

## Shifting Gears

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### [Mercedes C-300: The All-Purpose Luxury Car](#)

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**By Roger Witherspoon**

The snow was no problem.

It was only about two inches deep and, at that level, most cars would ignore it. But the temperature kept skipping just above freezing, producing cold rain, and then heading back south, turning the white stuff into a two inch glaze. It was the kind of road conditions made primarily for snow plows, tow trucks, and Jeeps and if I didn't have to take a low riding, sleek, Mercedes sports sedan out during the middle of this mess I wouldn't have.

Not that it mattered. With some cars, icy conditions are problematic and the only way to move is by disconnecting the electronic traction control because the continuous, unpredictable, uneven skidding among the tires crashes the wheels' computer system. That was not a problem here. While the five-spoke, 18-inch aluminum wheels and all-weather radials looked good on the four-wheel drive Benz, they were also quite functional and treated the ice as just another hard surface.

That was helpful on the Taconic Parkway rolling through the Franklin D. Roosevelt State park behind a fast moving Jeep Cherokee. We entered a slight curve in the highway and the rear of the SUV began to sashay back and forth. The driver, panicking, hit the accelerator in an effort to bull his way through the ice – which was precisely the wrong thing to do. The Jeep did a slow 360 across the three-lane highway and ended up on the shoulder.

I eased up on the C-300's accelerator to give the Jeep space to dance across the lanes, and then easily cruised around him and continued on my way. There is a lot to be said for having four-wheel drive, traction control and

appropriate tires.



The new Mercedes Benz C-300 is a four-door sports sedan whose long, sleek, low silhouette is intended to turn heads. But its exterior design, for all its eye-catching details, is always second to its primary function providing safe, sure, extremely comfortable transport in all conditions. In that regard, the Mercedes C-300 is a petty package on a really efficient, versatile, sports sedan that offers a lot for about \$48,000.

Under the hood is a relatively small power plant for a sports model, producing just 228 horsepower. But it is mated to a seven speed, automatic transmission which seamlessly gets the most torque out of each gear and effortlessly shifts among them. The quality of the transmission is particularly evident when used in electronic manual mode on an open road. It is not a car for drag racing – the top speed is just 130 miles per hour, and it accelerates from 0 – 60 in just over seven seconds. But except for Saturday night drag racing on certain urban streets, you really don't use maximum acceleration unless you are already on the road and need to pass something in a hurry or get out of the way. And when it matters, the C-300's power plant can deliver.

The ability to maneuver on icy terrain is part of a package of road condition safety features Mercedes hopes will steer buyers to its showrooms the same way Volvo cars have traditionally drawn those who view safety and stability as primary features. In addition to the relatively standard traction and stability controls, Mercedes' engineers have added capabilities, such as cross wind sensors which actually shift the angle of the car's chassis to slightly tilt into the wind. The effect of the innovation is particularly noticeable on mountain curves, where you can hear the wind howling down the side of the mountain towards you, only to flow harmlessly over the changed silhouette.

This Mercedes has side radar alerting the driver to the presence of cars on either side when changing lanes – a feature that is becoming common in upscale cars. But Mercedes has changed it from a passive system noting objects in the area, to an active safety system calculating how fast the distance between the cars is closing. The system can do two things: alert the drive to a possible pending collision and, if a crash is imminent, apply safety features such as tightening safety belts, reducing speed, and readying airbags.



Inside the sedan is what you would expect to find in a luxury car: a powered sunroof and rear window

sunscreen; soft, powered, leather seats which are heated in front and can fold in the rear; and a host of electronic gear. The leather-wrapped steering wheel tilts and telescopes, and has fingertip controls for cruise, information, audio, and easy to use Bluetooth. There is a 7-inch pop-up color screen for the navigation and entertainment systems.

For music there is a 6-disc CD player, as well as connections for USB drives, iPods, and MP3 players, as well as a six gigabyte hard drive to carry 1,500 or so of your personal favorites. The music emanates from eight speakers, producing a smooth surround-sound blanket which could lull you to sleep – except there is an alarm which goes off if the car drifts into another lane or onto the shoulder.

Whether one is driving through snowy, seasonal Nor'easters or watching the speedometer hit triple digits while rolling past mountaintop windmills in the Berkshire Mountains in Massachusetts, the C-300 provides quite a ride.



### **2012 Mercedes Benz C300**

**MSRP:** **\$47,850**

**EPA Mileage:** **17 MPG City** **24 MPG Highway**

#### **Performance / Safety:**

3.0-Liter DOHC V-6 engine producing 228 horsepower and 221 pound-feet of torque; 7-speed automatic transmission with electronic manual mode; 4-matic all wheel drive; 3-link independent front suspension; multi-link independent rear suspension; 18-inch, 5-spoke alloy wheels; 4-wheel disc brakes; electronic stability program; dual 2-stage front airbags; side airbags; head protection curtains; dual front pelvic airbags.

**Interior / Comfort:**

AM/FM/Sirius satellite radio ; voice controlled 7-inch retractable color display; 6-disc CD/DVD player with 6 GB hard drive; iPod, USB, and MP3 connections; Bluetooth phone and music connection; 8 speakers; tilt and telescope steering wheel with fingertip cruise, phone and entertainment controls; voice activated navigation; power sunroof; heated front seats; split, fold flat rear seats; powered rear sunshade.