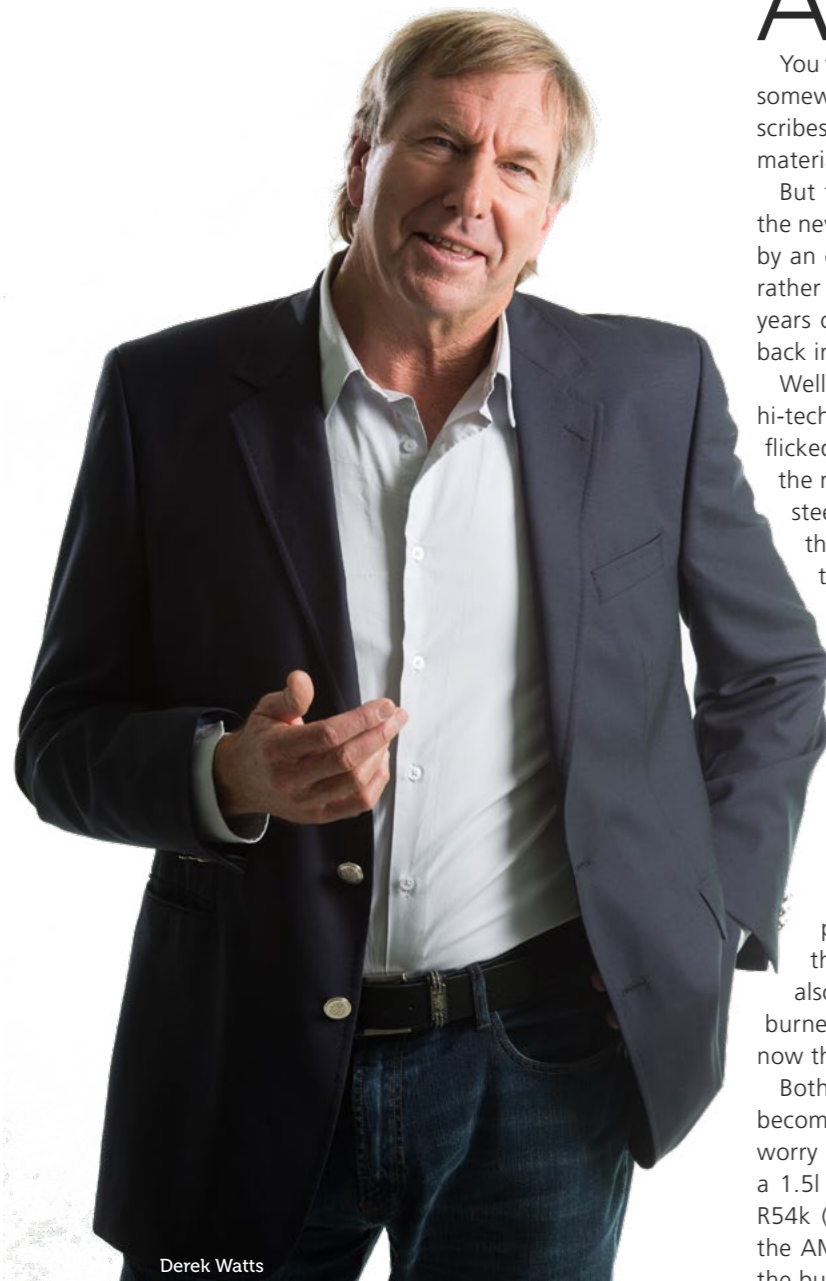


COLUMN

SEE CLASS



Derek Watts

Apologies for stealing part of a famous Ford slogan that goes back to 1984. But have you driven a Mercedes-Benz C-Class lately?

You would be forgiven for thinking that you were piloting a somewhat shrunken S-Class. And, although some pernickety scribes have complained about the quality of a few fascia materials, it has been dubbed the Baby S.

But there is nothing small about the super bold snoot of the new C-Class, with the massive Merc emblem surrounded by an eye-catching three point star pattern, which all flows rather stylishly to an unremarkable rump. Hopefully, after years of breath-taking design changes, we are not slipping back into the evolution rather than revolution approach.

Well certainly not with the interior which is a showroom of hi-tech with hardly a button to be pressed or a switch to be flicked. It's all soft, sensitive, touchy, feely finger strokes on the multitude of functions awaiting to be activated on the steering wheel. Those who are all-thumbs might suffer in this department. No problem, though, you can resort to the striking central portrait touchscreen or just give a shout out to the "Hey Mercedes" voice assistant who will answer your every wish - well almost.

As you may know the C-Class is homegrown. A R13 billion upgrade of the East London plant means that a specialist workforce of 600 plus a squad of almost as many robots turn out left and right hand Cs for 80 global markets.

This doesn't mean you are getting a bargain. The range starts with Avantgarde styling and the entry price is R849k. That is for the C200 which is a pleasure to drive, but not quite as powerful or smooth through the 9-gear transmission as the C220d, which is also far less thirsty. There are even some reports of the oil burner covering over a thousand kilometres on a tankful... now that's a blessing these days!

Both derivatives get a secret electronic boost, which is becoming a trend until we go the full Electric Monty. Don't worry too much about the numbers, though, the C200 is a 1.5l and the 220d is 2.0l and will set you back another R54k (by my calculations), which, by coincidence, is what the AMG option costs... and that is really worth stretching the budget for.



There are more options than a Starbucks coffee menu to take you over the million mark. The only question I have is why isn't a basic safety option like blind spot assist (which has been around for almost a decade) included as standard? You are obliged to pay an extra R14k for the Lane Tracking Package.

Delivery of your individually styled and accessorised Mercedes-Benz C-Class should be under four months despite the global shortage of semiconductors that has been such a major setback for the industry.

For the power hungry, the C43 should be out relatively soon and, the track star, the AMG C63 following early next year.

The C-Class Coupes and Cabriolets could take a while to debut. Word has it that Merc will trim some exclusive ranges and merge the C-Class and E-Class versions of these chic models into what should be a stunner – the CLE.

Buyers in the UK have the option of a petrol plug-in Hybrid

C-Class with a range of over 100 kilometres. There's no word yet on projected availability of this thrifty electrified version in South Africa, but Mercedes-Benz has a strategic focus on positioning the German luxury automaker as a global leader in the electric vehicle market.

Whilst the President of Mercedes-Benz Cars South Africa, Mark Raine, acknowledges that EV sales here have been modest to say the least, five new models from the Mercedes-EQ range will be launched this year.

Raine says Merc will follow the global push towards zero-emission mobility. The Stuttgart company aims for plug-in hybrids or all-electric vehicles to make up more than 50 percent of its global sales by 2030.

South Africa is an SUV country, but Merc's biggest seller is already making its mark here. So... HAVE you driven a Mercedes-Benz C-Class lately?