



Mercedes-Benz 300TD Turbo

Redefining the station wagon.

• The typical station wagon leads the life of a military vehicle. A regularly abused appliance with appropriately spartan appointments, it serves its time hauling groceries, fidgety kids, and overloaded vacation trailers. Any luxurious detail added to a wagon will probably end up as the final resting place for one of Junior's ice-cream bars.

The exceptions to the rule are a growing breed of station wagons that don't face such dim futures. Wagon versions of, for example, the sleek Taurus/Sable and the speedy Volvo 740 Turbo emphasize comfort, style, and refinement yet offer all the cargo room of traditional family haulers. The ultimate expression of the genre is the recently revamped Mercedes-Benz 300TD Turbo. Any sensible parent will make sure that Junior and his ice cream are forever parted before he gets anywhere near the interior of this machine.

The 300TD, Mercedes' first station wagon, has been hauling privileged Juniors since 1979. The original drew raves for its solidity, refinement, and sedanlike manners, but it was criticized for the weak performance afforded by its normally aspirated five-cylinder diesel engine. Mercedes did much to alleviate its off-the-line lethargy by adding a turbocharger to later models, and now even greater strides have been made with a complete redesign. The new 300TD Turbo, on sale since July, features a 3.0-liter, six-cylinder turbo-diesel and a wind-cheating shape borrowed from the slippery W124-series sedans.

The 300TD Turbo is, essentially, a 300E with a turbo-diesel and an enlarged

cargo hold. The front sheetmetal, the drivelines, and the front suspensions of both cars are identical. The rear suspensions are similar, too, but the 300TD's incorporates hydropneumatic self-leveling struts, instead of conventional shock absorbers, to accommodate heavier loads.

The smoother skin has done wonders for the wagon's aerodynamic efficiency. The new 300TD Turbo glides through the airstream with fifteen percent less drag than its predecessor. And to most eyes, the

Vehicle type: front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 5- or 7-passenger, 5-door wagon

Base price: \$40,950

Engine type: turbocharged diesel 6-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, Bosch mechanical fuel injection

Displacement	183 cu in, 2996cc
Power (SAE net)	143 bhp @ 4600 rpm
Transmission	4-speed automatic
Wheelbase	110.2 in
Length	188.2 in
Curb weight	3670 lb
EPA fuel economy, city driving	23 mpg
C/D observed fuel economy	20 mpg

car's visual appeal has also benefited: the flush headlamps and nearly flush side windows make for a pleasingly sleek form.

Inside as well, the 300TD mirrors the 300E. The wagon offers all of the standard equipment found on its sedan counterpart, including power windows, doors, seats, and locks; ABS brakes; and Mercedes' Supplemental Restraint System, which protects Junior's driver with an air bag and an automatically tightening seatbelt.

The wagon offers plenty of room, of course. With five passengers in place, there's still 42.3 cubic feet of cargo room

behind them. If that isn't enough, the rear seat splits (one-third/two-thirds) and can be folded flat for a total of 76.8 cubic feet of space. The front passenger seat can also be reclined to accommodate objects as long as nine and a half feet. There's even an optional history seat, so two additional passengers can face the rear and see where they've been. Everything buttons up tight with a tailgate that features an electromechanical closure assist.

The biggest news is the new six-cylinder turbo-diesel engine. Compared with the old five-cylinder turbo-diesel, the six boasts a higher compression ratio (22:1 versus 21.5) and more boost (13.7 psi versus 10.9). Horsepower is up 21 percent, to 143 at 4600 rpm, and maximum torque is increased to 195 pound-feet at 2400.

On the road, the 300TD Turbo feels heavy (at 3670 pounds, it is) and takes a moment to launch from a stop. Once it gets rolling, though, the engine pulls smoothly and strongly to extralegal speeds. (Mercedes claims a 0-to-60-mph time of 12.2 seconds.) Sustained high-speed cruising is a breeze for this autobahn-tuned family wagon. Its body is as tight and solid as a vault—no mean feat for a wagon—and it handles as well as most sports sedans. Like any Mercedes, its ride is taut and well damped and provides a carefully balanced blend of comfort and handling.

With a base price of \$40,950, the 300TD Turbo is by far the most expensive station wagon you can buy. But you do want Junior to arrive at school in style, don't you?

—Arthur St. Antoine