

E220 **1996**
Price Rs 4,10,000
Mileage 81,040km

Average condition bodywork but has strong mechanicals, aftermarket CD player and a fair amount of service history.

E220 **1996**
Price Rs 4,00,000
Mileage 1,30,605km

Fully refurbished at an authorised workshop. Clean interiors, new paint and has a CD player too.

E220 **1996**
Price Rs 4,50,000
Mileage 42,000km (approx)

Leather seats and alloy wheels. Drives well and has good tyres and an MP3 player.

E220 **1996**
Price Rs 4,25,000
Mileage 81,548km

Fully refurbished and has smart-looking alloy wheels. Also has a unique blue interior to match with the exterior.

Three-pointer for four

Recession and age have made way for you to buy a three-pointed star at the price of an A-star.

Is this the right time to buy one? **STORY** PERSEUS BANDRAWALLA **PHOTOGRAPHY** HIMANSHU PANDYA

IF WISHES WERE horses, everyone would own a Mercedes-Benz. But with an entry-level C-class selling for a whopping Rs 30 lakh, only a few privileged motorists have been able to afford these prestigious cars. Here comes the best bit though. You can now pick up a still desirable used Mercedes E220 (W124 series) for under Rs 4 lakh.

The Mercedes-Benz W124 series of E-class was one of the finest cars ever built, and is regarded by many aficionados as one of the last Mercedes-Benz models built and

engineered regardless of cost. The W124 illustrates the legacy of high standards of Mercedes-Benz build quality.

Like all Mercs, the E-class has understated looks and aptly fits the cliché of Teutonic design. India received the revised version of the W124 that was introduced in Europe in 1993. Even though the original design is now 25 years old, the car's safety and engineering features are still quite contemporary.

The quality of materials used in building this generation of E-class

was top notch, something you notice the moment you get behind the wheel of this German executive car.

Step into a 13-year-old E and you are ushered into a bygone era where simplicity and functionality were a virtue. The clarity of the dials (the speedo has 'shift' points marked on it) and the well-laid-out controls, which have a nicely damped and mechanical feel, remind you of the days when electronics didn't rule the world.

Its ride quality is supple and the seats are supportive and comfortable

as you would expect in a Merc. After all these years, the front engine rear-wheel-drive layout still remains entertaining to drive.

The E-class also has dual zone climatronic air-conditioning, which was quite a novelty then.

The doors shut with a vault-like thud that is only present on older-generation over-engineered Mercs. The manual central-locking system works with the key. The vacuum mechanism still manages to impress when the stoppers operate.

Safety features like airbags and

ABS came standard and even the body sheets were made of high strength steel which, back in the 1990s, was generations ahead of its time.

With the last models rolling off the assembly lines almost 12 years ago, it isn't easy to come across an example that can be termed as 'fresh'.

Most cars we saw had clocked high mileages. Scuffs and dings can be found in abundance on these cars, which have suffered the rough and tumble of Indian road conditions. However, it is advisable to look for a car that is mechanically sound rather than one that is cosmetically 'bling'.

The interiors tend to show signs of wear and tear and age becomes apparent. Especially when it comes to the carpet, steering wheel, gear lever, dashboard and seats. However, a thorough clean up and polish should sort things out. As expected with used cars, electrical gremlins

are aplenty and sometimes very expensive to fix. The fuel pump, headlight switch and power window switches tend to fail and this is the W124's Achilles' heel. On most cars that we drove, the parking brakes did not function effectively, very annoying when parking on slopes. The foot-operated parking brake takes some getting used to, especially in the manual versions, which made up the bulk of the car's sales in India. Both the diesel and petrol engines came with an optional automatic transmission that was considered one of the best in the world at its time.

The petrol engine in the E220 is very refined and bullet-proof. It produces a respectable 143bhp but can feel a bit sluggish at low revs and is more suited to long-distance cruising rather than flat-out performance. There are five-cylinder diesel-powered E250Ds available too. →

ABOUT THE W124

INTRODUCED TO the world first in 1984, it was only in 1995 that India was introduced to the W124 series in form of the E220 petrol and E250D diesel models when Tata Motors and Mercedes-Benz started building and selling them under a joint venture.

The W124 never took off in India because it was launched just before it was replaced in Europe by the newer W210. This made the W124 a generation old and instantly outdated, which didn't go down well with its snooty customers who wanted the latest. It is for this reason that Mercedes-Benz was forced to replace the W124 with the W210 a mere three years after production began in India. In a short production run that ended in 1998, just 2,465 cars were sold in the Indian market. In contrast, the W124 proved to be one of the most successful models in Merc's history. In fact so good was the car that Mercedes sold its platform to Ssangyong and the car is still built and sold in Korea under licence as the 'Ssangyong President'.





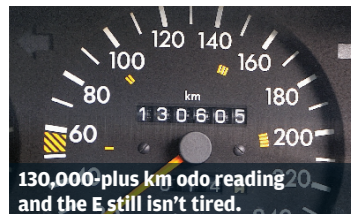
Neat and functional dash. Note: CD player did not come as standard.



Aircraft-style seatbelt warning light looks cool.



Headlight switch and parking brake can fail.



130,000-plus km odo reading and the E still isn't tired.



Plastic parts in cabin can crack with fatigue. Difficult to fix.

AUTHORISED OR INDEPENDENT

There is a huge difference in the cost of spares

	Authorised service stations	Independent workshops
SERVICE PARTS	Rs	Rs
Air filter	2275	850
Oil filter	992	350
Fuel filter	4942	1450
Wiper blades (pair)	2213	900
Spark plugs (set)	1444	600
Timing belt/chain	41334	2500
Fan belt/Drive belt	4136	1000
Front brake pads (set of 4)	5888	3200
MECHANICAL PARTS		
AC evaporator coil	82511	20000
Radiator hose set	5945	2000
Front strut/Shock absorber	40663	9500
Front brake disc/drum	12586	1500
Front suspension lower arm	69062	11500
Clutch & pressure plate	51950	15000*
Clutch release bearing	5070	incl. above*
Tie rods (set)	9415	3500
Fuel pump	27080	6200
Suspension bushings kit	19180	2500 (per kit)
Headlight on/off switch	5300	3500
ACCIDENTAL REPAIR PARTS		
Front bumper	76576	25000
Wheel rim (each)	9750	N/A
Front fender	52074	8500
Bonnet	51825	20000
Radiator	46150	20000
Front door	65001	25000
Bootlid/Tailgate	53150	27000
Headlamp (each)	39950 (each)	10000
Tail-lamp (each)	16790 (each)	5000
Front windscreen glass	27834	15000
Side mirror (with casing)	31553 (each)	15000

EXHAUST CORROSION
Exhaust pipes can be rusty on old cars.



REAR HEADRESTS
Fold at the touch of a button to allow easy parking. Missing on the new C-class.



VAULT-LIKE DOORS
Doors shut with a solid vault-like thud missing in modern cars.

DOOR MIRRORS
Different for driver and passenger sides in the days when cost pressures didn't dictate commonality.



ECU
ECU box is located behind the battery. They tend to fail and are expensive to fix.



SERVICE HISTORY
Buy a car with a detailed service history.

'Out of production for 12 years, yet the E220 still feels good to drive.'

← First impression on driving an E220 is how well-put-together the car is. However, on older cars we noticed that the engine's performance had eroded by 10-15 percent on an average as compared to when the car was new. The brakes seemed a little faded too. On some cars, the gear lever bushing felt like it needed replacement. Radiator hoses too can give way, and cars with six-digit odometer readings may need a suspension revamp.

Engine re-build costs are stratospheric and one must stay away from very high-mileage cars unless they have been refurbished at an authorised workshop by the previous owner or are available at throwaway prices. Avoid cars with a history of mechanical maladies. "Always try and look for a car with the most complete service history," says Rajesh Sanghi from Carma

Born Again Luxury Cars. Many cars, especially those more than five years old, are maintained by private garages as owners find them less expensive than going to an authorised workshop (see box). This is a habit with many Indian customers, says Sanghi. So it is important to give the car a thorough check before closing a deal.

We noticed that there is a world of a difference in the cost of spare parts at authorised workshops and spare parts available through stockists and independent automobile spare part stores (see box). While the latter are said to be 'Mercedes-Benz Approved', one must make sure that the source is reliable. Parts like the clutch assembly, oil filters and brake pads are reasonably priced (at independent spare part shops). This keeps the running costs of the E220 fairly reasonable and on par

with modern executive cars like the Honda Accord and Toyota Camry, provided it is maintained by a private garage that specialises in imported cars.

Ajay Parekh, a proud owner of a 1996 model E220 with more than 100,000km on the clock, says his E

has never skipped a beat in 13 years. Other than routine services nothing has ever gone wrong.

The body panels of the E220 were made of galvanised steel and do not rust easily but a thorough inspection is still recommended. Also conduct a vigilant check for under-body damage on a ramp. ABS and SRS lights glowing on the dashboard's instrument cluster spell trouble. Wiring harnesses and ECU boxes can fail on older cars and are again expensive to fix. It is best advised to visit an authorised Mercedes-Benz workshop to fix these issues.

There are some examples of the E220 with factory-fitted alloy wheels and leather seats which came only as options. According to Sudhir Damodar, an automobile and Mercedes-Benz expert, the E220 may not have the same amount of electronic sophistication as some

of today's modern Mercs, but this only adds to the charm of owning these older cars, along with the ease of maintaining a car with relatively simple electronics in the long run.

Car collector Gurbaxish Singh has owned five W124 cars till date. "My E220 has been easier to maintain than my Pajero," he declares.

With an average service at an authorised workshop costing anything in the area of Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000, E220s are certainly not as easy on the wallet as your average Japanese saloon. Fuel efficiency isn't frugal either. However, this should not change your mind as the E220 is an over-engineered, sturdy, luxury barge on wheels, built to last many miles of trouble-free, safe motoring. Buying one now may also be your ticket to owning a classic or vintage Mercedes-Benz in the future.

If a magic carpet-like ride, solid

build quality, bomb-proof safety and impeccable road manners are what you are looking for in your next car and you do not mind spending a premium for these virtues, the E220 could be the world's best used car! The shining three-pointed star on the bonnet will boost your ego too. **A1**

WHITE ELEPHANT?

Maintaining an E220 at authorised Mercedes-Benz workshops costs a bomb and labour charges for mechanical repairs are stratospheric. The labour charge for a regular scheduled service alone is a whopping Rs 8,000, excluding the cost of parts changed. At Rs 25,000-30,000 for a routine service, the E220 is certainly not easy to maintain at authorised workshops.

FACTFILE

MERCEDES-BENZ E220 PETROL	
Engine	4-cylinder, in-line 2199cc
Power	143bhp at 5400rpm
Torque	20.3kgm at 4000rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual/4-speed auto
Length	4740mm
Width	1740mm
Height	1468mm
Wheelbase	2800mm
Turning circle	11.3m
Kerb weight	1460kg
Tyre size	195/65 R15