Mercedes-Benz CLS 250 CDi Blue Efficiency Shooting Brake

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The Shooting Brake – originally a car that carried shooting parties -– is Mercedes' name for their eye-catchingly sleek CLS estate car. It's expensive, but great to drive and impressively frugal.

I drove the 250 CDI Blue Efficiency version almost 1500 miles. Quite a fair amount of this

was on motorways in the UK, France and Belgium and along German Autobahns. That meant much time was spent at anything from 70 to 80 mph, depending on the particular country's maximum speed limit, with an occasional sprint up to 110 mph on the Autobahn. (In fact, the 4-cylinder, 2143cc Diesel engine's 204 PS can get the car up to 146 mph.) The fuel consumption, as indicated on the trip computer never fell below 48 mpg and I could confirm this figure with a tank top-up to top-up of 50 mpg over several hundred of those miles. If you select the cost-free optional 80-litre fuel tank, you could drive up to 800 miles between fill-ups.

I chose to drive almost exclusively in Eco mode, but it never felt anything less than sporting, with plenty of easy acceleration when required. Indeed, there was just no point in using the Sport mode itself that merely hung onto higher-rev gear-changes and therefore increased the fuel consumption. Other drivers may, of course, have their reasons for selecting 'Sport'. All of this performance was delivered in a most refined and relaxed way, with no hint of any vulgar Diesel clatter.



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The handling was excellent. It made those abrupt reductions of the speed limit to 40 mph when leaving motorways via a 'cloverleaf' seem ridiculously unnecessary. Cliches such as 'it felt glued to the road' and 'it was like it was on rails' apply. The steering was a joy and the

brakes extremely reassuring, being progressive and powerful. The 7-speed automatic is up with the best. However, using it manually on the paddles, changing down from top gear, to use engine braking downhill for example, the gearbox always went straight into fourth gear.

The Shooting Brake's styling has some effect on its carrying capacity. The boot opening is smaller than some competitors offer and the outward visibility is a little restricted, especially rearwards over the shoulder. However, it is simply not a car that would be bought as a work-horse, so luggage capacity, in itself, is not at all bad, but it won't be the leading consideration for potential buyers. (In fact, with seats folded, available space amounts to 1550 litres.) The boot area is very nicely carpeted and finished with a variety of hooks, dividers and under-floor compartments. The tailgate can be closed by pressing a button. A little less than practical is that the tailgate needs to be open before the rear seats can be folded, because the seat-releases are located in the boot. The rear seats provide good space for two adults, but, as is usual in so-called five-seaters, anyone sitting in the middle at the back would not have a very comfortable time, because of the lack of foot-room and having to have your legs splayed.

The driver may also find that the sun-visor comes into much more use than in other cars, with the windscreen placed nearer your face than usual; this is not a criticism, just an observation.

A SCARY EXPERIENCE

The Shooting Brake has a long list of safety features, all of which should be expected in this sector and at this price. However, on two occasions, the car appeared to go out of 'Drive' into a neutral mode. The first time this happened, I was on the M25 in the middle lane at 50 mph through roadworks; I had to somehow cross over the left lane onto a very narrow hard shoulder… a scary experience. There was definitely no drive, but I got there, stopped and switched the engine off. Nothing was revealed by the handbook, and, after a while, I started the engine up again. Hey presto! The car moved forward in gear and, regaining my confidence, I pulled out and drove another 60 miles home and that was that – until the next day on the M4! The same thing happened and I undertook the same procedure and got

home in the end. In each case, I have no recollection of accidentally touching the speed-limit lever, which is what Mercedes-Benz UK suggested may have happened. They say it could find no fault with the car and that they have had no other such reports. If I had inadvertently activated the speed limiter, then it was too easy to do so without meaning to. It is also difficult to understand how, if the speed limiter had inadvertently been deployed, all drive had been removed, and not just down to whatever speed limit had been entered into the computer… The engine was running and could be revved, but there was no connection to the transmission. I merely report what happened honestly and to the best of my knowledge. Was it, just possibly, a case of the computer crashing and needing a re-boot, as I have experienced with other makes of car for a variety of reasons?

GENERAL EQUIPMENT

As far as general equipment is concerned, similarly, at nearly £50,000, the Shooting Brake should and does have everything that most of us would ever want in a car. In fact, it would take a considerable period of time to get to know all its capabilities. The car was driven in summer weather, warm and at times extremely wet: the air-conditioning was exemplary. So, too, was the Satellite Navigation, being more intuitive and user-friendly than some. So much on this car is operable through digital technology that the handbook very often simply refers the user trying to 'learn' the car via the Digital Owner's Manual, accessed on the screen in the central console.



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So to the crunch: is it worth the price? The initial outlay may be a bit painful, but owners can at least enjoy excellent fuel consumption (and, admiring glances, if that takes your fancy). The efficiency of the diesel engine is also reflected in its low emissions and low annual road tax. However, the insurance is up at the high end. The 'up to 30 years' warranty

on corrosion inside to out and on breakdown cover ‘providing conditions are met’ would be interesting to follow up.

VERDICT

Overall, this is a fine Mercedes-Benz, an extremely capable all-rounder, and the only estate car that’s a real head-turner. Just beware hitting the wrong lever…

WHEELS-ALIVE STATS. IN BRIEF

Price: £49,390 (before options)

Performance: 0-62mph in 7.8 seconds

Economy: 53.3 mpg combined cycle

Insurance: Group: 43

Tax: Band E (£120)