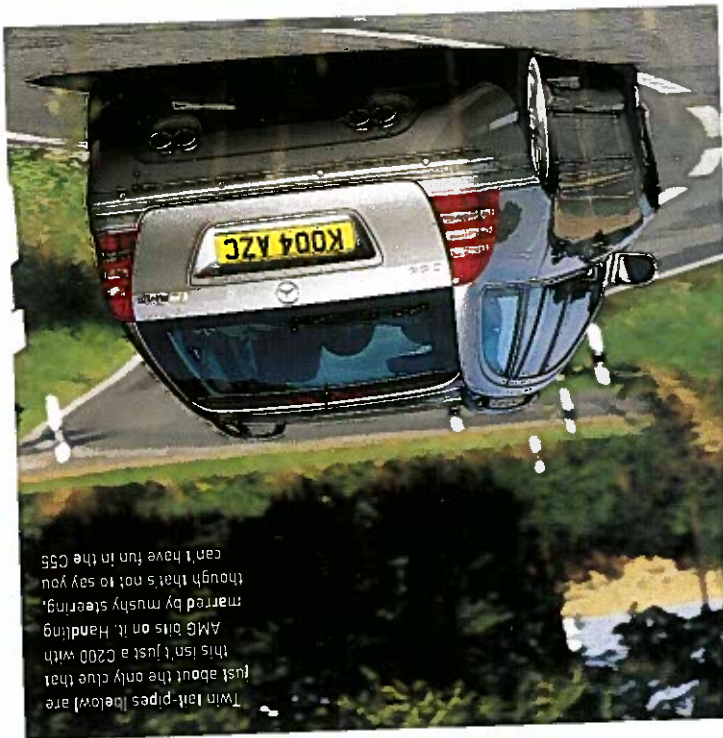


Twin tail-pipes (below) are just about the only clue that AMG bits on it. Handling isn't just a C200 married by mushy steering, though that's not to say you can't have fun in the C55



## Mercedes C55 AMG

A thumping great V8 in a comparatively small car; sounds like just the sort of thing we like

It's no surprise other autobahn traffic takes its time to get out of your way when you're driving the C55 AMG estate. After all, you can have AMG body styling and alloys on a C200 diesel, so how would the driver who's just ambled in to your path know that the little C-class bearing down on them is the genuine item, packing a monstrously large 5.5-litre V8?

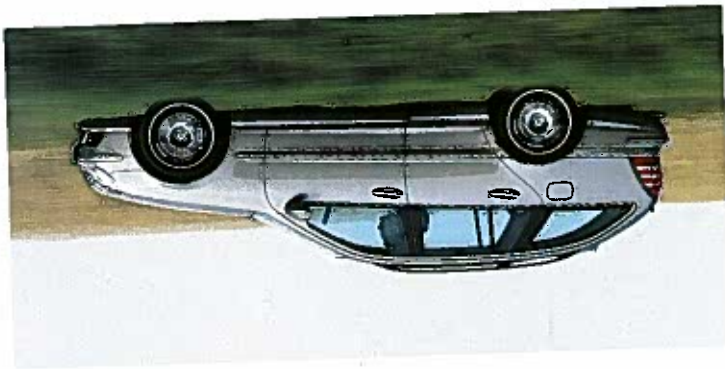
The C55 must set some kind of record – I can't recall a Mondeo-class saloon or estate with such a huge lump. AMG's latest take on the C-class eclipses all generations before it, be it the original straight-six C36, the V8 C43 or the outgoing C32 with its supercharged V6. There was, briefly, a C55 version of the '97 C43 but it had trouble making its performance stick. Initial impressions indicate that, in the dry at least, this new C55 has no such problem, even though it develops 367bhp and 376lb ft of torque. The supercharged C32 wasn't much less muscular, with 349bhp and 332lb ft, so the best reason for ditching the V6 latter its lack of aural charisma appears to be the Audi S4 with its 4.2-litre V8. When it comes to firepower, Mercedes blitzes the opposition in most other sectors, so why not in this one too?

V8 where the V6 once was, though. Compared with regular models, the nose of the C55 is 80mm longer and its bonnet line is slightly higher to accommodate the normally aspirated 24-valve V8. It's a subtle nose-job, while the overall appearance of the C55 is restrained. Indeed, the AMG body styling is discreet enough to render the potential of a de-badged C55 estate invisible to all but the keenest car spotter, while AMG's current corporate alloy disguises the 18in rim diameter, leaving the four stubby tailpipes as the most distinguishing feature.

When you're at the wheel, held by the super seat, there's never any doubt that the C55 AMG estate is special. This

mighty V8 has a deep, traditional throb at idle and even at a 100mph cruise those tailpipes suffuse the cabin with a looping beat. It's hard to avoid cruising very close to three figures because that feels like the natural gait of this compact estate. A firm prod of the throttle sends the tach needle leaping for the redline as the very keen and smooth five-speed auto shuffles cogs to find maximum grunt, and the C55 surges forward. Given a clear stretch it'll run to the 155mph limiter with impressive determination. There isn't a manual option and really there doesn't need to be. The re-worked AMG 'Speedshift' produces superb, rapid shifts and, as in the SL55, there's a manual shift program allowing individual gears to be held, and soft-touch buttons on the rear face of the steering wheel for up- and down-changes.

Naturally, the chassis has been tuned to cope with the extra weight over the nose and the torque arriving at the rear wheels and, in line with the rest of the



### SPECIFICATION

Engine	V8, 5439cc, 32v
Max power	347bhp @ 5250rpm
Max torque	376lb ft @ 4000rpm
Top speed	155mph (limited)
0-62mph	5.2sec (claimed)
Basic price	£48,815
On sale	Now
EVG RATING	★★★★★
Fast, great shift, discreet	Pricey

John Barker

340bhp, four-wheel-drive S4 Avant. C55 estate is £10K more than the Mercedes and bargain rarely appear in the same sentence – at almost £49k, the spec suggests. The downside is that as wickily indulgent as the on-paper (1560kg), so its wonderfully gutsy V8 is but this AMG C-class isn't too hefty big engine small car isn't fully realised desirable. Sometimes the promise of a there's no question the C55 is going, you're asking for it.

You switch off ESP when the wipers are rear-drive estate with a 5.5-litre V8, if wet you have to be on your toes, but in a confident way mild oversteer. In the can now paint lines on the road and play never seems to fully disengage, but you smooth and discreet. Turn it off and it control engaged, but its intervention is weak the line with ESP traction/stability The power doesn't get the opportunity to mushy and the nose pushes gently wide. pushed, steering feedback becomes when you're on your own, though. When Don't expect it to turn into a sports car holdall card with aplomb.

travel, so the C55 plays the fast family self-leveling rear rarely runs out of control. Even when fully laden, the non-judged damping that is a good compromise between comfort and general driving, helped by very well nose-heavy balance pretty well in steering, seven per cent faster geared, slightly wider front track. The C55's latest generation C-class range, there's a

