

COLUMN
DEREK
WATTS

THE A AND B OF EGO



Have you ever thought of the reasons why you bought your last car?

Maybe some brain storming factors came into the equation. Like reliability, service plan, smooth engine, and low fuel consumption ...and possibly room aplenty for the family.

But many of us, and I put my hand up as a guilty party, are swayed by a breath-taking picture in a glossy magazine or a rash of envy at the traffic lights.

Now, motoring journalists are not known to be phenomenal psychologists, but I would say that is our ego, our sense of self-esteem talking.

We just love the LOOK of that new model and the buzz it might create in the shopping centre car park.

Yet, those external features are just roughly 0.004167% of what we see of that stunning head turner. Based on my dodgy maths of five seconds to get into the vehicle and an average 20 minute drive.

Given a healthy dose of EQ, or Emotional Intelligence, the primary elements of our buying decision should be interior styling, seat comfort, infotainment, visibility, handy controls, and "pleasing" acceleration and suspension. In other words, what we experience BEHIND the wheel!

So, why have we strayed from the path of Brake Horsepower and Torque? Basically, because I am torn between the new MercedesBenz GLA 200d and the GLB 250. Yes, we are mixing diesel with petrol and a fair stash of cash.

But, before I get called before the Zondo Commission, let me declare that we are an Aclass family. Possibly not in behaviour or achievement but in our choice of transport.

We fell in love with the CLA when it was launched in 2013 and, partly due to a slight slip-up in the order, we ended up with three of them in succession. MercedesBenz have called it "their best launch in 20 years" and the first generation sold about 750 000 units.



I still think it is the most stylish "subcompact executive car" on the road. However, the CLA is really not designed to go off that road ...and we opted to sacrifice elegance for ground clearance and practicality with a switch to the GLA.

Enter the new less-angular GLA 200d with an incredibly striking, upturned nose – the now historic slats giving way to a diamond grille with the central logo straddled by two silver wings.

If the designers have done an admirable job, the techies have produced an interior wonderland which really underpins the generational change.

The word "dashboard" is outdated with the driver confronted by a bright stretch of two screens, so many controls on the steering wheel that Sir Lewis Hamilton would be confused, touch pads and mood lighting set to the feeling of the moment. It is overwhelming at first ... but totally intuitive. An hour or two in that luxury cockpit and you will be scrolling and flipping between data screens and entertainment options like a Millennial.

One of the most pleasing figures that spring out of the visual paint box is fuel consumption. You have to be very aggressive with the right foot to take it over 6 l/100 km and the fourcylinder turbo diesel is frisky to say the least.

A small spanner in the works is that you know you are driving an oil burner. At lower speeds, this is not the smoothest or quietest drive in town – only on the highway does the 200d get into its stride.

This is the polar opposite of the boxy GLB 250 that belies its functional looks with astounding pace (a claimed 0-100 km/h in 5.3 seconds) and unruffled performance which takes "smooth" to a level that would make Santana envious. Even if it is a little thirsty at the pumps.

The interior layout is virtually identical, but I just cannot fall in love with the design, although it has practicality stamped all over it. All the way back to the flat rump.

Sure, there are some features you may need – like the two optional back seats which would be essential for a

family of seven, better headroom for passengers, and more loading space. The GLB 250 looks like it wants to explore the continent.

If we must be crass and discuss finance, the base price of the GLB 250 is a relatively steep R831k, while the GLA 200d comes in at R710k. So, here is the crazy thing: even if price was not a factor, and I had to make a choice ...

Shamefully, I have to admit I would sacrifice the brilliant performance and snap up the GLA 200d.

How absolutely shallow. You are right... the ego has landed.

I hope that there are many more MercedesBenz customers with a higher EQ!

