

Climate-friendly ragtop revisited

We covered the all-new 2010 E-Class sedan and coupe launch in Las Vegas, had a followup E-Class for a week and covered the also-all-new E-Class Cabriolet launch in the Smoky Mountains last spring, where a rainy and chilly day put this “four-season convertible” to the test. But any E-Class is a treat, and we welcomed a full week with the E350 Cabriolet in Arizona. We were still curious about a couple of things.

AIRSCARF® AND AIRCAP®. The AIRSCARF, already introduced with the SL roadster, pushes warming air from the headrests around the front occupants’ necks. The AIRCAP, new with the E-Class Cabriolet, extends an airfoil above the windshield frame, calming the flow of air in the cabin, especially notable in the back seat.

HOT WEATHER. We had wondered whether the cocoon effect, with windows up and AIRCAP deployed, would help maintain some semblance of an air-conditioned open cabin with the top down, even at, say, 110 degrees. (The AIRSCARF and seats provide heat, but not cooling, just ventilation.) Last spring, we had inquired with one of the Mercedes-Benz engineers on hand in North Carolina. He had explained that actual cooling in the seat and neck areas can cause muscle fatigue, so active ventilation is their approach. A feed of cooler air from below the seats is intended to keep you dry on a really hot day. “Even when it’s 117?” we asked. “Even when it’s 117,” though even he had to laugh at the possibility.

CHILLY WEATHER. It was raining so hard at times in the Smokies, we had to keep the top up during the chilliest times. These systems help with temperature and

wind, but not so much with rain. So we still could benefit from trying some dry but cool and windy weather.

ANY WEATHER. In Arizona, we could conceivably have all extremes in the same week, you never know.

We received the car in late October, cold and rainy. It was 106° a couple of weeks prior, but now 60°. We thought, take a convertible out, in this?! But it’s all about the AIRSCARF and AIRCAP, we reminded ourselves, so if it would at least stop raining hard, we’d have the cool weather to give it a try. It never got hot during that October week, so we still hope to try the 100-plus-degree experiment—but for now we could guess.



E350 CABRIOLET LOGBOOK

- The AIRSCARF comes on at max level (3) like a good heated seat; hit again to bring it down to 2, 1 or off—the best design.
- Just two weeks after temps in the 100s, we think 73° is chilly, but there’s not much effect from the AIRSCARF’s flow, which is probably not much warmer. In the evening, though, we come to a traffic light and feel the warmth from the AIRSCARF quite readily. We’re sure the effect would be dramatic a month or so later, at 50° or so.
- Raising the AIRCAP also raises the rear headrests and deflector. We reach our arm back and definitely feel more turbulence till raise the AIRCAP, on surface streets; on the freeway, we feel less difference.
- We raised the AIRCAP after more rain, to show a colleague, who noticed the screen was chock-full of dead bugs—with aroma.
- Our notes confused AIRSCARF and AIRCAP at times; we may not be alone on this.
- “What, no AIRMUFFs?” asked one friend.
- The car came without active ventilated seats, so between that and our timing, we have our Phoenix summer E-Class Cabriolet hot weather experiment yet to perform.
- 5300 miles of test drivers, but nobody had adjusted the audio: everything was at neutral. We boosted bass and treble a little, set the fader one step toward the rear, and most significantly turned on the Logic 7 Surround Sound. Bingo: way better sound.
- About 20 seconds to lower the top and 22.7 to raise it, depending how you deal with windows. You can start raising while still in motion at lower speeds, a big plus.
- This smaller 350 is plenty peppy; we find ourselves 5 mph over the limit without even trying; pulling the driver’s seat back a hair solved that. Idles so smoothly, we almost started it a second time. A definitely likable car, features galore. Nice above-average suspension, firm on pavement seams, comfortable on speed bumps. The Cabriolet is a great member of the E-Class family. ■

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