

Extreme C-Class: AMG C63 S. by Joe Sage

The Mercedes-AMG C63 is readily identified by its more aggressive grille and lower front air dam, dramatic rear haunches, larger performance wheels and quad exhaust. Big differences lie under the skin, notably a 4.0-liter biturbo V8, a hand-built AMG wonder akin to that in the GT and GT C Roadsters and Coupes, with 469 horses in the C63—or in the case of our higher-tuned C63 S Cabriolet, 503 hp. The S version also has an electronic limited-slip rear end (mechanical in the non-S C63), even larger wheels, dynamic engine mounts, carbon ceramic front brakes and a sportier steering wheel to remind you you made the top choice. One of the first places we took it was to lunch with NASCAR driver Brad Keselowski, so we were, well, inspired on our drive back to the office. This car is best when taken seriously and performs better the more seriously you take it—its joys increase exponentially when pushed.

We had spent considerable time, already, playing with drive modes (Comfort, Sport, Sport Plus and Racing) and scrutinizing the manual for some ten minutes wading through details of its soft top operation (concluding from its potential complexities that it's supposed to be fun and carefree to drive a convertible and shouldn't be like preparing a launch at the Kennedy Space Center). The net takeaway is that it was both easier and more rewarding to simply put the top down (one button on the console), raise the front AIRCAP and rear wind deflectors (another button), lower four windows at

once (a third console switch), put it in one of the Sport modes, then add more aggressive exhaust acoustics for good measure (a console switch). With power, sound effects and the top down on a sunny, 80-degree February day, the C63 S becomes a very effective tool for doin' things right. As manual shifters at heart, we're not always big users of paddles, but the AMG's tightly tuned sequences quickly became part of our performance dance.

The AMG C63 S is happiest at speed, cornering hard—a performance vehicle that's optimized for exactly these things. Around town, its Comfort and even Sport modes make it a no-compromise daily driver (though its aggressive suspension—or maybe the feel of its electro-mechanical steering—is noticeable in slow turns, say in a parking lot). We tried Race mode only briefly and would need track time to appreciate its differences.

The C models—C43, C63 and C63 S—comprise the AMG lineup's entry point, but this \$80-to-100k model (almost exactly double the cost of the C300 Sedan on the facing page, before or after options) tackles its spot in the performance and prestige pecking order admirably, from all those horses and track-inspired suspension, to luxury sport finishes and features inside and out.

A non-S C63 starts \$8,000 lower than our C63 S, while a C43 (with a 362-hp "AMG-enhanced" 3.0L V6 starts \$12,700 below that, also differentiating itself by coming only with 4MATIC all-wheel-drive, while the C63 and C63 S are rear-drivers only. ■

You can see our blue tester on our social media sites and in the table of contents, but we also like this C63 in Designo Cardinal Red paint (\$1080 vs \$720 for our blue) and AMG forged cross-spoke black wheels (\$2100 vs \$1600 for our silvers).

SPECIFICATIONS (C63 S CABRIO)

| | |
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| ENGINE | handcrafted AMG 4.0L V8 biturbo |
| DRIVETRAIN | RWD |
| HP/TORQUE | 503 hp / 516 lb-ft |
| TRANSMISSION | AMG Speedshift MCT 7-spd / paddles |
| 0-TO-60 / TOP SPEED | 4.0 sec / 174 mph (elec ltd) |
| SUSPENSION | F: indep multi-link w coil, sgl-tube shock w contin adjust damp & tubular torsion bar; R: same |
| STEERING | speed-dep electro-mech rack & pinion |
| BRAKES | F: 15.4" / R: 14.2" |
| WHEELS | F: 9x19, R: 10.5x19 cast standard |
| TIRES | F: 255/35 R19 / R: 285/30 R19 standard |
| LENGTH/WB/GRND CLEAR | 187.0 / 111.8 / 4.0 in |
| TURNING CIRCLE | 37.1 ft |
| LEGROOM (F/R) | 42.0 / tba in |
| LUGGAGE CAPACITY | (top up/down) 8.8 / tba cu.ft |
| WEIGHT | 4226 lb |
| FUEL CAPACITY | 17.4 gal |
| MPG | 17/22/19 (city/hwy/comb) |

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| BASE PRICE | \$81,500 |
| BRILLIANT BLUE METALLIC | 720 |
| INCLUDED: Nappa leather, natural grain black ash wood and brushed aluminum trim, black soft top | incl |
| AMG PERFORMANCE EXHAUST SYSTEM | 1750 |
| VENTILATED FRONT SEATS | 450 |
| HEADS-UP DISPLAY | 990 |
| 19" FR 20" R AMG FORGED CROSS-SPOKE WHEELS | 1600 |
| EXTERIOR CARBON FIBER PACKAGE II: mirror housings, rear spoiler lip | 1750 |
| PREMIUM PACKAGE: Burmeister Surround Sound, power fold mirrors, AIRCAP, semi-auto trunk separator | 1300 |
| ADVANCED LIGHTING PACKAGE: Active LED headlamps, adaptive high beam assist, 3-color ambient lighting, AMG illuminated door sills | 1090 |
| MULTIMEDIA PACKAGE: COMAND® nav w 3 yrs map updates, 5 yrs traffic/weather (SiriusXM), voice control, 8.4" color display | 2100 |
| AMG NIGHT PACKAGE: High-gloss black elements: A-Wing, front bumper trim, side sill inserts, ext mirror housings, rear diffuser trim, black chrome-plate tailpipes, silver-chrome Lamella grille | 750 |
| EXTERIOR CARBON FIBER PACKAGE: Front apron A-wing, side sill inserts, rear diffuser trim, silver-chrome Lamella grille | 1750 |
| ADVANCED PARK ASSIST PACKAGE: Parktronic w active parking assist, surround view system | 1090 |
| PREMIUM DRIVER ASSIST PACKAGE: Active blind spot assist, Distronic Plus w steering assist & stop-and-go pilot, active lane keep assist, Pre-Safe Plus, BAS Plus w cross traffic assist, Pre-Safe brake w pedestrian recognition, speed limit assist | 1700 |
| DESTINATION CHARGE | 995 |
| TOTAL | \$100,235 |

Mainstream C-Class: C300. by Joe Sage

The Mercedes-AMG C63 S Cabriolet on the facing page and the Mercedes-Benz C300 Sedan driven here share bloodlines, but were brought up quite differently, that one with its cousin the F1 race driver, this one with its cousin the office executive. For most people, the C300 will be the point of departure, though we can't help but compare and contrast the two.

The C300—with about half the horsepower for about half the price of the C63 S—is 18 percent lighter, 2.5 inches shorter, surprisingly enough a hair closer to the ground (it has smaller wheels) and has a tighter turning circle. (It holds more luggage, too, but after all, the AMG here is a convertible.)

By the time you've spent yourself up from \$40 grand to 60 for a C300 with an option list like ours, though, if performance is more your game, you'll might take a look at the 503-hp AMG C-Class beast on the facing page, at \$80 grand. On the other hand, by the time that C63 S is in turn optioned up to \$100 grand, you may look again at this basic C300.

The Mercedes-Benz C300, with a 2.0L four-cylinder turbo, has plenty of power for its

lighter weight (as with the AMG version, the C300 has aluminum sheet metal over its steel unibody)—enough to dive into that rare gap in traffic and enter a new lane in confidence. The powertrain generates a healthy, competitive growl that falls somewhere halfway between what it is, a 2-liter turbo, and a V8.

The car is feature-laden, giving us a typical mix of creature pleasures and interface frustrations, but is basically a painless and seamless experience from seats to controls.

This is a compact, to the E-Class's midsize, yet it is functionally and experientially very close. This puts it in the fringe of two hugely competitive segments, but its premium attributes give it an edge. The C300 is also available with rear-wheel drive, something quite rare in these segments, but a handling and performance plus, especially well suited to dry Arizona roads (and with stability control for your forays into high country winters—or for two grand (and gaining just 166 pounds while shaving one MPG), you can be ready for anything, any time, with the 4MATIC all-wheel-drive option. ■

SPECIFICATIONS (C300 SEDAN)

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| ENGINE | 2.0L aluminum alloy 4-cyl turbo |
| DRIVETRAIN | RWD (AWD available) |
| HP/TORQUE | 241 hp / 273 lb-ft |
| TRANSMISSION | 9-speed 9G-Tronic Plus auto |
| SUSPENSION | F: indep multi-link w coil, single-tube shock w SSD & tubular torsion bar; R: same |
| STEERING | speed-dep electro-mech rack & pinion |
| BRAKES | F: 13.0" / R: 11.8" |
| WHEELS/TIRES | 7x17 cast standard / 225/50 R17 |
| LENGTH/WB/GRND CLEAR | 184.5 / 111.8 / 3.8 in |
| TURNING CIRCLE | 36.8 ft |
| LEGROOM (F/R) | 41.7 / 35.2 in |
| LUGGAGE CAPACITY | 12.6 cu.ft |
| WEIGHT | 3472 lb |
| FUEL CAPACITY | 17.4 gal |
| MPG | 24/33/27 (city/hwy/comb) |

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| BASE PRICE | \$40,250 |
| SELENITE GREY METALLIC | 720 |
| OMITTED: Wood console, analog clock | (325) |
| MB-TEX DASHBOARD & UPPER SILLS | 350 |
| HEATED/VENTED FRONT SEATS | 1030 |
| PANORAMA ROOF | 1000 |
| HEADS-UP DISPLAY | 990 |
| 19-INCH AMG MULTI-SPOKE WHEELS | 500 |
| BURMEISTER SURROUND SOUND | 850 |
| LED LOGO PROJECTORS | 200 |
| HANDS-FREE PACKAGE: w electronic trunk close | 250 |
| LEATHER SEATING PACKAGE: w power passenger seat, 3-position memory, thigh support | 1950 |
| ADVANCED LIGHTING PACKAGE: Active LED headlamps, adaptive high beam assist, 3-color ambient lighting, illuminated door sills | 1900 |
| MULTIMEDIA PACKAGE: COMAND® nav w 3 yrs map updates, 5 yrs traffic/weather (SiriusXM), voice control, 8.4" color display, touchpad | 2200 |
| AMG LINE PACKAGE: AMG body styling, brushed alum pedals w rubber studs, AMG floor mats, sport suspension, sport steering, perforated front discs w Mercedes-Benz calipers, rear spoiler | 2175 |
| ADVANCED PARK ASSIST PACKAGE: Parktronic w active parking assist, surround view system | 1090 |
| PREMIUM DRIVER ASSIST PACKAGE: SiriusXM, Keyless-GO, active blind spot assist, Distronic Plus w steering assist & stop-and-go pilot, active lane keep assist, Pre-Safe Plus, BAS Plus w cross traffic assist, Pre-Safe brake w pedestrian recognition, speed limit assist | 3050 |
| DESTINATION CHARGE | 995 |
| TOTAL | \$59,175 |

