



Pickup with a touch of class

Liam Campbell

crosses the Atlantic to put the new Mercedes-Benz X-Class to the test.



It's finally here! The world's largest commercial vehicle manufacturer has, at long last, launched a pickup truck. Developed in conjunction with its partners, the Mercedes-Benz says the X-Class raises the bar in terms of style and comfort and invited us along to the global launch in Chile, to test it for ourselves.

X-Appeal

Mercedes-Benz has made no secret in that it is aiming the X-Class at the premium, one-man bands, and it has therefore been sculpted and finished accordingly. While most pickups strive for the 'macho' and 'rugged' look, Mercedes has opted for beauty.

With its distinctive twin louvre grille, sleek design and the three-pointed star, the vehicle brings a touch of class to the pickup segment. The 18-inch alloy wheels, chrome detailing in the bumper and grille and LED lights add to its luxury presence, but would it be the same story on the inside?

With the standard set high on the walk up to the vehicle, I was surprised to find that the designers

had managed to replicate, and possibly exceed, the high-quality feel inside. The dashboard has concave trim design that runs the full width, creating a spacious and 'purist' feel, while the dash top is made from leather, although we note a distinct lack of useful storage spaces and pockets.

There are many features that have been plucked out of the passenger car line, like the round ventilation outlets, the round dials in the instrument cluster and the multifunction touchpad for the infotainment system.

The touchpad itself takes some getting used to but, once cracked, the COMAND Online multimedia system is easy to navigate and responsive. Its 8.4-inch touchscreen display is the largest in the segment, and it comes with satellite navigation and 360-degree camera, which was a great help on the tight Santiago streets.

In and around Santiago

The 2.3-litre power plant is the same unit in the Nissan Navara and there are two outputs currently offered, the X220D (161hp/403Nm) and X250D (188hp/450Nm). Our X250D model achieves 0-62mph in 11.8 seconds - which isn't exactly hair raising - although a vigorous 3.0-litre V6, producing 258bhp/550Nm and reaching



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>> 62mph in around 8 seconds, will be available later in the year.

The X-Class is outpaced by less powerful pickups due to its weight at over 2.2 tonnes, making it the heaviest pickup. A lot of the weight gain is down to the increased lead soundproofing, which has helped give the X-Class the most refined ride in the pickup segment.

Handling is also second-to-none thanks to coil-springs at the rear and well-optimised steering, which is accurate and provides ample feedback. Unlike most pickups, the X-Class isn't plagued by exaggerated bodyroll in the bends, either.

Handy in the Andes

After the run around the city, we headed east out of Santiago and into the Andes. At around 2000 metres we leave the tarmac roads behind us, and I engage four-wheel drive using the electronic switch. The smaller engine (X220 and X250) models use part-time, or selectable, 4WD, but the 3-litre V6 X350 will be permanent 4WD.

The independent rear suspension takes to the inconsistencies and bumps of the dirt track much better than the traditional solid live rear axle with leaf spring arrangement for a number of reasons. The most obvious advantage is that there isn't the loud 'bang' and 'shudder' when you hit bumps, although the second is a little more obscure.

The X-Class is a lot more stable and the braking is more effective on these types of roads due to the coil springs pushing the individual wheels down into the divots much faster than leaf springs. This increases the amount of contact between the wheel and the ground and gives the driver more confidence to put their foot down.

The independent suspension, however, becomes a bit of a hinderance on more rugged terrain as it is not able to articulate to anywhere near the degree of a solid rear axle - but then again, how many people will take their X-Class rock climbing?

The X-Class rides fairly low (201mm ground clearance), but the approach and departure angles are quite high (29 and 24 degrees) - which helps avoid nasty bumper scrapes. The 500mm wading depth came in handy as we crossed the Mapacho River.

Can it graft?

Sadly, there wasn't any opportunity to test its loading and towing capabilities in Chile but, according to the tech specs, payloads vary between a respectable 1066 and 1087kg and there's an industry-leading 3.5t towing capacity. However, we have our reservations about going anywhere near that with coil-spring suspension so you'll have to wait until we get one back to our farm for a real assessment.



Quality comes at a cost

The X-Class has been in UK dealerships since December and our version is priced at £34,100 plus VAT - making it by far the most expensive pickup on sale. The X-Class, however, is expected to hold its value well and it is backed by the most respected LCV dealer network with a three-year, unlimited mileage warranty.

One of the downsides of the X-Class's weight is its fuel economy. Combined figures on the smaller 2.3-litre engine vary between 35.8mpg and 37.2mpg, depending on transmission and output, which falls slightly short of pickups with a similar performance.

Summing up

After the arduous trek across a broad expanse of Chile's rugged landscape, the new kid on the block has earned our respect as a tough cookie. No squeaks, no rattles, no hissing. But, perhaps the biggest surprise is the effect that it's had on our mental state, or lack of.

While most modern pickups look the part nowadays, the high levels of road and engine noise, accentuated body roll and dentist waiting room seats is enough to drive anyone mad after such a long time in the vehicle - but the X-Class doesn't have any of that. This is the first pickup that ticks all the boxes in terms of looks, luxury and refinement.

Liam Campbell is editor of Professional Pickup and 4x4 Magazine.



The new kid on the block has earned our respect as a tough cookie

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