

Leading Light

Ian Lamming drives Mercedes' latest shining light

WHEN you want to shine a light on your branding, your engineering, your extreme cleverness, no-one does it better than Mercedes.

Just in case you can't see the famous three-pointed star in the glint of a streetlamp, they have come up with a brilliant plan – branded puddle-lamps on the GLE.

Walking across the hotel car park, plip the plip to unlock the doors and two veritable flood-lights illuminate the ground with Mercedes' prestigious badge. Not only is it cool beyond cool, it stops you treading in anything nasty and transferring it inside the sumptuous cabin.

Some people might say this is showing off, rubbing the mass' nose in it; some Mercedes drivers might reply, 'so what', though I'm sure these same drivers are much too polite to speak that thought out loud.

I can't help but admire the flamboyance of the branded lighting and when it is viewed alongside the eyebrow LEDs that also come on, it's Christmas every night of the year.

Neither are the lights the only surprise. GLE is the big brother of the range, a proper full-sized SUV of considerable proportions.

It is powered by a muscular but refined 3.0 V6 diesel that whops out close to 260 brake. But

let's face it, that motor has a lot of metal to pull and push (it is four wheel drive after all). So, realistically, it's only going to be a moderate mover, right? Similarly, it's never going to be a great handling vehicle.

First impressions fit those preconceptions and there's nothing wrong with meeting expectations. Then I notice the dial on the transmission tunnel – it's in comfort. I wonder what sport does?

Wow, GLE becomes a completely different car, I mean, really, like you wouldn't believe.

For the sake of losing about three or four miles per gallon the motor comes alive with so much power you would swear you were in a super car. And it doesn't stop there.

The handling, poise and steering become so sharp, so positive, that GLE takes on a dynamism not normally associated with this class of vehicle; it is breath-taking. What is a sizeable vehicle seems to shrink around you

and it becomes so drivable that you will be forever looking for the twisty way home.

Inside is opulence personified; leather, more leather, dials, more dials, switches, more switches, everything you could possibly desire, it's a gluttony of design and equipment.

When you want to cruise and bowl along on the motorway 'comfort' is fine and the mpg rises back into the 30s, so there's definitely the best of both worlds.

Another notable, among a long list of notables, is the powered tailgate, operable from inside the cabin or on the key, both up and down. It's such a great feature when your hands are full or you just want to keep your pinkies clean.

But the leading lights, for me, are still the branded puddle-lamps. They are such a great touch they make you look forward to the long winter nights.

Fact File

- Mercedes GLE 350d 4Matic AMG Line
- Engine: 3.0 diesel
- Power: 258hp
- 0-62mph: 7.0secs
- Top speed: 140mph
- Combined MPG: 39.2
- Transmission: nine-speed automatic
- CO2 g/km: 179

