



## 2020 Mercedes-Benz GLE450 review: More luxurious and techy than ever

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### THE GOOD

The 2020 Mercedes-Benz GLE-Class has an excellent in-dash navigation system with augmented reality, a snappy drivetrain and plenty of luxury features.

### THE BAD

The new MBUX infotainment system is still not as user-friendly as others in the segment.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

The GLE-Class is a great choice for those who want the latest and greatest in technology

matched with a responsive chassis and power plant.

From the moment I first get in and adjust the driver's seat in the 2020 Mercedes-Benz GLE450, I know this SUV is something special. The large center screen prompts me to enter my height, and after doing so, the seat, steering wheel and pedals move on their own, putting me in the perfect seating position. That's one heck of a first impression.

The GLE-Class -- formerly known as the M-Class -- is the vehicle that arguably started the luxury SUV craze, more than 20 years ago. This fourth-generation model promises to be a big leap forward in terms of both onboard tech and driving dynamics, making it better poised to take on a growing crop of premium SUVs.

Turbocharged and electrified

The 2020 GLE-Class starts with the GLE350, powered by a 2.0-liter, turbocharged I4 engine. But I'm rocking the GLE450, which uses a 3.0-liter, turbocharged I6, putting out 362 horsepower and 369 pound-feet of torque. While the GLE350 can be had with a choice of rear- or all-wheel drive, the GLE450 only comes with Mercedes' excellent 4Matic AWD system, as well as a nine-speed automatic transmission.

This power plant has an ace up its sleeve: Mercedes' EQ Boost electric assist. It's a mild-hybrid system, kind of like the eTorque tech in the new Jeep Wrangler and Ram 1500, with a 48-volt onboard motor-generator that can add 21 horsepower for short bursts.

The 48-volt system also supplies juice to the GLE450's E-Active Body Control system, which is a combination of air suspension and hydraulic dampers that can control each wheel independently. It really comes into play when I turn the drive mode to Curve -- instead of leaning to the right while taking a left-hand sweeper, the car actually leans into the turn. That makes for nearly flat cornering, which honestly is a little strange at first, but easy to get used to.

BEST CARS

2020 Ram 1500

2020 Kia Telluride

2020 Hyundai Palisade

2020 Mercedes-Benz GLE450

Enlarge Image

The GLE started the luxury SUV craze more than 20 years ago.

If you ever take your fancy GLE450 to the dirt, the EABC system offers a few get-unstuck-quick tricks. For example, the car can bounce itself up and down to self-extract if you find yourself mired in soft sand. You can also adjust the height of any individual wheel in an effort to find grip. Or, you know, you can just make it dance.

The EABC tech is certainly cool, but be aware, it's a costly add-on. On this GLE450, it adds \$8,100 to the bottom line.

In Sport and Sport+ modes, the GLE450's throttle snaps to attention and the nine-speed transmission downshifts under braking so I have lots of power coming out of a turn. The transmission is so nicely tuned I don't even bother with the paddle shifters.

Of course, if you want to achieve maximum fuel economy, it's best to stay out of the Sport modes, and here, you'll find a plush ride with light, accurate steering. The EPA estimates fuel economy ratings of 19 miles per gallon city, 24 mpg highway and 21 mpg combined for the GLE450, which isn't too bad, though during my week of testing, I saw numbers lower than that.

The latest driver-assistance tech

The GLE450 has a huge list of driving aids, making my commutes around San Francisco a breeze. Adaptive cruise control is nothing new, nor is stop-and-go functionality, but the Benz will do you one better. Using GPS, the GLE450's system can read the road ahead and slow down automatically for curves, toll booth plazas and so on.

When traffic opens up, the GLE offers an Active Speed Limit Assist function. I can set the cruise control to 65 miles per hour, but when the limit drops to 55 mph, the car automatically slows down.

The navigation system features augmented reality with addresses and directions laid directly over the forward-facing camera display.

Active Steer Assist gets an update for the 2020 GLE and now offers full steering assist on tighter-radius curves. The Mercedes will even change lanes for you, using the blind-spot monitoring and lane-keeping features. All you have to do is turn on the turn signal. How easy is that?

Voice control and augmented-reality navigation

There's a ton more tech inside, by way of Mercedes' new MBUX infotainment system. The biggest upgrade here is the addition of advanced voice control -- just say, "Hey, Mercedes," and use natural speech to control the climate functions, media, navigation and more. All I have to say is, "Mercedes, turn on the massaging seats," and before I know it I'm receiving a rolling pressure point massage that does wonders while I slog through Bay Area traffic.

Other Roadshow editors have had moderate to great success with the MBUX system, and I'll admit, it's hit or miss here, too. It has no problem telling me the weather and giving me information when I ask, "Who is Steph Curry?" But when I ask it to switch over to Apple CarPlay, nothing happens.

The GLE450 offers a pair of 12.3-inch screens, with a digital gauge cluster in front, and the main MBUX infotainment screen to the right. You can control MBUX via touch, which is a new bit of tech for Mercedes-Benz, or you can use a central touchpad or smaller thumbpads on the steering wheel. I find I like using the center touchpad the most, simply because I never have to take my eyes off the road, unlike finding a place on the screen to touch.

Though I'm usually in favor of using smartphone mirroring for navigation functions, the GLE450's system really has it going on. The forward-facing camera offers augmented-reality overlay to show me exactly where to turn, and the addresses of nearby buildings pop up on the screen so I never miss my destination. This is a huge step forward for navigation tech.

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