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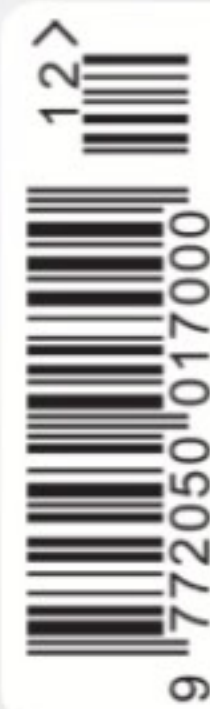
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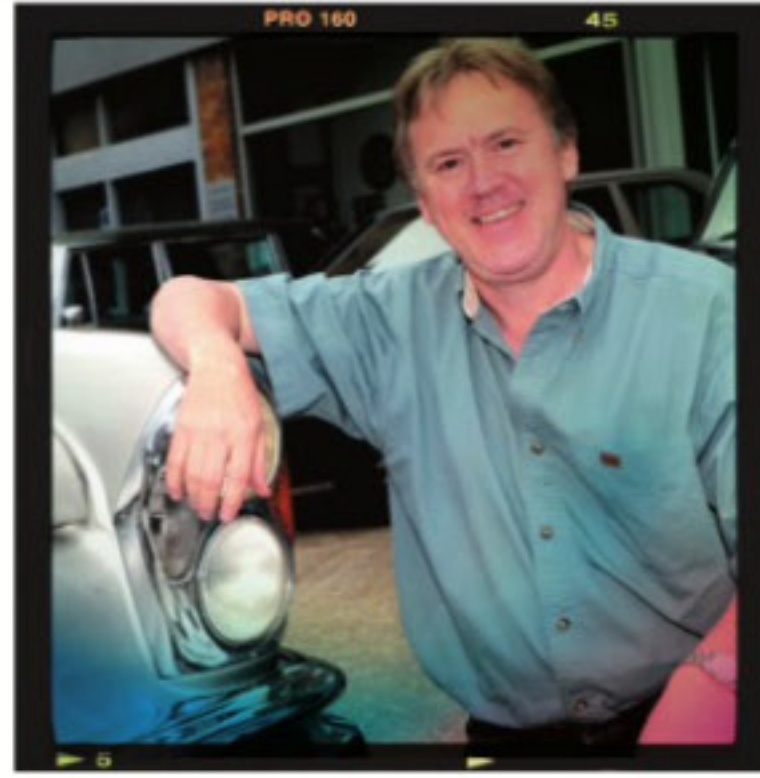
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Some material has been previously published in Mercedes Enthusiast magazine.



In this issue of Classic Mercedes

With commitment, you can enjoy a droptop Mercedes at any time of year, but we were more than happy to be lured into lining up three such classics for this, our summer issue. Mercedes is not the only car maker

with a history of building four-seat cabrios, yet somehow no one else has done it so much or so well – read our 'Cabrio Magic'

"MERCEDES IS NOT THE ONLY CAR MAKER WITH A HISTORY OF FOUR-SEAT CABRIOS, YET SOMEHOW NO ONE ELSE HAS DONE IT SO MUCH OR SO WELL"

stories on the 1950s 220S, 1960s 300SE and 1990s 320CE and I'm sure you'll agree with that statement.

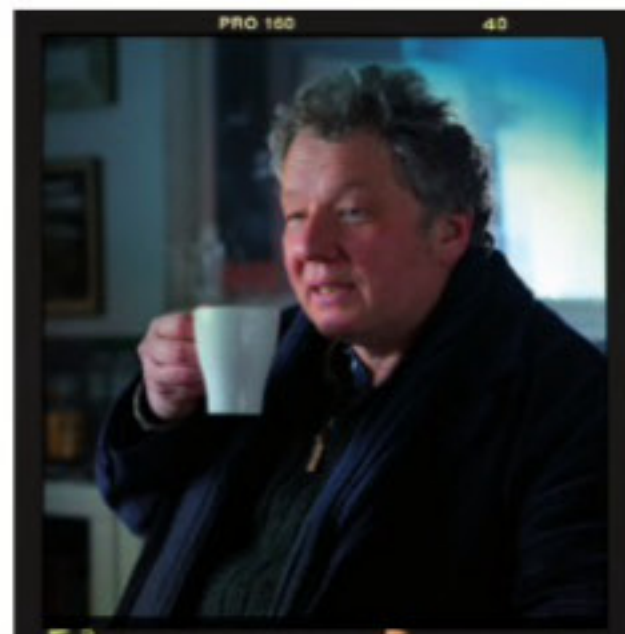
It may be less sexy, but the W123 is without doubt one of the saloon car wonders of the 'young classic' era.

Never, many say, was a four-door car designed with such care and thought, and with so little regard to research and development costs, which could be why three decades on since it was replaced, the many virtues of this discreet but elegant Mercedes still impress. Luxuriate in the 17 pages we've given it, and please come back for more on the world's best marque in the Autumn issue, published on August 7.

David Sutherland
Editor



Who's been bringing you the classic stories in this issue



Martin Buckley

As the motoring scribe who unquestionably knows most about Mercedes' 123-series (he's even authored a book on it), Martin wrote a significant part of our special section on the 123 saloon. It's knowledge he's built up over a long time:

"I've owned most variants since buying my first in 1998, when no one thought of them as classics – just used cars," he tells us. "I was even given a free one because I needed a car to get home from London in!"



John Colley

A long standing expert in studio photography of cars, John spends much time closely examining their details in order to reproduce them in their best light, and there was a wealth of them on this issue's cover car, the magnificent W112 300SE Cabriolet (page 22). "This car says 'German' without any apology," he observes. "The styling is strong and refined with a mixture of massive and delicate details, all blending to form a very confident design."

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Classic Mercedes

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CLASSIC NEWS

UK AND INTERNATIONAL REPORTS FROM THE CLASSIC MERCEDES WORLD

A hard sell

Bonhams' auction saw high, but not runaway prices for Mercedes



Gullwing was followed on to the red carpet by a fully rebuilt 1957 300Sc.

Either classic prices have run out of steam, or the pre-sale estimates were over optimistic, but in The Mercedes-Benz Sale at the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart in late March there was little of the frenzied, estimate-busting bidding that has defined recent top international auctions. Of the 27 classic and modern classic models sold, just four exceeded their estimate.

The most expensive car sold at the Bonhams-hosted event, a 1938 540K Cabriolet A for €2,760,000 (£2,022,528), did make more than expected, rising £222,000 above its top estimate. But a trio of 300SL Roadsters and one Gullwing sold for between €1,046,500 (£766,875) and €1,121,250 (£821,652), all well short of their top estimate.

Two other entries that



Mercedes' museum a spectacular backdrop to the Bonhams sale.

out-performed expectations were a pair of R107 SLs, models not previously hot properties in premiere classic land. A 1986 500SL with under 8,000km (5,000 miles) sold for €100,050 (£75,844), which was over £7,000 more than the top estimate, while a 1983 380SL made €51,750 (£37,922) which was £4,900 above – more about this, and other cars in the same Bonhams sale, in 'Auction Stars', starting on page 76.

A 1967 250SE Cabriolet emphasised the still increasing interest in the 1960s W111 by making €83,950 (£61,518), £6,500 above estimate. The sale also highlighted the excellent value that the 1951-1961 300 'Adenauer' saloons are in relation to other Mercedes of that era, with a late model, 1959 car making €47,150 (£34,551).

Top listed

The US-based Historic Vehicle Association (HVA) has added one of the most significant post-war Mercedes-Benz classics to its database – the first 300SL Gullwing built, which was also the first one sold in the US. It bears chassis number 198 040 4500003, and was delivered to its first owner in September 1954, via New York based importer Max Hoffman.

Added historical importance is conferred by that first owner being Briggs Cunningham (1907-2003), the famous racing driver and yachtsman. He is reported to have displayed it shortly after purchase at the Watkins Glen Grand Prix Concours, where it won its class. Cunningham's attempt to race the car at Daytona Beach the following year, partnered by Phil Hill, was frustrated by an engine failure, but the Mercedes was successfully raced by its next owner, William Fleming. Thereafter it had only two owners.

The HVA, in Gaithersburg, Maryland runs the National Historic Vehicle Register, which, through members submissions, documents classic cars on a worldwide basis. It was founded in 2009 and has 375,000 members.



Paint job

A leading Canadian artist has turned the 1980 Mercedes-Benz 300SD that transported him for over three decades and nearly 144,000 miles into a painted exhibit, which was then put on public display for six weeks. It is said to tell "the compelling story of a mutually caring relationship between a Mercedes-Benz owner and his beloved car."

The work of Tom Forrestall, and entitled 'Car For All Seasons' was displayed at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Fredericton, New Brunswick. The painting work took place at a Mercedes-Benz dealer in Halifax, a corner of its showroom being effectively converted into a studio, thus allowing Forrestall's progress to be viewed by staff and visitors.

Forrestall (pictured in the Mercedes showroom), aged 77 when he began the project, found himself at "the proverbial crossroads with respect to the vehicle's fate." But over coffee a friend suggested he turn it into a work of art.



Web feat

Daimler AG has opened its massive online photo archive, previously only accessible by registered journalists and researchers, to the public. It is almost certainly the world's largest historical automotive photo collection, having been established in 1936 and now running to almost four million images.

Mercedes-Benz Classic began digitising the images in 1997, and now that this has effectively been completed, it was decided to make it fully public, with car images downloadable without password, and free. Visit 'Public M@RS' at mercedes-benz-publicarchive.com – and turn to page 82 for the full story.



You can now download images like this from Daimler's archive site.

In other news...



Pre-war wonder on stream

Having restored its one-off, 1938 aluminium-bodied 540K Streamliner in 2014, Mercedes-Benz has released a 45-minute film about the experimental aerodynamic car, and the process of rebuilding it, which took 5,000 man hours. Entitled *The Streamliner Case*, it can be seen in full at www.mercedes-benz.com

Gullwing to turn eight

American TV celebrity and petrolhead Jay Leno has acquired a new addition to his legendary garage, a 300SL Gullwing that was said to be "rotting in the desert", and minus an engine and transmission. He plans to fill the straight-six shaped gap with a 6.3-litre V8.

Missing link revealed

In our Spring 2015 issue, the blue 500SEC we used for photography was kindly loaned by Avantgarde (01827 288177, www.avantgardecars.co.uk), a fact we failed to mention.

Mercedes values cool down

Data from the Historic Automobile Group, which monitors top end classic car values, adds weight to the widely held view that Mercedes prices, such as those of the 300SL (below), have fallen slightly. In the year to the end of February 2015, they were down 0.9 per cent, following a three-year climb of 40 per cent.



Classics unlocked



The barn finds just keep on coming – recently a batch of five 300SEL 6.3s from the late 1960s and early 1970s turned up for sale in north eastern Colorado, having been advertised in the online Craigslist in the US. They generated much interest and, after a 20-minute viewing and no test drives, were sold to longtime

Mercedes buff Randall Faris and his brother-in-law, Scott Milewski.

The quintet of 247bhp super saloons had belonged to a wealthy cattle farmer, who died in 1994. But the cars had been kept in climate-controlled buildings for over 40 years, and apparently not driven for the last 20. Two of them are from 1969 and the other three from 1971, the year before the 6,526-unit production run ended, and mileages are between 27,000 and over 70,000.

The cars were dusty but intact. "We cleaned them up and were astounded by the beautiful condition," said Faris. "There were no dents in the bodies, and the interiors were very nice. One car had a couple of rips on front seats, but that was it. So far, it appears that replacing a few of the air springs might be the biggest expense needed."

• Following the thaw in relations between the US and Cuba, and a likely end to trade and visiting restrictions for Americans, classic car enthusiasts and collectors believe many locked-away cars will emerge from the island, 90 miles from the Florida coast. A badly deteriorated 300SL Gullwing rumoured to have been owned by Fulgencio Batista, who ruled Cuba prior to Fidel Castro's revolution, is believed to be among them (pictured right).



Test special

Since November 2012, cars registered prior to 1960 have not required an MOT certificate, and a European Union directive may see those over 30 years old exempt within a few years. This has prompted the launch of a campaign to remind owners to keep their vehicles at least up to MOT standard.

It's called Classic Aware, and names a nationwide network of 'Classic Friendly' garages that are able and willing to provide the kind of safety

check appropriate to pre-1960 cars, some 650,000 of which are on UK roads. There is no official 'pass' or 'fail', but Classic Friendly garages provide the vehicle's owner with a comprehensive report on their car's condition, highlighting any problems.

"Owner inspections might miss crucial clues that affect classic cars more deeply than modern cars, which have more automated safety systems in place," said classic car garage owner and TV presenter Fuzz Townshend, who instigated Classic Aware, with help from the specialist classic car insurer Carole Nash.





High society

IMAGES
Bonhams/Hollywood
Wheels/Chip Riegel/
Darin Schnabel

This exclusive US sale provided further evidence that 300SL values are taking a breather, but also that other Mercedes classics, including Pagoda SLs and W111s are making their sellers ever more money, reports **Richard Truesdell**

◆ **Amelia Island auctions**
Location Amelia Island, Florida
When March 12-14, 2015

To many it might fall just short of the scope and prestige of Pebble Beach in California, but the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance in Florida has, under the direction of patriarch Bill Warner, evolved into the season-opening event on this side of the Atlantic. And with four high profile auctions sharing the stage, Amelia Island is, like its West Coast counterpart in August, becoming an almost week-long schedule of events.

The 'stagnation' of the W198 300SL marketplace appears to be continuing, prices of the top-tier offerings from Stuttgart not keeping pace with the massively increased values of the most desirable Ferraris. But this is not necessarily a significant long term development, some believe, because while it may be nice for some owners

to see values of their Ferraris increase by as much as \$100,000 (about £67,200) a month between auctions, it's just a matter of time until the gap becomes so large that 300SLs will reignite. You are soon likely to see more of the very best 300SLs, both Gullwings and Roadsters, placed with the big auction houses and selling for over the magic \$2m (£1.34m).

RM SOTHEBY'S

As the official auction of the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance, and sharing its venue at the Amelia Island Ritz Carlton, RM Sotheby's had a large selection of Mercedes-Benzes on offer on the Friday and Saturday. These included the week's top priced three-pointed star at Amelia Island, a 1935 500/540K Cabriolet A by Sindelfingen, which sold for \$3,025,000 (£2,033,200), slightly above its lower estimate. This car was

ABOVE RIGHT
Fintail's \$55,000 price at Gooding was small beer, but high for such a model.

ABOVE FAR RIGHT
Hollywood Wheels' most expensive Merc was this 1956 190SL, at \$154,000.

LEFT TO RIGHT
Two-owner 300SL striking, but it could not quite crack \$1m at RM Sotheby's sale.

1935 500/540K Cabriolet found a buyer at just over three million dollars.

Quite a few 190SLs were offered for sale, this 1956 example hitting \$165,000.

This 190SL, sold at the Bonhams auction, made a very healthy £247,500.

updated with a 5.4-litre engine by the factory, and is reportedly one of 11 remaining cars of the 33 originally built. It is not to be confused with the 540K that was a no-sale in Scottsdale back in January 2015.

Of interest to Mercedes-Benz enthusiasts was the 1956 300Sc Cabriolet that sold for \$1,100,000 (£739,350). Below the emotive \$1,000,000 threshold was the sole 300SL offered by RM Sotheby's, a Roadster that sold on Saturday for \$962,500 (£646,930). Bought from its original owner 35 years ago, this 63,000-mile Roadster in fire engine red was obviously well loved by its previous keeper, who was a member of the Gull Wing Group. A car not often seen at auction, a 1952 220 Cabriolet A, sold for a more than respectable \$286,000 (£192,230).

RM Sotheby's had a pair of 190SLs on offer, both of which sold. The more



Moss metal

A most impressive collection of Stirling Moss race cars lined up on display at Amelia Island, says Richard Truesdell

IMAGES DermerStudios.com



Never an F1 champion, but Sir Stirling Moss drove many of the classic racers.

Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance

Location Ritz Carlton, Amelia Island, Florida
When March 15, 2015

At this year's Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance, Sir Stirling Moss's famed 1955 W196 300SLR, number 722, took the award for the Most Historically Significant Mercedes-Benz. It also won the *Autoweek* Award for the Most Historically Significant Race Car Driven by Sir Stirling Moss, and travelled all the way from the Mercedes-Benz Classic Center in Fellbach, near Stuttgart, Germany.

Another significant multi-marque prize, the This Car Matters Award, went to the 1954 300SL owned by Dennis P. Nicotra of Fairfield, Connecticut. Other Mercedes collecting trophies in multi-marque

categories included the 1938 Mercedes-Benz 320 A Cabriolet entered by Rosner Motorsports of Fredericksburg, Virginia, that took home the European Custom Coachwork Award. It was joined by the 1913 Mercedes 37/95 from The Nethercutt Collection in Sylmar, California that won Best in Class hardware in the 40+ Horsepower Horseless Carriage class.

Another Best in Class trophy was awarded to the 1954 Mercedes-Benz 300S Cabriolet owned by the Craig Kappel Collection in Chatham, Massachusetts, while Larry Page from Richmond, Virginia took an Amelia Award for his 1961 300SL. The final Mercedes award went to the 1961 Mercedes-Benz 190SL owned by Christian and Connie Nast from Hartland, Vermont.



expensive of the two was a 1957 car that went under the hammer at \$209,000 (£140,480), while a 1956 model fetched \$165,000 (£110,900). The final Mercedes-Benz at RM Sotheby's was a 1969 280SL Pagoda that sold for \$132,000 (£88,720), \$7,000 (£4,700) over estimate.

BONHAMS

UK auction house Bonhams had what it described as a very successful sale at its inaugural Amelia Island auction on Thursday, March 12, held at the Fernandina Beach Golf Club. The first lot was a very well presented 1959 190SL in dark grey metallic with a new tan leather interior that was ordered with the optional transversely mounted third seat. It sold for a very stout \$247,500 (£166,000), while a second, more race-oriented 1957 190SL sold for \$90,200 (£60,600).

Bonhams also presented a white 1969 280SL Pagoda that was offered without reserve and which sold for \$51,700 (£34,750), proving that Pagodas can still be downright affordable by classic car standards. Its black cloth top was replaced in 2013, and it was sold with its matching removable hardtop. A noteworthy aspect was that this Pagoda is equipped with the rare-for-the-US, four-speed manual transmission.

GOODING & COMPANY

Gooding & Company might have left Amelia Island with its showcase offering, a Maserati 200 SI once driven by Sir Stirling Moss, failing to find a new owner after bidding stalled at \$4.7m (£3.2m, and twice the price Gooding sold it for five years ago), but the Santa Monica-based auction house had no trouble shifting its Mercedes-Benz consignment, even if there were no fireworks. The first of two 300SL Roadsters, a red 1963 example, and



one of the final W198s, featuring an alloy engine block, and disc brakes, sold for \$1,275,000 (£856,970), which was 20 per cent under its lower pre-sale estimate. The second, a cream 1957 car, ended up selling for five per cent under at \$1,237,500 (£831,760).

Two W111 convertibles made an impact at Gooding, the first a 1971 280SE 3.5 Cabriolet that sold for \$280,500 (£188,500). A 1970 model went home with a new owner at \$165,000 (£110,900). Selling for \$148,500 (£99,800), a companion 1970 280SE 3.5 Coupe all but hit the top of its pre-sale estimate range. The first and last cars in the Gooding catalogue were a pair of 1970 W113 280SLs. Lot 1, a dark red example, made \$143,000 (£96,100), roughly in the middle of its pre-sale estimate, but Lot 87, a dark olive example, sold for \$220,000 (£147,900), over 20 per cent more. A 1980 R107 450SL offered by Gooding without reserve made \$46,200 (£31,000).

Perhaps the most pleasant surprise for a seller at the Gooding event was a beautiful 1967 230S Fintail saloon that exceeded all expectations when it sold for \$55,000 (£37,100). Considered one of the finest Fintails in the world, it shows just how far mainstream Mercedes-Benz models have risen.

HOLLYWOOD WHEELS

Hollywood Wheels, its sale now in its second year, and held in conjunction with the Festival of Speed event at the Omni Plantation, specialises primarily in a full selection of Porsches (on the Friday), but did offer a number of tantalising Mercedes-Benz consignments on Saturday. These included a pair of 1970 280SLs that were listed as two lots but sold to the same buyer for \$75,900 (£51,000) and \$68,200 (£45,800), respectively. The oldest and most expensive Mercedes-Benz at the Hollywood Wheels event was a 1956 190SL that sold for \$154,000 (£103,500), while a second 190SL, a 1959 model, went under the hammer for \$92,400 (£62,100).

Talk of the town

A well established classic motor show in the Middle East, this four-day gathering attracts some of the very best cars in the region, reports **Dave Saunders**

IMAGES Dave Saunders

◆ Emirates Classic Car Festival 2015

Location Downtown Dubai

When March 19-22, 2015

It is fitting that Mercedes scooped a batch of awards at the seventh Emirates Classic Car Festival held March 19-22 in Downtown Dubai. The marque's importance in the heritage of the Middle East stretches back to the 1930s, when the Saudi royal family imported Mercedes-Benz buses to transport pilgrims from the port at Jeddah to Mecca during the Hajj.

Having dominated the show last year, including a 1970 280SE Cabriolet taking Best of Show, Mercedes were again out in force with throbbing 300SLs and sedate 600s to be seen. Dr Mohammed Ben Sulayem, 14-time FIA Middle East rally champion, brought along his pristine Gullwing, worth a cool £1m. "Driving in a rally car is good, but a classic car feels very peaceful," said Sulayem. "It's like a sanctuary for me. It relieves a lot of the daily stress and tension."

The annual festival is organised by Emaar Properties in association with

the Automobile & Touring Club of the United Arab Emirates (ATCUAE), a member of FIVA, with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Community Development. Sulayem, president of ATCUAE, handed out the trophies. The Emaar Award was presented to Rafiq Mahmoud for a

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM RIGHT
Gorgeous 250SE Cabriolet took Emaar Award; 600 Grosser against the world's tallest building; rally driver Dr Mohammed Ben Sulayem brought his Gullwing; 1960 300d Cabriolet looking good; concours judges at work.

gold 1967 Mercedes 250SE Cabriolet, while the Best European Car Award went to His Excellency Tariq Al Qemzi for a black 1957 Mercedes 220S.

This year, for the first time, an exclusive concours d'elegance was staged within the festival to highlight exceptional cars. A 1960 Mercedes 300d Cabriolet was among three immaculate vehicles that took to the red carpet on the Mohammed Bin Rashid Boulevard at the foot of the 829m Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world. This late production version of the 300-series included many improvements, such as the same fuel-injection straight-six engine as the iconic 300SL Gullwing.



Sale points

Interesting and unusual classics seen at auctions

◆ Production of the pre-war 170V resumed in 1946, and this 1948 example, sold at Brightwells in Herefordshire for £6,500, must surely be one of the earliest surviving post-war examples in the UK. First imported to Britain in 1956, it comes with its original buff coloured 'logbook', but was a serious restoration project.



◆ So few 1968-76 W114 coupes survive that the model is barely on the classic market's radar. But the £17,800 paid at Historics at Brooklands' early March sale for this original condition 1970 250CE – more than £1,900 above its pre-sale estimate – suggests that interest in these pillarless, six-cylinder cars is increasing.



◆ Prices of C107s have been on the rise for some time, but are still low compared to those of the equivalent R107 SL. This late 450SLC from 1979, offered by H&H in Cheshire in February, and described as 'excellent', sold for £5,712, making it an affordable classic that could be enjoyed without any immediate expense.



◆ The very best 190E 2.3-/2.5-16s now carry high price tags, but they can still be bought inexpensively, as this 1989 2.5 sold at Classic Car Auctions at Silverstone proved when it went under the hammer at just £4,346. And it has a celebrity/royal connection, its first owner the society photographer Lord Lichfield.



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Letters

WE INVITE YOU TO SHARE YOUR VIEWS ON ANYTHING TO DO WITH MERCEDES CLASSICS

◆ A great uncle

I have a 1971 W114 250C (with the 2.8-litre engine), and until I saw the model in the Spring issue of *Classic Mercedes* I hadn't realised that it was becoming quite rare. The car belonged to my uncle, who acquired it in 1971 to mark the 100th anniversary of the family business, Isnor Motors Ltd, the Mercedes dealership in Halifax in Nova Scotia, Canada.

The company was established by my great grandfather in 1871 as a livery stable. One of his sons, my grandfather, took over the business. He presided over the transition from horse drawn carriages to "horseless carriages", and he brought the first motorcars for sale into Halifax. My uncle died in 1995,

and the 250C disappeared.

Five years later my wife and I saw a W114 being raffled by a local charity. "Isn't that Uncle Ken's car?" my wife asked. It was, unquestionably. I knew this because there were two badges on the grille – I accompanied my uncle to Stuttgart in 1972 or 1973, when Mercedes had all its North American dealers over, and these badges given out.

I bought a ticket – but did not win. I called the charity some months later to enquire after the car, and discovered that they still had it, as the winner had taken the cash instead. I offered to buy the car, we struck a deal, and I have been its happy keeper ever since.

Ken Giffin,
Nova Scotia, Canada



Ken Giffin was reunited with this 250C five years after his uncle passed away and his family sold it.

◆ Early is better

I have found myself to be quite an admirer of the classic era of Mercedes, and so regularly read *Classic Mercedes*. My main area of expertise is the 124-series range, of which I have bought, repaired and sold quite a few.

In the article on the C124 E320 and in the S124 Buyer's Guide that the Spring 2015 issue contained, the emphasis was very much on the later, post-1993 facelift cars, and pushed the would be purchaser toward them. But in my experience, the best advice with regard to 124s is "anything pre-1993".

The earlier 'chrome grille'

cars are noticeably better built – which is obvious when you take them apart. The paint finish is superior, they are less prone to rust, they have more robust engines, and are without the wiring issues that affect later models. Rear subframe mount rot seems to affect later cars much more.

For all their technical improvements, late 124s seem



One reader believes early 124s are the best made.

cursed by the same quality cuts that affected Mercedes-Benz's reputation during that era. Early cars are as good as a 123-series – and I have had a couple of them in my time, too.

Edward Hall, Attington Classics,
Thame, Oxfordshire

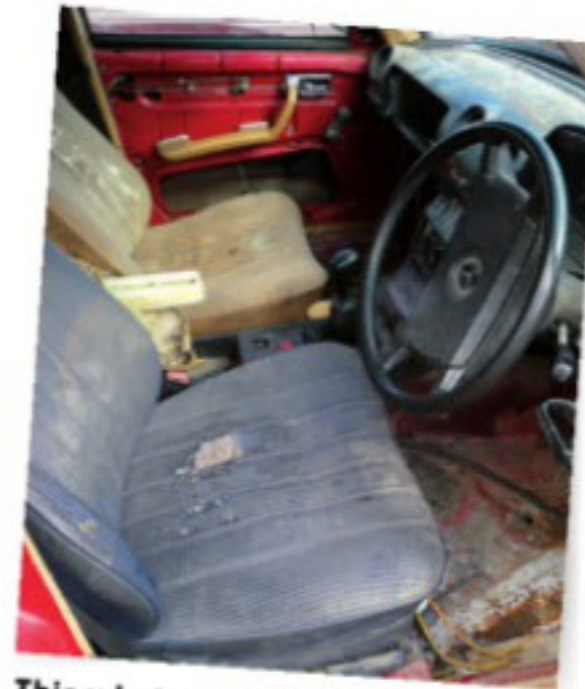
An interesting expert view. We tend to concentrate on later 124s simply because they are more plentiful.

◆ Basket beauty

This photo shows the interior of a 123-series 240TD that was recently traded in to us, and shows that not all the cars we work on are show grade vehicles. It has covered over 300,000 miles and has led a very tough life with a builder, but it still has an MOT and drives surprisingly well. We're not sure if we should preserve its originality...

Mark Cosovich,
W123 World, Swansea

If you retrimmed it, the car's distinct patina of age would plainly be lost, Mark.



This what we call a Mercedes that has given its owner great value.

◆ Safe seat

Since Mercedes launched the 124-series estate in the mid 1980s, Benz wagons have been offered with an extra, rear-facing seat in the load bay as an optional extra. I have always thought that

this seat, even though it has proper seat belts, looks extremely vulnerable in the event of a heavy rear end crash. How does Mercedes reconcile this with its continued and unstinting efforts to improve car safety?

Blythe Keeler, Swindon

Apparently serious accidents of this type are relatively rare, which is presumably why Mercedes, and other manufacturers, offer such seats.

◆ Trick or treat?

It seems that increasingly auctions are the places where classic Mercedes models are bought and sold – and I don't mean the big sales in the US where rich collectors trade their wares, but the smaller ones where you can buy a Fintail for £5,000.

I am very tempted to give it a go. But as an inexperienced private buyer, who knows no tricks of the trade, is my foray into this territory likely to see me 'take a bath', which I believe is the motor trade term for a significant loss from an investment?

Lindsay Gotch,
Fraserburgh, Scotland

Some auctions, for example Classic Car Auctions at Silverstone, are definitely becoming more novice friendly.



A rear facing seat was optional from the 124 on.

Get in touch!

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Rain man

It was going to take more than a sustained autumn downpour to prevent **Nick Kurczewski** from driving a 300SL Gullwing to the limit on a wonderful and sometimes tricky route through the Austrian mountains

IMAGES Daimler AG

No, no, not that one! It's the Gullwing with Stuttgart plates." This brief exchange between the driver of a hospitality van and his eagle-eyed co-pilot had us laughing out loud. Where else but on the Mercedes-Benz Classic Days can you lose a 1955 300SL Gullwing in a car park?

The event we attended in September 2007 was, not for the first time, held in the picturesque Austrian countryside, with the sinuous 2.6-mile Salzburgring race track serving as the base for nearly a week of driving events devoted to the three-pointed star.

We joined the party halfway into the second day and, unfortunately, right in the middle of a

rainstorm. We finally found 'our' battleship grey 1955 300SL Gullwing waiting in parking spot number 89; locating our car proved harder than we could have imagined, and the deluge was only partly to blame.

The entry list for the event included nearly 200 cars from 15 different countries. The bulk of entrants hailed from Germany and Austria, but many others had come from as far away as the UK, Italy, Spain – and even Australia.

Everything from Pontons to Pagodas and 540Ks to Fintails filled the Salzburgring's car park. A personal favourite was a wonderfully original, 1928 Mercedes-Benz 630K Open

Tourer, from sunny Spain, and owned by the Torroba family since 1931. While many of the cars at Classic Days could be museum pieces, all the cars present were there to be driven, and not just admired.

Tucked among the lush green hills and valleys east of Salzburg, the Salzburgring is a superb venue – provided you can find it! Having a convoy of vintage Mercedes-Benzes leading the way certainly helps. Luckily, we also had our faithful friend Florijan Hadzic, of the Mercedes-Benz Classic Center, to help guide us there. The first day of soggy track action had come and gone and we were primed for a full day of cross-country driving. As my co-driver was not due to arrive until later in the day, I



Weather appalling, but when a prepped 300SL awaits, it's no hardship.



LEFT
Period stopwatches very appropriate for an event for classics and 'youngtimers'.

RIGHT
Driver teams flagged away from the Salzburgring start at 30-second intervals.



"AS THE WIPERS WORKED OVERTIME AND THE INTOXICATING SOUND OF THE 212BHP INLINE-SIX ENGINE FILLED THE CABIN, THE GULLWING TRACKED STRAIGHT AND TRUE"

had the Classic Center's 'fastest' Gullwing all to myself. This example is fitted with the lowest of several gear ratios available when the 300SL was new. It provides stronger acceleration, but does exact a penalty in terms of ultimate top speed. Considering the weather – and my self preservation instincts – I had absolutely no problem keeping the Gullwing well shy of its 130-140mph maximum.

Split into even and odd numbers, each group of cars rolled away from the Salzburgring at roughly 30-second intervals. Reports of snow showers meant the planned mountain route was postponed, and instead we headed for a lower tour of neighbouring lakes and valleys. For first time visitors to Austria – yours truly included – the landscape is breathtaking. Winding country roads meander through charming villages alongside lakes and bubbling streams, and all under the shadow of snow capped mountains.

Tip-toeing the Gullwing along, the rear tyres occasionally scabbled for grip on the soaked tarmac – the swing-axle rear suspension in the 300SL coupe demands respect even when driving well within the car's limits. The pressure required to fully wake up the finned drum brakes at each corner also reminds you

that, despite easily keeping up with modern traffic, the 300SL is still from the 1950s.

In spite of this, the Gullwing is remarkably smooth, quick and comfortable. The clutch is firm, but never excessively so. Each gear in the four-speed manual transmission engages with a well oiled mechanical click. As the wipers worked overtime and the intoxicating sound of the 212bhp three-litre inline-six engine filled the cabin, the Gullwing tracked straight and true. With 202lb ft of torque available, the 1,295kg 300SL had little trouble pulling away from tight corners in fourth gear. Shifting down a gear, then two, I let the revs climb and revelled in the crisp mechanical



Mercedes' old stagers did their maker proud on the snowy mountain route.



It's not often that you can 'lose' your Gullwing in a car park overflowing with them.

roar of the motor. Unfortunately, my admiration of the 300SL's performance capabilities came at the expense of getting hopelessly lost. The Gullwing's effortless high speed cruising capability – and a few clever shortcuts – got me back among the other participants by lunchtime, but my colourful interpretation of the permitted route meant I was mysteriously absent from the day's timing sheets.

The next day's drive was shared between me and fellow journalist, Yoshi Kimura. Under ever so slightly improved skies, the cavalcade of classic Mercedes tackled the mountain route that had been postponed for 24 hours. The decision proved wise as 40cm of snow was recorded at some points.

The afternoon's rendezvous was the Unterhofalm Inn, located beneath the towering Bischofmutze mountain. Following the route book to perfection, Yoshi and I clawed our way back to 57th place overall. Job done, we both felt.

The journey

Car 1955 300SL Coupe, M198 2,996cc, 212bhp, 202lb ft of torque
Route Salzburgring race track, and surrounding valley and mountain roads
Summary A very challenging – and extremely wet – road route that proved not only immensely enjoyable, but that a more than half century old Mercedes could cope with the conditions with ease



1959 Mercedes-Benz 190SL #51 Black & Red

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INSIGHTS AND OPINIONS FROM INSIDE THE CLASSIC MERCEDES TRADE



Perfect day

Restoring a classic Mercedes isn't all panel-beating and engine rebuilds, says Eric Hjeltness. There are philosophical aspects too

IMAGES Richard Truesdell

I believe restoration touches the heart more readily than seeing the process of brand new production. That's because there is a high value placed on this mysterious, even seemingly miraculous process of taking what is unusable and making it not only beautiful, but functional again. Somehow, if you know how tough a life the object has had, then seeing it better than new brings exponentially more joy. I think this is because humans hold in high regard the dynamic process of taking what is worn, old, and sometimes rendered useless, and miraculously reversing the process.

'Over-restoration' is a charge that is often levelled against my kind of work. But a love of history and a desire to replicate what is original – similar to that of a counterfeiter – is what drives the restorer. And while originality is extremely important, age alone causes a lot of damage to a classic Mercedes, or any other car, that cannot be left the way it is.

Incidentally, virtually all of the good restoration candidates in the classic Mercedes world have been 'redone' already. I hold back from using the term 'restored' because I know that many owners have simply wanted their cars 'fixed up' because they planned to sell them, and took them somewhere to be painted and chromed and have a new interior put in. The originality of those cars is lost for ever.

During a restoration project, my worry is not what the judge at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance in August might say. Rather, for example, the concern for me for is the remnant of gold cadmium plating that I discover on the underside of some bracket or cover when I unbolt it from where it has lived inside the engine compartment for 60 years. 'Oh, my,' I think, 'the only other one of these I've ever seen was silver cad. But, after all, this car was produced later than that one was, so it stands to reason, does it not, because plating processes changed?' Concern over the details helps produce an overall



The obsessive care that Hjeltness puts into a car is evident when it's finished.

"WHEN I SAY RESTORATION I MEAN RESTORATION - EVERY NUT AND BOLT, EVERY RIVET, EVERY SHIM AND GASKET. I AM AN ALL OR NOTHING GUY"

accuracy. 'I am not restoring this car for the judge!' I tell myself from time to time.

Forgive me for exposing you to my strange world, but this is how I believe anyone seeking to replicate history should go about their craft – revisionist history is not acceptable to me. Leaving behind an accurate record of what something used to be ranks, for me at least, up there with an epic biography.

I know that passion and philosophy, even spirituality, don't pay bills. It is a very expensive proposition to fund a restoration where the bills come weekly, monthly, or in large instalments. And when I say restoration I mean *complete* restoration – every nut and bolt, every rivet, every shim and gasket. I am an all or nothing guy. I believe this is the only approach, when you have a car that has suffered so much degradation from time and usage. I know that not every car needs everything, but when it comes to 60-plus years of use, and even abuse, no other choice makes sense.

It is a sad fact that too many restoration shops haven't been able to carry such a long

process. The horror stories do the rounds. I believe some shops are in over their heads, as are some owners. An owner may discover over time that, due to unforeseen expense, he is not willing or able to see the project through to its completion.

In my 30 years of working in restoration with my father, Jerry, most if not all of the cars that have been through our hands have had more money put into them than they were worth at the time. I am happy to say, however, that every single one of those Mercedes is now worth handsomely more than the owner invested. So, the moral of the story is that the desire to turn a profit should not be the main motivator in putting a car back to its original state. Even if, given that the job is done properly, it is a welcome long term bonus. CM

⇒ Eric Hjeltness is a director of 300SL Gullwing/Roadster specialist Hjeltness Restoration in Escondido, California
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250SL Sports Pagoda, 1968, finished in the breath taking colour scheme of light silver blue with darker blue hard & soft tops, light beige hide interior and carpets, with overmats. Auto, p/steering, CD stereo system, full tool kit, lots of old MoT's/ history & invoices, handbook, looks like new. Drives superb, garaged. Remarkable car. Please view our website for more detailed pictures you will be amazed. Fantastic investment and fast appreciating in value don't miss this one. £139,500.



280SL Sports Pagoda, 1968, brilliant Artic White, superb contrasting interior, hard and soft tops, auto, PAS, CD stereo system. One of the finest having had thousands spent through its life, and only used on summer days, only 58,000 miles, supplied with original hand book, etc. It would be very difficult to find another even come close to this. £135,750



Mercedes 300SL, 1987, Sports, unmarked signal red with cream hide interior, rear seats, headrests, hard and soft tops, overmats, tinted glass, light up vanity mirrors, power windows, central locking, stereo system, power steering, automatic, alloys, immobiliser, alarm, only 57,000 miles, with service history, garaged from new, magnificent. £26,750.



230SL Sport, 1966, Porcelain White with as new Black hide interior, auto, PAS, CD stereo system, hard and soft tops, known to us for many years, original service books etc. Entered in many events in UK and Europe. Fitted stainless exhaust system, recent overhaul. Over £10,000 spent in the last few years making this car one of the finest. £89,750



280SL Sport, 1969, left hand drive, finished in Ivory White with Dark Brown hide interior, auto, power, only 68,000 miles, hard and soft tops, air-con, stereo system, two owners from new. This car is just magnificent in every way, fast appreciating in value. £67,750



560SL Sport, 1989, left hand drive, finished in Nautic Blue with Mushroom hide interior, headrests, hard top and Dark Blue soft top, over-mats, power windows, cruise control, original stereo system, air-bag, air-con, alloys, tinted glass, complete with all tools. Auto and power steering, history, 42,000 miles, garaged from new. £39,750



560SL Sport, 1988, left hand drive, finished in Impala, metallic colour-coded bumpers, contrasting interior headrests, over-mats, hard and soft tops, auto, power, cruise control, ABS, air-con, air-bags, stereo and CD system, SRS, alloys, complete with all tools, 43,000 miles, two owners, garaged from new, service history. £38,500



560SL Sport, 1986, left hand drive, Astral Silver with Maroon hide interior, hard and soft tops, rear seats, air-con, cruise control, air-bags, headrests, power mirrors, light up vanity mirrors, stereo system, SRS, power windows, alloys, tinted glass, centre armrest. Only two owners, 39,000 miles, FSH. Probably the finest Mercedes sports ever. £39,750



280SL Sport, 1985, finished in Arctic White with superb interior, hard and soft tops, auto, power, Clifford alarm and immobilizer, alloys, cruise control, stereo system, CD player, power windows, service history, excellent example. £12,750



560SL Sport, 1987, left hand drive, gleaming Signal Red with Beige hide interior, headrests, centre arm rest, hard and soft tops, this flag ship SL has power windows, tinted glass, stereo system, light up vanity mirrors, cruise control, air-con, power mirrors, ABS, air-bags, alloys, over-mats, only 27,000 miles from new, with FSH, 1 owner, garaged and pampered. £46,750

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Cabrio magic

Cover
story



Sixties splendour

The sunshine of the Cote d'Azur might help, but you can enjoy the glorious 1960s W111 convertible even if the sky looks like wet cement, says **David Sutherland** after trying a rare 300SE. Read on after this feature to discover the joys of a 1950s 220S Cabriolet, and also the story of the 124-series convertible, introduced nearly a quarter of a century ago

IMAGES JOHN COLLEY

To follow...

Page 30 220S Cabriolet

It set new standards of quality and luxury in the mid-1950s

Page 38 320CE Cabriolet

The A124 of '91 was Mercedes' first four-seat drophead for 20 years





“Europe had not seen the like of it, a low, sleek and notably long booted car that borrowed its proportions from big, 1950s American cars”

FOUR-SEAT CONVERTIBLES

300SE Cabriolet

Specifications



Mercedes-Benz 300SE Cabriolet (W112)

Engine
M189 2,996cc 6-cyl

Power
168bhp@5,400rpm

Torque
184lb ft@4,000rpm

Transmission
4-speed auto

Weight 1,715kg

0-62mph 10.9sec

Top speed 125mph

Fuel consumption
21.6mpg

Years produced
1962-1967

All figures from Mercedes-Benz

F

ollowing a decade in which the drab, post-war austerity in Germany had receded, Mercedes-Benz entered the 1960s a confident and globally significant car manufacturer. The company whose factories

had mostly been destroyed in World War Two, and which by 1945 was a barely functioning entity, had become the natural supplier of quality cars for German customers (courtesy of the Ponton saloon), had convincingly entered the North American market, and no less decisively conquered motorsport.

In February 1961 Mercedes-Benz would raise its game even further, with the introduction of the W111 luxury coupe and convertible range that not only broke technical barriers but which is also, more than half a century on, nominated by many as the most exquisitely styled post-war Mercedes. The coupe version came first, revealed at the opening of the new Daimler-Benz Museum in Untertürkheim in Stuttgart, the cabriolet arriving in August of that year.

The W111 was not Mercedes' first large four-seat convertible. Indeed, its introduction overlapped with the final year of the 300d Cabriolet D, the last of the 'Adenauer' range which had been in production for a decade. But Europe had not seen the like of it, nor the coupe, before: a low, sleek and notably long booted vehicle that borrowed its proportions from big, 1950s American cars, although shorn of their extreme rear wings and wild chrome embellishments. This was, of course, no random inspiration, because North America was where a high proportion of Mercedes' top range models were sold, thanks to the efforts of its high profile, visionary New York based importer, Max Hoffman.

The W111 coupe was only seven inches longer than the preceding 128-series Ponton-based two-door models, but its square-rigged modernity and also its sheer presence make the difference seem far greater. This was Mercedes' first pillarless coupe as we know them now.

The W111s were based on the six-cylinder Fintails launched two years earlier, with the same wheelbase but a plainer tail. The resemblance is clear – although no body parts were interchangeable. The only model offered was the 220SEb, its six-cylinder, overhead camshaft, 2.2-litre, Bosch-injected engine taken from the Fintail 220SEb, and producing the same 118bhp and 140lb ft of torque. Transmission was either four-speed manual or four-speed automatic, and the W111 was the first Mercedes to use disc brakes, beating the 300SL Roadster to it by a couple of months.

The 220SEb Cabriolet, with body stiffening to compensate for the roofless construction, used an identical powertrain, and the drophead would mirror the coupe's specification throughout the five-model evolution that ended in 1971, when the W111 two-door was replaced by the C107 SLC coupe. By then, Federal legislation threatened to outlaw convertibles in the US (although it never did), this being one possible reason why there was no direct replacement for the W111s.

The first addition to the W111 coupe/convertible range arrived in March 1962, the Geneva motor show hosting the launch of the 300SE, the model shown here, and a variant with sufficiently different engineering for Daimler-Benz to assign it a separate code, W112. Its three-litre engine bore no relation to the 220SEb unit, instead the M189 was a new development of that which had been used in the big 300 Adenauer saloon, and also the 300SL Gullwing and Roadster, redesigned with a light-alloy cylinder block to reduce weight. It gave 158bhp and 184lb ft, the former figure rising by 10bhp in January 1964 when the fuel-injection pump was made into a six-plunger unit.

Whereas in the 220SEb a four-speed manual gearbox was standard, and automatic transmission optional, in the 300SE a four-speed automatic was default equipment. A year later a four-speed manual gearbox was offered, reducing the car's price by DM1,400, and a ZF five-speed manual gearbox was added to the optional extras list. ⇌





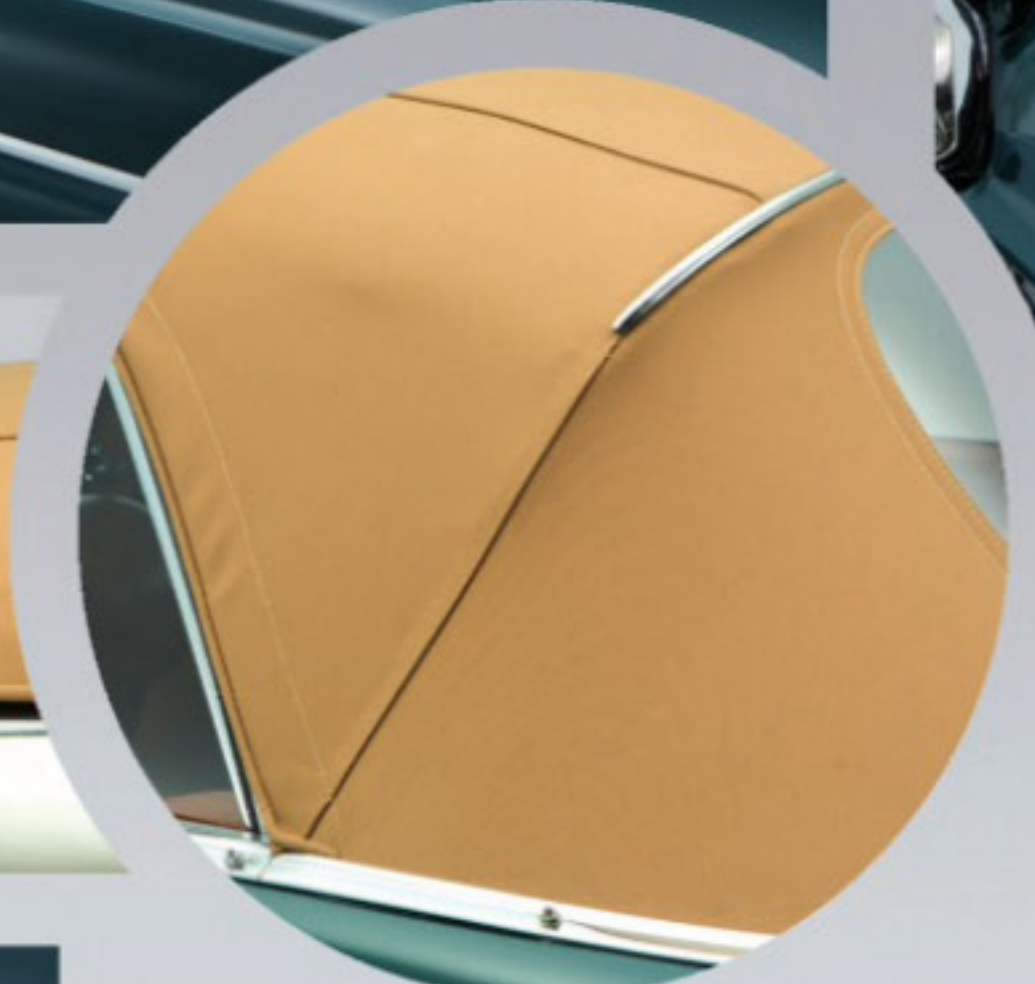
Glass rear screens not around in the 300SE's day, but the hood is classy.



Injected three-litre, straight-six dates back to the Gullwing and before.



A gap free join with the screen and side window minimises wind noise.



LEFT A multi layered hood when single skin canvas tops ruled.



LEFT 300SE's flagship status is indicated by chrome for the side strip and arches.



BELOW Proudly upright Stuttgart star is a great sight from the W111's driving seat.



RIGHT Vertical lamp stacks helped define the Mercedes look of the 1960s.

“Besides the ‘racier’ engine, the 300SE also featured air-spring suspension and powered brakes, with rear disc brakes over the 220SEb’s rear drums”



FOUR-SEAT CONVERTIBLES 300SE Cabriolet

⇒ Besides the 'racier' engine, the 300SE also featured air-sprung suspension and powered brakes, with rear disc brakes over the 220SEb's rear drums. To differentiate the flagship W111 coupe and convertible, a chrome strip ran along each side of the body, also encasing the wheelarch edges. The launch price was Dm34,750, making it well over a third more expensive than the base car.

The next evolutionary step came in September 1965, when the 250SE replaced the 220SEb. Engine capacity grew to 2.5 litres, taking output up to 148bhp and 159lb ft of torque, and both it and the 300SE had 14-inch wheels instead of the previous 13-inch rims, larger brake discs (from the new 108-series saloon, which had effectively replaced the six-cylinder Fintail saloons), and hydro-pneumatic self-levelling rear suspension.

By 1968 the 300SE's all-aluminum six – complex, expensive to produce, and no longer a particularly comfortable fit in the Benz engine hierarchy – had come to the end of the road. It, as well as the 250SE, was replaced by the 280SE, its 2.8-litre straight-six not far short of the 300SE's output despite its smaller cubic capacity, at 158bhp and 177lb ft of torque.

Mercedes' V8 era had now begun, and in 1968 the 280SE 3.5 appeared (the 280SE continued alongside it), boasting the M116 3.5-litre V8. Equipped with Bosch D-Jetronic electronic fuel-injection and an early form of electronic engine management, it offered 197bhp and 211lb ft of torque. Its introduction coincided with the sole body update to the W111 coupe and convertible, a typical tweak of that era at Mercedes: the height of the radiator grille was reduced, and the bonnet line correspondingly lowered. The bumpers also gained rubber strips.

The W111 coupe was an exclusive car, with 28,918 built in the decade long production run, but the convertible even more so, its total 7,013. The drophead notching up the highest sales was the 220SEb, which found 2,729 customers in four years. The 280SE came second with 1,390 sales, the 280SE 3.5 third at 1,232, the 250SE fourth at 954, and the 300SE – despite having the longest production run, at almost six years – is the rarest, with just 708 sold.

Driving the 300SE Cabriolet

Although I have had the opportunity to drive quite a few W111 coupes and convertibles, a 300SE had never previously come my way, but this was a gap filled when Jonathan Aucott of Tamworth-based Avantgarde Classic (01827 288177, www.avantgardecars.co.uk) wheeled out his own example, a stunning 1967 car with under 53,500 miles recorded since new.

My view is that other than the W100 600 of 1963, the W111 convertible is Mercedes' grandest and most striking shape of the 1960s, and possibly the entire post-war period.



ABOVE
Publicity shot would have been improved had the model cracked a smile.

BELOW
In the world of classic Mercedes, things don't get much better than driving an open W111 on a warm day on quiet country lanes.



BELOW
A rare treat – a convertible that looks as good with the hood up as when it's down.

The taller grille and bonnet line of the pre-1969 cars, while less sleek than what followed, gives the car a significantly more imposing frontal appearance. It's a looker even with the hood erected, but when lowered and tucked under the neatly shaped tonneau cover (the W111 was the last Mercedes convertible without a solid cover to hide the top

when down), the car is pure mechanised hedonism.

The cabin is more like a well stocked antique furniture shop than a mere car. Beautiful light brown leather, with subtly contrasting tan carpet abounds, and the fabulous, curved and generous wood fittings for the fascia and door posts have a hand-made feel. In this car the woodwork is unblemished, free of the cracks and water stains common in less well preserved W111s. It is also intensely and delightfully 'in period', thanks to the steering column-mounted gear selector, the vertically stacked minor gauges between the two main instruments, the chrome edged switches and not least the large diameter but thin rimmed ivory coloured steering wheel with its big, chrome plated

horn push. The one concession to modernity in this particular W111 is the 1960s styled, but high tech Becker Mexico head unit offering sat nav among other clever digital features.

Turning the key cranks the single overhead cam

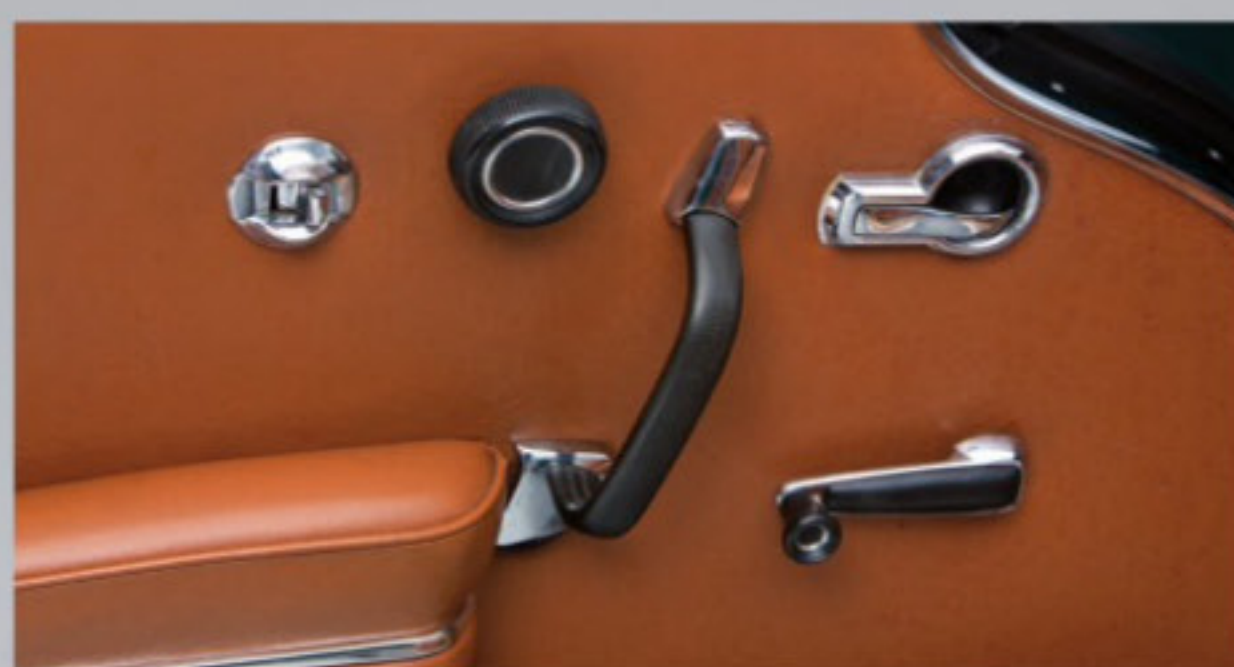
six into life, a quite buzzy engine that revs eagerly compared to many contemporary units. Fuel-injection ensures it does not fluff or die on wide throttle openings. To obtain 'Drive', the slim selector must be carefully wiggled into its slot; some

might find this a little tedious when the floor selector in the later W111s offered a smoother selection, but I love the column shifter, finding it so appropriate for the car.

Interestingly, while selectors like these went out of fashion in the late 1960s, about 10 years ago Mercedes began to bring them back in electronic form, and now they are fitted

to most of its current automatic models. ⇒





“Beautiful light brown leather, and the fabulous, curved and generous wood fittings for the fascia and door posts have a hand-made feel”

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

The wood around the dials alone tells of the car's exquisite finish.

Tan leather and a cream steering wheel are a lovely colour combo.

Modern Mercedes owners might be surprised at manual windows.

Becker Mexico looks traditional but it's a modern digital unit.

Column gear selector and classic instruments set off the cabin.



Price watch

W111s have climbed spectacularly in value of late

Mercedes' W111 convertible is a car that became a sought after classic more or less as soon as production ended in July 1971. It did not follow the common pattern of falling values and the worsening condition of surviving cars, before scarcity drove up prices a decade later; they were always expensive, as were the coupes, the lack of a replacement for the W111 surely part of the reason.

But despite this history, the way in which W111 prices have rocketed in

the last two or three years is astounding. While values of 300SL Gullwings and Roadsters may have levelled off this year, the big four-seat drophead is surging ahead, a good example now into six figures. At last summer's Pebble Beach classic car auctions an original condition, 57,000-mile 280SE 3.5 (pictured) fetched £265,000, nearly £80,000 over its pre-sale estimate, and others have gone for huge prices since. It's the price of perfection, we guess.



Pawel Litwinski

⇒ Once up to a constant speed, the 300SE's engine is fairly smooth, but lacks the sweetness of the 2.8-litre six that replaced it. It is not short of response, though, with a good pick up from a 70-80mph cruise. Higher gearing would have quietened it down, but this side of a Rolls-Royce not many cars of the time were truly quiet at speed.

You are left in no doubt that this is a big car, but it is not a wallowy, ill-handling affair, even if the steering is wholly vague. It corners confidently and brakes well – although I was surprised by how ordinary the ride feels, despite the air suspension. Engineers could presumably have given the 300SE the soft, magic carpet ride of a Rolls-Royce or a Citroën had they wanted to, but chose instead to keep it quite firm, like other W111s.



ABOVE
Spare wheel uses up a fair amount of space but the boot is large, nonetheless.


hood does almost as good a job as the coupe's metal roof of keeping the elements out, and lowering and erecting it is – by 1960s standards, at any rate – a doddle. Just undo two catches on top of the front screen surround, fold back, and snap on the tonneau. Having a friend on hand does help, though.

The W111 came many years before draught management on

Much of the joy of a W111 is in the driving position. You are sitting fairly high on big seats, your elbow at the perfect height to drape across the top of the door. Ahead is the curvature of the bonnet, the radiator at the end of it marked out by an upright, three-pointed star that makes no excuses for its size and prominence. You cannot help but feel superior at the helm, no doubt the way Mercedes-Benz intended it when it launched the car just over half a century ago.

Save the odd whistle where glass meets canvas, the tautly fitting, multi-layered

convertibles became an advanced science at Stuttgart, so you are not really going to want to travel too far at much more than 50 or 60mph with the roof down, without at least the four side windows raised (inconveniently, they are manual on this car). But at a relaxed pace on France's Cote d'Azur, or California's Newport Beach, it is going to feel just fine.

In fact, feeling fine is what the W111 convertible is all about, come rain or shine. It is one of the most wonderful cars Mercedes has built in the seven decades since it rose from the ashes. There is not a single angle from which it does not look good, not a single inappropriate design feature, and surely few journeys undertaken in one that were not enjoyed. There is only one thing that bothers me: why has Mercedes never again built another large, four-seat cabriolet? 



“There is not a single angle from which it does not look good, not a single inappropriate design feature”

Morris Leslie

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Guide Price £30,000 - £32,000



1939 Mercedes Benz 170V

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1970 Mercedes Benz 280 SL

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Cabrio magic

Open all hours

It was not restored as a concours winner, but as a classic to be driven. And Bob Gunthorp's lovely 220S Cabriolet has done plenty of that in the 23 years since he finished rebuilding it, **Richard Truesdell** reports

IMAGES RICHARD TRUESDELL

“While built on a modern assembly line, they were finished using traditional coachbuilding methods, giving a glamorous and luxurious appearance”





FOUR-SEAT CONVERTIBLES

220S Cabriolet

Specifications



Mercedes-Benz 220S Cabriolet (W180)

Engine M180 2,195cc
6-cyl

Power
99bhp@4,800rpm

Torque
119lb ft@3,500rpm

Transmission 4-speed
manual

Weight 1,385kg

0-62mph 17.0sec

Top speed 100mph

Fuel consumption
25.9mpg

Years produced
1956-1959

All figures from Mercedes-Benz

If, 60 years ago this September, you had been walking the floor of the 1955 Frankfurt motor show you would have been treated to the introduction of an all new Mercedes-Benz convertible, the 220S. The 220S Cabriolet, and the sister 220S Coupe unveiled the following year, were based on the six-cylinder, four-door 220 saloons that had been introduced in 1954.

Replacing the 170-series models, whose design dated back to before World War Two, were the W120/W121 four-cylinder 'Ponton' saloons of 1953, the elongated, six-pot 220a arriving the following year, and the 220S saloon in 1956. These model series would drive Mercedes' strong resurgence as a mainstream, volume manufacturer during the 1950s.

Thanks to a German journalist, the cars gained the nickname Ponton (a Ponton – or pontoon in English – being a floating structure used as a support for a bridge) due to the design of the front subframe, which supports the engine, gearbox and front suspension in one structure, making it removable as a single unit. The cars were Mercedes' first all new post-war volume models and featured monocoque body construction (the body and frame a single welded unit). All were part of the West German 'economic miracle', or *Wirtschaftswunder*, which saw the country's manufacturers embarking on a concerted effort to expand exports and gain valuable and much needed foreign exchange, especially from the United States.

To achieve suitably sporting proportions, Mercedes-Benz shortened the wheelbase of the saloons

some five inches for the 220S coupes and cabriolets. And while they were built on a modern assembly line, they were finished using traditional coachbuilding methods, giving the cars a glamorous and luxurious appearance. This was enhanced by the extensive use of chrome trim on the exterior, and real wood and full leather trim for the interior.

These were 'personal' luxury models, smaller and sportier than the bulky 300 'Adenauers', and were the blueprint for many cars that would follow on both sides of the Atlantic. Unlikely as it may seem now, their closest counterpart in market positioning in the US was the domestic built, four-seat Ford Thundebird, also offered in both coupe and convertible form, although unsurprisingly the American car was cheaper.

"The 220S/SEs are, by classic Mercedes standards, very rare, and this is reflected in rapidly escalating prices at auction over the last three years"

The 220S Cabriolet models benefited from body reinforcements to make up for the loss of the structural rigidity caused by the absence of a roof. Its powertrain identical to the Coupe, the 220S Cabriolet began life with its 2.2-litre overhead camshaft engine producing 99bhp and 119lb ft torque, this rising to 105bhp/127lb ft for the August 1957 facelift, which also saw the introduction of the optional Hydrak clutchless manual transmission (see 'Pedal power'), as well as a few detail changes, such as repositioning the illumination for the rear number plate from the bootlid to the bumper.

One year later the 220SE Cabriolet and Coupe were added to the line-up, benefiting from the M127 family engine, still 2.2 litres but with Bosch fuel-injection giving

113bhp and 137lb ft torque. In October 1958 this was increased to 119bhp/140lb ft, by which time the 220S had been discontinued. A total of 2,178 220S Cabriolets (compared to 1,251 220S Coupes), and 1,112 220SE Cabriolets (830) were built before the model series was discontinued in late 1960.

The 220S/SEs are, even by classic Mercedes standards, very rare, and this is reflected in their rapidly escalating prices at auction over the last three or so years. And that's key to the story of the 220S shown here,

owned by Mercedes-Benz enthusiast and vintage parts specialist Bob Gunthorp of Chula Vista, California, and a well known name in *Classic Mercedes* magazine.

As he has done with his many other classics, Bob has completely documented the car's history. It is a European model that was completed on February 26, 1957, and thus a 'pre-facelift' model. He notes that the body number is for 1956 and the chassis number is for 1957, not an uncommon practice at Mercedes-Benz at the time, as these were, after all, limited production cars that were hand finished, a process that proceeded at its own pace.

It was delivered to the first owner, a German customer, via the factory dealership in Hamburg, Germany, at a cost of DM21,500. At that time the United States Port of Entry price for either the 220S Coupe or Cabriolet was \$7,641, over \$2,000 more than a Cadillac, Lincoln or Imperial, these being the most expensive US-built luxury cars available at the time.

It was first registered in California in May 1979, Bob and his wife Terry purchasing it in August 1980 from a

Mercedes-Benz dealer, Hoehn Motors, north of San Diego. Originally it was Bob's intention to use it as a parts car (he had set up his spares business seven years earlier), but Terry took one look at it and said, "It's a pretty car and it has great lines, I think we should keep it." They did, and embarked on a restoration effort that would span more than a decade.

Bob describes the car when he bought it as "neglected". "The floor from the front seats back, including the boot floor, was completely rusted away, one of the rear thrust arm mounts was rusted off and the thrust arm was jammed into the road," he recalls. "The front bumpers must have



ABOVE
Publicity photo of the time is for an August 1957 facelift model.

RIGHT
Bob Gunthorp first set eyes on the 220S Cabriolet in 1980.





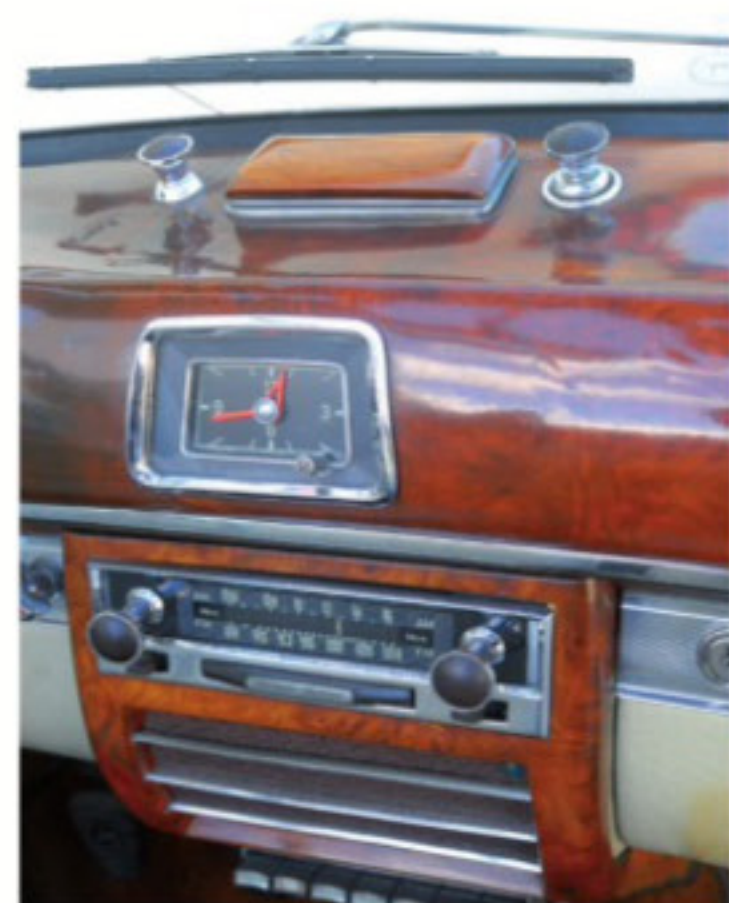
ABOVE
Huge steering wheel
and column gearshift
was the Ponton way.



The rear seat looks basic,
but it does offer reasonable
legroom for two adults.



Flawless interior rather
different to what it was
before Bob restored it.



ABOVE
Near rectangular
clock and period
radio set in fascia.

BELOW
During the 1950s
these horizontal strip
speedometers ruled.



And when the seat was
folded, useful space
appeared.

MERCEDES

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Mercedes W114/5 Binz Estate 1972. LHD. Specially built for King Hussein of Jordan. Recent full body restoration and respray in dark green (822 H). Black leather interior Aircon. Fitted rebuilt M616 240D diesel engine and manual box. (M617 3 litre and 5 speed option available).

£10000



Mercedes W124 Coupe 1992. Metallic blue with dark blue leather. Electric roof, windows mirrors, drivers seat, aerial. Aircon, ABS Central Locking, etc. Fitted M606 Turbodiesel and manual 5 speed box.

£4696



Mercedes 300SEL 6.3 1972. Famous first owner. Metallic red with black leather interior Factory aircon. Air suspension. Unused many years and needs work. Rare car, very few RHD examples left.

£4630



Mercedes W123 Estate 1985. Metallic green/blue with black cloth interior. Sunroof. Electric windows. ABS. Fitted M617A 3 litre Turbodiesel and 5 speed box. Tidy condition and drives nicely. LHD, French papers.

£4444



Mercedes W123 crewcab pickup 1983. Dark green with tan leather interior. Electric sunroof, mirror, aerial. Fitted M617 diesel and van manual 5 speed. Heavy duty suspension and van tyres 215x14. Great workhorse, load lugger/tow car.

£2000



Mercedes R107 cabrio 1973. Detachable hardtop. Blue with tan cloth interior. Fitted M617 diesel engine and 5 speed box.

£5350



Mercedes W123 Estate 1984. White with blue cloth interior. Aircon. ABS. Electric windows. Fitted with M617 turbodiesel and 5 speed box. Needs respray.

£2500



Mercedes 460 G Wagen 300GD. Camouflage green with black leather seats. M617 diesel with 4 speed manual box. 4x4, low range, diff locks. Dumper tyres. Girder bumpers and roll bars. Inboard steel fuel tank Used as farm tractor/off roader.

£2300



Mercedes C107 450SLC 1980. Metallic blue with cream leather. Aircon. Cruise control. Electric windows. Fitted 3 litre M603 diesel and autobox. Excellent driver, needs bodywork respray.

£3000



Mercedes W123 Estate 1986. Red with black cloth interior. 7 seater. ABS. Electric windows. Sunroof. Fitted 5 cylinder M602 diesel and autobox.

£2500



Mercedes W108 Crayford Estate 1972. Silver and rust with black MB Tex seats. Fitted M 617 diesel and manual box. Higher ratio diff. Electric roof and windows. Very rare car. Not for the faint hearted.

£900



Mercedes W123 280CE 1983. Dark blue with blue cloth interior. Electric roof and windows. Solid original car for restoration.

£1280



Mercedes W123 240TD 1986. Cream with tan cloth interior. 5 speed. Sunroof. Scruffy workhorse. Great engine.

£1000



Mercedes W108 saloon 1972. Black with cream MB Tex interior. Four headrests and three armrests. Fitted M617 diesel and 5 speed box. High ratio back axle. Aircon.

£3300

Tel: 01626 834 074 / 07759 588469

E-mail: ken@kensbenz.co.uk

Pedal power

The 220S was offered with Mercedes' Hydrak clutchless gearshift

During the 1950s automatic transmission was fast becoming the preference of motorists in the US, an important market for Mercedes-Benz, writes David Sutherland. But Stuttgart did not have a suitable automatic gearbox for the Ponton range, hence it came up with Hydrak, a clutchless shifting system for the car's four-speed, manual gearbox. It was introduced first on the 220S, to coincide with its mid 1957 update.

A series of microswitches on the column gearshift automatically disengaged the clutch when it sensed gears were being selected, allowing a smooth change, and an automatic drive lock-up provided engine braking. But the system earned itself a reputation for high maintenance costs, and quite a few Hydrak cars were converted back to conventional manual transmission. Mercedes was not alone in trying to pioneer a clutchless shift – Porsche and Saab both tried it, too, with an equal lack of success, and it was not until the 2000s and the introduction of paddleshifters that semi-automatics truly caught on.



HYDRAK
Die hydraulische automatische
Wahlmechanik für die Mercedes-Benz Typen
219 und 220S

⇒ been replaced in the past, as they were absolutely rust free. But the upholstery was shot, the top was shot.”

There were mechanical issues, too. “It had the wrong engine – a W111 220Sb unit – and with a running problem,” Bob explains. The transmission was in poor condition, he adds, and further woe presented itself inside: “The wood was poor, with the veneer separating, several chrome pieces were missing, and several others were damaged beyond repair.

“All the other chrome pieces had been poorly redone in the past. A later model rear bumper had been installed on it.” To say that the car was a mess would have been an understatement, but, undaunted, Bob and Terry persevered with the project.

“We started rebuilding it in 1980, and the repairs were finally completed in 1992,” says Bob. “I was able to use a rust-free floorpan from a saloon to replace the rear section of the floor. I found the last NOS



ABOVE
Bob saw the fitted luggage for sale on eBay, and made sure his was the high bid.

LEFT
Impressive collection of grille badges, including one for covering 500,000km.



ABOVE
Body was built in 1956, the chassis in 1957, which was normal in those days.

RIGHT
Four-cylinder 220S 2.2 carb engine makes 99bhp – injected SEs gave 119.



“The front bumpers must have been replaced in the past, as they were absolutely rust free. But the upholstery was shot, the top was shot”



BELOW
Contemporary illustration shows the drophead Ponton oozing exclusivity.

[‘new old stock’] right rear bumper available in the United States, and probably the world. The same supplier also had the last NOS panel for under the bootlid. We used part of the original bootlid and pieces from two saloon bootlids to make one good one. I also found a correct 1957 M180 engine, and rebuilt it. The vehicle was painted cream when we bought it – we repainted it the original DB516 Medium Red.”



Bob is known in the American Mercedes-Benz community for driving his classic cars,

and he talks about his restoration philosophy in these terms. “This is not a concours level restoration, there was simply too much wrong with it even to try to restore it to that level,” he emphasises. “When we bought it, these vehicles were nowhere near as valuable as they are now.

“The original veneer was a very plain ⇒



“This is not a concours level restoration, there was simply too much wrong with it to even try to restore it to that level”

⇒ wood, so the wood was done in burl maple. Because this was not a concours project, we used the late Mercedes factory vinyl material for the upholstery instead of the leather that was the standard interior upholstery in period.”

The headrests are noteworthy, Bob having acquired them from two different 190 Pontons several years before he bought the 220S Cabriolet. He didn't own a Ponton at that time, but the headrests were so rare that he kept them. The luggage appeared on eBay so he grabbed that as well.

“We rebuilt it just for use as a ‘driver’ vehicle – and what a ‘driver’ it has turned out to be,” says Bob. “Everywhere we go it’s always been a crowd pleaser. It’s never been on a trailer. When taken to shows, we always drove it. The fold-down rear seat was an option available only in Europe. I installed the optional headrests I had acquired previously, and I also added the short wave adapter and a power antenna.”

His wife called this car The Money Pit. But Bob, ever the pragmatist, points out

that he and Terry still had less money in the 220S than they would have had in a new Mercedes cabriolet.

In a household including more than a dozen Mercs, the 220S was always Terry Gunthorp’s favourite. Sadly, Terry passed away on October 27, 2009, so this car obviously occupies a very special place in Bob’s heart.

“She loved driving it in parades, and it has been used in many parades, including the one in Coronado, California, each Fourth of July. We even used it in two Coronado High School football homecoming parades.”

Indeed, the last public photo of Terry (left) was taken in the Coronado Fourth of July parade in 2009. Terry had a very special hat made by a granddaughter-in-law for the parades, and, fittingly, Bob still mounts the hat on the bonnet of the Cabriolet in the Fourth of July Parade.

BELOW
The 220S was a favourite of Bob’s late wife, Terry.



Paper chase

A 220S Cabriolet was one movie journalist’s chosen wheels

The 1972 thriller, *The Odessa File*, stars Angelina Jolie’s father, Jon Voight, who plays Peter Miller, a West German journalist investigating a Nazi war criminal played by Maximilian Schell. Also performing what might be considered a starring role is a beaten up, filthy Mercedes 220S Cabriolet, driven by Miller in several locations in West Germany and Austria in his effort to track down the notorious

Eduard Roschmann, the SS Commandant of the Riga Concentration Camp.

Several other other Mercedes-Benzes feature in the film, though some newer than the film’s 1963 setting, as can be seen here. Notable among the 220S Cabriolet’s other film credits is a small role in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1959 *North by Northwest*, driven by a drunken Cary Grant after he was force fed bourbon.



ABOVE
The W108 saloon was a bit late for the *The Odessa File*.



RIGHT
Jurno Peter Miller character zoomed around in a 220S.

Patrick Carroll

Mercedes from the Isle of Man

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2003 MERCEDES BENZ SL500 SPORTS CAR

Metallic silver, light grey leather, AMG wheels. Full main dealer history. 22,000 miles only. Be really ready for summer £16,500



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Metallic azurite blue, cream cloth interior, 8 hole alloy wheels, OTG, aircon, cruise control. One elderly owner, 38,000 miles only. Full main dealer history £3,950



1978 350SE SALOON

Silver Blue Metallic, Beige velour, electric windows, sunroof and alloy wheels. Last owner 25 years – a magnificent 2 owner car with excellent service history £8,500



1990 230CE 2 DOOR COUPE

Classic White with contrasting Black hide interior, electric sunroof. Full service history with detailed file to confirm the last owner for 20 years. Just had a major service and expenditure £3,500



1983 200 AUTOMATIC SALOON

Dark Blue, unmarked and perfect Blue cloth interior, sunroof, absolutely superb condition, full Mercedes-Benz dealer history. First owner had car for 20 years and the last for 10 years. Ready to go £6,000



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Ruby Red Metallic, Black soft top, mushroom hide, climate control, 10-CD system, excellent service history from new £8,250



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Cabrio magic

Safety car

The 124-series cabriolet was not only a notably refined machine, but thanks to Mercedes' unstinting efforts boasted the best passenger protection systems of any four-seater droptop at the time, says **David Sutherland**

IMAGES Terry Osborne

“A high proportion remain in remarkably good condition, having been bought new as second cars and cosseted in secluded driveways”





Specifications



Mercedes-Benz 320CE Cabriolet (A124)

Engine
M104 3,199cc 6-cyl

Power
217bhp@5,500rpm

Torque
229lb ft@3,750rpm

Transmission
5-speed auto

Weight 1,720kg

0-62mph 8.5sec

Top speed 144mph

Fuel consumption
24.2mpg

Years produced
1992-1997

All figures from Mercedes-Benz

I

f you are looking for a four-seat convertible Mercedes-Benz that offers classic style, practicality, moderate running costs and eventually the likelihood of a good return on your money, the chances are that after a process of elimination you will arrive at the A124, the much loved open derivative of the 1987 to 1996 E-Class coupe.

Its most direct predecessor, the glorious W111 cabriolet, which went out of production two decades before the arrival of the A124 in 1991, is a fragile, full-on classic that could not be used every day, while the R107 SL is also delectable but its rear seat is a promise unfulfilled. The 208-series CLK cabriolet that followed the A124 in 1998 does not have quite the same gravitas – not least because it feels rather cheaply built by comparison. This has left the cabriolet as easily the most coveted member of the 124-series family, E36 AMGs and 500E/E500s included. The fact that such a high proportion remain in remarkably good condition, having been bought new as second cars and cosseted in secluded driveways, has undoubtedly helped. Now, prices for these cabriolets start where its 124-series coupe stablemate tops out, at around £10,000.

With just under 34,000 built, but only a tiny fraction of those coming to the UK, any A124 ('A' being the prefix for cabriolets) generates interest when it comes up for sale, the best attracting collectors and investors. The car you see here is a little unusual, being one of the few 'in between' cabriolets that came with the then new M104 3.2-litre engine which replaced the three-litre in the 300CE-24 model, but which did not feature the facelifted body trim or the new badging that would have seen it called the E320. So it still has the Mercedes-Benz three-pointed star standing on top of the grille rather than on the bonnet, and also orange lenses over the direction indicators.

As would all 3.2-litre cabriolets, this 320CE has the lowered and firmer Sportline suspension, and also a slightly smaller, 390mm steering wheel and a Sportline leather trimmed transmission selector. Additionally, it would have been one of the first Mercedes equipped with the optional five-speed



ABOVE
Cabriolet has Sport suspension, and thus slightly wider tyres.



RIGHT
When the hood is down, the 124's lines are smooth and uncluttered.





automatic gearbox, and in fact this car does not want for features, having leather, electrically adjustable and heated seats, cruise control, headlamp wash/wipe and metallic paint, in this case Malachite Green.

Introduced at the 1991 Frankfurt motor show, the A124 was much more than the decapitated 124 coupe it appeared to be. The reduction in body rigidity was addressed with substantial cross bracing for the floor, and more than 130kg of extra sheet metal. Crash protection came in the form of reinforced A-pillars, plus rear headrests that also served as pop up, roll over protectors, activated in a fraction of a second should sensors detect potentially hazardous body angles. It was a system derived from that of the R129 SL introduced two years before. The multi layered hood has two catches at the top of the windscreen, which have to be released and the hood pushed up before the elaborate electro-hydraulic system takes over. Owners of the SL model built at the same time as the A124, the R129, are not

troubled by catches or levers, although the 124 cabriolet has the advantage of a glass rather than a plastic rear screen. Once down, in traditional Mercedes-Benz style the roof is neatly concealed beneath a solid metal panel, allowing the A124 a completely unobstructed profile aft of the windscreen.

Quite a few people fell in love with the A124 when it played a brief

but memorable role in the 1993 film, *The Firm*, in which Tom Cruise as the young hotshot lawyer Mitch McDeere is seen driving the new Mercedes cabrio given to him by his employers, with wife Abby and their dog on board (his relationship with his corrupt bosses sours badly, however, and he ends up back in his aged Toyota Supra). This particularly well preserved example, which has the feel of a lightly used car, has to be one of the earliest A124s in the UK. The last E320 Cabriolet was built in June 1997, over a year after the coupe bowed out.



ABOVE
Hood takes up some space but the 124's boot is still generous.

LEFT
This example has the optional five-speed automatic gearbox.

FAR LEFT
Many love the 124-series for its solid, classic looking cabin.

BELOW
Mileage on this mint condition 320CE cabrio is unusually low.

*“Quite a few people fell in love with the A124 when it played a brief but memorable role in the 1993 film, **The Firm**”*



The A124 also came in four-cylinder, 2.2-litre E220 guise, but the E320 with its added power and refinement offers far more driving pleasure. Its engine is also much better than the older three-litre unit: rated at 217bhp it has no extra power, but with 33lb ft more torque (229lb ft and occurring at lower revs) it has substantially more mid range punch than the 300CE-24 Cabriolet, which is really quite poor in this respect. And no Mercedes six-cylinder engine was as sweet and refined at the time as the 3.2-litre M104 – it pulls with a distant hum rising to a gentle whoosh when worked hard. Although it is a pity Mercedes never managed to fix the heavy and hesitant throttle on these six-cylinder cars, which can make low speed manoeuvres tricky.

Some reckon the five-speed automatic gearbox is worth avoiding on 124s, believing its added complexity over the four-speed auto to be as much a liability as it is a bonus. But there is no doubt that when all is well it is a delight, making the 320CE Cabriolet feel more lively and responsive than a four-speed car, which can be a little slow to change, and also does so less smoothly.

The A124's handling is best described as fail-safe. The steering, which on this low mileage car has no free play at the straight ahead, is improved by the smaller steering wheel, but there is little feel. The Sportline chassis gives the cabrio a neater cornering line, but at the expense of a less

LEFT
Quick enough, but the 320CE is all about smoothness, not speed.



RIGHT
Two screen top latches to undo, and the hood lowers electrically.



“When the cabriolet’s hood is erected the car does a passable impression of a 124-series coupe, wind and noise proofed to a high standard”

⇒ comfortable ride, and despite the extra bracing (partly responsible for the 320CE Cabriolet weighing over 200kg more than the coupe) some body rattles are felt when the roof is lowered.

The A124’s roof was impressive for its time, appearing five years before the supremely clever folding metal vario-roof on the SLK.

The hood’s operation now seems slightly clumsy, but endearingly so, as you can sense all six hydraulic cylinders and the 10 valves and 12 electrical switches making everything happen. Driving this 320CE on a sunny day is a delightful combination – being fully open, the car gives a more liberating feel than, say, an SLK or a Porsche Boxster, in which fixed roll protectors create more of an enclosed feeling. When the cabriolet’s hood is erected the car does a passable impression of a 124-series

BELOW
Sweet M104, 24-valve 3.2-litre was Mercedes’ final petrol straight-six.



coupe, wind and noise proofed to a high standard. The A124 also has proper rear seating for two, and because it started with quite a large boot there is still a reasonable amount of room left once the hood is stowed in it.

The appeal of the 124’s cabin is something we have described many times before on these pages, but for admirers of ‘youngtimer’ Mercedes-Benz cars it probably does not get much better. The design is attractive yet traditional, and the quality of everything, from the smallest of switches to the leather upholstery, cannot be faulted.

Twenty-four years on from its introduction, the A124 is as classy and charismatic as ever. Modern, middleweight Mercedes are obviously in a different league dynamically, but time spent with a tidy E320 Cabriolet, or in this case a 320CE Cabriolet, is a reminder that driving pleasure is not always about having the newest and highest tech gizmos on board. CM

Raising the roof

The 300CE-24 Cabriolet of 1991 was surely the world’s safest droptop in its day

In transforming the 124 coupe into a cabriolet, Mercedes used about 1,000 new parts to stiffen the body, with almost all structural components replaced. The four corners of the floorpan for example, were located with the same type of diagonal struts used on the R129 SL. Reducing the vibrations that are the sworn enemy of a convertible car was also comprehensively addressed, including the use of strategically sited

vibration absorbers, placed in a damper strut, in the roof frame and in the boot.

The hood itself was designed to be as compact as possible when stowed, and featured no fewer than 27 linkage points and 34 joints. It took up 80 litres of boot capacity, thus leaving reasonable space. The 124’s safety equipment was most impressive: the twin ‘tombstone’ rear headrests doubled as a roll over bar, popping up in under 0.3

seconds when reacting to information from electrical sensors, while the strengthened A-pillars were so tough that in extreme tests a 124 cabriolet was suspended by a single A-pillar and apparently lived to tell the tale. The lengths engineers went to when engineering the cabriolet were to ensure that Mercedes owners who loved al fresco driving didn’t have to make any compromises on comfort and safety.



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Crowded house

Fifty-two years ago, Mercedes-Benz stunned visitors to the Geneva and Frankfurt motor shows, pulling the covers off first the W113 SL Roadster, and then the W100 saloon. **Tim French** looks back at a vintage year

It is not unusual for new Mercedes-Benz models to hog the limelight at international motor shows. But in the post-war period, 1963 must surely mark the high water mark of its sensational launches, the spring and autumn of that year witnessing the unveiling of two of the car maker's most celebrated designs.

In mid-March the wraps came off the extraordinarily pretty W113 SL Roadster, a replacement for both the 190SL and 300SL which had been in production for seven and eight years, respectively. Then in September, at the Frankfurt motor show, the magnificent W100 saloon arrived, superseding the ageing 300-series 'Adenauer' limousine.

Although the decade was three years

ABOVE
It's not just since *Top Gear* that young men have been captivated by fast cars.

old, the 1960s had not quite happened yet. Beatlemania was on the rise, but the Fab Four's fresh and irreverent style had not yet fully roused the young to challenge the stuffy status quo in Britain, nor had Bob Dylan's protest songs impacted on the US establishment, while the building of the Berlin Wall two years earlier was stifling economic prosperity in Germany. But the appearance of the new SL and the 600,

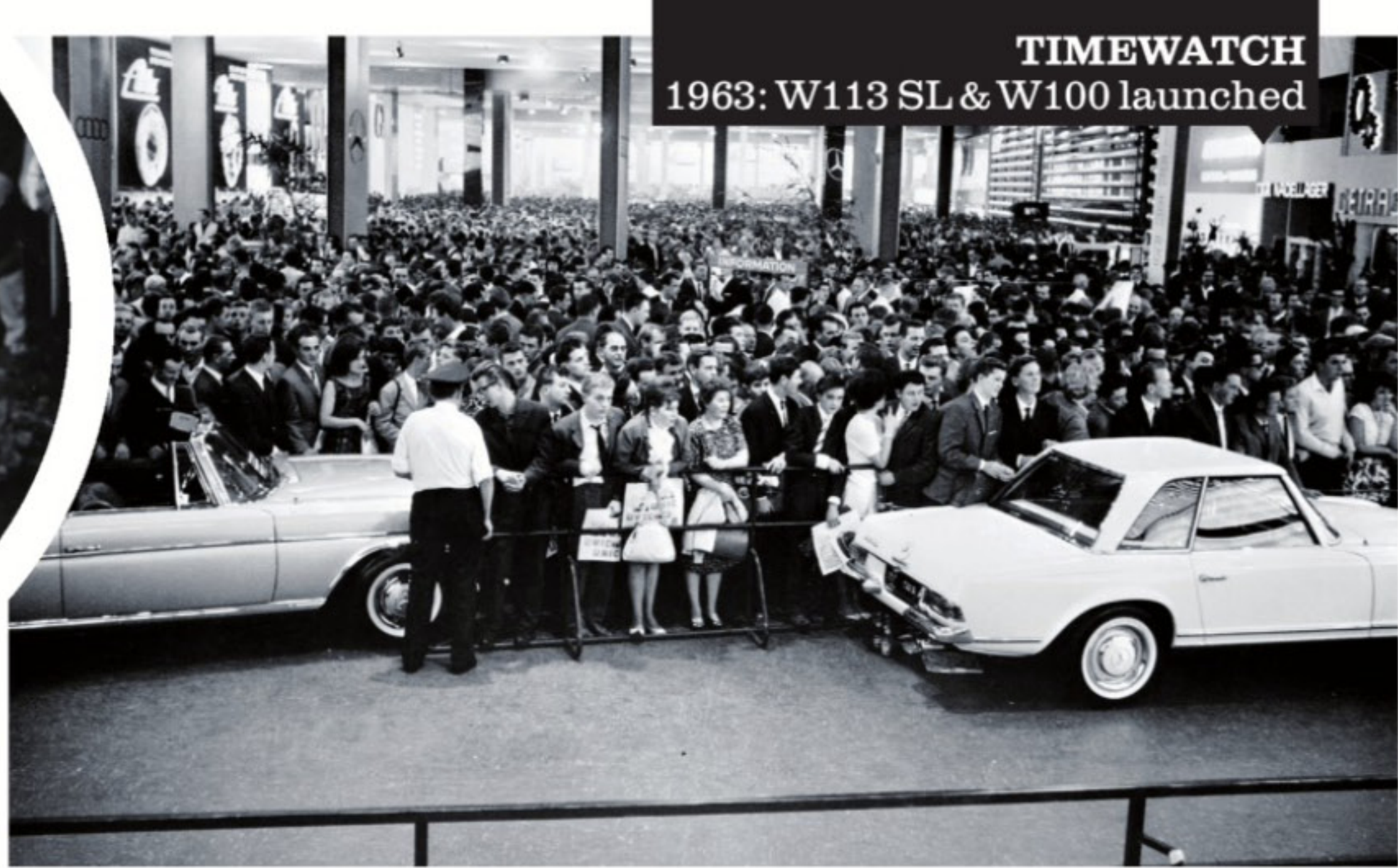
with their super modern, razor sharp looks, helped kick-start the 60s, certainly in the car industry.

Despite their very different positions in the Mercedes range, the two cars shared many styling features, unsurprising given that they were both the work of Paul Bracq, head of Stuttgart's design studio at the time.

"THE APPEARANCE OF THE NEW SL AND THE 600, WITH THEIR SUPER MODERN, RAZOR SHARP LOOKS, HELPED KICK-START THE 60s, CERTAINLY IN THE CAR INDUSTRY"



ABOVE
Master of ceremonies in the immediate aftermath of the W100's unveiling.



RIGHT
An unbelievable number of people crammed in to see the Mercedes display.



ABOVE
These two 600s exhibited at Frankfurt must have left show visitors awe struck.

The horizontal waistline, minimal body curves, one-piece front lamp clusters and angular rear lenses, and even the instrument design, were just four aspects in common.

The two cars perfectly mirrored the “white heat of technology” that Britain’s headline-conscious Labour prime minister, Harold Wilson, who came to office in 1964, would speak of a year later. Advanced engineering, skyscrapers and international communications all helped consign the monotone austerity of the early post-war years to history, as did the W113 and 600.

Both cars were far more than glamorous and impressive lookers. The SL was the world’s first sports car to feature bodywork designed with safety in mind, employing the crash structures pioneered by Mercedes’ safety guru, Béla Barényi, for the Ponton and Fintail. It was also notably refined for an era when sports cars were very sparsely equipped, with comfortable seats, and the options of automatic transmission and power-assisted steering.

The photos of the 1963 Frankfurt show, from the archive of Mercedes-Benz Classic in Stuttgart, show young, eager crowds packing the Mercedes hall to get a close look at the new roadster. Motor show stands were very basic in



ABOVE
A moment of automotive history was when the covers came off the 600.

those days, with a few pot plants just about the only decorative feature, but that mattered little when there were amazing new Mercedes models to be seen.

The W113 SL was launched in 230SL form, using a fuel-injected six-cylinder engine (from the Fintail 220SE) with an overhead camshaft, at a time when the typical two seater – at least those from the British car industry – had a pushrod four-cylinder engine with twin carburettors. It produced 148bhp, which gave it easy, satisfying performance, and the W113 soon gained the “Pagoda” name due to the concave curve of its factory supplied hardtop, this sturdy, well fitting item a further advance over most other roadsters, which generally relied on a not particularly weatherproof canvas hood, or a flimsy aftermarket glassfibre hardtop.

So radical a departure from the curvaceous 190SL and 300SL was the Pagoda that even some professional road testers found it hard to take in. “At first glance we found the upper lines of the compact body to be somewhat shocking,” opined the US car magazine *Road & Track*, on testing the 230SL in 1963. “However, on better acquaintance with this car, with all its fascinating details, its improved accessibility and range of vision, we grew more and more enthusiastic.”

In the UK, *Autocar* magazine said, “The character of the car brings out the best in a driver and invites him to ‘get a ⇨

★ Headlines of 1963 ★

★ President John F Kennedy was shot and killed as his motorcade passed through Dallas, Texas. Conspiracy theories regarding the assassination, caught on an amateur film, still persist to this day

★ Thieves ambushed the Glasgow to Euston mail train in a heist that became known as the Great Train Robbery, with £2.6m stolen – at the time the biggest ever theft of its kind in Britain

★ By the end of the year The Beatles has released three top selling albums, Please Please Me and With The Beatles, while Roy Orbison had sold enough singles to make up In Dreams: Greatest Hits

★ The P6 Rover 2000 (below) was launched, a much lauded design featuring a unitary body design, four-wheel disc brakes and sophisticated de Dion tube rear suspension. It was manufactured until 1976.



⇒ move on',” and concluded that, “There is much to admire in the 230SL – the high standard of finish and workmanship, comfort, tasteful styling and interior appointments. Leech-like adhesion to the road on fast corners makes the greatest dynamic impression.” In the UK the 230SL cost £3,600 on its launch, around £65,000 in today’s money, and, interestingly, a similar price to the current SL400.

The 230SL was built until 1966, when it was replaced by the identical looking 250SL, with its more torquey 2.5-litre engine, rear disc brakes and other minor improvements. The third and last chapter was the 280SL, coming little more than a year later, in early 1968, still looking exactly the same, but with 2.8 litres and 168bhp. Production of all three W113 models totalled nearly 48,500 before the R107 took over in 1971.

ABOVE
Besides the new SL and 600, the 300SE (second from left) arrived in 1963.

“AS HAD BEEN THE CASE WITH THE PAGODA PRESENTATION, THERE WAS NOT A SPARE SQUARE CENTIMETRE OF STANDING ROOM IN THE HALL WHERE THE 600 WAS UNVEILED”

If the Pagoda redefined the sports car, the W100 that followed six months later took the luxury car rulebook, ripped it into pieces and stamped them into the ground. The Adenauer, with its upright, stately poise, had served

Germany’s great and good well, but as the 1960s arrived it was very dated, and was actually discontinued 18 months before its successor was revealed, some say in a move to separate the new from the old as far as possible.

As had been the case with the Pagoda presentation, there was not a spare square centimetre of standing room in the hall where the astounding 600 was unveiled. A wonderful archive image included here captures the precise

moment when the covers were pulled off, to reveal the most advanced car in the world at the time.

Of the 600’s many innovative features, the most radical was the hydraulic system that powered the windows, locks,



LEFT
German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard (light tie) being shown the 600.

BELOW
Niger's Hamani Diori (centre) came to Frankfurt to size up the new 600.



BELOW
Mercedes' photographers caught some lovely random moments.



seat adjustment, sunroof and other functions, the technology borrowed from the company's aeronautical division. The silent operation that this endowed was enhanced by air suspension with self levelling, while two separate air conditioning systems were electronically controlled.

Initially the W100, powered by Mercedes' all new 6.3-litre, 247bhp V8, was offered in standard and long wheelbase Pullman versions, and right from the start the latter was in demand from dignitaries and heads of state. Niger's then president, Hamani Diori, was, with his entourage, seen closely inspecting the 600 at Frankfurt, and Ludwig Erhard, in his first year as German Chancellor, also took an interest in the new flagship model.

Production – always to individual orders, probably

BELOW
Mercedes commissioned the artist Hans Liska to paint the 600 at Frankfurt.



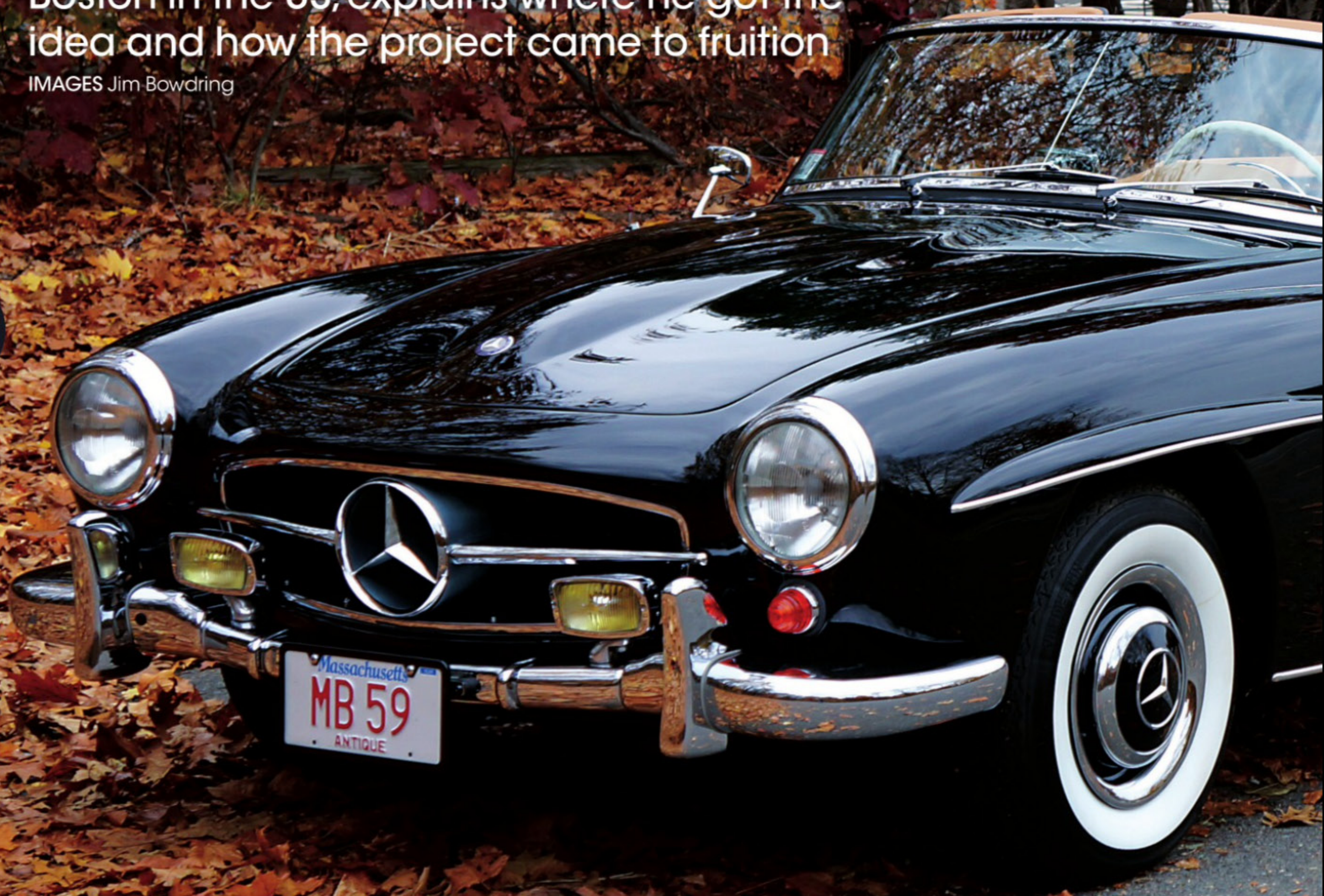
with no two cars having exactly the same equipment specification – would begin a year later. It continued until mid 1981, by which time 2,677 had been built, including soft topped landaulets, a number of specially commissioned cars with bespoke bodywork, armoured versions, and even a pair of two-door coupes.

In 1963 Mercedes also launched the 300SE, a slightly elongated version of the six-cylinder Fintail, and sharing the 600's air suspension, a model which established the tradition of the long-wheelbase S-Class saloon. Other manufacturers introduced important new models that year, including the handsome Rover 2000, the rear-engined, Scottish-built Hillman Imp, the Lotus-Cortina, the Mini Cooper S and the Lancia Fulvia. But undoubtedly 1963 was Mercedes' year, when it arguably consolidated its reputation as the maker of the 'best car in the world'.

TOW & SHOW

This beautiful 190SL and its custom-made trailer attract admiring attention wherever they go. Owner **Jim Bowdring**, who lives near Boston in the US, explains where he got the idea and how the project came to fruition

IMAGES Jim Bowdring



**"THIS PARTICULAR 1959
MERCEDES 190SL WAS
ONCE ALL BUT FORGOTTEN,
LEFT TO THE ELEMENTS AND
CERTAIN DEATH"**





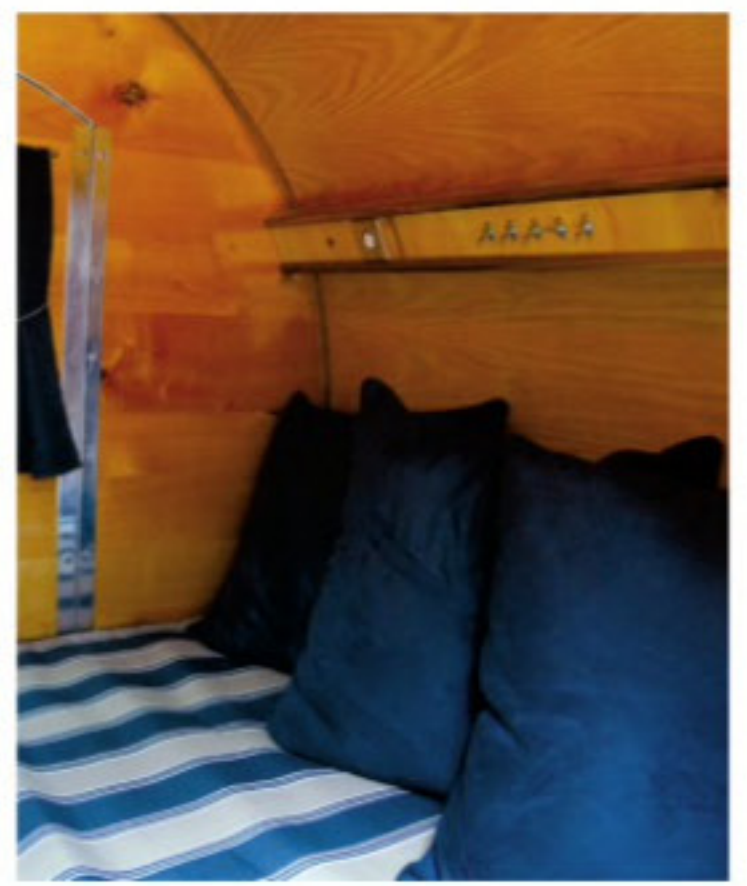
ABOVE
TV/DVD set up useful for those lengthening Autumn evenings.



RIGHT
The ambience is maintained by indirect lighting.

BELOW
Hard wood fittings inside are all of beautiful quality.

BELOW RIGHT
Such is the trailer's space-efficiency it takes a full-size bed.



"AFTER THE BASIC RESTORATION WAS COMPLETED, THE SEARCH CONTINUED FOR AS MANY FACTORY, DEALER, AND AFTERMARKET OPTIONS OF 50 YEARS AGO THAT COULD BE FOUND"

Autumn in New England is a time when bright, sunny days give way to cold, crisp nights. It is also a time when Mother Nature begins her dependable, annual bombardment of our visual senses. Local trees of oak, cherry and maple suddenly jump off the canvas in a glorious spectacle of crimsons and golds. It is a magical time.

With a day like this as a backdrop, I could not resist adding a little 1950s kitsch to the show, a Mercedes classic with a difference, and with enough chrome to make Elvis jealous. The colours are not the vibrant hues that infuse the local foliage, but the more important difference is that, unlike the autumnal scene, this automotive show is not ending any time soon.

This particular 1959 Mercedes 190SL was once all but forgotten, cruelly left to the elements and certain death, until, that is, I joined forces with a talented restorer. And, as you can see,

ABOVE
Rear bumper is cleverly integrated, which is typical of the attention to detail.

TOP
The interior fittings are as supplied by the maker, MiniTears in California.

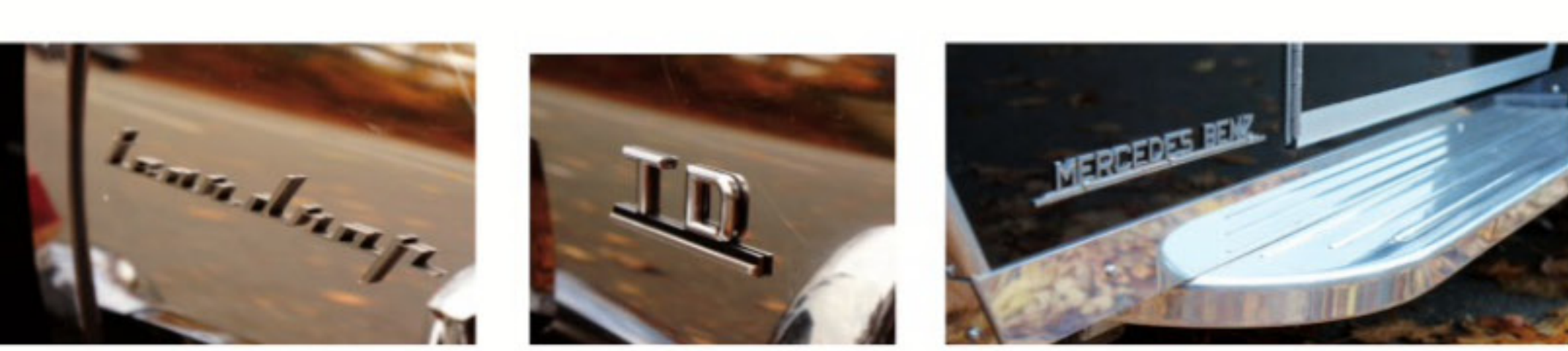
the end of this story is pretty unusual.

My love of the Mercedes 190SL began in my late 20s, when I first saw a model of the roadster in this ebony and tan colour combination in a shop in coastal Maine. I knew this was the car for me, but did not have much money. But as life progressed and I started to make a few dollars, I was able to buy the real thing, and finally, eight years ago, at the

age of 47, I stumbled across this car that had just been shipped up from Florida to Boston where I live. Within days it was mine. It was given a quick restoration so that I could enjoy it, after which I drove it for several years, but three years ago I decided to go for a full house restoration, and shipped it down to BL Adams 190SL Restoration Company in North Carolina.



RIGHT
As many official factory and dealer extras as possible were sourced.



TOP ROW LEFT TO RIGHT
Not a diesel – in this case 'TD' stands for 'Teardrop'; Mercedes badge is from a 1950s 300SL.

LEFT
The customising work on the Teardrop included adding a pair of modified 190SL rear wings.

RIGHT
Space at the front of the trailer made this the obvious location for the car/trailer spare wheel.

BELOW
On seeing the trailer, many feel it could easily have been made in the Mercedes-Benz factory.



Job done

Bruce L Adams, the man who turned the 190SL owner's dream into a reality, explains the challenge of the task

Jim Bowdring approached us at BL Adams 190SL Restoration Company (www.bruceadams190sl.com) three years ago and requested a complete restoration for his 1959 190SL. To enhance the process, Jim also wanted to add as many options and accessories as possible to give the car a different look, and set it apart.

Once the trailer hitch was installed, Jim realised that it has no value unless you have an appropriate trailer to attach. That led to our final phase of the restoration, supplying him with a trailer to attach to his 190SL that has the look and feel of a 1950s factory option. We sourced it from MiniTears in California, whose trailers are designed and built by Kurt Bowden.

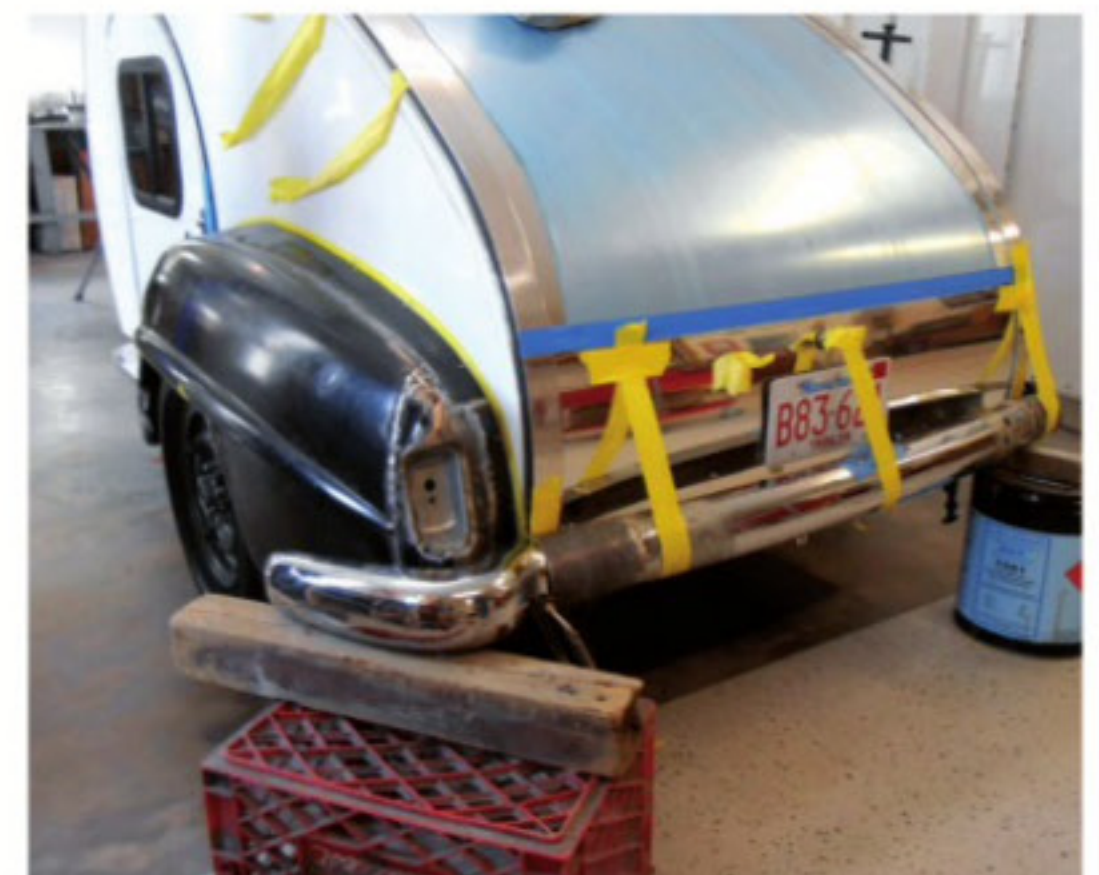
These hand-built trailers were originally designed for a BMW-era Mini Cooper S, whose towing capacity is under 1400lb (635kg). Each trailer has months of detailed work put into its design and construction, with exotic hardwoods from around the world used, and in this case the basic MiniTear design was tailored to be the perfect match for the 190SL.

We took Kurt's basic design and added, with Jim's direction, 190SL lighting, paint, and rear bumpers to complete a period look. The most difficult aspect of the process was sizing the sheet metal of the 190SL rear wings to the trailer so that it looked like a 190SL wing but with the symmetry and size you would expect. The wings had to be shrunk 300mm in length and 200mm in height, and the wheelarch moved back to fit the axles.

ABOVE
Sizing the 190SL rear wings to the right proportions was a challenge.

RIGHT
A 190SL rear bumper was carefully cut into three sections.

BELOW
Several years earlier, the car itself underwent a full restoration.



Despite a painstaking 12-month restoration of the 190SL that included the engine, leather, paint, chrome and tyres, I felt the product still wasn't complete. But this is common in major restorations – the bug had stung, and I was well and truly bitten.

I thought to myself, 'What can I do to complement this car?' and considered a boat trailer, but then I discovered so-called 'tiny trailers'. I was born in 1960, but have an affinity with things from the 1950s. These compact post-war teardrop trailers were very popular 60 years ago, as they allowed Americans to travel the country very economically. Why not completely drive that 1950s message home and add a matching, vintage-era teardrop trailer to the package?

So after the basic restoration was completed, the search continued for as many factory, dealer, and aftermarket options of 50-plus years ago that could be found. Many of the options are almost undetectable in the car thus

equipped, such as the Alboj spare fuel tank, the engine bay work light and the tool kit. Others are more obvious: the matching five-piece leather luggage set (three cases for the boot, two not shown here, for behind the seats), leather upholstery with contrasting piping, Becker radio, wicker picnic set with original Mercedes-Benz 1950s glasses and tableware, front fog lights, and a trailer hitch. Even individually, these are rarely found on surviving 190SLs, but they perfectly complement the pretty Mercedes roadster, and I feel it is wonderful to see all of them on one example.

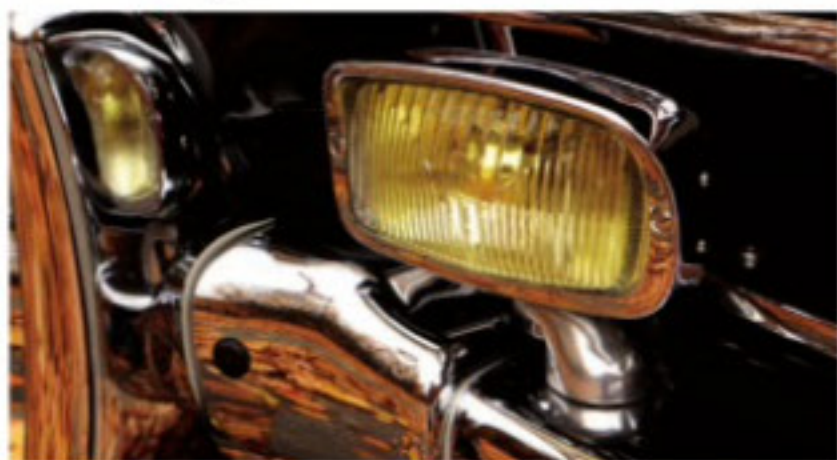
Of course the final option was the most spectacular – the trailer. We shipped a basic, unpainted reproduction of the classic teardrop trailer design from MiniTears (www.minitears.com) in Lakehead, California, and added some body panels, bumpers, and a few other items from the Mercedes-Benz spare parts bin, and in six months Bruce Adams created a custom-made, one-off

Equipped to succeed



Much effort was taken to track down factory and dealer options originally available for the 190SL, and these are the ones now fitted to this car

+ Yellow Hella fog lamps and mounting attachments



+ Trailer coupling
+ Tow rope
+ Becker Europa with short wave
+ Electric radio aerial



+ Alboy 5.1-litre fuel container
+ Cocomats floor mats
+ Safety belts
+ First aid box
+ Five-piece luggage set



+ Fire extinguisher
+ Picnic basket
+ Piping on the interior leather
+ Spare parts box



"ONE GETS THE SENSE OF BEING IN A SMALL BUT HIGH END MOTOR YACHT FROM A BYGONE ERA"



⇒ Mercedes-Benz teardrop trailer. We had a little fun with the '190TD' badge, which for me stands for Teardrop, but which might be a little confusing for others, because of course otherwise it usually refers to 'Turbo Diesel'.

The compact trailer has got to be the most effective use of 32 square feet on the planet. Housed within its 4x8ft frame is a full-size bed, indirect lighting, a TV/DVD system, wine rack, sink, ventilation system, and tons of clever built-ins – including a vanity mirror and a cheese cutting board – all wrapped within an exotic hardwood interior.

We attached 190SL rear wings, and took two donor bumpers from a 190SL and cut them to fit. We might not have the exact correct proportions, but nobody is going to get the tape measure out. The tow hitch, which Bruce had in his stock, was bolted on in the standard way for the time, and then we added

ABOVE
Almost a full working kitchen here, including a running sink and cool box.

ABOVE RIGHT
The hatch is made from aluminium, hence its eye-catching shiny finish.

more bolts. We also checked the car's recommended towing weight.

The spare wheel was mounted on the front of the trailer, this being the ideal place for it, because it takes up some of the space there. The 'Mercedes-Benz' badges were from a 1950s 300SL. I've heard nothing from Mercedes-Benz about this – I can picture them sitting in the boardroom in Stuttgart chuckling, and saying, "Leave this kid alone, he's having fun!"

One gets the sense of being in a small but high end motor yacht from a bygone era. I believe it might even convince many who see it that it rolled off the Stuttgart assembly line over 50 years ago. It screams out the era, I believe. I guess there's nothing some classic car enthusiasts won't do in order to keep the past alive. GM

⇒ This is a revised version of an article that previously appeared in *The Star*, published by the Mercedes-Benz Club of America

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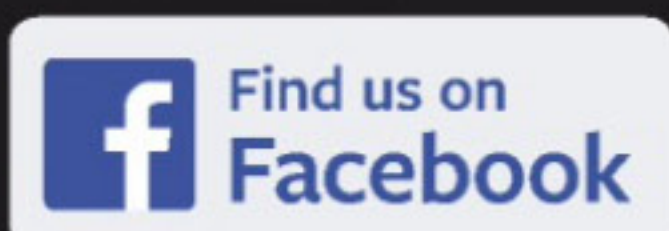


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Classic Car



Modern Car



Classic Bike



Multi-vehicle



Military



Blue sky thinking

It may not have been the fastest or the sportiest four-door saloon car of its day, but no others offered the same design integrity, and few have aged as well as the W123, says David Sutherland

IMAGES Tim Andrew

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“Customers, loyal to Mercedes for years, knew what they were signing up for: a car of discreet style, engineering excellence and top quality”

If, while deciding which new car to buy, you came across one that in standard form lacked alloy wheels, any form of music system, had interior trim whose plainness verged on the austere, and delivered quite limited performance but which cost significantly more than most other cars of a comparable size, you would probably move swiftly on to the next possibility. But three decades ago people in many countries were eager to buy such a car, expecting – and given – no discount on the price, and prepared to wait six to nine months before they could get hold of it.

The reason was the three-pointed star on the bonnet. It was a Mercedes-Benz 123-series, and for customers of the German marque, that was enough. It did not matter that on paper it compared poorly with other cars, because customers, many no doubt loyal to Mercedes for years, knew what they were signing up for: a car of discreet style, engineering excellence and top quality, attributes that in the course of ownership would expose the bells and whistles specifications of lesser cars as mere fripperies.

At that time I was as aware as anyone of the price premium that Mercedes-Benz was able to charge, part of my job being to write comparative road tests of cars for a mainstream car magazine, and every time a Mercedes was the subject of a test I knew that its engine specifications and equipment list would look meagre compared to rivals, if indeed they could be truly called that. Take the Mercedes



Even the door mirrors fitted to the 123-series were over-engineered.



But Mercedes refused to offer electric adjustment for the driver's side mirror.

230E we have here. When new in 1984, it was priced at £11,500 (about the same as its current equivalent, a mid-spec E-Class, once the price is inflation-adjusted) and came with central locking and electric windows. Whereas the Ford Granada 2.8 Ghia X – available for much the same money, after discount – boasted air conditioning, plush velour seats, a sunroof and much else, plus a V6 rather than a four-cylinder engine.

It helped that in those days marque image was more sharply defined than it is today. Mercedes-Benz was at the top of the tree, ahead of Rolls-Royce and Jaguar, not least because these two were beset by strategic issues, while BMW ran a fairly close second. Audi was not yet sitting at the top table, and even now I can clearly hear one of its senior executives complaining to me that his cars were far superior to Volvos, yet the Swedish marque had more kudos. Ford and Vauxhall were the 'low image' manufacturers, reliant on fleets to support volume, while the Italian marques were seen as lovable but not to be taken too seriously.

The days of the Mercedes-Benz as a no-frills, but premium motor car are long gone, the new model you buy today as well equipped as all others and with the same or more performance. But thanks to Swansea-based 123-series guru Mark Cosovich, and also regular *Classic Mercedes* contributor Martin Buckley, who was looking after the car at his Cirencester man cave, I was able to recapture those days and decide if all the fuss we made about the Benz was really justified.

This particular car was first registered in 1984, close to the end of 123 production at the Untertürkheim factory in Stuttgart, its first owner residing on the Isle of Man. The 230E, its M102 Bosch-injected 2,299cc engine producing 134bhp and 151lb ft torque, had been introduced in mid 1980 to replace the carburettored 230 (108bhp/137lb ft),



SPECIFICATIONS MERCEDES-BENZ 230E (W123)

Engine M102 2,299cc 4-cyl **Power** 134bhp@5,100rpm
Torque 151lb ft@3,500rpm **Transmission** 4-speed auto **Weight** 1,360kg
0-62mph 12.3sec **Top speed** 109mph **Fuel consumption** 23.0mpg
Years produced 1980-1985 **Number built** 245,588

All figures from Mercedes-Benz



and its eventual production total of 245,588 accounted for 10 per cent of all 123 saloons built. The biggest seller was the diesel 240D, with 448,986 delivered.

The 230E's closest competitor was the BMW 520i, which at two litres had a 300cc capacity disadvantage; Munich's six-cylinder engine produced some 10bhp less and lacked mid-range torque, but was marvellously smooth. Audi's candidate was the famously aerodynamic 100CD, output from its somewhat gruff five-cylinder engine similar to the 230E's, but the Ingolstadt car was front- rather than the rear-drive of the Mercedes and BMW. Volvo was doing good business with its old-fashioned but still charming 240/260-series (although it appealed mainly in estate form), while Citroën's CX was still an exciting prospect despite being a decade old, though its complexity made it a maintenance nightmare.

The freshly cleaned W123 230E (estates are known as the 'S123' and coupes the 'C123') wheeled out to greet us is a light metallic green car with 103,458 miles on the clock. It's not one of Cosovich's full house, no-expense-spared, 'engine/suspension out' rebuilds, but the Mercedes – in pretty good condition to start with – has been comprehensively tidied up, and when we visited was being offered for sale for £14,999.

The W123 shape, essentially a scaled down version of the 116 S-Class that appeared five years before, deployed understated elegance to its maximum, although by the end of its decade long production was beginning to look a little staid. This was due to the more angular profiles, particularly around the front of cars, that began to emerge during the early 1980s. Of course, 30 years on these models, with their slits for headlamps, and minimal front grilles, are remembered as the products of a transient fashion trend – if they are remembered at all. ⇒

Handling is not sporty, but failsafe, and ride comfort beats many modern Mercs.



RIGHT
Before all cars came with air con, an electric sunroof was a very desirable extra.

FAR RIGHT
In the 123's day, that star badge did all the selling Mercedes-Benz needed.



RIGHT
Alloy wheels optional, but no one made a better hub cap than this car maker.

FAR RIGHT
230E engine perkier than 200's, but considerably less thirsty than 280E's.

BELOW RIGHT
This car rolled out of Untertürkheim in the last year of W123 production.



“This particular car was first registered in 1984, close to the end of 123 production at the Untertürkheim factory in Stuttgart”

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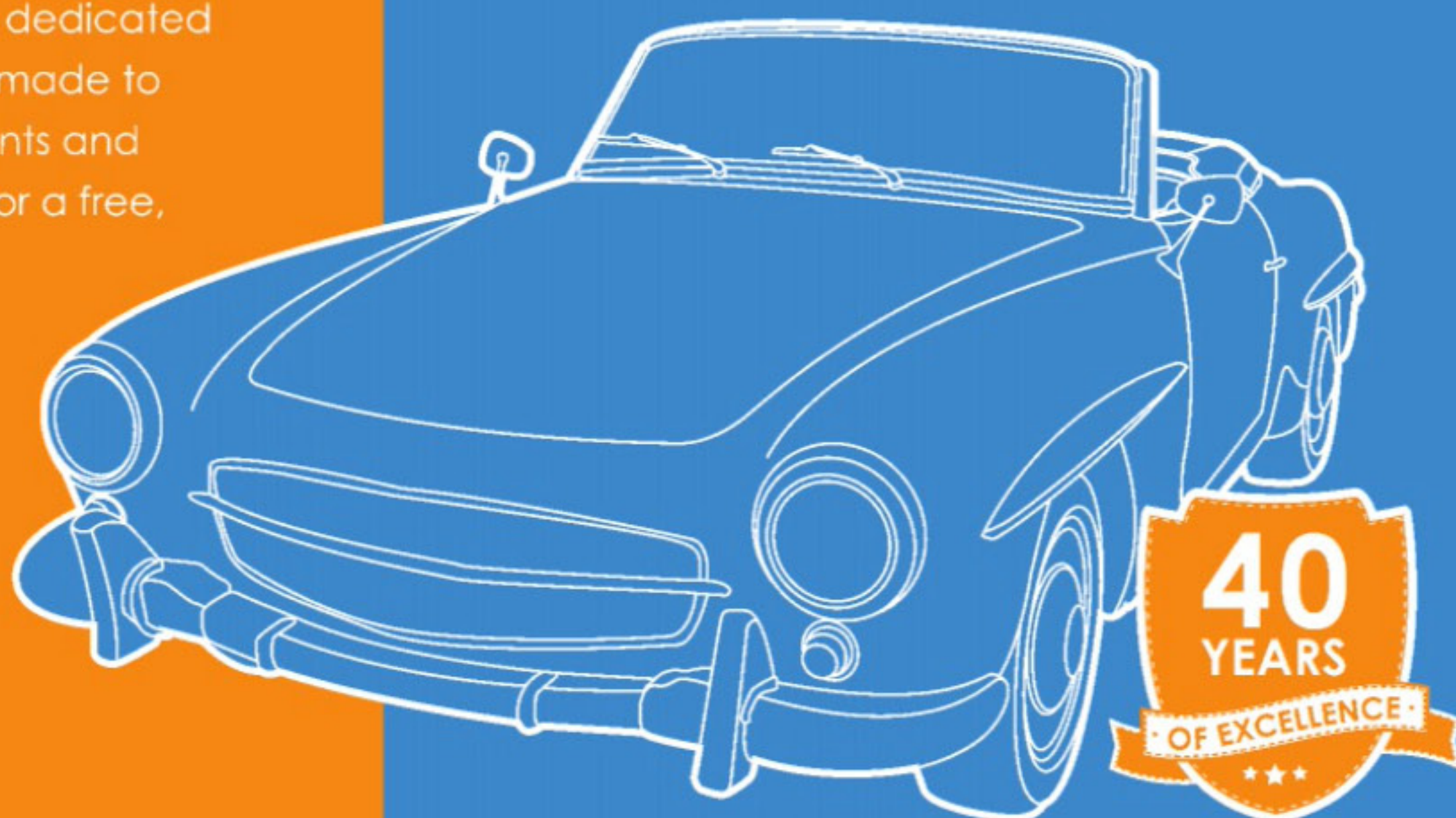
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many modern cars. But where it counts, the Mercedes has plenty of space, above your head, and for rear seat occupants. Driving ergonomics are dominated by the very large steering wheel (whose vast centre section activates, in an amusing contradiction, the most pathetic squeak of a horn), and the oddly padded seats, the like of which were

not seen in anyone else's cars. They are hard yet at the same time springy, but do seem comfortable once you are used to them. Adjustment is rudimentary: backrest recline, fore/aft movement and crude increments of seat height.

One feature that was standard for the UK market

was the wood veneer on the centre console and dash (some markets made do with a black plastic finish), and this not only looks genuinely classy, but has survived this long without developing any cracks or blemishes. The switches that protrude from it have a precise and slightly heavy action, these two



attributes key to the Benz feeling of quality and solidity.

The ignition key is mounted on the left, just below the good looking, super clear three-dial instrument display, rather than being on the side of the steering column, the normal location for most cars. The engine launches into an anonymous hum, and revs smoothly if not willingly, the sensation of a slight reticence heightened by a quite stiff accelerator pedal.

The 230E was popular because it was halfway between the leisurely, carburettored 200 and the livelier but thirstier six-cylinder 280E. In the early 1980s, I wrote more than once that it had sufficient but not surplus performance, and the car can still claim that description, just. Tootling along, medium throttle does for most occasions, but to get anywhere briskly, lots of engine revs

⇒ By contrast, time has emphasised the rightness and superiority of Mercedes' prominent chrome grille topped with the star badge, and the large double lamps behind a rectangular single lens.



Elsewhere on the 123, you see a lot of chrome. The front screen and side windows are surrounded by it, the bumpers capped with it, and there is even a subtle chrome flourish linking the rear doors and the rear screen, defining the shape of the C-pillar. And those hub caps for the steel road wheels, a pleasing combination of high shine embellishment and body-matched paint, rendered alloys unnecessary in many people's eyes.

I am also struck by how compact the W123 now looks. Then, it was the middleweight and the W201 190E the baby, but cars in general are now bigger, and the W123 is only 1.5 inches longer than the current C-Class – and even has a two-inch shorter wheelbase – and is three inches shorter than the latest E-Class saloon.

The feeling that this is not the big car it once seemed continues inside, despite the large glass area compared to

TOP
The supreme quality of the 123's interior is still obvious three decades on.

ABOVE RIGHT
Rear passenger head and legroom is a virtue, and the storage nets are handy.

ABOVE
Instruments are superbly clear, though 'economy' gauge is a waste of space.

“The W123 shape, a scaled down version of the 116-series S-Class that appeared five years before, deployed understated elegance to its maximum”



Range finder

A classic British 4x4 served as our camera vehicle

In order for photographer Tim Andrew to capture 'tracking' images of the 230E, he needed to be aboard a vehicle travelling slightly in front (or behind for rear shots), and what could be a more perfect candidate than the 1980 Range Rover belonging to Martin Buckley, who was looking after the Mercedes. The vehicle's elevated height gave Tim the required height,

the soft, long coil suspension mimimised jolting, and the ability to open just the top half of the tailgate made the operation safer for him.

And this Range Rover, with its 3.8-litre, carburettored V8 is every bit as classic as the W123, being an original three-door example in one of the best original colours, Tuscan Blue. It's also one of few surviving examples from

this era - although much of the body is aluminium, the other steel panels and chassis members rusted, and many perfectly good examples were ruined when they were cut up into off-road racers. However the very early, pre-production Range Rovers have been in collectors' hands for many years now, and are fast appreciating in price.



Photographer Tim Andrew on board the Range Rover belonging to Buckley (inset).



⇒ are recommended, and a four-speed automatic transmission that was smooth and quick shifting for its day - and still respectably responsive now - helps make it happen.

There is one aspect of the 230E's road manners that impresses regardless of era - the ride comfort. Uncompromised by the big wheels and fat tyres fitted to many modern Mercedes (14-inch rims with high sidewalled 175 SR rubber do the job on this veteran), the W123 glides over bumps without feeling the need to describe their contours to occupants. This contributes significantly to the feeling of serenity experienced in an old school Mercedes.

Despite the vague, recirculating ball steering and ample suspension travel, the Mercedes corners securely, and you are never in any doubt that the brakes on this old car are up to the job. Indeed, some might prefer their more natural feel to the

BELOW
Small details such as this chrome embellishment help define the W123.



often over-sensitive pedal action of modern Mercedes.

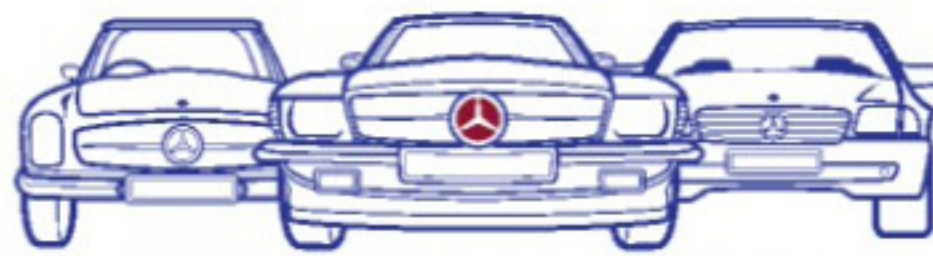
Aside from its outstanding build quality (although it was no better rust proofed than most other cars of the day), the 123-series did not shine brightly in any one aspect. So why did two authors use the words "the finest saloon car of the 20th century" in the title of their book (reviewed on page 74) about it?

Perhaps this seemed appropriate because what Mercedes clearly wanted to achieve with the 123-series was not a car that excelled in some areas and failed in others as a result - for example razor sharp handling at the expensive of ride comfort, or a revvy but noisy engine - but one which reflected the best engineering standard across the board. That was what customers expected, and what Stuttgart delivered in full with the 123-series.



“The 230E was popular because it was halfway between the leisurely, carburettored 200 and the livelier but thirstier six-cylinder 280E”





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Solid state

Owner of many 123s over the years, and author of a recent book on the car (reviewed on page 74), **Martin Buckley** tells the story of Mercedes' most iconic saloon from the 'modern classic' era

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“BMW was feeling bullish enough to challenge Mercedes head-on with the 1972 5-Series, the excellence of which cannot have been lost on Stuttgart”



“It was tooled for a long production run and was designed to be timeless and still very much a Mercedes in its conservative elegance”



It is now 40 years since the launch of the Mercedes W123, although at the time most of us didn't know the various internal Daimler-Benz AG 'W' designations and their significance. I can remember a more innocent time when even well informed car spotters tended to get confused by Mercedes nomenclature, and the place in the hierarchy of the various models.

This new three-box saloon was simply Mercedes Benz's latest interpretation of its mid-sized theme, unveiled with modest fanfare at the end of 1975. Today it would be an 'E-Class' but, again, such terms were not being bandied about in those days. The fact that it offered the option of nine different engines in one body didn't help lift the fog of confusion, especially when there was so much cross pollination of engines between the different Mercedes model ranges.

The W123 was, visually, very clearly related to the already well established 116-series S-Class, but directly replaced the W114/115 'new generation' range dating from 1968. There was quite a long crossover period in 1976 as production of the W114s (six-cylinder cars) and W115s (four-cylinder) wound down, and W123 production got into its stride.

In the same way that the W108s were really re-skinned Fintails, the W123 was not strictly speaking new, but directly developed from its predecessor and used much of the same suspension and drivetrain technology, and locked in 'hard points'

ABOVE
The testing of the W123 was unrelenting and exhaustive, and paid off.

ABOVE LEFT
Some interesting looking models were made prior to production commencing.

TOP
Mercedes wanted the new car to have a less German, more international image.

BELOW
The 123 carried over some basic chassis engineering from its 114/115 forebear.

of the older model's dimensions. It measured very slightly longer in the wheelbase but somehow managed to be slightly lighter than the W114/115.

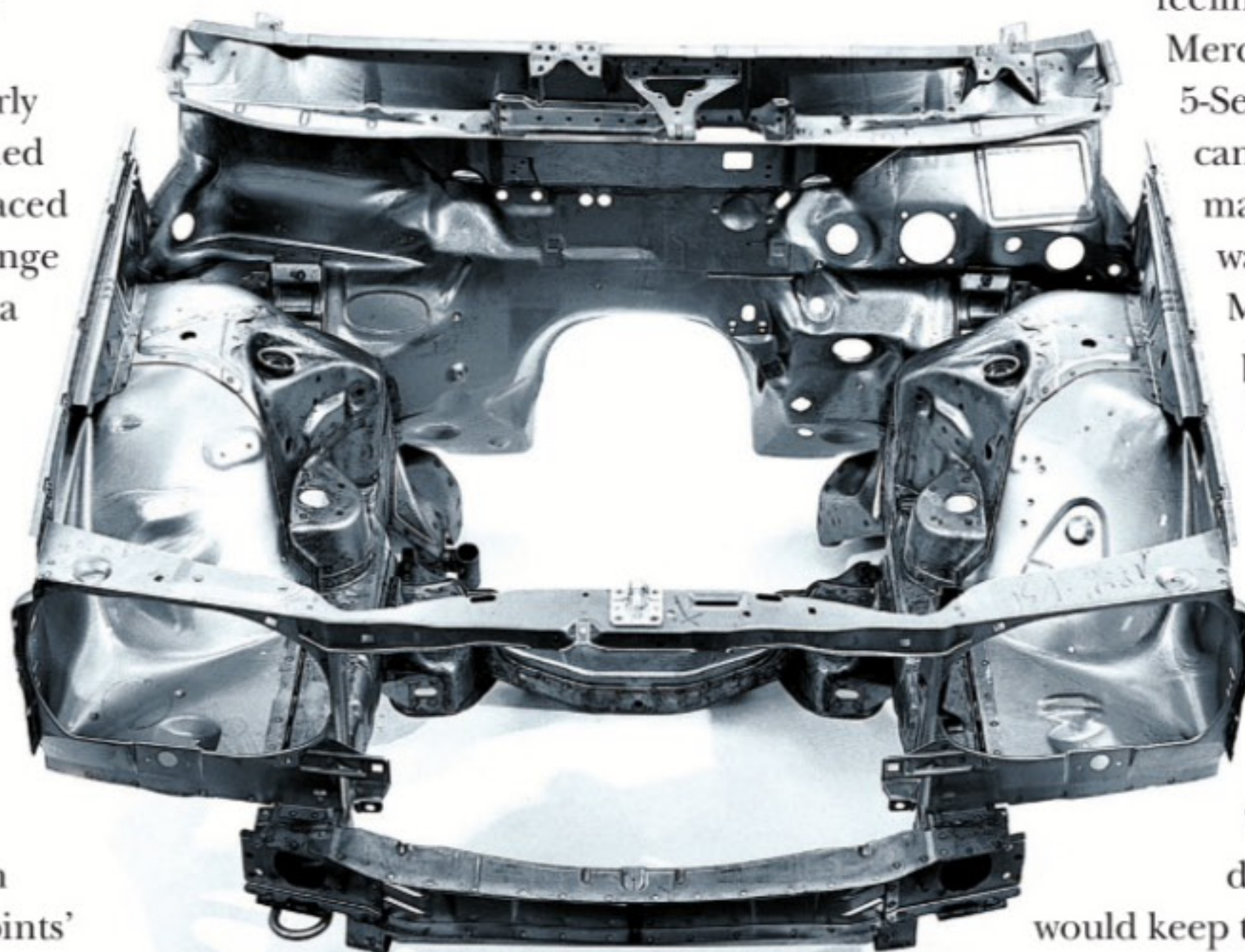
The main engineering changes were the introduction of the zero offset steering geometry that had first been used on the 1972 116. The semi-trailing arm rear suspension was nearly identical, bar a few details, to that of the W114/115.

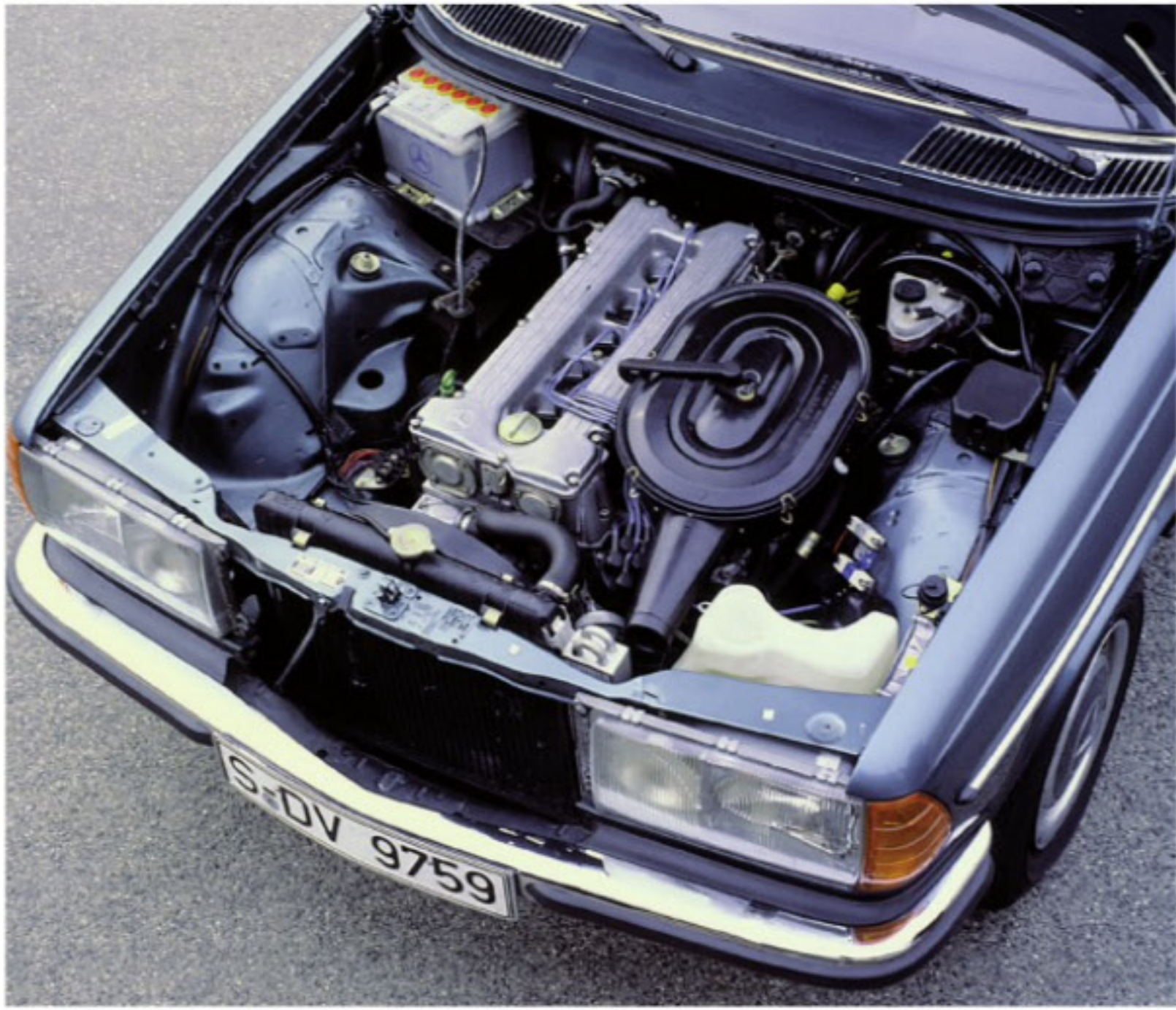
This, then, was very much evolution not revolution, the aim being to produce a car for the second half of the 1970s and beyond that would build on the good reputation of its predecessor, and also have a more international appeal. This class of saloon was more important than ever for Daimler-Benz now that BMW was

feeling bullish enough to challenge Mercedes head-on with the 1972 5-Series, the excellence of which cannot have been lost on Stuttgart management. The mid-range saloon was, after all, the cornerstone of Mercedes' success as a producer of passenger cars; it sold by the hundred thousand to business users, taxi fleets and middle class private buyers who wanted the Mercedes experience in a more compact car that was still beautifully made.

As the era of the W123 dawned, Germany was changing. World War Two was becoming a much more distant memory, and while the W123

would keep the older and more traditional

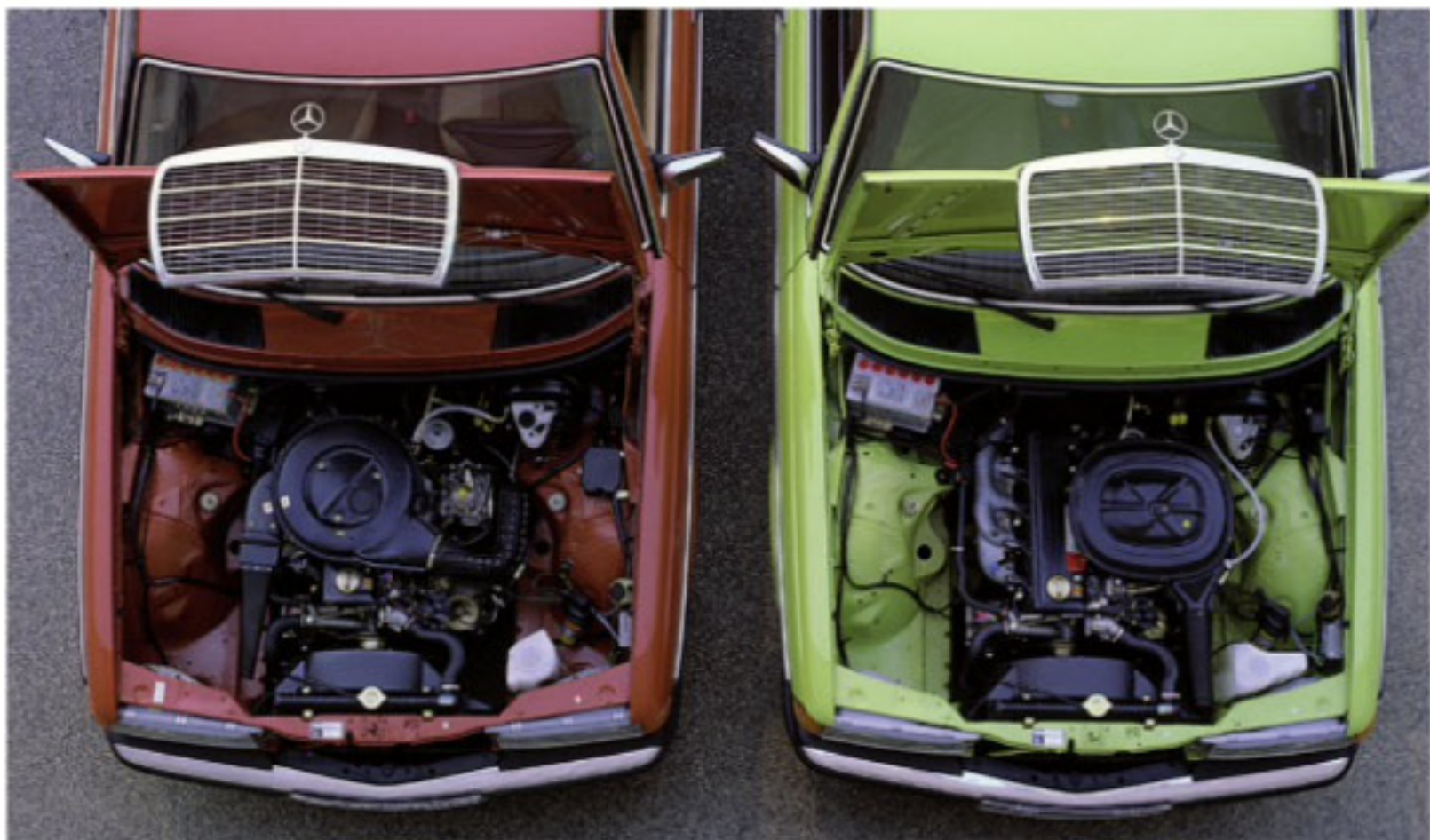




FAR LEFT
Interior trim colours were brighter than they had been in the old W114/115.

LEFT
The flagship 280E used Mercedes' staple six, the twin-cam 2.8-litre M110.

BELOW LEFT
Side by side are the 1980 200 carb engine (left) and the injected 230E unit.



“There are faster, more economical Mercedes cars, but none have the same integrity of engineering”

Working with 123s

All through his adult life, Mark Cosovich (pictured) has owned, repaired, rebuilt and sold them

“My association with the 123-series began in the mid-1970s, when it was launched. I'd just started driving, and although my family had already owned a Mercedes in the 1950s, the 123 was the first Mercedes to become 'popular' in the UK. Suddenly, Britain was in Europe, and owning a German car became acceptable.

For me, to see one was to love one, it was so superior to all other makes, and even other Mercedes. I worked hard, stayed on my motorcycle, and saved to get one. Even the entry model was very expensive, but extras don't make a car good, so I had my first, very basic 1977 200 saloon in 1979. Owning one changed my life, as instantly I was catapulted into friendship with other owners, from walks of life I surely would not otherwise have encountered.

I would go on over the next 35 years to own, repair, restore and dismantle every 123 model, buying up to 40 a year at one time. Never has the feeling that they are of special quality left me. I'm certain the 123 has no equal – yes, there are faster, more economical Mercedes cars, but none have the same integrity of engineering, along with clever yet

simple engineering, and certainly none have improved on the ride quality. This 40-plus year old design is a now classic in the UK and Europe, but it's often a 'daily driver' in many parts of the Developing World, still battling along on some of the planet's worst road systems. No other vehicle has this record.

I have no problem driving the lowest powered 200D diesel to the highest specification 280E, as all have that same indefinable magic. I always come away from a W123 with a smile on my face.

Having fully restored so many has also left me with a lasting appreciation of the build qualities that I now try to replicate. The 123 is a very much loved car on every single continent, despite for many years popular culture deriding it as the 'Berlin Taxi'. It is far, far more than that, as anyone who has encountered it knows.”

buyers well satisfied, it was also a car for many first time new Mercedes-Benz buyers, who were now of the younger, post-1945 generation.

Work began on the W123 range almost as soon as the previous model was signed off. And having established what worked – and, more importantly, sold – its creators would have been in absolutely no hurry to make any earth shattering changes to such a proven formula.

The W123 brought together all the latest refinements and improvements – with a particular emphasis on crash safety, and ease of servicing – in a more modern looking package that aligned the volume selling Mercedes saloon with the tastes, whims and desires of the mid-1970s, rather than of a decade earlier.

Although not a cutting edge shape, it was tooled for a long production run and was designed to be timeless and still very much a Mercedes in its conservative elegance. After the hard edges of the 1960s, its softer and more rounded lines

made the W123 perhaps the first 'cuddly' and approachable saloon from Stuttgart. Its gentler contours and vaguely wedge shaped profile even made a small concession to the increasingly important science of aerodynamics.

If somehow the handsome but angular W114 range still had an air of Cold War austerity about it with its vertical headlamps and tall grille, then the W123 had a friendlier



ABOVE
Headlights and driving lamps were positioned behind a single glass lens.

RIGHT
This sweet Signal Red '84 200 auto was one that Mark Cosovich did earlier.



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⇒ and more family orientated look with its big chunky indicator units and squat radiator. It looked European rather than specifically German – you couldn't picture a Bond villain's henchmen chasing 007 down the side of a mountain in a W123 as you could in a Fintail – and came in a wider range of more cheerful colours than before.

Inside, the new car had a crash-safe dashboard, a big, padded steering wheel, and a much more

“It is hard to think of a single design of car that covered such a wide spread, from 54bhp 200D diesel to the 125mph 280E”

rational instrument and switch layout than the previous model. The seats were still rather firm, but they were more contoured and could be had in a wider range of cloth, velour and leather trim, if you didn't fancy chilly MB-Tex. The W123 was more comprehensively heated, cooled and demisted, and could be ordered with a much more extensive range of comfort and convenience options, as Mercedes wised up to the fact that there was money to be made from selling items like electric windows, tinted glass, sunroofs and all the other items that were becoming the norm rather than the exception on lesser makes.

Coupe and estate variants came later, but even in saloon form it is hard to think of a single design of car that covered

such a wide spread of aspirations, from 54bhp 200D diesel to the 125mph 280E which shared its throaty, fuel-injected twin-cam M110 straight-six with lesser variants of SL and S-Class models.

In the price list £5,000 separated them, and it was quite possible to double the cost of the basic W123 by going for the most expensive options. A 280E with air, cruise control, powered sunroof, alloy wheels and leather could end up costing as much as a V8-engined S-Class.

At launch in 1975, there were four diesel and five petrol W123s. The famously sluggish but durable oil burners comprised the four-cylinder 200D, 220D and 240D (the latter being the most ubiquitous), and the five-cylinder 300D. There were two four-cylinder petrol models, the carburettored 200 and 230, and the 2.8-litre straight-six with carburettor or electronic Bosch injection, although the UK got only the injected car, badged 280E.

Filling the gap between the 230 and 280 was the straight-six 250 engine, the only unit in the range that was new and not a carry over from the previous generation. When the

ABOVE
In some markets (not the UK) W123s came minus the fascia wood veneer.

TOP LEFT
Brown velour a very 1970s colour, and was more popular than leather trim.

TOP RIGHT
Big clear dials and a helm larger than necessary were two 123 hallmarks.

BELOW
The 300D Turbodiesel was a W123 model sold only in North America and Japan.



Unlike many 1970s cars, the W123 would always start in the cold and damp.



In a decade Mercedes delivered almost 2.4 million 123 saloons.



40 years ago Mercedes sought out a younger customer for its new model.



A fairly long and square tail gave the 123 saloon a large luggage capacity.



The 280E towed well, if fitted with the optional self-levelling rear springs.

“Ubiquitous on every continent and with a legendary reputation for durability, the W123 would be one of the great ambassadors for the Mercedes brand”

⇒ petrol four-cylinder units were uprated in 1980, the 250 (which had never enjoyed a brilliant reputation for reliability) was effectively replaced by the new fuel-injected 230E. This was a variant which in many ways gave the best compromise between performance and economy in the W123 body. Until that point it had been possible to differentiate the four- and six-cylinder W123s by their headlamp arrangements; post 1980, the rectangular Bosch units exclusive to the 250 and 280 were used across the range.

The W123 saloons then went on with very few changes until 1984 and the introduction of the 124-series, a mid-range car cast in the mould of the then recently announced Cortina-class 190 saloon. For many, this car was the beginning of the end of Mercedes as a maker of quality vehicles. Like the 190, the 124-series was built light and

slippery in the name of saving fuel and boosting profit margins. It was in many ways a more capable car than the 123, but marked a clear tipping point between the values of two different generations in a world that was becoming increasingly trivial and throwaway in mindset.

What nobody could have realised in 1975 – or, indeed, 1984 – was the significance of the 2.4 million selling W123 (with nearly 300,000 123 estates and coupes on top of that

total) as a car that would come to signify everything that was best about Mercedes Benz. Ubiquitous on every continent, and with a legendary reputation for durability, the 123 would come to be both one of the great real world ambassadors for the Mercedes brand for many years after its demise as a production car in 1984, but – rather unexpectedly – also a small thorn in the side of a forward looking company that can no longer afford to build cars this way and stay in business.

BELOW
The two millionth 123 was this 200D saloon, built on September 19, 1982.



Another country

In the 1970s and 80s, as now, Mercedes' South African factory manufactured cars for local sale

Sindelfingen in Germany was the home of 123 production, but for nine years until 1986 Daimler-Benz's plant in South Africa turned out 77,345 W123s, in 200, 230E, 250 and 250E form, writes David Sutherland. While car makers undertaking overseas assembly during that period typically set up 'screwdriver' factories, making cars out of pre-prepared kits, the East London plant was a genuine

production facility, where a certain amount of engineering work was also undertaken. A great deal of attention is said to have been paid to quality control (such as there being two sets of quality checks), due to the high numbers of experienced expatriate engineers working there, and some even say the build standard of the South African W123s was slightly better than in Germany.

The South African cars also had slightly different equipment specifications. For example, all cars had three- rather than two-section, wraparound front bumpers (normally seen only on the 280E), reflectors between the twin headlamps, and chrome underriders on the rear lamps. Extra heat absorbing glass was fitted, and the engine air intake had a special filter to keep snakes out.

RIGHT
Mercedes' East London site in South Africa was a true manufacturing plant.



W123s made here were a different spec.



The last 123 of a nine-year production, in which most variants were built.



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1983 MERCEDES 230

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Fare game

It was no coincidence that for many years the W123 was the world's favourite taxi. **Martin Buckley** explains why it won cabbies' hearts

IMAGES Daimler AG



Although primarily designed as a private family saloon car, in many ways the defining image of the W123 Mercedes four-door is its role as a taxi. While the purpose-designed American Checker Cab and the Austin FX4 (both now defunct) are linked mainly with particular cities – New York and London, respectively – the W123 is much more international. Walk out of an airport or hotel in Hamburg, Paris, Stockholm or Hong Kong in the 1970s, 1980s or 1990s and, likely as not, the first cab you would see on the rank would be a W123, almost certainly diesel.

BELOW
The 123 taxi was a model line in its own right, petrol and diesel versions made.



In 1975, before the introduction of the W123, three out of every four taxicabs in the Federal Republic of Germany were Mercedes. The 1960s W115 'new generation' models had perpetuated the basic Mercedes model's reputation for economy of operation that is essential to a taxi driver who relies on his car to pay his rent, put food on his table, and clothes on his family's backs.

The W123's formidable reputation as a taxi was not acquired by accident. Its small turning circle, large boot and hard wearing interior surfaces are clues that these cars were designed with some consideration for taxi use in mind. Indeed it was decided during the car's development gestation that a model specifically aimed at taxi drivers would be produced, ⇨



Saloon icons

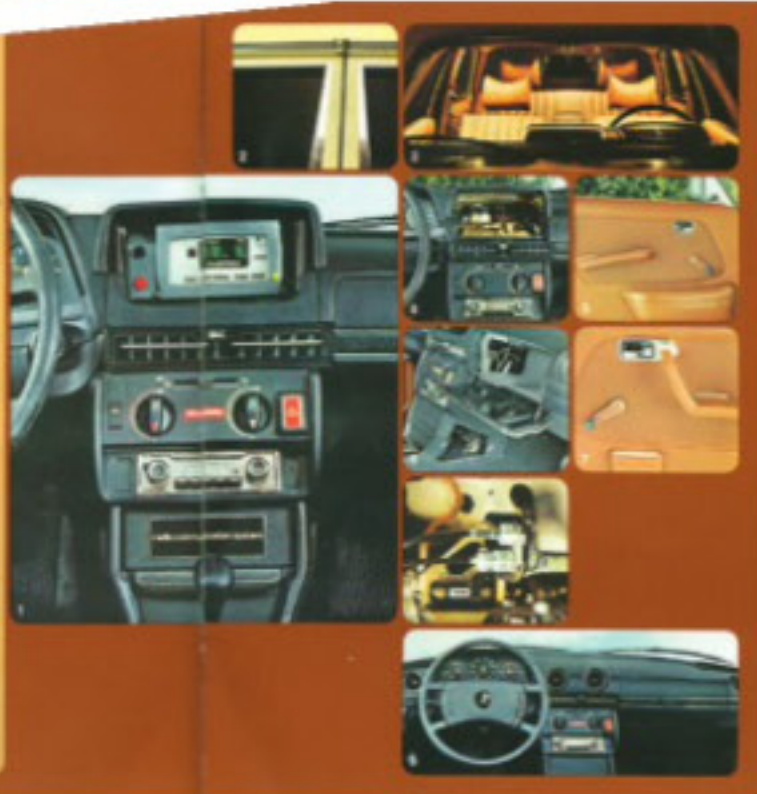
“It was decided during the car's development gestation that a model specifically aimed at taxi drivers would be produced”

Mercedes-Benz Taxi



The complete taxi from the assembly line

T



Comfort is relaxing - for the driver

R



You have the choice between seven basic models. The special taxi equipment is available for each of these models.

200 D		200	
220 D		250	
240 D		250	
300 D			

steering column, and a cut-off under the bonnet) should the driver be robbed or attacked, a two-part interior mirror, fire extinguisher, heated seats front and rear, and stainless steel trim on the bottoms of the inside door panels to guard against continued scuffing.

The 200D was the entry-level version, and for tax reasons in many European territories the first choice for cab owners. Capable of running all day with modest thirst, the 200D's 54bhp did not permit high speed cruising or brisk acceleration (its quoted 0-62mph in manual form was 31 seconds dead, and maximum speed 81mph), although they

could appear sprightly when enterprisingly driven through city traffic, a skill of seasoned taxi drivers the world over.

The two-litre single overhead cam engine, type OM615, carried over many similarities of the previous tried and tested power unit, but featured a new type of oil filter which could be removed from above, and a new cylinder-head gasket material that required no regular maintenance. The 220D taxi was in production only until 1979, and similarly found favour with fleet operators. More evident in taxi form was the 240D which – given enough road – might do 90mph, although 70mph was a more realistic cruising speed. Even driven hard, the average cabbie would have struggled to get less than 35mpg out of a 240D.

The 240D had better acceleration and flexibility than the 200/220, combined with a range of over 600 miles if driven gently. An increase in power and more modern injectors and heater plugs from 1980 onward on this model allowed the use of an optional

⇒ specially adapted for taxi use; 'a complete taxi from the assembly line' as the dedicated brochure described it.

Inside, 'Mercedes Special Taxi Equipment' included a modified dashboard for a taximeter and two-way radio with connections for the taximeter shaft drive and the 'Taxi' sign. As well as a pocket on the driver's door (with lid) there was an ashtray instead of a door pocket on the passenger's front door, and grab handles on the rear arm rests. Uprated electrics included four interior lamps (with 60amp total wattage), interference suppression for the two-way radio, a bigger battery, and a heavy duty, 55amp alternator.

ABOVE Brochure shows the wide range of specialised equipment on the taxi.

BELOW The stretched, limousine taxi was very popular among corporate users.

automatic gearbox; it was also available with a column shift to allow increased passenger room, and in final form the fitment of a five-speed Getrag gearbox increased high speed autobahn cruising ability for those lucrative airport runs.

Fitted with the OM616 engine the 240D was the most popular of all the diesel models, and many were taxis from new. However the taxi spec could be applied to over half a dozen W123 variants, from the 200 petrol model to the five-cylinder 300D.

Few, if any, W123s are still plying for trade in Germany today, and Mercedes has struggled to rebuild its reputation with the hire car trade after the quality debacle of the 1990s and early 2000s. Indeed, the car maker even incurred the

You could order fabric upholstery, but most operators went for practical, almost indestructible and wipe-clean MB-Tex, while rubber mats instead of carpets were obligatory in the taxi specification. The front seats were reinforced.

All German taxis had been black until 1971, but the official W123 taxi came in a special Light Ivory DB623 (RAL1015) finish, and featured a right-hand exterior mirror. Mercedes claimed that it was easy to return the car to its normal specification if you wanted to use it as a standard private car.

Taxi options included an alarm (with a switch under the



“Many civilian W123s, fit only for the scrapyard by western standards, have been exported to Africa for a second tour of duty, as taxis”

wrath of owners of early 124-series taxis, who back in the mid 1980s protested en masse over

reported cylinder-head and gearbox problems. It is understood that these issues were quickly addressed.

As a result, the modern E-Class is nothing like as dominant on the taxi ranks as the W123 was in its heyday. But the Mercedes minivan-based Vito Taxi, converted in 2009 in partnership with an engineering company in east



Taxi facts

● In a DTM race at Hockenheim in 2003, Mercedes works driver Bernd Schneider, the DTM champion that season, drove an AMG-Mercedes CLK in the livery of a taxi.



● This Mercedes-Benz 240D once owned by Greek taxi driver Gregorios Sachinidis completed 4.6 million kilometres (2.9 million miles) before he retired it.



● The world first production diesel car, Mercedes' W138 260 D built from 1936 to 1940, was very popular with taxi drivers. The photo shows a landaulet taxi.



● The W168 A-Class, small but noted for its excellent interior space, was offered with a taxi equipment package. This photograph was taken in 2000.



● Over many years, W123 taxis have provided good fodder for cartoonists and illustrators working for comics, providing a metaphor for dependability and familiarity.



London, and featuring rear-wheel steering for a tighter turning circle, does appear to be making some headway with London's traditional black cab trade.

But even if no longer commonly seen in Europe, the W123 is still highly evident in many African and South American cities. Its reputation for longevity is rivalled only by certain Japanese models, and the Peugeot 504 and 505 diesels. Many civilian W123s, considered fit only for the scrapyard by western standards, have been exported to Africa for a second tour of duty, as taxis. Indeed, it is believed that many have been stolen to order to provide parts for the third world cabbies who love the W123 for its tough dependability and easy DIY maintenance.

'Beirut Taxi' has become a sort of shorthand term of affection for these cars, which can still be seen braving the pot holes, the cavalier attitude to traffic laws, and perhaps even the occasional bomb or missile in all kinds of war-torn areas of the world, wearing bent wings and bumpers as badges of pride. It is likely to be many years yet before the last W123 taxi delivers its final fare.



The W123 taxi was improved in many ways over the W115, pictured here.



Before switching to Light Ivory in 1971, all Mercedes cabs came in black.



BOOK REVIEW Mercedes-Benz W123 The finest saloon car of the 20th Century?

Right number

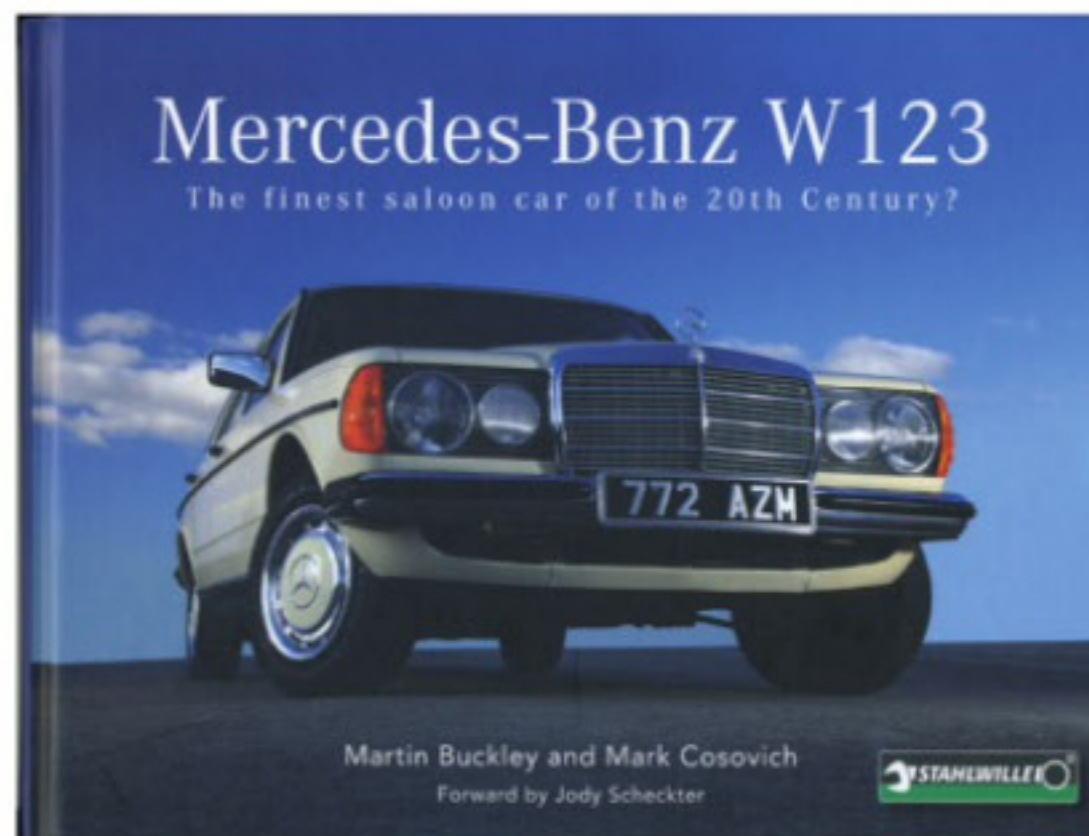
Its publication was repeatedly delayed, and it is expensive, but this new book on Mercedes' 123-series saloon is fascinating to read, says **David Sutherland**, and is the definitive work on the car and a must-have for those considering buying one

Can there really be an entire book about a car that was aimed at a mainstream if upmarket customer base, and which was last built almost three decades ago? If that car is a Mercedes-Benz 123-series, and the author is unquestionably the man in the UK who knows more than anyone else about it, then emphatically yes.

The 123-series was built in Germany from 1975 until 1985 – and then produced for a further period in South Africa – and for almost as long as that Mark Cosovich has been involved with the cars, servicing and repairing them, and latterly refurbishing and rebuilding them as their rising values from the mid 2000s began to make this viable. What moved him to produce *Mercedes-Benz W123 The finest saloon car of the 20th Century?* was his belief that the car marked a golden period for the German manufacturer.

With spannering rather than writing his trade, Cosovich hired knowledgeable classic car journalist Martin Buckley (whose name you'll see elsewhere in this W123 special section) to produce the book's main text, which extends to nearly 180 pages, supplemented by comprehensive data. I know for a fact that this book was not something merely dashed off by a motoring hack during quiet periods, but a true labour of love. Even before *Classic Mercedes* first appeared, in summer 2012, I had various conversations with Cosovich about the book, which after various delays was finally published in late 2014 when he, and those within Mercedes-Benz Classic who worked with him on it, were fully satisfied with the content.

The 'W123' in the book's title implies that it is solely about the saloon, but the estate and coupe are included,



Mercedes-Benz W123 The finest saloon car of the 20th Century?

Pages 226, hardback

Authors Martin Buckley and Mark Cosovich

Price £42 including UK postage

Available from www.w123book.com

too. I was mystified by the fact that Cosovich refers to these two as W123s, when it is now fairly common knowledge that the estate is coded 'S123' and the coupe 'C123', but his reasoning is that these titles were never used outside the factory. This is the level of detail you can get into with 123s.

Everything you would expect is included: the 123's development, a lengthy account of how models evolved, equipment options available, its motorsport involvement, South African production, and exhaustive buying advice, Cosovich of course being ideally

placed to dispense this. But demonstrating the unprecedented scope of the book are a number of more obscure topics, for example a section on the 'lost' 280E rally car, delivered to the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin in 1978 but never driven by him – and never seen since. Buckley, through whose hands many 123s have passed, writes with authority, so even the basic information sounds fresh and interesting, and not simply a rewrite of what has already been published, all too often the failing of car books.

With Cosovich having accessed Daimler's massive and marvellous photo archive in Germany, the hardback book, priced at £42, is rich in delightful period images, most in colour, the rarely seen pictures of early 1970s prototypes especially interesting. It also includes many recent photos of the 123s he has rebuilt, and which amply project the appeal of this elegant 'young classic'. That the title is self-published (with help from fellow Mercedes fan John Summers, who handled the design) is one indication of the sheer enthusiasm that drove the project, and this shines through on every page. CM

Tools: Stahlwille 123-series

DIY 123 owners will love this set, which is all they'll ever need

As part of his long and deep involvement with 123s, Mark Cosovich has also worked with German toolmaker Stahlwille to design a toolkit specially for the car – and which will also fit most post-war Mercedes models prior to the 123. He linked up with Stahlwille because his father had been an early advocate of the brand – which can trace its roots back to 1862 – and because he recalled its

catchy advertising copyline: "Stronger than any bolt".

The firm supplied tools for the 123's on-board toolkit, and Cosovich was getting requests for them from owners. After long discussions with other car restorers in the UK, he came up with a list of what he considered essential tools, and anyone buying the Classic Mercedes-Benz 1950-1985 Tool Set should – given the necessary DIY

skills – be able to perform all servicing tasks, as well as trim removal and other specialist jobs on 123s.

The kit comprises 56 items, many designed to be used in confined spaces, and it is supplied in a sturdy, wheeled case. "It's the last set of tools any classic Mercedes-Benz enthusiast should require," Cosovich claims, no doubt with justification. For further information, call 01792 846888.



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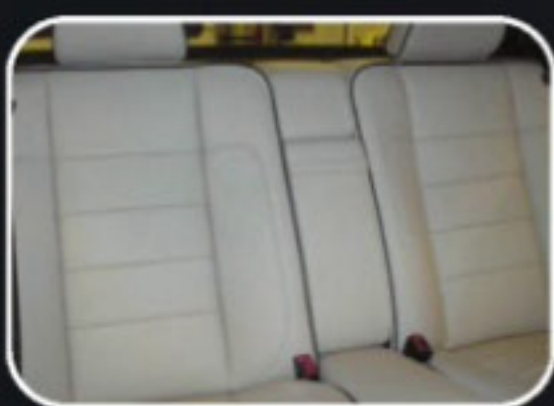
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UNDER THE HAMMER

In late March, Bonhams hosted an exclusive sale of classic Mercedes models at the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart, its second such event. We highlight five of the most outstanding cars to go under the hammer

IMAGES Bonhams



MERCEDES-BENZ MUSEUM, STUTTGART, GERMANY

Black gold

Sixty years on from new, this fully restored, glamorous post-war Mercedes cabriolet retains all the presence it had when it captivated visitors to the 1951 Paris motor show

Lot 130 Mercedes-Benz 300S Cabriolet A

The conservatively styled 300 saloon, launched in April 1951 and built by Mercedes-Benz's most experienced craftsmen, was soon joined by the 300S Coupe, a model which succeeded in recapturing all the elegance of the pre-war 540K. Introduced at the Paris Salon in October 1951, the 300S was built in two-seater coupe, cabriolet and roadster forms on a shortened 300 saloon chassis, the cabriolet being the more luxurious of the two soft-tops. Indeed, with its lined hood erected, the cabriolet was judged every bit as quiet and as comfortable as the fixed-head coupe.

Not only was the two-seater 300S considerably lighter than the big saloon, it was also more powerful, the same three-litre, straight-six engine equipped with triple (as opposed to twin) Solex carburettors and using a raised compression ratio. Maximum power output was increased to 148bhp and top speed to 109mph. Unlike some of its sparsely furnished contemporaries, the 300S boasted a lavishly equipped interior featuring supple leather upholstery, beautiful burr walnut trim, chromium-plated dashboard instrumentation and precision-made switchgear.

Elegantly styled in the pre-war

Year	1954
Engine/power	M188 2,996cc/148bhp
Chassis no	188-010-4500019
Engine no	188.920-3500380
Auction	The Mercedes-Benz Sale, Bonhams
When	March 28, 2015
Pre-sale estimate	€450,000-€550,000 (£330,000- £410,000)
Price achieved	€465,750 (£341,301)



Period stop watch useful for vintage rallies car did.


manner yet technologically bang up to date, the 300S was built to the Stuttgart firm's uncompromising quality standards. Inevitably, production was limited, only 760 examples of the 300S/Sc (560/200) leaving the factory between 1951 and 1958, of which only 203/49 were 300S/Sc cabriolets. Ownership of such an exclusive automobile was necessarily restricted to a wealthy few, among them film stars Cary Grant and Gary Cooper, and the Aga Khan.

Chassis number '4500019' was delivered new in 1954 to a German industrialist, the owner of a rubber factory near Frankfurt, complete with a full set of pigskin luggage, including the rare round suitcase. He kept the car until 1973, when it was purchased by another German entrepreneur for his extensive private collection, where it remained for nearly 30 years.

The original invoice when the car changed hands from the first to the second owner is in the file. The 300S was one of the latter's favourite cars and was used for touring and classic rallies after he moved to Switzerland. In 1989 he commissioned Garage P de Siebenthal, based in Lausanne, Switzerland, to undertake the car's restoration. In the course of these works the car received a new interior, a brake overhaul, a general major service and new carpets.

At the same time, the interior

woodwork was restored and re-lacquered (10 coats), new shock absorbers fitted, the steering wheel restored and a new hood lining installed. The invoice amounts for these works were CHF32,080.50 and CHF16,190. Also on file is a quantity of old invoices dating back to the 1950s, a copy of the original German registration, the aforementioned sales invoice to the second owner, the cancelled Swiss *Carte Grise*, and proof that EU taxes have been paid.

In 2002, the car was purchased at auction by the immediately preceding (third) owner, a Swiss-based private collector, and treated to a thorough service by Markus Scharhorst in Toffen (Berne) immediately after acquisition. The Mercedes was used for some memorable Alpine tours, coping admirably with high-altitude passes such as the Simplon, Saint Gotthard and Nufenen, the second highest pass in Switzerland. While in the preceding owner's care the car was driven to Germany and serviced there by his mechanic, a member of the Mercedes-Benz *Veteranen* Club, receiving a full service, carburettor set up, new voltage regulator and battery, new steering damper and a full set of new whitewall tyres. Purchased by the vendor in 2006, the Mercedes has resided since in his impressive private collection and has seen very limited use. It was presented in remarkably original condition, featuring the nicely patinated interior and good hood. 



LEFT
You can tell by the dash that the 300S was craftsman built.

RIGHT
Engine electrics an awful lot simpler back in the 1950s.



"CHASSIS 4500019 WAS DELIVERED NEW IN 1954 TO A GERMAN INDUSTRIALIST, COMPLETE WITH A FULL SET OF PIGSKIN LUGGAGE"

RIGHT
Gorgeous leather makes the rear cabin so inviting.

FAR RIGHT
Fitted luggage was offered for Mercedes of this era.

BELOW
Top speed was 175km/h, or 109mph, fast back then.

BOTTOM
Triple carburetors gave the straight-six 148bhp.

BOTTOM RIGHT
300S sensational in black and with whitewall tyres.



**"IN 1968 THE ODOMETER
READING WAS BACK TO ZERO,
INDICATING THAT THE CAR HAD
COVERED ITS FIRST 100,000KM"**



Life story

Most top classics come with a history, but few will have such a detailed record of servicing and repairs as this late model 300SL

Lot 127 Mercedes-Benz 300SL Roadster

A 1962 model fitted with the desirable disc brakes, this 300SL Roadster was delivered new in Germany, and enjoys an outstandingly comprehensive service history that reflects fastidious care throughout its life so far. Chassis number '002973' was delivered on December 11, 1961 to Mr Josef Binder of Scheidegg, Germany, and registered in his name with the numberplate 'Li-KN-24'. Mr Binder must have been very conscientious, having the car serviced every 3,000 kilometres (about 1,900 miles, and sometimes earlier) as recommended by Mercedes-Benz. The service book was stamped by Autohaus Scheider, Lindau.

He kept the 300SL until March 1965, a little over four years, by which time it had already been serviced over 20 times, as recorded in the service book. In March 1965 it was sold via racing driver Reinhardt Stensel to its second owner, architect Horst Sautter of Stuttgart, for DM18,000, who

Year	1961
Engine/power	M198 2,996cc/212bhp
Chassis no	198.042-10-002973
Engine no	198.980-10-003034
Auction	The Mercedes-Benz Sale, Bonhams
When	March 28, 2015
Pre-sale estimate	€1m-€1.4m (£740,000-£1m)
Price achieved	€1,092,500 (£800,584)

registered it in Stuttgart on the numberplate 'S-VC 819'. The original bill of sale on file records the following: that the car is accident free, that the odometer reading of 61,000km (38,125 miles) is genuine, and the results of a compression test.

By scrutinising the contents of the amazing history file of service/maintenance invoices and correspondence with Daimler-Benz AG, Mr Sautter's name can be traced up to 1994. Starting around the year 2000, the invoices are addressed to another family member, Mr W Sautter. In 2012, this 300SL was registered by Mr Horst Sautter's daughter, Diana, who kept the car for only one year before selling it in 2013.

The maintenance history consists of the aforementioned service book, stamped during the first ownership up to 1965. It then continues in the form of more stamps in the service book (until 1969 at over 110,000km, 68,750 miles) followed by all invoices.

In July 1966, with approximately 80,000km (50,000 miles) recorded on the odometer, the car's left side was

damaged in a minor accident. On that occasion the left door and left front wing needed to be repaired. From another document it can be deduced that the accident was not Sautter's fault because he was able to claim back the total cost of the repairs in August 1966.

In September 1966 a major service was undertaken by Daimler Benz AG at a cost of DM7,600. In 1968 the odometer reading was back to zero, indicating that the car had covered its first 100,000km (62,500 miles). Over time, certain services have been carried out several times: engine, gearbox, clutch, brakes etc. Even the 1975 request for a new key set is on file, while in 1977 there was an exchange of correspondence with the factory concerning the choice of tyres. There is also correspondence with Daimler-Benz dating from 1980 regarding seat re-trimming. The original trim needed to be changed because of its age, and the owner asked Daimler's advice regarding a suitable material. Originally red, the interior was changed at that time to a dark brown.



ABOVE
Wheels replaced in the early 1980s, record shows.

LEFT
When it left the factory in 1962 the interior was red.

RIGHT
Plate makes it a late car, with discs and alloy block.



THIS PICTURE
Two minor body repairs recorded in car's history.

LEFT
Once round the clock, so a certified 157,840km.



In 1982 at approximately 132,000km (82,500 miles) the car had another slight accident and was again immediately repaired. It becomes clear from the 1980s documentation that Mr Sautter had difficulty finding correct new wheels to replace the tired originals, resulting in further correspondence with Daimler-Benz AG to find the correct wheels and tyres. At some time the car must have ceased to be registered to Mr Sautter's architectural practice, because the 300SL received a new numberplate: 'S-CC 7668'.

An engine overhaul was carried out by Hoeckle in Stuttgart in 1988 (the correspondence is on file) while in 1989, at approximately 140,000km (82,500 miles), the car is believed to have been completely repainted at a cost of DM20,000, including other works. A short while later other engine problems were noted, and the engine was completely rebuilt by marque specialists Kienle in 1992, for DM36,000. The slight bubbling on



ABOVE
A sole, streamlined mirror graces the SL's bodywork.

ABOVE LEFT
A clock is incorporated in the centre of the fascia.

the right rear wing support is believed to be that referred to on invoices from Kienle in 1993. It was resprayed again in October 1993 but is still slightly visible. The wheels have been repainted, too. It is believed that only some 16,000km (10,000 miles) have been covered since the complete engine overhaul by Kienle in 1992.

The extensive service history continues until 1994 when, it is believed, the car was no longer used frequently by Mr Sautter. It was still in his ownership but apparently he drove it only occasionally, judging by what can be deduced from the invoices on file.

There are also a few invoices for the period 2001-2007 addressed to Mr W Sautter. The continuous service history supports the conclusion that the current odometer reading of 57,000km (35,600 miles) represents a genuine total of 157,000km (98,125 miles) from new.

Serviced earlier this year, this 300SL comes complete with owner's manual, original *Datenkarte*, compression test (1987), parts list, summary of major services, Kienle Automobiltechnik price list (1987), German *Fahrzeugbrief* and the aforementioned service history of invoices, correspondence and other documentation. A hardtop (not original to this car) was included. CM

RIGHT
It doesn't look like the boot has done any hard work.

FAR RIGHT
Engine has been serviced on the button all its life.



Royal run

This extremely tidy SWB 600 was owned by the King of Senegal for almost two decades

Lot 125 Mercedes-Benz 600 Pullman

By the beginning of the 1960s, Mercedes-Benz's ever-expanding model range was lacking in only one department – a super prestige saloon to rival the Grosser Mercedes of the past. This gap was filled in September 1963 with the appearance at the Frankfurt International Motor Show of the all new 600. Representing state-of-the-art automotive engineering in just about every department, the supremely well equipped newcomer featured an overhead camshaft, fuel injected, 6.3-litre V8 engine – Mercedes' first – air suspension with variable ride control, four-speed automatic transmission, all round disc brakes, power-assisted steering, central locking and separate air conditioning systems for front and rear compartments. Its cosseted occupants enjoyed the advantages conferred by multi-way adjustable seating powered by a sophisticated system of aircraft type hydraulics that also operated the windows and assisted in opening and closing the doors and boot lid.

The most popular version was the 3,200mm wheelbase saloon that could seat up to six passengers, while the long-wheelbase Pullman

Year 1973
Engine/power M100
6,332cc /247bhp
Chassis no
100.012-12-002236
Auction
The Mercedes-Benz
Sale, Bonhams
When
March 28, 2015
Pre-sale estimate
€125,000-€150,000
(£92,000-£110,000)
Price achieved
€133,400 (£97,755)

ABOVE
Front and rear, the 600's interior is in fine condition.

BELOW
V8 and hydraulics have been lovingly maintained.

BOTTOM
Flag mounts on front wings a sign of royal ownership.

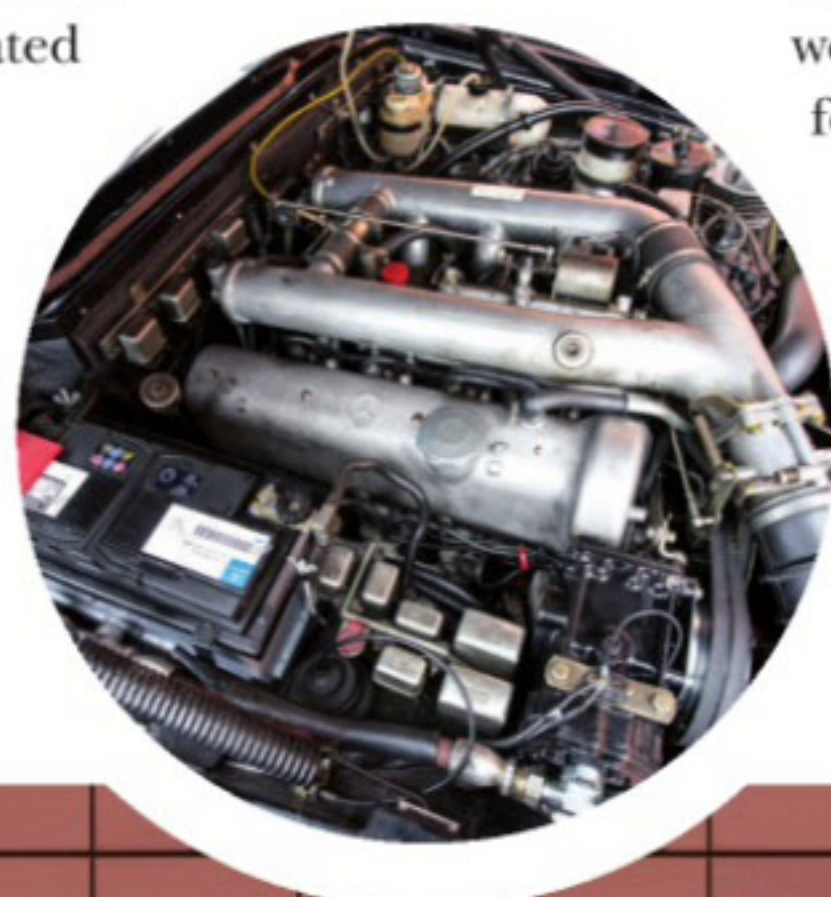


limousine – a veritable leviathan exceeding 5.5 metres in length and beloved of heads of state, not to mention a succession of Popes – could accommodate up to eight. Despite its not inconsiderable weight, the 600 was endowed with highly respectable performance, reaching 62mph in a little under 10 seconds and exceeding 125mph flat out. Only 2,677 examples were made, of which 2,190 were four-door saloons, 428 were Pullman limousines and 59 were Landaulets.

This particular 600 was ordered new by the King of Senegal and is one of the later in the series, incorporating updates. Delivered with the optional sunroof installed, the car was kept by the King of Senegal until 1992, when it

passed to Peter Werger in Germany. He kept the Mercedes until 1995 before selling it to Martin Voit in Germany, its owner until 2014.

There are various service invoices on file from Mercedes-Benz St Ingbert, Germany, relating to Mr Voit's ownership. The latest vendor had spent €22,000 (about £16,000) on the car for various works, including an overhaul of the hydraulics. Mechanically in generally very good condition, having covered only 68,000km (42,500 miles) from new, this magnificent 42-year-old 600 Pullman was accompanied with its original instruction book, German registration papers and the aforementioned invoices.



Young at heart

This near 'time capsule', sub-10,000-mile R107 sailed past its top pre-sale price estimate

Lot 103 Mercedes-Benz 380SL Roadster

Launched in 1980, the 380SL Roadster and 380SLC coupe retained the 107-series body and platform, first introduced in 1971, in virtually unchanged form apart from the addition of a front spoiler. It was thought there was no need to change a winning formula, apart from updating the engines. These luxuriously equipped newcomers supplanted the outgoing 350SL/SLC models and were produced alongside the outwardly similar 280 and 500 SL/SLCs. Their power unit was an enlarged (to 3,818cc) an improved version of the existing 3.5-litre overhead cam V8, featuring a light alloy rather than the previous iron block.

The running gear followed Mercedes-Benz's established pattern, comprising all-independent suspension and four wheel disc brakes,

Year 1983
Engine/power M116 3,839cc/201bhp
Chassis no WDBBA 45A3DB025093
Engine no 11696212015696
Auction The Mercedes-Benz Sale, Bonhams
When March 28, 2015
Pre-sale estimate €30,000-€45,000 (£22,000-£33,000)
Price achieved €51,750 (£37,922)

while a four-speed automatic transmission replaced the previous three-speed unit. Top speed was in excess of 130mph. After little more than a year the 380SL was re-engined with a longer-stroke, 3,839cc V8 in the interests of better fuel economy and reduced emissions. Production of the model in this improved form continued until 1985, when the 420SL replaced it.

Finished in silver with blue leather upholstery, this quite exceptional



An average of just over 300 miles per year since new.

380SL was delivered new in the USA. With only 9,787 miles recorded, the car is in effectively 'as new' condition, and comes complete with its original owner's pack and service booklet. Currently registered in the UK, it is offered with a

V5C document, current MOT certificate and Mercedes-Benz letter confirming manufacturing details. While many pristine later R107s survive, it is less common to see an earlier, pre-1985 facelift car this good.

BELOW
R107 cabin little changed in 18 years of production.



It is unusual to see an R107 SL from the early 1980s in top condition.

Shining star

Its bright silver paintwork may be a change over the original grey, but it's a stunning looker

Lot 117 Mercedes-Benz 300SL Coupe

This 'matching numbers' 300SL Gullwing was completed on January 27, 1955 and shipped immediately to Mercedes-Benz Distributors Inc in San Francisco, California. It had several owners in California, but in 2003 was exported to Europe, where it formed part of the collection belonging to the well known collector Pierre Mellinger. According to Anthony Pritchard's definitive work on the model, *Gullwing, The Mercedes-Benz 300 SL Coupe*, this car formed part of a Swedish collection at some time. More recently, it was owned by a collector from Monaco. The current owner bought the car in 2012.

The accompanying copy build sheet states that this Gullwing was originally finished in white/grey with blue

Year 1955
Engine/power M198 2,996cc/212bhp
Chassis no 198.040-55-00049
Engine no 198.980.4500209
Auction The Mercedes-Benz Sale, Bonhams
When March 28, 2015
Pre-sale estimate €950,000- €1,250,000 (£700,000- £920,000)
Price achieved €1,046,500 (£766,875)

cloth/vinyl interior, and was delivered equipped with the optional Becker Mexico radio and single external mirror. Extensively restored, it has been fully repainted in silver metallic, while the interior has been completely re-trimmed in blue leather with matching carpets and beige muslin roof lining. Other noteworthy features include overhauled electrics, original white steering wheel (mildly patinated), four new Dunlop tyres and an unused spare wheel in the boot.

Currently displaying a total of



The original blue cloth and vinyl interior trim was replaced with this blue leather.

81,700 miles on the odometer, the car shows no signs of corrosion or accidents, and is in good condition with excellent interior and very good chrome. It had been driven only occasionally by the seller.



RIGHT
Engine is the original unit fitted at the factory in '55.



A subtle colour change on the outside, the Gullwing having been resprayed in silver.

Public image

Daimler has by far the biggest and best photographic archive of any car manufacturer, and now anyone can enjoy these fascinating historic pictures free of charge, reports **Tim French**

IMAGES Daimler

You will notice that every issue of *Classic Mercedes* contains a selection of delightful period photographs of Mercedes-Benz cars. These mostly come from the archive in Stuttgart tended by Mercedes-Benz Classic, an extraordinary collection of nearly four million photographs and films dating back to the dawn of motoring in the 1880s.

The abbreviation 'M@RS' stands for Multimedia Archive and Research System. This is the name under which, in 2000, Mercedes-Benz Classic developed an internet portal with information from the archives where, for example, registered journalists and researchers are able to explore the diverse history of Daimler. This database, which is used intensively by outside specialists, was also the starting point for development of the new Public M@RS, now online and freely available – without login – to anyone who is interested.

For the last 15 years the images and information have been available only to journalists, book authors and researchers who, once registered and vetted, could download. Some 13,000 of them were doing so, but Daimler has now opened up what is by far the world's largest motoring archive to the public.

The enormous collection was initiated in 1936 when engineer Max Rauck, employed by the then Daimler-Benz *Aktiengesellschaft* (joint stock company), was instructed to "collect and examine our historical literature and photographic material for the purpose of establishing and managing an historical archive." Nearly 80 years on, what has prompted the car maker to open it to the public?

Possibly the decision was rooted in the 1997 initiative to begin digitising the material, most of which had survived World War Two despite Mercedes' manufacturing capability having been all but wiped out. That process is largely completed, transforming the potential use of the archive.

"Fascinating history consists of exciting stories," says Michael Bock, head of Mercedes-Benz Classic and Customer



ABOVE Considering how much material it contains, the site is easy to navigate.

Center. "This is especially true of the history of Daimler AG, which dates back to the invention of the automobile by Carl Benz and Gottlieb Daimler in 1886. Our aim is to bring this resource even closer to the general public."

For the time being, what the public can access is a 'lite' version of the full archive that registered users enjoy, with photos of a lower resolution downloadable and the material limited to passenger cars. But in due course images and data on, for example racing cars and commercial vehicles are likely to be added. Other than sensitive company management information, Daimler sees no problem in making everything accessible, the only limitation being the sheer volume of material, much of which is not even on the registered users' site.

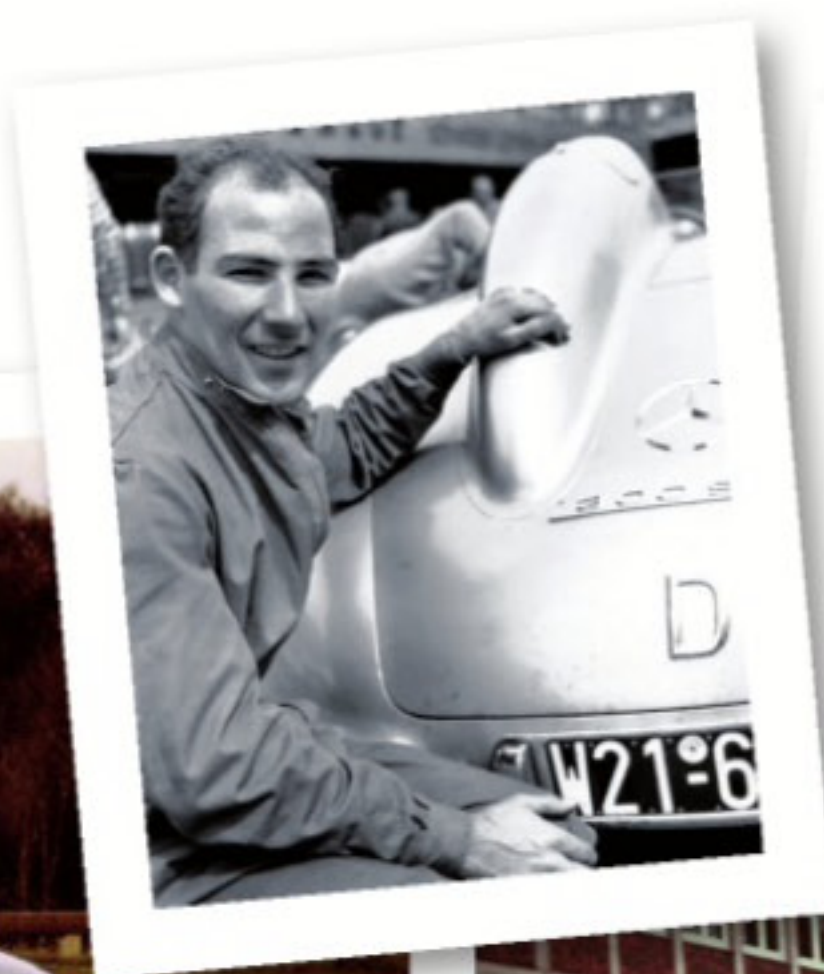


ABOVE Images and documents dating back to the dawn of motoring can be accessed.

The original site is praised for its easy navigability, and Public M@RS is

based on the same template. The vehicle images, technical data and illustrations are structured in five historical chapters: Benz prior to 1926; Daimler and Mercedes until 1926; Mercedes-Benz from 1926 to 1945; Mercedes-Benz from 1946; and Maybach from 2002.

Unsurprisingly all of the early images are black and white, but even in a far less publicity-conscious era the company took



LEFT Great photos of works drivers, road cars and experimental vehicles are free to download.





comprehensive sets of photos of many models. For example, the M@RS registered users' site has 27 photos (including some taken more recently) of the world's first diesel passenger car, the 1936 260D, 17 of them having found their way on to the public site.

There are close to 200 pictures and advertising posters of 1950s Pontons (90 on the public site), and over 450 of 1975-1985 123-series saloons, estates and coupes (167), by which time most of the photos are in colour. Many of the images, such as those of 300SL Gullwings being assembled in the Sindelfingen factory, and of the 1957 300SLS racer – the two built now long

"THE PUBLIC CAN ACCESS A 'LITE' VERSION OF THE FULL ARCHIVE THAT REGISTERED USERS ENJOY, WITH PHOTOS OF A LOWER RESOLUTION DOWNLOADABLE"

disappeared – really bring history alive. The sheer scope of the archive contrasts starkly with those of some other long established car makers, whose history files are slim or even non-existent.

While almost unimaginably vast even now, the site's content will continue to increase during the coming years, as current vehicles become 'historic'. When M@RS was launched, the then current Mercedes range comprised nine models, but this has now more than doubled, and every

last mechanical variant is added to the archive once the model series is discontinued. Staff at the archive also work continuously to unearth fresh historical material, for example recently acquiring the original birth certificate from 1889 of Mercedes Jellinek, the daughter of the automotive entrepreneur Emil Jellinek, and after whom the Mercedes range of cars was named.

Since its revival in the late 1940s, Mercedes-Benz has been one of the most media-savvy car manufactures, always striving to promote its engineering prowess and image, and granting free access to the photo archive is the latest step. Visit mercedes-benz-publicarchive.com.

Just remember not to over-indulge in Mercedes' generosity. All the material is strictly copyright, so while you can spend as much time as you want looking at the photos, and you can download as many as you want for personal use, do anything more than that with them – using them in a promotion or advertisement, for example – risks seeing the less friendly side of the company.



ABOVE Some photographs capture lifestyles of the time as well as the actual cars.

Scan plan



The Mercedes-Benz Club is digitising two roomfuls of classic images

In the UK, the Mercedes-Benz Club is undertaking the not inconsiderable task of digitising its archive of photos, brochures and other material, currently stored in offices in the old Control Tower at Brooklands. The many thousands of photos include the fascinating collection of images amassed by the club's 'founding patron', Edward Mayer, of the more than 100 Mercedes cars he owned between 1904 and his death in 1962.

Presently about 20 to 25 per cent of the collection has been digitised, and once it is completed, club members will be able to access images online for personal use, subject to the usual copyright restrictions. But as a valuable asset – and costing a substantial amount to digitise – the club hopes to exploit it commercially, for example supplying historical images to classic car auction houses.



RIGHT Besides publicity pictures, a large numbers of brochures have been scanned in.

Old guard

They are few and far between, and most are pretty dilapidated, but find a well preserved W114 or W115 and you will enjoy a traditional, understated Mercedes saloon. We reveal the vital pre-purchase facts

IMAGES ERIC RICHARDSON

We call these features 'Buyer's Guides', but in this instance perhaps the term 'Buyer's Search' is more appropriate. That's because anyone looking for one of these stately and graceful Mercedes W114/W115 saloons, built for eight years until 1976, should be prepared for considerable legwork. Not just finding one for sale, but one that is actually worth buying and spending money on.

Nearly four decades having passed since the last were made, the survival rate is low, and most will be so rusty and worn out that they will be a colossal headache. They have never been worth anywhere near enough to justify major restoration, and so sadly were usually left to deteriorate. But a lucky few have escaped the ravages of time, either by leading a very cosseted life or as a result of very committed owners ignoring the economics of restoration and lavishing money on them.

W114/W115s are generally not cars bought on a whim or as a cheap runabout, but because a buyer finds a fascination with that particular era of Mercedes-Benz. The charm is in the simple styling and the good, old fashioned engineering.

Engineering, evolution

The cars were introduced in 1968 to replace the Fintail range and were commonly referred to as the 'New Generation' models. They also became known as the 'Stroke 8' or '/8', referring to their 1968 launch date, to allow parts departments to distinguish them from Fintails, which used the same badging. Another point of confusion is the factory codes, W115 denoting the four-cylinder cars, and W114 the six-cylinder models.

The styling was more conservative than the Fintail's, although the angular lines set the template for the



ABOVE
Launched in April 1972, the 280E was the flagship model in the later years.

RIGHT
The 114/115 introduced a more conservative style of interior design for Mercs.

FAR RIGHT
Not only did the 'Stroke 8' have a prominent star, but a fake radiator cap too.

“A FEW HAVE ESCAPED THE RAVAGES OF TIME, BY LEADING A COSSETED LIFE OR AS A RESULT OF OWNERS IGNORING THE ECONOMICS OF RESTORATION”



LEFT
Six-pot 114s tended to be four-speed auto, the 115 fours were often manual.

RIGHT
M110 twin-cam six did service in most Mercedes models during the 1970s.



! What goes wrong

Bodywork

The main check you need to make on a W114/115 is for corrosion. "As far as rust is concerned, these cars were real horrors," says Richard Miles, retired after over 40 years working on older Mercedes-Benzes. "They were no better than Morris 1100s, but they should have been."

The basic problem, according to Miles, was that due to the numerous spot welds in the construction of the platform's box sections, and also insufficient sealing, moisture and water quickly found and attacked the welds. "It was the first Mercedes-Benz that started to rust from the inside," he says.

The problem was aggravated, he adds, by the well meaning application of thick underseal, which simply trapped the water inside. The bulkhead between the engine bay and cabin was a particular victim; water would run in through the large intake ahead of the front windscreen, to be trapped by the considerable sound deadening material on the bulkhead. "It acted like a giant sponge, holding in the water and making the cars rust even more quickly," Miles recalls. Rust also takes hold in all the obvious places, such as on the wings and sills.



Parts

If you are brave enough to take on a W114/115 that needs work, you will need to know who the specialist Mercedes breakers are, because they will be the prime sources of parts. The one that always springs to mind is Mercman in Hayle, Cornwall (01736 757 777, www.mercman.net), with its vast inventory of reasonably priced parts for old Mercedes, while The Mercedes Parts Centre in Chingford, Essex (020 8524 9922, www.mercedes-parts-centre.co.uk), is also worth contacting. The official Mercedes dealer best known for the supply of new classic parts is Mercedes-Benz of Poole (01202 501922).

Renovation

It may sound heartless given how we love old Benzes, but we cannot recommend starting a rebuild on a W114/W115. You might not pay much for the car to start with, but restoration costs have certainly kept pace with inflation, and you are unlikely to recoup the money spent when reselling. It would also be vital to know a specialist who knows the W114/115 inside out – and they are few and far between.

⇒ Mercedes look for years to come. Inside, too, a much plainer approach was adopted, with simple looking instruments and trim; the image of a Mercedes as an austere furnished car probably started here, particularly as many came trimmed in MB-Tex, a vinyl that was as tough as it looked.

Measurable advances over the Fintail included new independent, trailing arm rear suspension on coil springs to replace the old swing-axle set up. This had the advantage of decreasing the amount of unsettling camber change on the rear wheels as the suspension moved up and down, but also retaining the same generous amount of bump absorbing spring travel. Another key improvement was



ABOVE
Mercedes' vertical stacked front lights had their last outing on the 114/115s.

the extended service interval (to 5,000 miles between services, 10,000 the major service) and the elimination of that joyless DIY task, greasing steering and suspension joints.

The W115 engine line-up comprised 2.0- and 2.2-litre units in petrol and diesel form, though only the 220 and 220D came to the UK, while just one

2.5-litre car, and torque of 159lb ft a 12lb ft increase. Two years later, the M110 2.8-litre twin-cam unit was introduced, in carburettor form (the 280, not sold in the UK) and with Bosch D-Jetronic fuel injection and 182bhp for the 280E. Besides the 250's larger front bumper, these top line models had a wraparound rear

"THE SIXES ARE MORE LIVELY AND MANY HAVE THE FOUR-SPEED AUTO FOR A SMOOTHER, MORE FLUID DRIVE THAN THE RATHER SLOW, LUMPY FOUR-SPEED MANUAL"

W114 was imported initially, the 2.5-litre six-cylinder 250 (one distinguishing feature being the double deck front bumper). All petrol engines were fuelled by carburettors, the fours having a single carb and the sixes a twin set up with an automatic choke system.

The W114 and W115 underwent a facelift in autumn 1973, but prior to that a five-speed manual gearbox was offered, and two new engines appeared. In 1970, a 2.8-litre, single overhead camshaft engine was offered for the 250 (alongside the original model), its 128bhp matching the

bumper and twin exhaust pipes.

The facelift, coming three years before the end of production, saw subtle visual changes, the main one being a slightly lower bonnet line and grille to soften the car's upright stance (the car pictured here is pre-facelift). The front windows lost their quarterlights, while a new type of decorative trim on the A-pillar was designed to direct dirt away from the side windows. Internally adjustable door mirrors were fitted, the rear light clusters were of a new ribbed design to repel dirt, and the double front bumper was replaced by a slimmer



ABOVE
At the September 1973 facelift these quarterlights disappeared from the cars.

i Specifications/ years sold in the UK i

- 220 (2.2-litre, 4-cyl, 104bhp) 1968-1973
- 230.4 (2.3-litre, 4-cyl, 108bhp) 1973-1976
- 220D (2.2-litre, 4-cyl diesel, 59bhp) 1968-1976
- 240D (2.4-litre, 4-cyl diesel, 64bhp) 1973-1976
- 250 (2.5-litre, 6-cyl, 128bhp) 1968-1972
- 250 (2.8-litre, 6-cyl, 128bhp) 1970-1976
- 280E (2.8-litre, 6-cyl, 182bhp) 1972-1976
- 240D 3.0 (3.0-litre diesel, 79bhp) 1974-1976



Engines

Powertrain wise, if the car starts and runs as it should, you probably don't have much to worry about. Those used to today's super-smooth turbodiesels might be horrified at how smokey and rattley a W115 diesel is, but don't worry about it, because that's how diesels were in those days.

Unlike modern engines, these do not have an electronic brain (ECU), ruling out a multitude of possible running problems. But if you are looking at any of the six-cylinder models prior to the 280E, bear in mind that these engines had twin carburettors, and can be tricky to tune. Then, and for years before and after, Mercedes did fuel-injection much better than carburettors. "They were very troublesome," says Miles. "Very few people understood them." Hence the fuel-injected 280E is easily the preferred model if you don't want a four.

Miles has some additional basic, but often overlooked advice on maintenance: change the engine oil and filter regularly. "They're good, tough engines, but a lot of people think that because it's an old car they don't need to bother. A lot of perfectly good engines have been destroyed because of that neglect." Their long term reliability, if regularly serviced, is surely borne out by the Greek cab driver who a few years ago eventually retired his 1976 240D after an amazing 4.6 million kilometres.



LEFT

From the inside, facelift cars are marked out by the padded steering wheel.

BELOW

Some prefer the more classic looking wheel, and quarterlights, of early cars.



single panel item. Little details, such as mounting the front number plate on rather than under the front bumper, and a redesigned bootlid handle, smartened the car's exterior lines.

Interior revisions were in place six months before the facelift, and were mainly safety related. A four-spoke padded safety wheel of the type seen in the then recently launched R107 SL and W116 S-Class replaced the original, rather delightful item with the chrome ring horn push, while headrests and automatic seat belts were fitted as standard.

Mechanical updates included the introduction of a new four-cylinder 2.3-litre petrol engine. This model replaced the 220 and was badged the 230.4 to distinguish it from the

six-cylinder 230 model. The 240D joined the 220D, and the following year the 240D 3.0 was launched, the world's first five-cylinder diesel, giving a then unprecedented 79bhp.

How they drive

These cars do not offer a monumental driving experience. The 220's engine was not particularly revvy, and its 104bhp didn't go a long way, 62mph coming up in 13.7 seconds (with the manual gearbox) and a top speed barely into three figures.

The 220D's performance would scarcely be believed today. It boasted 59bhp, a 28.1 second 0-62mph time, and a 84mph top speed (with a manual gearbox). Likewise, fuel economy of around 33mpg would hardly

BELOW LEFT
Heating and ventilation was effective enough but not that precise to control.

BELOW
The 280E was available in manual or auto form, but all UK cars were the latter.



Milestones

January 1968

W114 and W115 saloons launched

August 1970

2.8-litre single-cam engine introduced for 250 2.8 model

April 1972

2.8-litre fuel injected twin-cam engine introduced for 280E

March 1973

Safety update includes padded steering wheel, headrests and automatic seat belts

September 1973

Facelift – new bonnet and grille, also revised interior trim

December 1976

W114 and W115 range replaced by W123 models

Telltale signs of trouble

- Serious rust attacks engine/cabin bulkhead
- Rust likely on wings, sills and in boot
- Twin carbs on six-cylinder engines can be tricky to set up
- Interior trim parts can be very hard to find
- Good cars are extremely scarce – buy on condition, not model
- Is it Vehicle Excise Duty exempt? It needs to be a pre-1975 car



“THOSE WHO LOVE THE BIG GRILLE, STACKED HEADLAMPS AND SIMPLE INTERIOR WILL FEEL IT WORTH THE EFFORT TO FIND ONE OF THE FEW REMAINING TIDY EXAMPLES”

£ What a W114/115 will cost you £

In all, 1.9 million W114s and W115s were built – but very few survive. “They went through the zero value stage in about the early 1980s,” observed one long time Mercedes specialist, “and then they fell into the wrong hands. They were never as well regarded as the W116 S-Classes.” It’s the sort of vehicle that classic car dealers have from time to time, usually taken in part exchange. “I can’t remember when I last saw a W114 or W115,” is a typical response.

A ‘spares or repair’ project will cost around £500. But when one of the few examples in good condition does come up for sale, it is sometimes advertised at bullish prices. Indeed, while preparing this article we spotted a 1974 250 auto offered at £13,995, a price that not so long ago would have applied only to the pillarless coupe version of the W114. A left-hand drive 220D was also advertised at £1,900, so we can only state the obvious, and say that prices vary wildly according to what is for sale at any one time. Prices will eventually rise – but don’t hold your breath.

Price range

- Up to £500** Rusty runner, short MOT, possibly in a terminal state
- £500-£1,500** Rusty but with some potential
- £1,500-£3,000** Sound cars with some kind of history
- £3,000-£5,000** A well preserved car, not too much rust and a fully intact interior
- £5,000-£10,000** That extremely rare, concours 280E model
- £10,000-£15,000** The very best example, a ‘time capsule’ car

Typical servicing/maintenance costs (including labour, VAT)

- Lubrication service (5,000 miles), 4/6-cylinder cars **£185**
- Major service (10,000 miles), 4/6-cylinder cars **£471/£479**
- Renew water pump and belts (all models) **£472**
- Replace engine mountings (all models) **£380**
- Front brakes discs and pads (all models) **£693**

Prices from Klasse of Fulham (020 7385 4156, www.klasse-of-fulham.co.uk)

⇒ impress nowadays. The manual 240D is almost as snail like, taking nearly 25 seconds to reach 62mph.

The sixes are more lively, and many have the four-speed auto for a smoother, more fluid drive than the rather slow, lumpy four-speed manual. Power steering is also desirable, because without it the recirculating ball system is heavy and low geared (4.6 turns lock to lock as opposed to three with power assistance).

Handling is probably best described as ‘contemporary’. It’s ponderous but, with secure and predictable manners, W114/W115s were notably better poised than some of the nose heavy rival cars of the late 1960s.

Verdict

Setting out to buy a W114 or W115 is something of a mission. Some might question why anyone would want one in the first place, given that its W123 successor looks quite similar but does everything better and is more plentiful. But those who love the big

grille, the stacked headlamps and the simple but typically Benz interior will feel it worth the effort to find one of the few remaining tidy examples.

BELOW
Alloys not optional, so all cars wore painted hub caps.

BOTTOM
An oil pressure gauge is present, but no rev counter.

The W114 six-cylinder models are clearly the preferred option (although we can understand a desire to take on the unrefined but characterful diesels), but the golden rule of old cars applies: buy on condition, not on model.

Buying the best one you can is crucial, because there is no financial sense in attempting restoration. Thinking of it as an affordable classic, not an investment, is surely the most realistic approach, at least for the time being.



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CLUB NEWS

REPORTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD ON CLUB MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES



Garry Boyce's newly rebuilt Gullwing took the top classic award.



Kiwi gold

A beautifully restored 1956 Gullwing is New Zealand's top classic

On Saturday, February 7, vehicles mustered at 10.00am at six locations spread around Auckland, for the annual Tour d'Elegance, phase one of 2015 Classic Car Show, writes David Winn. The six groups took different routes, heading towards Vellenoweth Green at St Heliers on New Zealand's North Island, aiming to arrive at

lunchtime. Club vice-president and 'concours supremo' Garry Boyce was on hand to meet members of Mercedes-Benz Club Auckland.

The next day, Sunday, saw members setting up the club display at the show's venue, Ellerslie Racecourse. The theme this year was 'The Big Screen', linking cars to famous films. Members provided a 1957 300SL Roadster, a

1928 (replica) SSK, a 1976 450SEL 6.9, a 1978 350SL, a 1969 280SL, a 1960 180 and a 1966 250SE cabriolet. Each car was linked to a film, and visitors to the stand were asked to match the car to the movie.

In the main arena the Master Class was being judged, entries comprising Boyce's just completed 1956 300SL Gullwing, and four other contestants, the winner taking the accolade of number one classic car in New Zealand for 2015. After swarming around the car with hands enclosed in white gloves, and clipboards at the ready, the judges declared the Gullwing (which took maximum number of points for its paintwork) the clear winner, Boyce receiving two trophies and a certificate.

Show stopper

One of southern California's favourite, and regular car events, at which Mercedes club members and their cars featured prominently, has been brought to an end, a victim of its own success, writes Marcus B Fitzhugh. In eight years and 410 meetings, Car and Coffee Irvine, held at Ford Motor Company premises at the crack of dawn on a Saturday, chalked up 450,000 visitors and 185,000 car exhibits.

"Growing attendance has exceeded available space and overtaxed our volunteer staff," the organisers explained, "and we must remain respectful of new

residential development nearby. What began in 2006 has led to a worldwide movement with some 100 similar gatherings globally. The formula obviously works - free, non commercial, enthusiast driven and operated."

This Cars and Coffee will be missed, and the nearest alternative is Malibu, 70 miles north of Irvine. However, should a suitable new venue be found, the event could be resuscitated, the organisers said. Pictured here is the SL Appreciation Day some years ago, coordinated by Nadine Schwartz, when Mercedes was the featured marque.



Cars and Coffee Irvine was a terrific event for those up very early on Saturdays.



But its popularity saw it outgrow the venue, and the organisers had to end it.

Sun kings



Attendees enjoying the sun-bathed 2014 SLK Day.

SLKs return

SLKs will take centre stage at Mercedes-Benz World on Sunday, June 28, when the Mercedes-Benz Club hosts its second SLK day to celebrate the 'junior SL'. All facilities at Mercedes-Benz World, and the brand and heritage centre at the old Brooklands race track will be made available to club members.

The SLK is the generation of smaller sports cars launched in 1996, and now in its third incarnation. Examples of all three generations will be present, and there will be track demonstrations, parade laps, a 'Polish and Show' competition, plus presentations and advice from the Club's Technical Team. Some 120 SLKs attended the first 'Day' in 2014.

All Mercedes-Benz enthusiasts, whichever model they drive, will be welcome, but to take part rather than just watch, owners must be Mercedes-Benz Club members, and have registered in advance.

Australia's independent MB Classic Car Inc held its sixth annual Show and Shine event during the All German Day meeting on Saturday, February 7, at Newcastle Foreshore, north of Sydney.

The event has grown over its half dozen years, with cars attending from Queensland, New South Wales and Canberra, writes MBCCC president Phillip Garside. The variety of Mercedes-Benzes, and also early Benz motorcars, was dazzling. The oldest was a 1912 Benz, believed to be the oldest in Australia, and always a crowd pleaser when it appears. Many 116- and 126-series cars found their way to the event, as did ever popular W108s, and R129 SLs and 124-series models.

With cars displayed from 9.00am in the summer sun, the event concluded at 2.00pm after the awards ceremony, many owners keen to get their cars' delicate interiors and dashboards out of the 33C heat. Besides Mercedes, a variety of other German cars were there, including Volkswagens, Audis, BMWs and even Gogomobiles.



Plenty of Mercedes and compariot cars showed up at the All German Day.

American star treatment

The Mercedes-Benz Club America has announced that for the Legends of the Autobahn in August – the concours event that is attached to the Pebble Beach classic auctions in Monterey in California – it will introduce the MBCA Silver Star Preservation Class. "This is a special Class for members who want to show their well preserved, largely original, and unrestored-since-new Mercedes-Benz on the concours field, but not have it judged," the club says. "It is intended for driver-quality cars that have withstood the ravages of time, climate, and daily driving."

To enter this class, your car must be 25 or more years old, be in good working order, be driven to this event under its own power, and be largely original (including engine and drivetrain). More details from MBCA, at www.mbca.org.

The club will also celebrate 60 years since the launch of the 190SL Roadster at Monterey, with a special judged class for the roadster. In other concours classes, all Mercedes models from 1995 onwards are eligible to enter.



Legends of the Autobahn is a key annual concours event in California.

In brief



Stately does it

The Mercedes-Benz Club has announced a stately home venue for its annual SL Day. It will be at Woburn Park, Bedfordshire, on Sunday, July 12.

Mike Powell 1941-2015

Members of the Mercedes-Benz Club in the UK have paid wide ranging tributes to Mike Powell, who has died aged 73. He joined the club in 1988, and under his chairmanship membership increased significantly.

Sale of the last century

Mercedes-Benz club member Stewart Imber, well known Ponton and Fintail racer, is selling off some of his extensive collection of Mercedes-Benz books and artwork, such as lithographs from Roy Nockolds depicting Mercedes race cars in the 1930s and 1950s. Call 07702 508093 or email stewart.imber@gmail.com

One careful owner required

In the 60th year of the 190SL, The Mercedes-Benz Club is on the lookout for someone who bought one new and still has it. There's a decent free lunch in it, the club promises.



Please send your club news and photos to

info@classicmercedesmagazine.com

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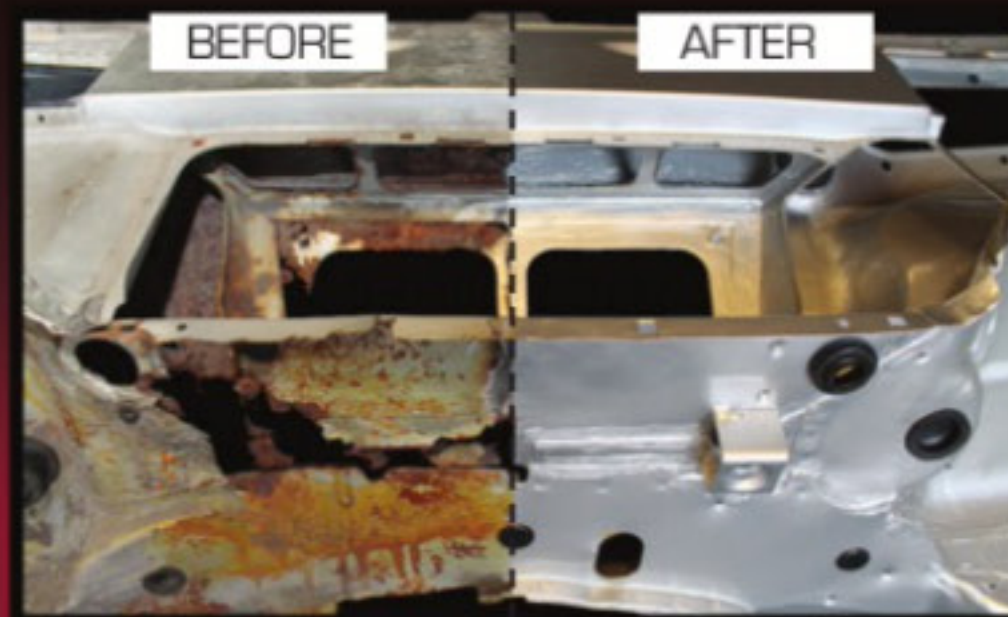
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Red alert

It's so very 80s, but **Dan Trent** took a deep breath and plunged in, finding more to like about this AMG-modified 300SL than he had expected

IMAGES Dan Trent



**"BACK IN THE 1980s
HAVING MORE MONEY
THAN TASTE WAS A BADGE
OF HONOUR, A DEMAND
THAT AMG CATERED
FOR IN FINE STYLE"**

To many, the R107 SL is a piece of motoring perfection, a wonderful balance of style, engineering and that essential Mercedes-ness that enthusiasts admire so much. And if you are of that mindset, then there is probably a good chance that you consider the car before you a truly monstrous carbuncle.

That was certainly the thought expressed by a large number of the people who saw it on its first public outing in years at a classic car show. To the extent that one specialist dealer who owned it at one time – Peter Lewis at Cheshire Classic Benz – even considered converting it back to ‘original’ specification. But thank goodness he didn’t, because while clean, unmolested R107 SLs are highly prized and relatively rare, a genuinely original AMG version like this is even rarer. Unique, perhaps.

A bold claim? Probably not, considering that back in the 1980s an AMG like this was likely a bespoke creation (expensively) crafted to the owner’s whims. Whims that, almost 30 years ago, were somewhat different from what they might be now. Whims that ran to potentially doubling the already ambitious £30,000-plus asking price for a standard 300SL for an effect that many would now consider barely appropriate for a chavved-up hot hatch.

Today, roughly tacked on, tarmac skimming GRP bodykits are the preserve of the DIY enthusiast, the results usually doing nothing for the poor, unfortunate recipient of the imagined upgrades. But back in the 1980s having more money than taste was a badge of honour, a demand that AMG catered for in fine style.

The mid-80s was a funny period for Mercedes, too. At the time, some of the range – the SL and 123-series saloons, wagons and coupes – appeared locked in the past, while the more up to date 190E and 124-series exuded a more minimalist, functional air of modernity. Described memorably if unflatteringly by *Car* magazine as a “well built Triumph Stag”, the R107 SL was clearly viewed as a bit old fashioned even then. Yet it



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
Whatever is done to an R107 interior, it will retain a classic feel.
AMG badges grace the centres of the red and silver alloy wheels.
The tuner’s badge is small, but in black it stands out on the red.
Rims are a very 1980s look – small diameter but noticeably dished.

clung on for nearly the whole decade.

And if a standard Mercedes symbolised the mature end of Armani suited, 1980s finesse, an AMG version was the brash, perma-tanned, Bermuda shirted relative – Harry Enfield’s Loadsamoney in four-wheeled form. So it comes as no surprise to hear that the epicentre of AMG’s UK presence was the prosperous Cheshire countryside south of Manchester, a region associated to this day with a certain brand of conspicuous, competitive materialism symbolised by the many footballers and wealthy celebrities who call it home.

Indeed, this particular car has come full circle. Having been originally converted by then AMG agent Stratton of Wilmslow, it spent a summer in the Greek sunshine and then returned to Cheshire, where it lurked in cosseted storage before once again venturing out into public gaze. And my, how things have changed since it first turned a wheel, back in 1986.

Writing in *Car* of another Stratton converted AMG in 1986, the late, great Leonard Setright perfectly summed up the buyer’s mindset with typical wit and

elegance. “For most of them the main cause of pride is simply the ownership (or the demonstration of the means for ownership) of the most extravagant car that unspared expense can contrive,” he wrote, continuing, “Stratton...caters for that custom with all the punctilio it demands.”

This car illustrates the mentality Setright describes, being based on a six-cylinder 300SL, rather than a V8 420 or 500SL. Show rather than go was clearly the intention, the standard 300SL’s 9.4-second 0-62mph sprint and 123mph top speed slower than even contemporary hot hatches such as the Peugeot 205 GTi. Weighed down with all the AMG addenda, this R107 is no rocket ship, then. But if being noticed is your *raison d’être*, now, as then, it works handsomely.

Indeed, to be fair to the R107 SL it never was about performance. Its SLC cousin was rallied and raced with some success, AMG assisting in the latter, but although the ‘slammed’ (lowered) ride height and ground hugging side skirts evoke AMG’s competition heritage, the extensive modifications →

Specifications

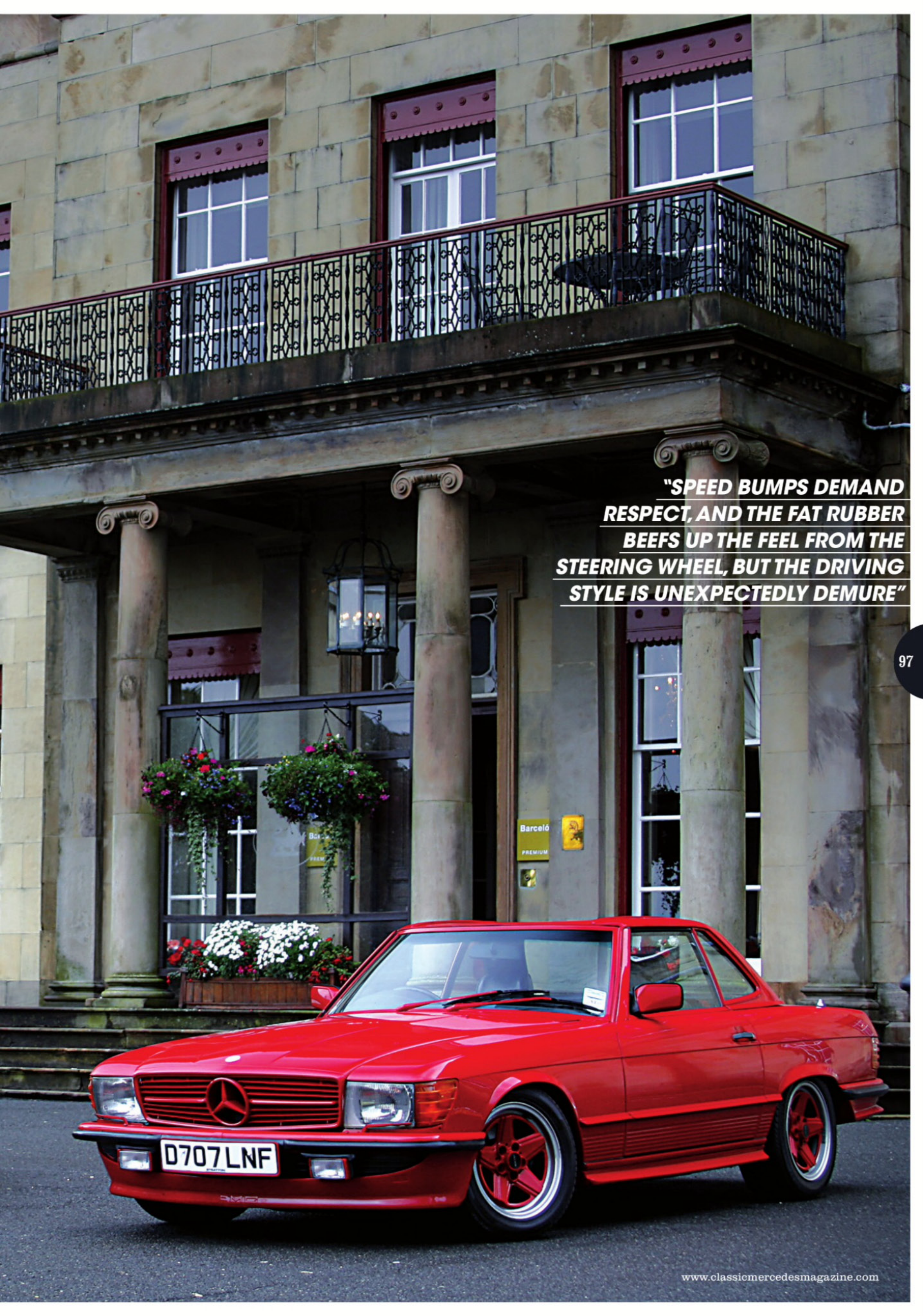
Mercedes-Benz 300SL AMG (R107)

Engine M103 2,962cc 6-cyl Power 185bhp@5,700rpm Torque 188lb ft@4,400rpm

Transmission 4-speed auto Weight 1,550kg 0-62mph 9.4sec Top speed 123mph

Fuel consumption 23.8mpg Years produced 1985-1989

All figures from Mercedes-Benz, for a standard 300SL



**"SPEED BUMPS DEMAND
RESPECT, AND THE FAT RUBBER
BEEFS UP THE FEEL FROM THE
STEERING WHEEL, BUT THE DRIVING
STYLE IS UNEXPECTEDLY DEMURE"**

⇒ to this particular example are all about aesthetics rather than improving the driving experience.

That said, even with the reckoned 60mm drop in ride height the SL still rolls along with surprising comfort. Speed bumps and steep driveways demand respect, and the fat rubber beefs up the feel from the steering wheel, but for all the muscular looks the driving style is unexpectedly demure. Sure, AMG offered its performance upgrades back then, too, but at the same time was perfectly happy to cater for those who just wanted added visual impact.

BELOW
All the chrome fittings were removed during the conversion in Wilmslow.

Driving it now, it really does feel like a period piece, the huge steering wheel filling your lap, and the R107's 1970s engineering roots suddenly feeling more Pagoda than R129. It is clearly built to cruise, and the relaxing demeanour is pleasant, but somehow seems at odds with the flamboyant looks. It is all shoulder pads and big hair and very, well, Cheshire. Go back to the 1980s and it is easy to imagine the high streets of Wilmslow, Alderley Edge and Altrincham full of cars like this, much as they are now with Porsche Cayennes, Range Rover Sports and Bentley

Continental GTs. Tastes may change, but the message is very much the same.

According to the car's history, the SL's original owner collected it from the Sindelfingen factory in standard form and drove it straight to Stratton for the conversion work to begin. Back then AMG was, of course, independent from Mercedes-Benz proper, and the dealership was instead one of the UK agents. Parts were shipped over from AMG in Germany and fitted according to the customer's required specification, this car also gaining a lavishly trimmed interior with every possible surface covered in hand-stitched leather by



ABOVE
Original rear screen stickers prove this SL has the genuine AMG bodykit.

LEFT
Door mirrors were chrome backed before the first owner arrived at Stratton.

BELOW
The Mercedes' interior was subject to a full, expertly carried out leather retrim.



"THE THICK LEATHER HAS BEEN BEAUTIFULLY INTEGRATED INTO THE SL'S INTERIOR, THE PATTERN MORE EXTRAVAGANT AND THE AROMA RICHER THAN ANYTHING IN A STANDARD MERCEDES-BENZ"

Stratton's skilful in-house craftsmen.

This would certainly not have come cheaply, nor would the removal of all the chrome parts for acid etching and subsequent colour coding. The overall effect of both is stunning, though, the mirrors, three-pointed stars, trim strips, wheel centres and even the headlamp wiper arms all receiving a coat of searing Signal Red paint. Inside, the thick, stiff leather has been beautifully integrated into the SL's interior design, the pattern more extravagant and the aroma richer than anything found in a standard Mercedes-Benz. Original Stratton window decals and number

plates attest to this car's authenticity, the quality of the workmanship still very apparent nearly three decades on. A shoddy DIY project this Mercedes is most certainly not, no matter what the uninitiated may care to think.

And it seems there are plenty of those, the reaction of some people to this perfectly preserved slice of 1980s nostalgia bordering on aggressive. The majority, however, are much more generous and accepting, one young staff member at our luxury hotel photo location making a point of breaking

off his work to come and gaze in awe. Indeed, by the time he had been born this car would have fallen so far out of fashion as to be considered laughable. But to his eyes – perhaps raised on a diet of *I love the 1980s* TV shows – this was kitsch cool made real.

It is all a question of context, though. And given this Mercedes' Cheshire beginnings, it seems as much at home here at this luxury golfing hotel as it would rolling along some Californian boulevard or sun baked Gulf state highway. Seeing it back in its old stomping ground is, indeed, something to celebrate, we'd say.

CM



Events Diary

A round-up of UK and international shows and events of interest to classic car fans

IMAGES Deutsche Classic/International Oldtimer Meeting/Schloss Bensberg Classics/Richard Truesdell/



UK events

- 
190SL Day
May 24
 A meeting of 190SLs, timed to mark the roadster's 60 years
Venue Mercedes-Benz World, Brooklands, Surrey
www.mercedes-benz-club.co.uk
- 
The Brooklands Double Twelve Motorsport Festival
June 13-14
 Speed trials on the Saturday, and driving tests on the Sunday
Venue Brooklands Motor Museum, Surrey
www.brooklandsmuseum.com
- 
Mercedes-Benz Club National Concours
June 20
 A concours with numerous categories, attracting both first time and experienced entrants
Venue Mercedes-Benz HQ, Milton Keynes
www.mercedes-benz-club.co.uk
- 
Goodwood Festival of Speed
June 26-28
 Modern and classic racers and road cars, demonstration runs, and motoring personalities
Venue Goodwood House, Chichester, West Sussex
www.goodwood.co.uk


Mercedes-Benz Club SL Day
July 12
 Gathering of members' SL models of all generations
Venue Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire
www.mercedes-benz-club.co.uk


Silverstone Classic
July 24-26
 Historic racing and club displays at the F1 circuit
Venue Silverstone, Northamptonshire
www.silverstoneclassic.com


Ripon Classic Car Gathering
July 26
 All makes classic car show
Venue Ripon Racecourse, Ripon, North Yorkshire
www.riponclassiccargathering.org


Salon Privé
September 3-5
 Exclusive classic displays, classic supercar parade
Venue Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire
www.salonprivelondon.com



Concours of Elegance
September 4-6
 An annual, upmarket classic car show for all marques
Venue Holyrood Palace, Edinburgh
www.concourssofelegance.com


Beaulieu International Autojumble
September 5-6
 UK's foremost annual autojumble, with 2,000 stalls
Venue National Motor Museum, Beaulieu, Hampshire
www.beaulieu.co.uk


RM Sotheby's London sale
September 7
 The UK's highest profile classic car auction. Held in association with Concours of Elegance
Venue Battersea Evolution, London
www.rmauctions.com


Goodwood Revival
September 11-13
 1940s to 1960s classic and racing cars, and many stalls. Period dress encouraged
Venue Goodwood Circuit, Chichester, West Sussex
www.goodwood.co.uk


Classic Motor Show
November 13-15
 The UK's biggest and best attended classic car show
Venue NEC, Birmingham
www.necclassicmotorshow.com


Bonhams December Sale
December 10
 Auction of important, high end classic and racing cars
Venue RAF Museum, Hendon, London
www.bonhams.com


London Classic Car Show
February 19-21, 2016
 The second year of a London classic car show
Venue ExCel, Docklands
www.thelondonclassiccarshow.co.uk


Practical Classics Restoration & Classic Car Show
March 5-6, 2016
 For hands-on enthusiasts, and includes the Practical Classic of the Year Award
Venue NEC, Birmingham
www.necrestorationshow.com



International events

- 
Mille Miglia
May 14-17
 Modern day touring recreation of the famous Italian road race run between 1927 and 1957
Route Brescia to Rome
www.1000miglia.eu
- 
Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este
May 22-24
 Concours show for top classics, in a beautiful setting. Event dates back to 1929. Includes an historic car parade
Venue Villa Erba, Lake Como, Italy
www.concorsodeleganzavilladeste.com
- 
Mercedes Entusiastklubb Meeting
May 29-31
 Lively three-day meeting for Mercedes owners, from classic to modern models
Venue Pers Hotell, Gol, Norway
www.mbtreff.no
- 
Rodeo Drive Concours d'Elegance
June 21
 An exclusive classic car meeting, yet free to enter, being held in Rodeo Drive, an upmarket shopping avenue in Beverley Hills
Venue Beverley Hills, California


Deutsche Classic
July 11
 Concours and display of German cars, with substantial Mercedes representation
Venue Oley Fairgrounds, Oley, Pennsylvania, USA
www.deutscheclassic.com





 **39th International Oldtimer Meeting**
July 10-12
 Large and well established gathering of classic cars built up to and including 1970
Venue Baden-Baden, Germany
www.oldtimer-meeting.de


 **Schloss Bensberg Classics**
July 17-19
 An exclusive classic car event, described by its organisers as for 'very important cars only'
Venue Althoff Grandhotel Schloss Bensberg, Cologne, Germany
www.sbc2015.com

 **Schloss Dyck Classic Days**
July 31-August 2
 Large gathering of classic cars of all eras at a spectacular island castle
Venue Schloss Dyck Castle, Jüchen, Germany
www.schloss-dyck-classic-days.de

 **Pagoda Rally**
August 6-9
 A gathering of W113 Pagodas, and many other Mercedes classics. For Mercedes-Benz Club members only
Venue Feldkirch, Austria
www.mercedes-benz-club.co.uk

 **AvD Oldtimer Grand Prix**
August 7-9
 Classic car racing on the Nürburgring Grand Prix track and on the challenging 14-mile Nordschleife circuit
Venue Nürburgring, Germany
www.avd.de

 **Sixth Annual Legends of the Autobahn**
August 14
 German marque meeting, with a concours for pre-1992 cars
Venue Nicklaus Club, Monterey, California, USA
www.legendsoftheautobahn.org

 **Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance**
August 16
 Summer classic car festival, plus various classic car auctions over the same weekend
Venue Monterey, California, USA
www.pebblebeachconcours.net

 **Gull Wing Convention**
September 9-13 (TBC)
 Long running annual get together for 300SLs
Venue TBA
www.gullwinggroup.org

 **Veterama**
October 9-11
 Vast autojumble, with many types of classic cars and parts, and more than 2,500 traders
Venue Maimarktgelände, Mannheim, Germany
www.veterama.de

 **Motorclassica**
October 23-25
 Australia's biggest classic car event, now in its sixth year, includes a concours d'elegance
Venue Royal Exhibition Centre, Melbourne, Australia
www.motorclassica.com.au

 **Auto e Moto d'Epoca**
October 23-25
 All-makes classic car show. Has a 'Dutch' auction with descending prices
Venue Padua, Italy
www.autoemotodepoca.com

 **LA Auto Show**
November 20-29
 Mainstream car industry showcase on the US west coast
Venue Los Angeles Convention Center, California, USA
www.laautoshow.com

 **Essen Motor Show**
November 28-December 6
 Modern/tuning car show, but with many displays of classics. Plenty of time and comfortable shoes are advised, given the size of this event
Venue Messe Essen, Germany
www.siha.de

 **Auto Retro**
December 4-8
 Large show catering for classic vehicles of all kinds
Venue Fira Montjuic Exhibition Center, Barcelona, Spain
www.autoretro.es

 **Scottsdale Auctions**
January 13-16, 2016
 A weekend of sales in the US by major international auction houses. Said to set price trends for the year ahead
Venue Near Scottsdale, Arizona
www.rmauctions.com
www.goodingco.com

 **Retromobile**
February 3-7, 2016
 The first big European classic car fair of the year, with cars, art and memorabilia. Usually attracts 100,000 visitors
Venue Porte de Versailles, Paris, France
www.retromobile.com



Schloss Bensberg Classics



 **MB Classic Car Club All German Day**
February 6, 2016 (TBC)
 A meeting for Mercedes built between 1950 and the 2000s, plus other German cars
Venue Newcastle, Australia
www.mbccc.org.au

 **New Zealand Classic Car Show**
February 7, 2016 (TBC)
 Gathering of classic cars, plus concours and various club displays. In 2014 it attracted around 70 club stands
Venue Ellerslie Racecourse, Auckland, New Zealand
www.concours.org.nz

 **Geneva Motor Show**
March 3-13, 2016
 The year's first major European motor show. Model unveilings, plus a classic car museum
Venue Palexpo, Geneva, Switzerland
www.salon-auto.ch

 **Antwerp Classic Salon**
March 5-7, 2016 (TBC)
 Classic car show for the Benelux countries. Some 350 stands, with restorers and classic car tuners across four halls
Venue Antwerp Expo, Antwerp, Belgium
www.siha.de

 **Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance**
March 11-13, 2016
 Prestigious classic car show, including exclusive auctions
Venue Amelia Island, Florida
www.ameliaconcours.org

 **Emirates Classic Car Festival**
March 18-21, 2016 (TBC)
 An annual classic car event on one of the world's most spectacular boulevards
Venue Downtown Dubai
www.emiratesclassiccarrfestival.com

 **Retro Classic**
March 26-29, 2016
 Eight halls full of classic cars, plus parts and memorabilia
Venue Stuttgart, Germany
www.retro-classics.de

 **Techno Classica**
April 13-19, 2016 (TBC)
 The premier European classic and modern classic car show, a must-visit event for enthusiasts
Venue Messe Essen, Germany
www.siha.de

We need your help!

If you would like dates of your classic car event included, please send details to:
info@classicmercedesmagazine.com

Classic classifieds



300SL, 1991, 72,300 miles, FSH, MOT until September, three owners from new, we've owned for the last eight years, always garaged, excellent condition but slight scrape on rear bumper, loads of history, private plate included, reluctant sale. £6,295. ONO Tel: 01344 771768. Sandhurst. [CM12W10]



230CE, 1991, 178,500 miles, Smoke Silver, black leather interior, my daily driver for the past decade, galvanized bodywork, in good condition, smooth drive, some minor work required to pass MOT (rust near rear axle) £1,000 ONO. Tel: 07930 565917. Croydon. [CM12W8]



C43 AMG, 137,000 miles, beautiful car, unmarked black leather interior, very extensive service history and receipts, only used in dry weather and garaged, great fun to drive, I just need more space for new one arriving. £4,750. Tel: 07710 914344, alecstoner@aol.com West Sussex. [CM12W7]

560SL, 1988, silver, full black leather, black hood, Euro spec not USA spec, 59,000km history, climate, heated seats, good spec, very original car in excellent condition, hardtop, as good as the £35K plus 560S. £25,999. Tel: 07966 265077. Essex [DEW16R]



280CE Coupe, 1979, Thistle Green, MOT, very good bodywork, 159,000 miles original condition, sunroof, velour interior. £3,500 ONO, Tel: 01763 848893. Hertfordshire. [CM12W6]



230E, auto saloon, 1985/ B reg, gleaming Signal Red with charcoal cloth, e/windows, central locking, CD, full service history, over £18,000 of receipts, supplying invoices from new, two former keepers, 140,000 miles, cruise control, rare electric sunroof, a true classic, totally stunning, £4,490. Tel: 07740 942001 [CM12W4]



300CE-24 Sportline, very quick, 1991, mine for 12 years, my specialist mechanic says it's good for another 100K miles and he's available to meet, tax and MOT until October 2015, e/ sunroof / seats / windows / seatbelts, five-speed auto, AMG wheels, black leather. Tel: 07973 428170. West London [CM12W1]



SL320, 55,000 miles, FSH, two lady owners, silver, unmarked blue leather, 1995 hard top, excellent blue soft top, original phone as new, toolkit, wind deflector, long MOT, Pirelli tyres, original solid car. £9,500. Tel: 07885 114093. Kent. [EFW16]



SL280, auto, finished in stunning Nautical Blue with matching blue leather interior, including perforated leather seats, 66,000 miles with FSH, hard and soft tops, MOT until June 2015 - will put full year on for new owner, 4x as new tyres, 3x remote keys and valet parking key, full electric pack, looks and drives superb. £5,995 ONO. Tel: 01287 624800 or Mobile: 07966 416818. Cleveland. [EFW23]



R107 500SL, outstanding automatic roadster, 1986/D reg, 82,000 miles, full service history, Smoke Silver, brown sports check, ABS, electric windows, cruise control, original wheels, new tyres, factory fitted roof, headlight wipers, excellent example, priced to sell. £12,499. Tel: 07767 886208. London. [EFW22]



500SE, auto, petrol, cc4973, 1983, four former keepers, 101,000 miles, MOT ready to drive £1,500. Tel: 07946 717741. West Sussex. [EFW20]



W124 200, 1984, auto, saloon, powder blue, very low mileage of only 42,000, outstanding condition, one family owner, father and son, always garaged, MOT until May 2015, offers around £2,500. Tel: 01704 893564. Southport. [EFP1]



CLK230 Kompressor, auto, 1998, FSH, RCL, three owners, top spec included, driver and passenger heated memory seats, black leather, six-spoke alloys, climate, 148,500 miles, MOT until Oct 2015, new Pirelli tyres, remote stereo with 10-CD changer, all books, toolkit, rare Black Opel metallic, very tidy. £1,550. Email: vis245558481@aol.com Tel: 07876 446252. Suffolk. [EFW18]



C240, 2000, Smoke Silver, cream upholstery, main agent maintained, lovely car only 69,000 miles, auto, air con, sunroof, remote boot opening etc, phone for full set photos, too many cars forces sale by club enthusiast. £3,100. Tel: 07818 068307. Wiltshire. [EFW17]



560SL, 1987 imported from USA, two owners from new, FSH, 68,000 miles, all books and manual, toolkit, V5, new MOT, hardtop, the car is in stunning condition and corrosion free, asking price £25,000 or negotiable offer. Tel: 07734 762688. Poole, Dorset. [EFW15]



S123 200T, five-seat estate, ivory, beige cloth, superior condition, expensive Blaupunkt Frankfurt radio/ cassette player, no sunroof, rot free, 12-month MOT, rare. Tel: 0151 6390149. [EFP6]



C180 Sport, saloon, 204,000 miles, incredibly well looked after car, all original, AMG wheel and lots of service history, bills and receipts, selling as spares and repairs as requires a little TLC, maybe good for some very rare parts, wheels, interior, a mint sport edition gearstick. Tel: 07827 665168. South Shields. **[EFW14]**



190E, 2.0, auto, 68,000 miles, loads of history including main dealer service record, last two enthusiast owners, very well cared for, currently SORN due to long term storage and will require a recommissioning service, in top order. £2,500 ONO. Tel: 07917 890246, Worcester. **[EFW13]**



SLK280, fine example of a 1999 SLK280, one family ownership since new, FSH, red leather interior, silver, 39,500 miles, TLC since new £4,395. Tel: 0161 7976223. Bury. **[EFW10]**



300CE, twin technics turbo, converted Mercedes, very fast car, drives superb, 12 months MOT, full stainless steel exhaust, superb cream interior, rare car - must be seen. Tel: 07584 710101, Haverhill. **[EFW8]**



W124 E280, auto saloon in immaculate condition inside out, last owner 15 years garaged kept, three owners in total, original toolkit, unused spare, air con, e/wing mirrors and sunroof, alarm, £1,500 spent this year, including engine wiring loom, serviced, MOT until Sept 2015. Call for more details. £2,200. Tel: 07890 548699. Ilford **[EFW7]**



190E, 2.0, auto, 1993, cream cloth, 77,000 miles, FSH, two previous owners, sunroof, immaculate, original condition, potential concours winner, £3,950. Tel: 01803 551 383. South Devon. **[EFP4]**



C-Class Elegance, 1998/Aug, two-litre, four-door saloon, automatic, Titan Red, metallic, immaculate minus upholstery, only 6,000 miles average per year, complete dossier, all accounts computerised, an unused spare, 12 months MOT, a cherished car inside and out. £3,500. Tel: 01304 611421. Sandwich, Kent. **[EFP3]**



500SEL 1991, two owners from new, current owner since 1997, leather seats, MOT until May 2015, a boardroom on wheels. £4,500. Tel: 01422 836668. Halifax **[DEP21R]**



280SL, 1983, 141,000 miles, MOT until Feb 2016, silver blue interior, bodywork and underside all in good condition, soft and hardtop well maintained, dry weather car £7,650 Tel: 01202 872127. Ferndown, Dorset. **[DEW22R]**



200 Fintail, left-hand drive, manual column shift, interior original and very good condition, black MB-Tex, bodywork and chromework in excellent condition, nearly new Michelin tyres, brake hydraulics overhauled recently, the car drives very well, £9,995 (which includes transferable number). Call Brian, Tel: 07710 077605. **[DEW20R]**

500SL, 1987, 115,000 miles, MOT 12/14, Tax 09/14, current owner 13 years, soft top and hardtop complete with stand, totally original car, lots of paperwork. £9,995. Tel: 07989 448307. Bolton, Lancs **[DEW15R]**

INTERNATIONAL MERCEDES



E430 & S320, the E-Class is a 2000 reg and the S-Class is a 1999 reg, £2,600 for both, high mileage but maintained regularly (all paperwork and original spec/UK reg details included) cars located in Wicklow, Ireland 30 minutes from UK ferry port, driving but will need good service. Tel: 00 353 86 30 40 684. Ireland **[CM12W9]**



W111 rolling shells, 2x W111 cars minus engines. Red car shown is a very solid car and would be an easy restoration driving when purchased with diesel engine fitted. Second car is very rusty but has very good doors bonnet and bootlid, fitted with mechanical sunroof in good roof, second car can be dismantled on site for transport, both cars are located in Ireland, call John. Tel: 00 353 8724 83999. Ireland **[CM12W3]**



109 SEL 3.5 V8, documented 53,000 miles dealer service history, this car has been dry stored for around 15 years, five new Vredestein tyres have just been fitted and much recommissioning work completed, the air suspension works well and stays up, this car needs to be driven to be believed it is as good as they get, the interior is grey velour with wood veneer all in perfect condition, all exterior chrome is virtually as new, the car does need a repaint but has no significant rust, the car is located in Ireland but still has its original UK registration, it is capable of being driven anywhere in the UK. £12,750. Tel: 00 353 8724 83999 - E-mail: johnstanley@workmail.com more images on request. Ireland. **[CM12W2]**

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Classic classifieds



500SEC, 1985, low mileage, one owner, 100,000 miles, all original, no rust, brought from original owners, stunning silver on blue colour combination, beautiful condition throughout, fitted with all options, the ultimate Mercedes-Benz coupe, VIN on the title reads WDBCA44D7FA095849, please feel free to call with any questions. \$10,000. Tel: 001 619 452 4235. Los Angeles, California. [EFW12]



560SL, 78,000 miles, Signal Red with light cream leather interior, factory back seat, powerful, strong runner, newer black canvas convertible top, matching red hardtop included, transmission functions perfectly, Florida car for 23 years, garaged in winter since coming to Minnesota, never seen snow! This is a real headturner and VERY fun to drive! Everything works as it should. Tel: 001 612 385 9617. Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. [DEW7R]



For sale: boot floor plastic handle assembly for W220 S-Class (W211 E-Class is identical) in black plastic, view shown in the photo is from underneath the boot floor. Tel: 07818 068307. Wiltshire [EFW19]



For sale, Mercedes-Benz C200 Elegance full leather interior, comes with all four headrests, heated front seats, door cards with wood effect trimmings, centre console, in stunning condition no wear on bolsters or no rips. Ideal for up grade £550 (NO OFFERS) buyer collects no time wasters. Tel: 07879 215057. West Midlands. [DEW11R]



W100 SWB, a beautiful and original UK car, RHD just emerged from long term storage, requires recommissioning and cosmetic attention, being very solid and complete, historic service documentation indicates that this car was well cared for, attached photo of car still in storage, within a very confined space, requires recommissioning before starting, although engine turns freely, viewing can be arranged, as car located approximately 30 minutes from Shannon Airport. Immense car with great potential. Tel: 00 353 8660 96557. Limerick (near Shannon Airport). [EFW11]

PARTS & ACCESSORIES



For sale, four Mercedes C-class wheels and tyre, alloys in very good condition no marks, tyres 10K wear, size 205/55/16, buyer collects. £250. Tel: 07973 443402. Leeds. [CM12W5]



For Sale, W204 C-Class spotlights and brand new grilles. £50.00 plus p/p. Tel: 07774 416 774. Birmingham. [EFW21]



W111 280SE Cabriolet, 1969, 70,980 miles, second owner since 1971, becoming more rarely available, good, unmolested condition (V8 in similar condition sold for \$473,000 at Scottsdale, January, 2015). \$325,000, contact Mrs Robins. Tel: 001 905 764 6363 or email: donnarobins@rogers.com. Toronto, Canada. [CM4P2R]

For sale, two engine mounts for 124, two rear light units for 124, two rear light units for C220, one master brake cylinder for C220, one headlamp complete for 124, one headlamp glass for E300, one starter motor for E300, all parts cheap and good condition. Tel: 02890 844474. Newton Abbey. [EF]



Breaking, 1976 W116 350SE, body rotten but interior good, ran and drove before stripping, parts are located in long Crendon, Bucks, I have logbook as it has a private plate 323 JOM. Tel: 07701 313864. Buckinghamshire. [EFW9]



For sale: Corgi Mercedes Benz 600 Pullman, no 247, in rep box, manufacture years 1964 to 1969, metallic body, working wipers, £65 post free. Tel: 0208 399754. Surrey. [EFP5]



For sale, Mercedes-Benz Haynes workshop manual, 123-series diesel, 200, 240D, 240TD, 300D, 300TD, 1976 to 1985, clean white pages, VGC, only £6.00. Tel: 07989 951895. Canterbury [DEW8R]



For sale, set of four alloys shod with 265x65x16 Pirelli P6000 tyres, ex E-Class. £100 for all four. Tel: 07759 661999. [DEP4R]



Continental WinterContact 205/55R16 tyres on Mercedes steel rims (no worry about kerbing) only about 2,000 miles from new. £160 buyer collects. Tel: 07774 416 774. Birmingham [DEW17R]

Breaking Mercedes sports, 113 and 107s. Tel: 01322 669081 or 07836 250222 [ABC]

For sale, Mercedes ML stainless steel side bars sidesteps (no pads) to fit ML 1998-2004, brand new still in packaging never fitted, cost £211 new, accept £75 buyer collects. Tel: 01425 614609. Lymington, Hants. [CM12]

For sale, 15-hole 7x15in alloy wheels for R107 Mercedes, fair condition require refinishing, £395 or best offer. Wilmslow, Cheshire. Tel: 07960 170380. [EF]

For sale, 1979 Mercedes 350SL, gold metallic, 114,000 miles, non runner, for restoration offers invited. Tel: 0161 929102. Wilmslow, Cheshire. [EF]

For sale, glazed type, wind deflector to fit R171 SLK (2008-2011). Genuine Mercedes accessory, no tools needed to fit, brand new condition. £95. Tel: 01691 652 988. Shropshire. [EF]

For sale: Mercedes E-Class dash, excellent condition, 115 miles on clock, £45, few spares. Tel: 07716 497113. Bedfordshire. [EF]

For sale: Mercedes Gazette, 84 mint copies, 2004-2010, £20 per year plus postage. Also a 2006 E-Class owner's manual, leather case £20 plus postage. Tel: 01243 573400. Chichester. [EF]

For sale, W210 E220 diesel saloon, 2001, 1x front and rear o/s door, bonnet, various ECUs, f/pass airbag, exp tank, brake fluid res, washer bottle, all cheap. Tel: 0208 6604538 or 07584 020272. Whyteleafe. [DER]

REGISTRATIONS

AI UGP

AI UGP, cherished numberplate for sale, AI UGP, the fastest road race circuit in the world. £1,250. Tel: 0208 3022283. Sidcup, Kent. [CM12]

H1 SSL

H1 SSL, for sale, enquiries please contact - Tel: 07710 666651. Leicestershire. [CM12]

A55 AMG

A55 AMG, on retention, sensible offers please. Tel: 01287 624800 or mobile: 07966 416818. Cleveland. [EF]

A250 EXC

A250 EXC, I own the UK registration number, A 250 EXC, it is currently held on a Certificate of Entitlement and is registered in my name, It can be placed on a car, van or motorcycle registered in the UK after August 1983, I bought it to go on a Mercedes-Benz 250 E-Class last year but the deal fell through, sensible offers please, If you need to contact me further pleased to assist, Malcom, Tel: 07580 364434. [DER]

X1 PVS

X1 PVS, personalised private numberplate for sale, on retention, and assignment, fee paid. £1,500. Tel: 01473 659 568. Ipswich. [DER]

W111

W111, cracking registration number for W111 enthusiast, valued at £1,000 to £1,500. Bargain at £500. Tel: 01503 220061. Plymouth. [DER]

280 S

280 S, appreciating marque, complement your SL/S/ Sport, Sensible offers please. Tel: 07582 839621. Glasgow [DER]

WANTED

Wanted, R230 SL500 post August 2008 'facelift' dealer promo, info, price list and sales brochures for a September 2008 production car. Tel: 01256 469893. [EF]

The copy deadline for Issue 13 is Friday 17th July

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The 600 was unchanged for 18 years, hence a personal plate completely disguises its age.



On a plate

The correct, or incorrect, number plate can make or break the appearance of a classic Mercedes. Tim French explains what's available – and what characters you can put on it

IMAGES John Colley/Terry Osborne/ Registrationmarks.co.uk

plate, although some rear fitments were for a plate either 11 inches or 14 inches by nine and a quarter inches, and after the extra, year-indicating suffix digit was introduced in August of that year, both the characters and the plates themselves were made slightly smaller. Embossed borders were optional, and during the 1960s the arguably less attractive injection moulded plastic characters appeared.

One company renowned for supplying number plates from all periods is Tippers Classic & Vintage Plates in St Austell, Cornwall (01726 879799, www.tippersvintageplates.co.uk). It has been in business for many years, and makes up classic plates from original metal and numbers stock from the 1960s. Prices range from £41.50 to £216.

Personalised registration numbers are something of a 'Marmite' question, people either loving or hating them. How much should those of the former persuasion pay for them? For a classic Benz a 'MER' prefix or suffix is a leading candidate if you don't want your own name – or more likely a rough approximation of it – spelt out. For example, at the time of writing, '10 MER' was available for £9,600, and '69 MER' for £13,140 including VAT. The highest prices paid tend to be for two-character numbers, '6 P' recently selling at auction for £270,000, but last November the record auction price of £518,000 was paid by a Ferrari dealer for '25 O', for use on an ex-Eric Clapton Ferrari.

The price of letter combinations making up Christian names or initials varies according to the popularity of that name at the time of your birth, explains Karen Atkins of Lancashire-based Registrationmarks.co.uk (01257 474746). "Anything starting with 'O' used to be unpopular, but now that a lot of Oscars, Olivers and Olivias are around they are much easier to sell."

But while the best numbers cost big money, the good news is that as of March 2015 it became cheaper and easier and to obtain a personalised number plate, now that the transfer paperwork has gone online.

"Previously it took seven to 10 days, and it could take two weeks, but now it can be done in two days," says Atkins.

The £80 transfer fee is unchanged, but a retention certificate – which keeps the registration 'alive' while not in use on a car – has fallen from £105 plus £35 per year to just £80 for 10 years. "It will be a big boost for business," Atkins predicts.

And if you are unfortunate enough to write off your classic Mercedes which has a fancy registration, be sure to arrange for the number to be legally 'removed' before the car is formally scrapped. If it isn't, it dies with the car.

For over a century their purpose has, in theory, been to allow the government to keep track of all relevant vehicles, and thereby tax their usage. But the number plates at each end of a car are of far more significance than that.

Car manufacturers spend a lot of time and money ensuring that the plates look integrated with the car's bodywork (although one or two Italian makers give the impression of having forgotten this requirement), and the characters on the plate, and even what they are made of, speaks volumes about you, the driver.

If your Mercedes was first registered in the UK before 1973, in other words before the original 'L' suffix registration came into force, you may use the classic white numbers on a black background, rather than the present reflective black on white at the front of the vehicle, and black on yellow at the rear. Silver engraved numbers on a black background are also permitted for this age of vehicle, and many feel that these look the classiest. Indeed, in years gone by they were bought as an optional extra on expensive cars.

Die pressed number plates were introduced in the early 1930s: 16-gauge polished aluminium embossed with the numbers, and then stove enamelled. Until 1963, registrations were a maximum of six characters, usually on a 21-inch by five-inch



ABOVE
To use silver or white digits, a car must be pre-1973.

LEFT
Barry Morgan would have to pay about £4,500 for this plate.

BELOW
The briefer the number, the higher its value, broadly; this could be £100,000.



"AS OF MARCH 2015 IT BECAME CHEAPER AND EASIER TO OBTAIN A PERSONALISED NUMBER PLATE, NOW THAT THE TRANSFER PAPERWORK HAS GONE ONLINE"

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