

Portland Observer Auto Review

News and reviews on new motor vehicles

2008 Mercedes Benz ML550

BY KATHLEEN CARR

The Mercedes-Benz M-Class SUV is just the right size and is set up well for families. It isn't so large that it's cumbersome or hard to park, but it comfortably seats five and carries plenty of stuff. As daily transportation, it doesn't feel like a truck, and it won't beat its driver or passengers up. Yet it has the potential for some fairly serious off-road adventuring, and it can tow up to 7,200 pounds.

For 2008, the M-Class line replaces the ML500 with the more powerful ML550. Also called the M-Class, the lineup continues to include the ML350 with its gasoline V6, the fuel-efficient ML320 CDI diesel, and the ultra-high performance ML63 AMG. Each is equipped with a seven-speed automatic transmission and electronically managed 4ETS fulltime all-wheel drive. The primary distinguishing feature for each model is its engine.

The ML550 is fun to drive. The 5.5-liter V8 engine will take this 2.5-ton SUV from 0-60 mph in less than 6 seconds flat, and then settles down to a background burble by the time you reach seventh-gear overdrive.

The seven-speed automatic offers a manual-shift mode, and it's the best automatic Mercedes has built. It's flexible, in that it kicks down to a lower gear more quickly than its predecessors, and it almost always keeps the engine in the most



Specifications: 5.5-Liter, V-8, 32-Valve, 382-hp@391 lb-ft. torque, DOHC engine; 0-60 mph: 5.6 sec; 7-Speed automatic transmission; 13-City 18-Highway MPG; \$67,030. MSRP

productive part of its power band. Yet its overdrive top gear makes for quiet high-speed cruising and better fuel economy.

The suspension is good at minimizing body roll in high-speed corners, and it smoothes dips and potholes well. The optional AirMatic suspension we tested can be downright supple, which trucks aren't supposed to be. The larger standard 19-inch wheels and tires and the power rack-and-pinion steering deliver a nice feel of the road, and quick reactions when necessary. At high speeds through mountain passes, the ML550 leans over a little, takes a set, and then grabs the ground and turns the corners.

In place of the original body-on-frame, truck-style design, this sec-

ond-generation M-Class has welded unibody construction with isolated front and rear subframes, a technique that emphasizes rigidity, decreased vibration and lower weight. The unibody also reduces its overall height, making it easier for families to get in and out. The M-Class has given up any pretense to being a large-family vehicle. The optional side-facing rear seats from the old model are gone, so the M-Class is strictly a five-seater.

Options include DISTRONIC radar-managed cruise control, Parktronic obstacle warning dual-screen rear-seat DVD entertainment system, Keyless Go starting, iPod integration kit, CD6 changer. Three packages are available, designated Premium I that includes DVD navigation, PII, and PIII, with exact con-

tent tied to the model. Last year's AMG Sport Package is standard on M-Class V8s.

Safety features on all models includes two-stage front airbags for the driver and front passenger, side-impact airbags front and rear (torso protection) and curtain-style head protection airbags. A rollover sensor can activate both the seat-belt tensioners and curtain airbags if the vehicle senses an imminent rollover. An Electronic Stability Program comes standard along with advanced anti-lock brakes with electronic brake-force distribution. A tire pressure warning system is also standard.

The 2008 Mercedes-Benz M-Class styling tweaks vary between V6 and V8 models. From the emotional perspective, the front end is

bold, interesting and aggressive, with ventilated grille bars, a power-dome hood design and wild-looking integrated headlamps. In profile, the wheel arches loom large and prominent. There's an unmistakable character line rising front to rear, and a forward-slanting C-pillar that frames trapezoidal rear side glass.

Inside the Mercedes-Benz M-Class, the dashboard, door panels and seats complement the aggressive exterior design nicely. Wood, leather, plastic and metal finishes are generally top-drawer, as they should be at this price.

Four huge, round air vents spread across the dash panel, which is dominated by a deeply hooded instrument cluster with sharp graph-

ics and prominent chrome trim around the tachometer and speedometer. A central information window between the gauges can be programmed to supply about as much driving and maintenance information as one driver can stand to absorb.

The M-Class is more than powerful enough in any of its variations. And it offers the safety equipment, luxury accoutrements, style and smooth finish expected of a Mercedes-Benz.

The 2008 Mercedes-Benz ML550 is one sweet-dream of a ride. But if you are consciously aware of rising gas prices the disappointing lack of fuel efficiency will give you nightmares.

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| 2 Cleaning Areas or more | \$30.00 Each Area |
| Pre-Spray Traffic Areas | |
| (Includes: 1 small Hallway) | |
| 1 Cleaning Area (only) | \$40.00 |
| (Includes Pre-Spray Traffic Area • Hallway Extra) | |
| Stairs (12-16 stairs) | \$25.00 |
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| Heavily Soiled Area: | Additional \$10.00 |
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HEALTH

Food Diaries Double Weight Loss

Study says write down what you eat

Everyone knows that eating less and exercising more will help you lose weight. The hard part is figuring out how to do that consistently. A new study from Kaiser Permanente's Center for Health Research finds that one of the most important things you can do is write down what you eat.

"The more food records people kept, the more weight they lost," says Jack Hollis, a researcher at the center and lead author of the study. "Those who kept daily food records lost twice as much weight as those who kept no records. It seems that the simple act of writing down what you eat encourages people to consume fewer calories."

The study is one of the largest and longest weight-loss maintenance trials ever conducted. It is also one of the few trials to recruit a large percentage of African Americans as study participants (44 percent). African Americans have a higher risk of conditions that are aggravated by being overweight, including diabetes and heart dis-



A new study says that keeping a journal of what you eat may double your weight loss.

ease. In addition to keeping food diaries, study participants were asked to follow the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension diet which is high in fruits and vegetables and low in fat, attend weekly group sessions and exercise at moderate intensity levels for at least 30 minutes a day.

After six months, the average weight loss among the nearly 1,700 participants was 13 pounds. More than two-thirds of the participants lost at least 9 pounds, enough to lower their health risks and qualify for the second phase of the study, which lasted 30 months and tested strategies for maintaining the weight loss.

"More than two-thirds of Americans are overweight or obese. If we all lost just 9 pounds, as most people in this study did, we would see vast decreases in hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease and stroke," says Victor Stevens, study co-author.

In an earlier study, Stevens found that losing as few as five pounds can reduce by 20 percent the risk of developing high blood pressure.

"Every day I hear patients say they can't lose weight. This study shows that most people can lose weight if they have the right tools and support," says Dr. Keith Bachman, a Kaiser Permanente internist and weight management specialist.

"Keeping a food diary doesn't have to be a formal thing. Just the act of scribbling down what you eat on a Post-It note, sending yourself e-mails tallying each meal, or sending yourself a text message will suffice," Bachman says. "It's the process of reflecting on what we eat that helps us become aware of our habits, and hopefully change our behavior."

Miraculous Cancer Recovery

(AP) — An Oregon man, given less than a year to live, had a complete remission of advanced deadly skin cancer after an experimental treatment that revved up his immune system to fight the tumors.

The 52-year-old patient's dramatic turnaround was the only success in a small study, leading doctors to be cautious in their enthusiasm. However, the treatment re-

ported in the New England Journal of Medicine is being counted as the latest in a small series of successes involving immune-priming treatments against deadly skin cancers.

When caught early, melanomas can be easily treated by surgically removing the cancerous patch of skin.

The Oregon man had a melanoma on his back before it had spread to his groin and right lung.

He was treated in July 2005. Two months after the treatment, advanced scans of his body revealed no tumors.

However, the case raised questions. The man had been treated earlier with other drugs. It's possible those treatments had already weakened or altered the cancer. Also, none of the eight other patients in the study did as well.

Clarke Returns to LifeWorks NW

Mental health and addiction services provider LifeWorks NW has re-hired a former Portland resident to enhance the group's culturally specific services.

Ebony Sloan Clarke began her career as an advisor for Mothers Against Gang Violence. After receiving her Masters in Social Work from Portland State University, she joined LifeWorks NW as a child and family

therapist. She then spent several years in various management positions at the Juvenile Justice Center in Philadelphia, including a year as behavioral health clinical director.

"We are thrilled to welcome Ebony back to LifeWorks NW. She is a strong addition to our management team, bringing a wealth of experience from her work with African American youth and families in

Philadelphia's inner-city," said Mary Monnat, President and CEO.

Sloan Clarke said she's excited to return to the Portland community where she grew up.

LifeWorks NW was founded in 1961 and promotes a healthy community by providing quality and culturally responsive mental health and addiction services across the lifespan.

THE SPINAL COLUMN™

An ongoing series of questions and answers about America's natural healing profession.

Dr. Billy R. Flowers

Part 26 KIDS AND CHIROPRACTIC

As the twig is bent so grows the tree

Q: I have recently noticed my son has one shoulder higher than the other. Could this be a sign of a problem in his spine?

A: Good thinking, mom! It surely could. In fact having one shoulder higher than the other is a cardinal sign of curvature of the spine. According to Chiropractic research, the earlier a curvature is caught, the higher the potential for success. To be certain about health of your child, call our office today for a professional spinal evaluation. Spines (big or small) are our specialty.

Q: I have been told that my child needs an operation for a curvature in her spine. Is there an alternative?

A: You most definitely should have a thorough Chiropractic checkup on your child immediately. Spinal surgery gets. All conservative efforts at handling your child's problem should be considered before consenting to surgery. Our office is highly trained and skilled at handling problems like that of your child's. Don't be fooled by the thought of "watching the condition" either. Without proper assistance it won't go away. Offer your children the best in health care. Give them regular Chiropractic checkups. As the twig is bent so grows the tree!

Flowers' Chiropractic Office

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