

Priced Right

A new Mercedes-Benz for less than \$50,000, there must be some kind of trick, right? Well yes and no as **PETER ATKINSON** discovers.



SPEC CHECK

How big? A compact two-door coupe with room for two adults in the front and at a pinch two more in the back. It also has a generous cargo space under the rear hatch.

How fast? Not as quick as it looks – its 1.8 litre supercharged engine produces a punchy 135 kilowatts, but it's no firecracker.

How thirsty? Thanks to that smallish engine, it also has a smallish appetite – expect economy of about 8.4 l/100km, although it prefers premium unleaded.

How much? Base price is \$49,900 although you can quickly boost that up by visiting the options list.

It's true – Mercedes-Benz has pulled some tricks out of its sleeve with the pricing of its newest model, the CLC Coupe. This fully-fledged, pretty-as-paint Benz which can be had for much the same price as a mid-range average Holden Commodore. Some trick, you say. Just as it did with the CLC's sibling, Australia's car of the year C-Class sedan, Benz somehow managed to introduce a new, improved model at a cheaper price than the old model.

The CLC's sexy new interior sits on some carried-over running gear from the previous model which has been tweaked and revised for this new car. Inside, there are components which many Mercedes drivers will find familiar from the previous C-Class and E-Class models. In short, that is how you produce a new Benz for less than \$50,000. It's also why this car is called the CLC, rather than the C-Class sports coupe like its predecessor.

The CLC does share a variety of attributes with the new C-Class – its 1.8 litre supercharged engine is the same as in the C200, for instance. Mercedes says more than 1100 components have been replaced or improved when creating the new CLC and there is no question it's a much prettier, sexier vehicle than the old sports coupe with its crisp design and the loss of the oversized rump present in the previous model. It's also better to drive, thanks to some added power (a useful 135 kilowatts) and the substantial improvements which come with all those new parts.

But it's not a C-Class and that is an important distinction. It's a great vehicle for such a bargain price, and while it doesn't quite match the engaging driving dynamics of the all-conquering C-Class, it is definitely at a very high standard. The C-Class was, after all, the first Benz to take on and many believe beat BMW at its own game – an executive sedan with the driving characteristics of a sports car.

All that said the CLC is still a heck of a buy for less than \$50,000 – particularly for a car with that coveted three-point star emblem in the front grill. There is little doubt it will find plenty of interest among the young professionals Mercedes is targeting with this new model. The price is right, it looks a million dollars and it's finished like you would expect of a Mercedes and at the end of the day that is a pretty decent trick. CL