

clever cars

Mercedes-Benz's excellent new E-Class is a window into the autonomous car of the future.

BY PHILL TROMANS

NEW TECHNOLOGY IN modern cars is becoming a problem for journalists. Simply listing the number of gadgets crammed in by engineers would take up multiple pages, so let's just say that the new Mercedes-Benz E-Class has a lot of very clever features.

The E-Class is Merc's large executive saloon and one of its biggest sellers, so a new model is big news. Visually, it follows the design established by the larger S-Class and smaller C-Class, but it's the extra features that really interest. While the automotive world (and much of Silicon Valley) works towards building self-driving cars, much of what Mercedes has developed so far is in the new E-Class for us to experience right now.

With the new Drive Pilot system, it's possible to sit behind the wheel and touch neither the steering wheel nor pedals for up to a minute, watching as the car drives itself along the motorway using an array of sensors and cameras to detect its surroundings. Only legislative restrictions mean the car prompts you to put your hands back on the wheel at regular intervals.

Further tricks include the ability to park the car while standing outside it, using a smartphone app and Bluetooth connectivity – perfect for squeezing into tight spaces.

Tech aside, the new E-Class has a stylish interior and proves composed and comfortable. For enthusiasts, the 333bhp, V6-engined E400 4Matic model provides unexpected thrills with confident handling and a rasping exhaust note for those moments when, for nothing other than nostalgia's sake, you'd rather tackle the road yourself. ■



THE RIVALS

The new Mercedes-Benz E-Class is competition for the likes of BMW's 5 Series and Audi's A6 range.

THE POWER

Three petrol-powered models are available at launch – the E200 and E300 have 184 and 245bhp respectively, while the E400 4MATIC has all-wheel drive and a 333bhp V6 engine.

CLEVER LIGHTS

The E-Class is available with Multibeam LED headlights, which use a grid of 84 LEDs to provide maximum illumination while tracking oncoming cars and blocking out individual patches of light to avoid dazzling them.