA? Is it more like a C-size or E-size? Our chart at upper right tells the tale via a range of key dimensions

(along with CLE's variance from all three others).

The CLE is clearly longer than the CLA, although both its trunk and overall height are less. CLE is closer to the past E-Class Coupe than the C-Class (reinforcing its naming as a CLE and not a CLC), although all three are relatively close (reinforcing their approach of continuing with just one instead of two). Although the CLE rides lower than CLA, its front headroom is almost two inches more, exactly what we had wanted as a tall person trying out that CLA. Despite the notable increase in length, legroom increases just a hair (and rear legroom is less than in the old E-Class Coupe). More surprisingly, the CLE has less cargo volume than the CLA, again presumably due to its low-slung stature.

At first, the CLE's steering and suspension felt very light and detached, but as we accelerated in-

Packaging and positioning: there's far more to creating a particular model than saying, "just make it an inch or two bigger." Each element affects the others, and some dimensions can become smaller even as a vehicle becomes larger. The new CLE is promoted as the largest coupe in its segment, significantly larger than the outgoing C-Class Coupe, though both lower and longer than the outgoing E-Class Coupe. While Mercedes focuses on comparing the new CLE with the outgoing coupes, we are interested in the current options, CLE vs CLA—especially having just had them back-to-back—although one is a four-door, the other a two.

	CLE Coupe (2-dr)	C-Class Coupe (2-dr)	E-Class Coupe (2-dr)	CLA Coupe (4-dr)
		(CLE=)	(CLE=)	(CLE=)
Length	191.0	184.5...(+6.5)	190.4...(+0.6)	184.6...(+6.4)
Wheelbase	112.8	111.8...(+1.0)	113.1...(-0.3)	107.4...(+5.4)
Width (w/o mirrors)	73.3	71.2...(+2.1)	73.2...(+0.1)	72.0...(+1.3)
Height	56.0	55.3...(+0.7)	56.1...(-0.1)	56.7...(-0.7)
Legroom (F/R)	42.1/34.2	41.3/32.0...(+/+)	41.8/35.9...(+/-)	41.8/33.9...(+/+)
Headroom (F/R)	40.3/36.0	40.26/35.6...(+/+)	40.9/36.4...(-/-)	38.5/35.7...(+/+)
Cargo capacity	11.2	10.5...(+0.7)	10.0...(+1.2)	11.6...(-0.4)

to our first corner, it felt accurate and sure-footed, and that was our ongoing impression.

We played with drive modes (sport-individual-comfort-eco) a bit, largely seeking quicker downshifts and powershifts from its automatic, settling into sport, where general "go" responsiveness is good, and freeway handling and toe-tapping lane-changing maneuvers are exact. There's a nice sub-

tle, healthy growl (all in sport mode), and routine shifts are prompt. While the pricier six-cylinder CLE 450 hits 60 mph in just 4.2 seconds, 6.2 seconds in this was not remotely disappointing and more than you'd ever need around town.

The 48-volt mild hybrid system provides about 21 miles of pure EV range, always fun to play with, although it seemed to greatly reduce our AC flow.

All in all, the CLE is a great drive, and we appreciated the increased cabin size, although a big apples-and-oranges factor remains—the CLE is a two-door and CLA a four. It's an easy tradeoff for those who travel largely solo, as we were. For others, perhaps a four-door CLE equivalent will follow. ■

# Wish fulfillment

Coupe classes combined and compared in new context  
BY JOE SAGE



## SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Bremen, Germany
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD	Poland / Germany
PARTS CONTENT	Germany 40% / US/Can 0%
ENGINE	2.0L inline-4 turbo w mild hybrid system, diecast alloy block/head
HP/TORQUE	255 hp / 295 lb-ft + up to 23 hp / 151 lb-ft from Mild Hybrid
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.5:1
TRANSMISSION	9G-TRONIC 9-spd auto
DRIVETRAIN	4MATIC AWD
0-TO-60 / TOP SPEED	6.2 sec / 130 mph
SUSPENSION	4-wheel indep w comfort tuning; F: 4-link; R: 5-arm multilink
STEERING	rack & pinion w electromechanical power asst
BRAKES	[ no information ]
WHEELS	8.0x18 twin-5-spoke black
TIRES	245/45 R18 extended mobility
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	191.0 / 112.8 in
HEADROOM (F/R)	40.3 / 36.0 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.1 / 34.2 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	na
TURNING CIRCLE	tba
CARGO CAPACITY	11.2 cu.ft
WEIGHT	4057 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	prem unl / 17.4 gal
MPG	24/34/28 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$56,500
DRIVER ASSISTANCE STANDARD	blind spot assist, adaptive highbeam assist, active brake assist, attention assist and more...incl
DRIVER ASSISTANCE PKG	active lane change assist, Distronic Plus w steering assist and stop & go assist, route-based speed adaptation
AMG LINE PKG	modified front bumper, air intakes & chrome trim element, larger front brake discs, two-tailpipe exhaust system w trim elements integrated into rear bumper, and more
SURROUND VIEW SYSTEM	600
HEATED STEERING WHEEL	250
HEADS-UP DISPLAY	1100
REAR SIDE AIRBAGS	700
ENERGIZING AIR CONTROL	150
DASHCAM	200
ADDITIONAL USB PORTS	300
GUARD 360 VEHICLE PROTECTION PLUS	50
DESTINATION CHARGE	1150
TOTAL	\$67,090

## 2024 MERCEDES CLE LINEUP

MERCEDES-BENZ COUPE	
CLE 300 4MATIC Coupe (255 hp) ...	\$56,500
Pinnacle trim	59,100
CLE 450 4MATIC Coupe (375 hp) ...	65,650
Pinnacle trim	68,250
MERCEDES-AMG COUPE	
AMG CLE 53 Coupe (443 hp) ...	72,800
MERCEDES-BENZ CABRIOLET	
CLE 300 4MATIC Cabriolet (255 hp) ...	64,350
CLE 450 4MATIC Cabriolet (375 hp) ...	73,850