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Issue 48
Autumn 2024

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20 TOP LEGENDS

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W123 ACROSS AFRICA

ACTION HERO
JOHN FITCH

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Do your research

Christopher Ward

christopherward.com

Classic Mercedes

Autumn 2024 • Issue 48

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In this issue of *Classic Mercedes*

Don't we all wish that one day we'll pull open the creaky, half-jammed door of a dilapidated outhouse and discover a dust covered classic that's been untouched for years but is basically sound, and is one we can buy cheaply? It's a dream, but one that came true for Mark Llewellyn when four years ago he found a low mileage but long neglected 126-series 500SEC, this issue's cover story. Read from page 24 how he found it and how easy it was to revive.

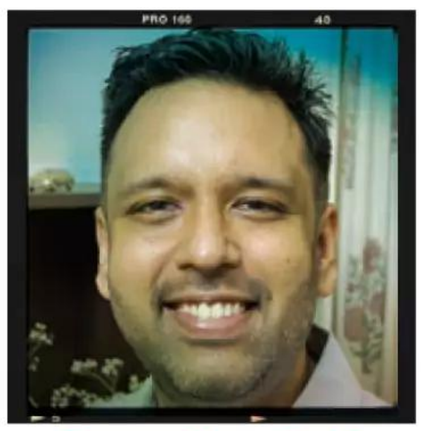
"FROM THE FAMOUS TO THE OBSCURE, NO LESS THAN 20 SLs ARE FEATURED"

It's 70 years since the 300SL Gullwing made its debut in New York, and our tribute to the original 'supercar' takes a very particular form. From the famous to the obscure, no less than 20 SLs from the 1950s to the 1990s are featured: the Gullwing of course, but also the one-off, Pininfarina-built Pagoda coupe of 1963. Brush up on your SLs from page 44!

123-series guru Mark Cosovich has retired and handed his W123 World business to his son, and we're pleased to have signed him up as a columnist. His fascinating insights into Mercedes-Benz engineering begin on page 14.

David Sutherland
Editor

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



Paranjay Dutt

The first Mercedes officially sold in India was the 124-series in 1996, but the venture got off to a faltering start. "The chink in the armour was that the W124, although more impressive than anything India had produced locally, turned out to be a touch too late to this party," explains Mumbai-based Paranjay. " But it was eventually an unwavering success story, and has been responsible for getting people hooked on modern classics." See page 70.

Karen Eriksen

When Karen and husband John entered the 5,000-mile Trans-Africa Rally (page 34), they needed a car, and bought a W123. From a collection and unused for years, it was a gamble for the self-confessed rally novices, but 'Bee' as they named the Sahara yellow 230, delivered, albeit with help. "John's favourite place was under the bonnet," says Karen. "Carburettor, timing chain, points and electrics were frequent conversation topics."

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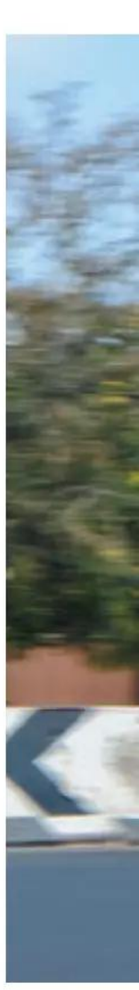

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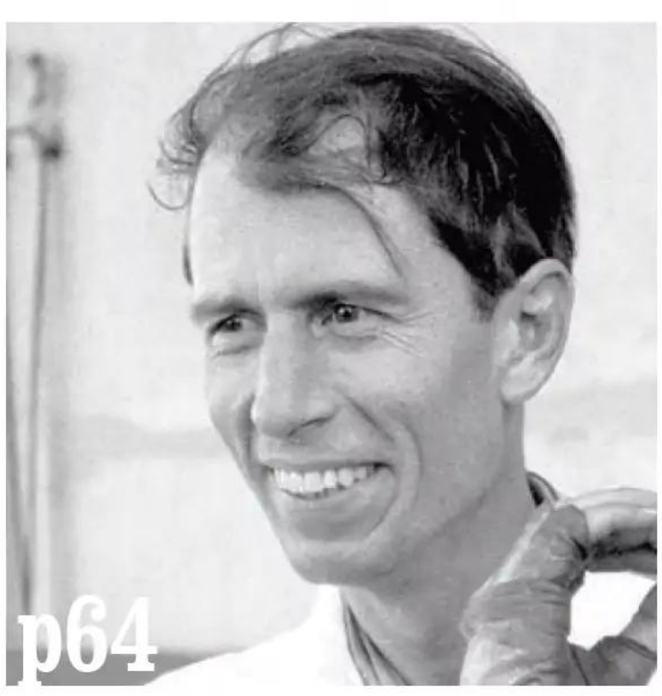

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CLASSIC NEWS

UK AND INTERNATIONAL REPORTS FROM THE CLASSIC MERCEDES WORLD

Electric SL

Everrati launches its £330,000 battery Pagoda

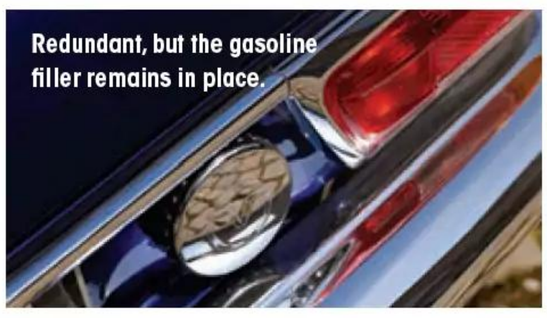
Oxfordshire-based engineering Everrati Automotive has formally launched the electric W113 SL it unveiled some time ago, offering it in standard and 'Touring' versions, priced from £330,000 plus taxes. Customers with cryptocurrency tucked away can use that to pay, the company says.

The standard version has a 54kWh battery and a 300bhp e-motor, giving a range of 160 miles and 0-60mph in under eight seconds, while the Touring has a 68kWh battery and a 200-mile range, and sub-eight second 0-60mph time. The drivetrain layout is optimised for weight distribution, the firm says.

Everrati has gone to great lengths to keep the electric Pagoda's appearance almost identical to that of the petrol car. For example, the original Instrument dials contain electric data, and with future sale value in mind, the electrification is 100 per cent reversible.

The process begins at Hilton & Moss in Hertfordshire, this long-established classic Mercedes specialist providing Everrati with a fully restored and trimmed car. The spec is high, including soft hide from leather supplier Bridge of Weir, said to make the lowest carbon leather for the car industry, and heated seats.

The only difference inside are modified instruments.



Redundant, but the gasoline filler remains in place.

Targa Florio reborn

Hot on the heels of restoring its first ever car, the 1894-1901 Benz Motor-Velocipede, Mercedes-Benz Classic has rebuilt a Mercedes Targa Florio racing car from 100 years ago, which the carmaker had in storage for many years. Mercedes works driver Christian Werner won the 1924 Targa Florio over a distance of 432km (four laps of 108km) in it, the first victory in the event for a driver from outside Italy.

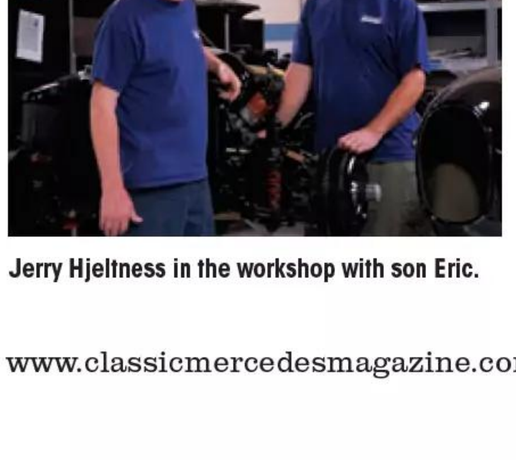
The keys aspects of the project were repairing the two-litre supercharged engine (including reworking the original camshafts and restoring screw connections with hybrid threads typical of the time), renewing the bodywork (changed by a later owner) according to historical blueprints, and repainting it to match the original paint, and paint method, after detailed analysis of small remnants of the original paint. It's seen here on its first post-restoration drive, on the Untertürkheim test track.

Restored and running at Untertükheim.

Christian Lautenschlager, Wilhelm Traub

Analysing small remains of original paint.

Ewy Rosqvist, Jerry Hjeltness farewell



Ewy Rosqvist with in 1962 with the 220SE she rallied.

Jerry Hjeltness in the workshop with son Eric.

The classic Mercedes community has recently lost and mourned two much-loved figures, from 1960s factory motorsport and from the world of high-end classic Mercedes restoration in Southern California. In early July Mercedes-Benz announced the death at 94 of Swedish-born Ewy Rosqvist, its works rally driver from 1960 to 1964, and in mid-April Jerry Hjeltness, founder of W198 300SL specialist Hjeltness Engineering, passed away aged 82.

Intending to qualify as a vet in Sweden, Rosqvist's driving talent emerged when it was noticed that she completed her daily rounds to far flung farms far quicker than colleagues. She made headlines in 1962 when, driving a 220SE Fintail with Ursula Wirth as co-driver, finished over three hours ahead of the rest of the field in the Argentinian Touring Car Grand Prix. More strong results followed, including a class win in the 1964 Monte Carlo Rally, her last event a return to that year's Argentinian rally, in which she finished third, with co-driver Eva Maria Falk. Thereafter she worked as a Mercedes Classic brand ambassador.

"Mercedes-Benz will always remember this extraordinary woman and her achievements and honour her memory," said Marcus Breitschwerdt, CEO of Mercedes-Benz Heritage, adding, "She shaped the image of women in motorsport."

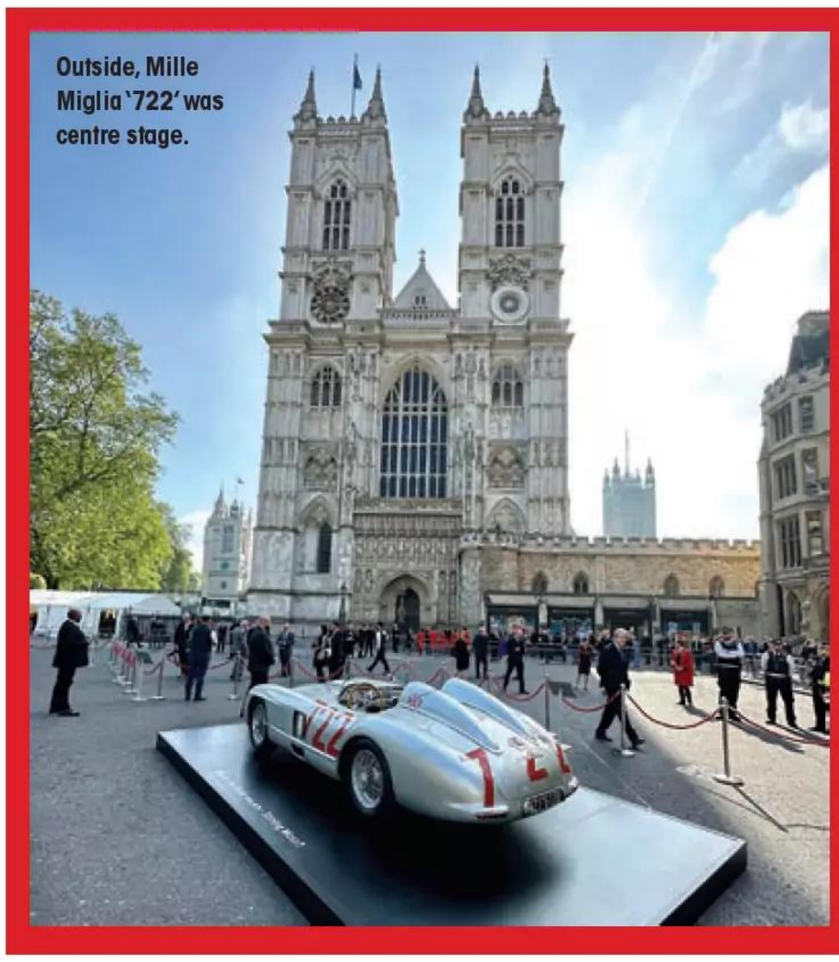
Jerry Hjetness bought his first 300SL Gullwing in 1960 and was soon working on others. This remained essentially a hobby until 1984, when he formally opened his business. Hjeltness Engineering, based in Escondido near the Mexican border, is widely regarded as the world's top W198 restorer, with over 50 body-off rebuilds completed, and also as a key authenticity expert. Jerry's son Eric runs the business.

M-B Classic expands

As part of its stated aim to push Mercedes-Benz Classic activities further up the corporate hierarchy, three new senior management roles have been created at the Classic Center in Stuttgart. Peter Schoren (left) becomes Head of the Classic Center, and gets a seat on the Mercedes-Benz Heritage board, Thomas Armbrecht (centre) becomes technical head and Patrik Gottwick (right) is appointed the new sales and marketing boss.

The carmaker says that the Classic Center's workshop capacity has more than doubled since February 2024 "as a result of an acquisition", avoiding mentioning the bankrupt Kienle Automobiltechnik, whose labour force, original Daimler-Benz body jigs and tooling, and large spare parts inventory it took over. Kienle was previously a highly regarded restorer before being raided in 2023 by German state prosecutors investigating alleged fraudulent trading.

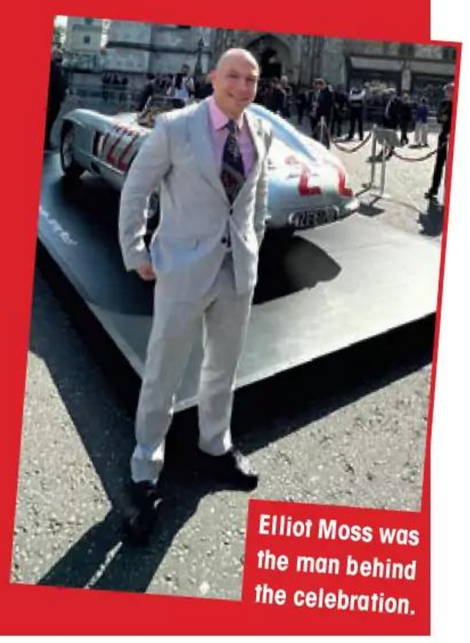
Moss tribute stars



Outside, Mille Miglia '722' was centre stage.

In early May, a packed Westminster Abbey in London played host to a service of remembrance for Sir Stirling Moss, who died in April 2020 aged 90, where it was almost easier to name the motorsport luminaries who *weren't* in attendance at the event. It was organised by Elliot, Sir Stirling's son.

Those reflecting on the London born grand prix driver and 1955 Mille Miglia winner's life included Sir Jackie Stewart, Nigel Mansell, Damon Hill, Derek Bell, Juan Manuel Fangio's son Oscar, Ross Brawn and Christian Horner. Mercedes-Benz Heritage's Marcus Breitschwerdt was there – useful, as he brought with him '722', Sir Stirling's Mille Miglia 300SLR.



Elliot Moss was the man behind the celebration.

Special wheels

It's not so many years ago that $150,000 would have bought a 300SL Roadster, although a lesser example. Now, though, that considerable sum will only be enough for wheels for it, albeit a very rare set.

W198 specialist Scott Grundfor based in Arroyo Grande, California, has been advertising five original rims for a Roadster for $150,000 (about £115,500), the optional Rudge wheels with centre locking which were required equipment for anyone racing a 300SL in period, usually a Gullwing. Only 27 sets of Rudges were delivered new on the 1957-1963 Roadster, it's understood.

The 5.5x15inch wheels are date-coded and described as in perfect condition. "This is a rare chance to complete your open W198 with the ultimate and rarest factory option accessory," said the firm's Drew Grundfor. "They just need painting."

IMAGES Everrati Automotive/Rob Halloway/Hjeltness Restoration/Mercedes-Benz Group AG/1,000 Miglia

In other news...

M-B supports Mille Miglia privateers

2024's running of the event celebrating the 1927-1957 Italian road race saw six 300SL Gullwing owners taking advantage of the technical support package offered by Mercedes-Benz. The 1,000km rally allows only cars that would have entered in 1957 or earlier.

Make a date – the correct one

If, while reading the 'Quick Guide' feature on the W124 500E/E500 in the Summer 2024 *Classic Mercedes*, you were puzzled to see the model was built from 1951 to 1958, we apologise. It was of course 1991-1995, the error due to a gremlin in the magazine production process.

Mercedes-Benz at Saville Row

There was a strong Mercedes presence at the Concours on Saville Row in June when cars took over the bespoke tailors' street in central London. Of note was the 1907 Mercedes 75hp Spider and a 300SL Roadster, while M-B Heritage boss Marcus Breitschwerdt attended.

130 years racing celebrated

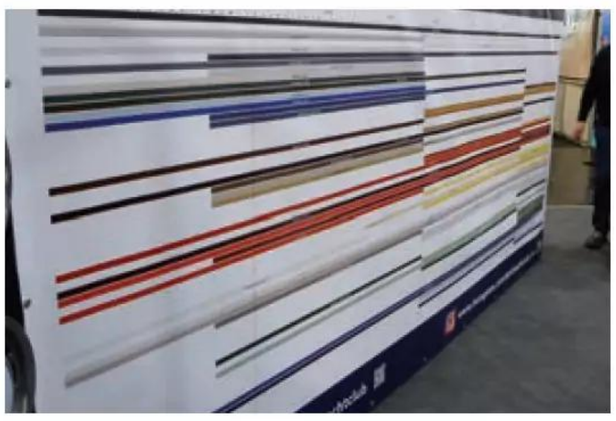
Mercedes-Benz used 2024's Goodwood Festival of Speed to mark this milestone, bringing a clutch of historic racers. These included its first race car, the 1894 Daimler two-cylinder V-engine, the 124 Targa Florio (see story), and two Silver Arrows grand prix cars, a 1934 W25 and a 1955 W196R (centre).

The Stroke Eight Club mounted a very clever colour-themed display.

Show colours

At this vast, long-standing show in Germany, all classic Mercedes life is to found if you have sufficient energy and shoe leather. Nick Kisch paints a picture of it

IMAGES Nick Kisch



FAR LEFT
This board showed all the colours W114/W115s came in, 1968 to 1976...

LEFT
...while each painted section of the car gave the colour name and code.

RIGHT
Stunning 1970 280SE 3.5 Coupe in *Beigegrau* has the rare manual gearbox.

Techno Classic Essen

Location Messe Essen, Essen, Germany

When April 3-7, 2024

It's branded as 'The World Collector Automobile Show', and 2024's Techno Classic Essen felt something of a return to pre-Covid levels of attendance, both in the quality and variety of machinery on display. Though reduced in number of halls to eight, it's now a great deal easier to find your way around. However in recent years, stiff competition from the Classic Stuttgart Show in April has stolen some of this show's monopoly and business; since the city of Stuttgart is home to both Mercedes-Benz and Porsche, it's consequently perceived as a more affluent region in which to display high-end classic products.

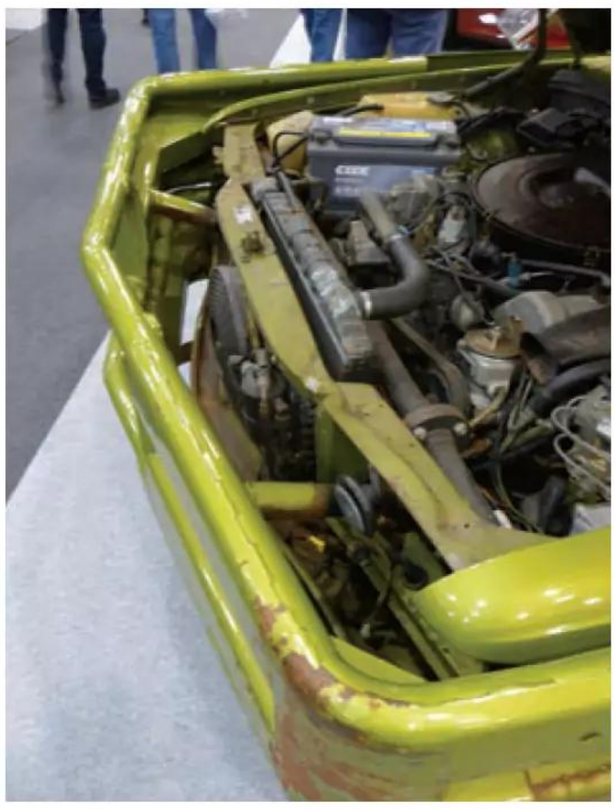
The exhibition halls occupy a triangular plot and it took several years of attendance before I felt able to fully navigate all 15 halls with any degree of confidence. In 2019, several of the halls were refreshed, the upper area disposed of and a new hall added at the eastern end. All eight halls now interconnect, with just one outside area for the smokers and drinkers to kick tyres.

The event still draws most of Europe's prestigious classic dealers, who had plenty of high-end exotica on display

FAR LEFT
The original 'Red Pig' is lost forever, this one of the various replicas built.

LEFT
Kisch got underneath to discover it sported a 126 diff and rear suspension.

RIGHT
This example looked like it had recently been out doing some classic races.



in 2024. One notable example was the great-to-be-seen-in, but not so great-to-see-out-of, Fritz Lang inspired 1935 Mercedes 500K Autobahn Kurier streamliner in Hall 8. Well, a replica of the car shown at the 1934 Berlin show.

There were plenty of Mercedes-Benzes of all ages on show, but being a child of the 1960s, this is the decade I'm most drawn to and which is now revered by most enthusiasts. As always, there were plenty of Pagodas, from a rather tired example with very suspect panel gaps, to mint cars with matching prices. Filipouriz Classic cars had one in a particularly fetching metallic blue, apparently an R129 SL colour. One fitted with the inevitable electric motor, which I'm pretty sure was the same car on display from previous years, was now offered with a slight discount, at €270,000 (about £228,200).

The Martallaria blechanufaktur (www.martelleria.de) in Forstern, west of Munich, is a workshop specialising in shaping sheet metal for reconstruction of classic bodywork or prototypes, using traditional techniques combined with modern computer-aided design technology. Hence its 1950s BMW 507 sports car on display had faultless quality of panel work, which was impressive in the extreme. Another of the company's leaflets showed a specially commissioned alloy-bodied W198 300SL Roadster it had worked on.

One of the many replicas of the 1971 Spa 24 Hours winning 'Red Pig' (a modified W109 3000SEL 6.3 entered in the famous endurance race by AMG) that have been built over the years was displayed on the AMG Owners Club stand. The original 6.8-litre Spa winner was sold to French engineering specialist Matra for undercarriage testing, as AMG needed to fund its next race car, after which it's believed to have been destroyed. On closer inspection, several contemporary modifications were to be seen, no doubt to keep it competitive, and it had clearly been out racing, as the dirt, scars and tyres indicated. Upgrades included electronic injection, fuel/air metering and ignition, what appeared to be gas shock absorbers instead of springs or air bags, and replacement of the rear low-pivot swing axle with a trailing arm rear axle and suspension, possibly from a 126-series S-Class.

The show's autojumble seemed much reduced in size from previous years, with far fewer 'hobbyists' selling second-hand car parts, and more generic automobilia offered. Perhaps increased stall prices deterred many smaller businesses from coming.

A 1966 long-wheelbase W111 Fintail had been supplied as airport taxi or hotel transport. The three owner, ex-private school example on display had survived remarkably well, possibly due to life in a hotter climate, as two cooling fans had been mounted on the rear parcel shelf to compensate for the lack of air conditioning. I didn't get to speak with the owner of a bright metallic green 116-series 450SE with heavy duty crash barrier sections welded to its front structure, so was unable to identify its original purpose. Crash barrier testing or riot police, perhaps?

The strichachtclub.de (Stroke Eight Club) which had a 'Mercedes colours from 1968-1976' theme had made a big effort. This centred around a patchwork W114 saloon painted in a sample of each shade (see lead photo), with rows of hub caps in each shade. On the wall, a timeline showed which year each colour was introduced. A particularly original W111 220SE Fintail in dark blue, with a roof rack packed with period correct suitcases, towing a suitably aged caravan with table chairs, curtains, a pair of wooden skies, a sledge and push chair, made real some of the 1960s covers from Mercedes' in-house magazine, *In Aller Welt*. CM

TOP LEFT
300d Cabriolet, one of 65 made 1958-1962, was for sale at €175K (£148K).

TOP RIGHT
Electric Pagoda yours for €270K (£228), but price negotiable, seller said.

ABOVE FAR LEFT
No air con on this 1966 LWB Fintail, instead two fans on the parcel shelf.

ABOVE CENTRE
An R129 SL hue, designo Varicolour Pearl, was used for this Pagoda re-spray.

ABOVE
Neat storage box for W113 centre tray, upholstered to match for €350 (£300).

ABOVE RIGHT
The purpose of the girder attached to the nose of this 116-series isn't clear.

LEFT
A very convincing replica of the extraordinary 1934 500K Autobahn kurier.

BELOW
Lovingly re-creating one of the covers of *In Aller Welt* magazine from the 1960s.

Sweet meet

W198 300SLs are rarely seen, let alone nearly 30 of them together – for that, a Gull Wing Group convention is the place to be. John Willott reports on this year's event

IMAGES Gull Wing Group

2024 Gull Wing Group Spring Convention

Location Ojai, California
When April 10-14, 2024

The first Gull Wing Group convention to be held in Spring, in Ojai in Southern California, is in the record books, the event attended in its entirety or in part by 138 members, plus Michael Kunz and Nate Lander from the Classic Center in Long Beach. Several members said spring rather than autumn, as previously, was a better fit with their busy schedules.

Following the event opening on Wednesday evening, on Thursday morning members travelled to the Santa Paula and the Collector Car Vault, owned by GWG member Xavier Maignan, for the Technical Session. The expert panel comprised Siegfried Linke, Steve Marx, Nate Lander and Robert Webster. When asked what the most important part of an 300SL is to maintain, the resounding reply was "BRAKES!" Another key aspect was Robert Webster's talk on the 300SL's ignition system, changes made during production, and proper maintenance.

Friday morning was the Rally and an early start to enjoy many great driving roads through Montecito and Santa Barbara. Members drove on the famous Highway 101 along the Pacific coast on a misty morning before turning inland beyond Gaviota and crossing the Santa Ynez mountains to Solvang where the weather cleared to a sunny day. We continued to the St Francis Ranch, owned by GWG member Alex Geremia.

LEFT
That's an impressive sight, but there were 10 more 300SLs brought to Ojai.

ABOVE LEFT
300SLs aren't renowned for luggage space, so bespoke suitcases help.

TOP TO BOTTOM
For 2024, the GWG changed the convention from Autumn to Spring.

The event is for W198s (and modern SLSs), but other classics sneak in.

Roads inland of the Pacific Coast highway were part of the event's Rally route.

Rain was predicted for Saturday, hence the HK-Engineering sponsored Car Show held at the Rosewood's Miramar Beach Resort was brought forward to Friday afternoon, when 28 300SLs and nine SLSs participated, along with a 190SL, a 220, and a 230. On Saturday instead of the Car Show, what was considered the best swap meet in years, was held indoors, 10 tables full of all things 300SL. Several long-time members were able to reduce their collections and raise some money.

Saturday evening, prior to the Sunday morning departure, saw a celebration of 70 years of the 300SL, as well as a number of awards given out. The best 300SL Gullwing was given to Hal and Debbie Ashton from Arizona, and best 300SL Roadster to Ginger Bamford, while the furthest driven 300SL belonged to Siegfried Linke who came from Stanwood in Washington, 1,160 miles away. CM

⇨ *The text and images in this report are reproduced courtesy of the Gull Wing Group Web www.gullwinggroup.org*

£10K heroes

Four Mercedes-Benzes sold for four figures at auction

£10K HEROES IMAGES Anglia Car Auctions/Brightwells/Historics Auctioneers/South Western Vehicle Auctions

We're quite envious of the bidder who picked up one of the best W201s this side of the 16-valvers, a 1991 190E 2.6, for just £6,994 at the sale hosted by Historics Auctioneers at Farnborough International in mid-May. The 108,700-mile car came with the added bonus of Sportline suspension and a celebrity former owner, Jay Kay.

The 107-series SLC is reckoned to be rising in value, but reasonable examples can still be found inexpensively, such as this 1979 450SL for £7,840 at Brightwells in May in Leominster, Herefordshire. It was treated to £6,200 worth of mechanical work in 2018, and more recently, at 121,800 miles, was serviced and tuned.

Most of the 1993-2000 W202 C-Classes are now gone, but the odd low-mileage car pops up to make relatively high money, such as this one, sold by Anglia Car Auctions in King's Lynn in Norfolk in April. With just 16,300 miles since new in 1993, the part-historied base model C220 made £7,344, a little above estimate.

Performance of the first European spec V8 R107, the 350SL, feels a bit lacklustre compared the 450SL and 500SL but can be bought more cheaply. In April, South Western Vehicle Auctions in Dorset sold this last-of-the-line, 1980 350SL with 84,800 miles for £9,000, with its last owner for a decade, and resprayed recently.

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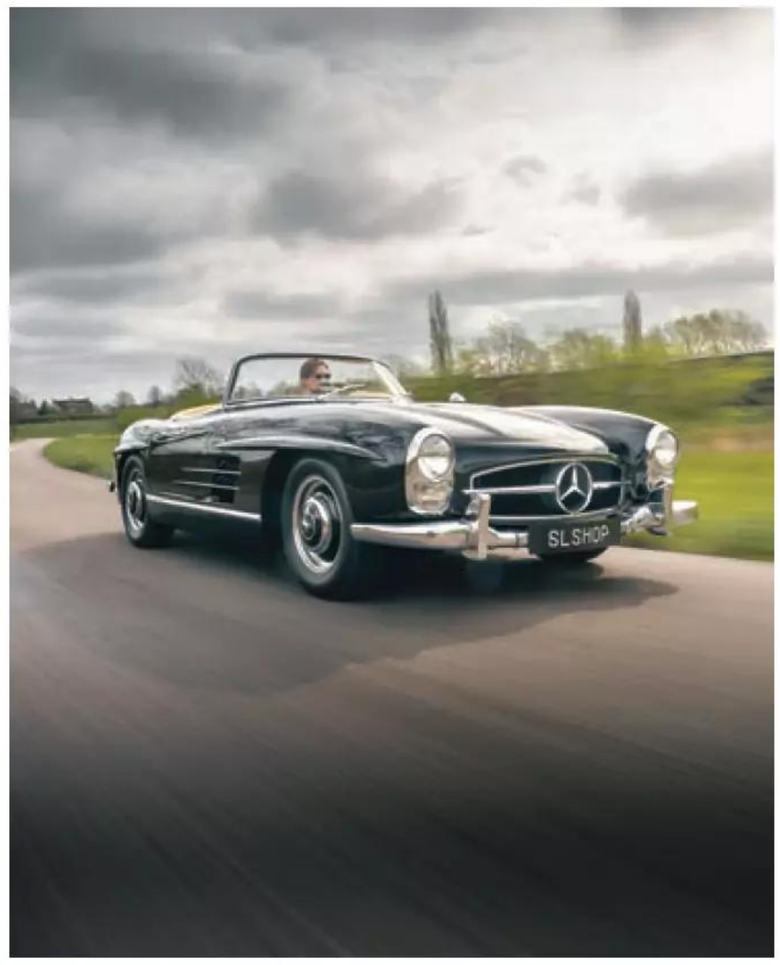

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Letters

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

Can an R230 SL get classic insurance, Oscar asks.

Good guide

Mushtaque is the 126 meister, having owned saloons and an SEC.

I enjoyed reading the Buyer's Guide for the 126-series in the Summer 2024 issue of *Classic Mercedes*, as I have owned six of these in the past, starting with a 1984 500SEC and finishing with a 1991 560SEL. Some of mine were good, and embarrassingly two were absolute lemons.

With this in mind, I was impressed that the guide covered problems with the EZL ignition module and the OVP relay, but it omitted other essential spares to always carry in the boot – the fuel pump relay, as well as a full set of belts which are relatively cheap, or at least they used to be.

With regards to corrosion, a very simple check is to lift the plastic covers for the four jacking points, which will reveal a lot about what is often hidden. Also, getting on your hands and knees and looking at the state of the thick doors, but from underneath, will tell you a lot about the overall condition of the car in a few seconds.

Finally, you mention the 500SE as being a good if not hot performer. I disagree, as the final incarnations had 261bhp versus the 560SEL's 296bhp. I have owned both, and the latter is about 150kg heavier, which makes the former not that much slower.

Mushtaque Ali, London

Sacco's big success

I was delighted to read your article on the 140-series S-Class in the Spring issue of *Classic Mercedes*. As a proud owner for the last eight years of a 1997 long-wheelbase S320 in Tourmaline Green, may I say I consider the 140 one of Bruno Sacco's successful creations, particularly with respect to his requirement that a new Mercedes-Benz design should remain current looking for many decades.

Considering how large many modern cars are, the 140 no longer dwarfs others, and compares elegantly on today's roads. I drive her daily, as no modern car is as cosseting. Buy one while you can and enjoy.

Joseph Leake, Cork, Ireland

It once looked a monster on the road, but against lardy modern motors the 140 is elegant, insists Joseph.

Looming issue

I have a 1993 124-series and was delighted to read in a past issue of *Classic Mercedes* that a heat damaged engine wiring loom is "usually neither as serious nor as expensive to repair as is commonly believed". I would like to explore that further: is there a source of aftermarket looms and/or technical advice that would assist me?

Robin in New Zealand needs a 124 wiring loom.

Robin Bell, Havelock North, New Zealand

Tony Leach, a technical adviser for the Mercedes-Benz Club in the UK recommends Kurth Classics in Wesseling in Germany, which can rebuild your loom if you can send it there – Ed

Best policy

With car insurance rates rocketing here in the UK, I want to try and minimise cost, and have been advised to move my 2004 SL500 on to a classic insurance policy. What are the pros and cons of such policies, and would mine even be eligible?

Oscar Butterworth
Llandudno, Wales

First, your car is borderline on eligibility, as classic insurers generally regard 20 years as the point at which a car becomes a classic. Polices tend to be cheaper, but typically come with more restrictions. – Ed.

Save the diesel

In the introduction to Reed Hitchcock's 'Merc Cast' column in the *Classic Mercedes* Summer 2024, it's stated that "diesels are fast falling out of favour". Among who, exactly? Electric car sales are growing, for sure, but is the trajectory what was expected? Various stories emerging about massive depreciation, excessive weight, catching fire and so forth might dampen enthusiasm.

As an owner of a CLS320 CDI with possibly Mercedes' best ever diesel engine, the three-litre OM642 V6, I feel the car industry is being too hasty by abandoning oil-burning motors. Diesel technology surely has plenty more potential in terms of economy and emissions, and who knows, could even become cleaner than electric power when the overall carbon footprint is considered.

Callum Longheath, London

Keep making diesels, is Callum's advice to M-B.

Get in touch!

Email your letters and pictures to the Editor: david@classicmercedesmagazine.com. Or post them to, The Editor, *Classic Mercedes*, Sundial Magazines Ltd, Sundial House, 17 Wickham Road, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 5JS. Or you can fax them to + 44 (0)20 8639 4411. We do not necessarily agree with the opinions expressed in letters published

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IMAGES *Classic Mercedes*/Terry Oborne

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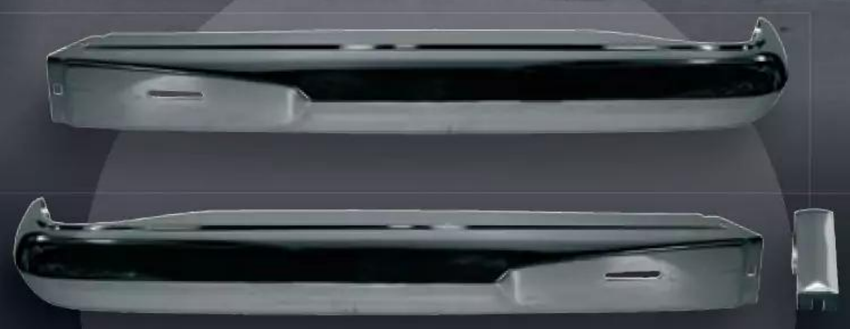
CLASSIC MERCEDES PARTS



Bumper, front, chrome, left/right (with clips)
Fits: Mercedes Pagoda (W113) (2.3-2.8) '63-'71
JP no. 8384100170 / 8384100180
OE ref. A1138800170 / A1138800270

NEW

Oil pipe, lower, from oil cooler to filter
Fits: Mercedes 123 (W123) (2.4D) '76-'86
Mercedes 123 (W123) (3.0D/TD) '76-'86
JP no. 8313700100 / OE ref. 6171871282

NEW

Slave cylinder for clutch
Fits: Mercedes Heckflosse (W110) (2.3) '65-'68
Mercedes S (W108/109) (2.3) '65-'68
Mercedes Heckflosse (W111/112) (2.3) '65-'68
Mercedes Heckflosse (W111/112) (2.5) '65-'67
JP no. 8330500100 / OE ref. 0002952906

Wing, rear, left/right
Fits: Mercedes Pagoda (W113) (2.3-2.8) '63-'71
JP no. 8380600470 / 8380600480
OE ref. 1136400509 / 1136400609

Fuel tank, diesel, 72 L
Fits: Mercedes 124 T (S124) (2.0-3.0 D/TD) '85-'96
JP no. 8315600700 /
OE ref. 1244700904

Fuel tank, gasoline, 72 L.
For models without catalytic converter
Fits: Mercedes 124 T (S124) (2.0-3.6) '85-'96
JP no. 8315600800 / OE ref. 1244701104

Fuel tank, gasoline, 72 L.
For models with catalytic converter
Fits: Mercedes 124 T (S124) (2.0-3.6) '85-'96
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VETERAN MERCEDES SPECIALIST MARK COSOVICH HAS FOUR DECADES OF TALES TO TELL

Memory lane

Now he's retired from his 123-series business, Mark joins *Classic Mercedes* to bring us nuts-and-bolts stories from the heart of the workshop. In this first column, he explains what drew him into the world of Mercedes-Benz all those years ago

IMAGES Dimitris Legakis/Mercedes-Benz Group AG

Jaws and the 123-series haven't dated. Can't say that about their outfits.

My mind drifts back…way back. It's 1976 and everyone's talking about a movie with a shark in it, while The Eagles are celebrating West Coast excess in their album *Hotel California*. And the new 'compact' car from Daimler-Benz is announced, the 123-series. No other manufacturer offered such a range of body styles for one model: saloon, coupe, estate and stretched limousine. Four-, five- and six-cylinder engines, carburettored and fuel-injected, plus diesels, and a first for Mercedes, a turbodiesel. Long waiting lists for new 123s existed for many years – you took the model you were offered, even in the final year of production almost no choice of spec. Mercedes dealers would often say, "You're lucky to get one."

I may well have been in a minority of one in 1979, buying my first W123 when I was 24, every other buyer middle-aged. It was a humble petrol 200 without power steering. At first I'd get stopped by the police, who asked, "Does your father know you're out in the car?" Yes, the 1970s were a very different time, and Mercedes had the global market for 'affordable' luxury cars to itself. This was Stuttgart's first 'world car', finding homes on every continent, such was its superb engineered quality, and of course its elegant style. Almost everything was extra, though, ensuring increased profitability for all higher spec models, particularly the coupes and T-model estates.

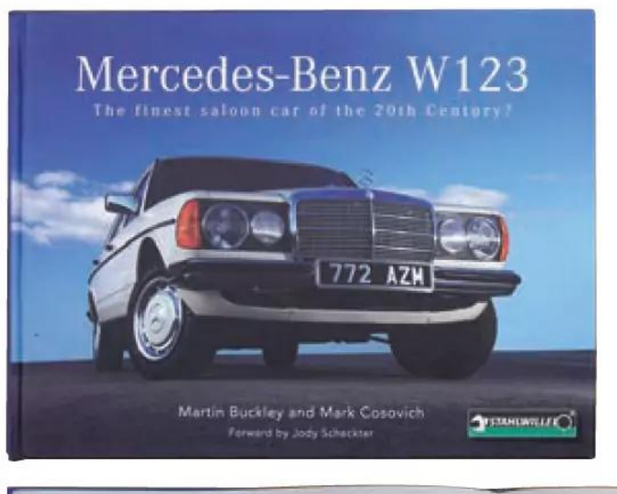
All three of my children were collected

at birth in a 123, and progressed through childhood with many of these vehicles, all supplying superb reliability and particularly safety. If you have 'precious cargo', one of the safest places for a family is a 123, I would say. The 123 is, I feel, easily the safest of classic cars to own and it still provides reliable motoring. Many 40-year-old classics are in fact potentially quite dangerous to drive, particularly in a serious accident. But 123s still provide a good level of safety.

I've been working with the 123-series since the late 1970s, and now my son Alex – who wasn't even born when the 123 went out of production – is running our business, W123 World based in Swansea. This was never a planned business venture, it's been built by enthusiasm and my love of fine engineering, the main and only reason it grew. I've been delighted to meet and make friendships around the world with others of a similar frame of mind, and have now been involved with the restoration of every variant, including the 300CE Turbodiesel which Mercedes-Benz never imported to the UK.

Enthusiasts have shipped them around the world to us, indeed Alex is currently restoring one from Beverly Hills, California. I could never have dreamed of getting my hands on such a thing back when I owned my first 123.

"IN 1979, BUYING MY FIRST W123, I WAS 24. I'D GET STOPPED BY THE POLICE, WHO ASKED, "DOES YOUR FATHER KNOW YOU'RE OUT IN THE CAR?""



ABOVE
The T-Model estate has become the most coveted 123.

LEFT AND BELOW
No question that this is essential reading for 123 enthusiasts.

My long-standing relationship with the car led to me writing a book on it, in partnership with *Classic Mercedes* contributor Martin Buckley, published 10 years ago and entitled *Mercedes-Benz W123, the finest saloon car of the 20th century?* I've now realised how important this vehicle was. Originally, the book was only in English, as I expected sales to be mostly in the UK, and maybe some in other English speaking countries. I certainly didn't expect the huge demand worldwide – copies have dispatched to over 100 countries. Due to the book, correspondence from owners and enthusiasts from all parts of the globe has now turned me into a clearing house and I've even found myself with a 'guru' status, partly because at W123 World we've restored over 60 123 saloon, estates and coupes.

As the book was successful, I'm planning a second edition, which I'm presently researching. I intend to include many anecdotes from owners worldwide I was not aware of a decade ago when researching the first volume. Last autumn, we visited Mercedes-Benz in Stuttgart and discussed the forthcoming volume being available at the Museum, as previously the staff there had been very helpful, allowing me access to the company archive.

The 123 isn't perfect, nothing man-made ever is. However, it's my contention it came pretty close. The general ambience and feel-good factor I've experienced in over 45 years driving them has never receded, and countless owners have confirmed this to me over this lengthy period. Here's an example.

Some time ago I was asked to collect and deliver an immaculate low-mileage W124 from the Midlands to South Wales, around 150 miles, then collect a similar condition W123. The W124 drove perfectly, and I arrived safely and got into the W123. After driving the W123 less than a mile, I realised I'd started to smile, I felt better, more 'in tune' with the vehicle. Not more comfortable, or faster or anything I could really describe, just the same feeling I've had many times, and that other people have commented, that the 123-series is the best ride of all, just as it was in 1976. Oh, and *Jaws* is still excellent too, I've seen it several times, and played *Hotel California* to death. Like the 123, they just don't seem to age. CM

BELOW
Mark has now retired from W123 World after over 40 years...

RIGHT
... but his son Alex takes it into the next Cosovich generation.

OLD SCHOOL MERCEDES DEVOTEE REED HITCHCOCK SHARES OWNERSHIP THOUGHTS

All in the detail

He's a serial car detailer, and the arrival of a W123 a while back gave Reed a chance to get to work again, especially as his wife had bought him an electric polisher he hadn't used much. Here he describes the finishing of a cab-tastic 240D

IMAGES Reed Hitchcock

It took a lot of finicky work to get the 240D like this, but Reed loved the job.

As a teenager, I used to love whiling hours away in the garage detailing cars. There was a certain pride in a fresh wax job, tyre shine, interior vacuum and upholstery clean that made an old car feel almost new again. My parents were lucky: they had a free auto valet service that ensured their cars were nearly always clean. Fast forward 40-odd years, I still appreciate a clean car, especially a classic, and when I bought a W123 240D recently I knew it needed a thorough going-over. The paint was oxidised to a chalky surface, the interior had a layer of dust and general filth that needed attention, and the alloy wheels that I bolted on to drive it home in place of the correct hub cap wheels with ancient, cracked tyres needed a thorough cleaning. Although I sometimes pay others to make my dirty cars clean again, this was one I wanted to apply my long-honed detailing skills to. Plus, my wife had given me a random orbital polisher that was crying out to be used properly.

However, before I could get started on full-scale paint restoration, there was a major hurdle: a 41-year-old adhered tape pinstripe that had faded or simply fallen off in a number of places up and down both sides of the car. I tried using all sorts of adhesive removal chemicals to no avail. A little internet sleuthing suggested I should buy a rubber wheel that attaches to a power drill to get it off. I figured the worst that could happen – on an already "patinated" paint job – would be a burn spot or two and

I would stop. In fact, I managed to get the whole thing stripped off fairly easily, just having to stop from time to time because the rubber wheel got extremely hot, which made it a little soft.

So moving on, I bought new cleaning chemicals, despite having a cabinet full of old ones, because I wanted to make sure I was working with both the latest technology and materials that hadn't degraded beyond the point of usefulness. I even watched a YouTube video of a chap bringing back the paint on his 240D, and noted that he taped up all of the rubber trim to avoid either damaging it with his polisher or staining it with the various waxes used for the job. I did the same and got to work.

With the level of oxidation present, it took me about two days to fully compound, wax, polish, and ceramic coat the paint. The results were very good, but I've spotted a few areas, such as around the badges, that are going to need more work. I also need to get busy with some rust stop and touch-up paint; There are no major corrosion issues evident (yet) but rot is starting in one or two places. Very treatable for a regular driver – which is what this car is intended to be.

I also cleaned the alloy wheels inside and out, and then used a long-lasting tyre coating on the excellent if slightly oversized Vredstein Classic tyres. With those mounted, I was feeling good about the car, until I looked a little closer. What really bugged me were the front headlight surrounds. I'm notorious for replacing US-spec headlights on all my youngtimer Benzes with proper European lights, but for some reason even I can't explain, on this car I decided to keep the US configuration (two separate removable round lenses) but install European lenses in place of the US-style sealed beams.

The light was much improved, as you might expect, but the new lamps really just showed off how bad the original surrounds were. While new Bosch surrounds are no longer available and new old stock units are very pricey, the aftermarket substitutes are very good and, I think, make a tremendous difference to the front end appearance of the car.

"AFTER A GENERAL CLEANING OF THE INTERIOR, I REPLACED THE CRACKED CONSOLE WOOD WITH A BRAND NEW PLASTIC ITEM, WHICH AMAZINGLY IS STILL AVAILABLE FROM MERCEDES"

Inside the car were a few details that needed addressing. After a general cleaning of the interior, I replaced the cracked console wood with a brand new plastic item, which amazingly is still available from Mercedes. It cost a quarter of what refinishing the wood would cost, and I like the look. I kept the wood to either refinish some day or sell-on with the car so the next owner can deal with it. I also replaced the shift knob – also still available new from Mercedes – because the old one just felt kind of squishy and you couldn't read the numbers anymore. Last, I bought a set of new, Palomino-coloured velour carpet floor mats. So now my German taxi-alike 1983 240D looks really quite good – from about 10 feet away. That's OK, this was never going to be a show car for me. I just want it to be a car I can enjoy and be proud to drive. CM

⇨ *Reed Hitchcock lives in Virginia, USA and is co-host of the* **Totally That Stupid** *motoring podcast and blog* ***Web*** ***totallythatstupid.com***

Even just a simple hose wash can transform the look of a car.

New plastic surrounds for the US spec lights made a difference.

Taping up brightwork prevents it being damaged by a polisher or stained by waxes.

RIGHT 'Mexican hats' from Reed's garage were fitted to the W123.

BELOW INSET He discovered that a random orbital polisher is useful.

BOTTOM RIGHT A rubber drill mount made easy work of an old side pinstripe.

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INSIGHTS AND OPINIONS FROM INSIDE THE CLASSIC MERCEDES TRADE

Old issues

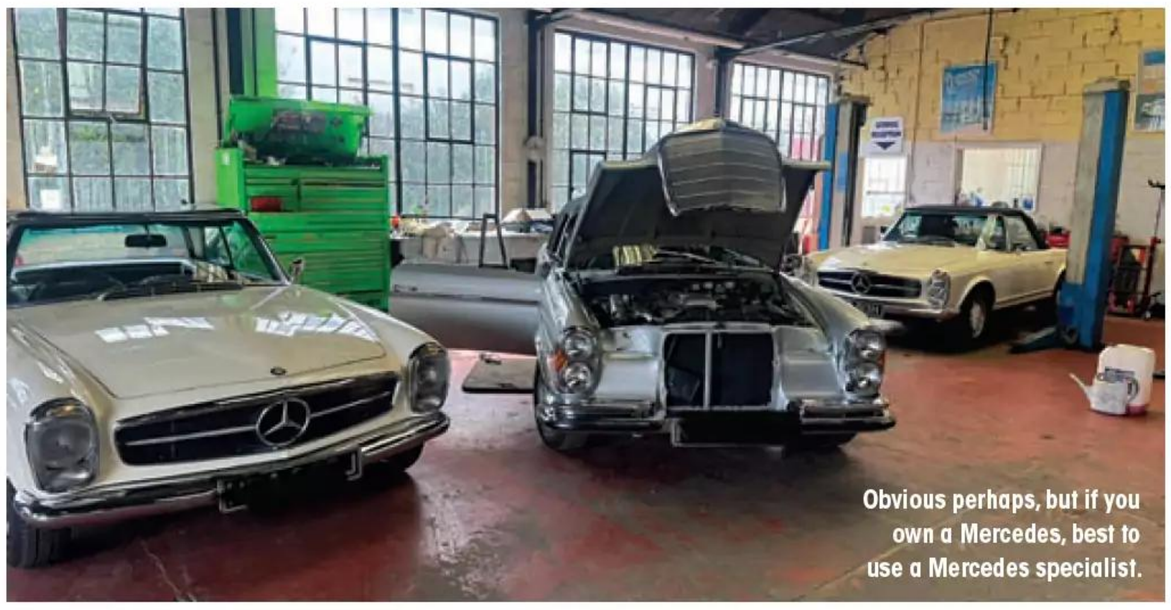
Classic cars need a particular kind of care, and Scott Thompson reveals some unexpected problems that you need to be aware of

IMAGES Richard Mason/*Classic Mercedes*

I've worked on Mercedes classics for nearly 40 years, joining Lymington Motors straight from school. The owner Roy Isherwood was ex-Mercedes-Benz Normand of Mayfair and had a great knowledge of the 600 and indeed anything with a three-pointed star. I learnt everything I know from him including work ethics, that's why today in terms of mechanical problems there's not much I haven't seen.

My customers therefore enjoy a cost benefit straight away, as less time is spent diagnosing a fault, as usually I can go straight to it. Depending on the model and its usage, most classics have the same requirements: say every 10 years, relays, timing chains and guides and so forth need attention.

Sometimes sourcing genuine spares is difficult. So, for example, I prefer to get electrical relays refurbished because this is better value for the customer than aftermarket items, which can be poor quality. Similarly, I have brake calipers refurbished. More recently, sourcing exhausts for the 124- and 201-series has become harder; usually I have them made, but that's a six- to eight-week wait. Radiators are harder to find, so again I get them refurbished. It's just that I like to fit German parts to German cars.



Obvious perhaps, but if you own a Mercedes, best to use a Mercedes specialist.

It's getting harder to source parts for 1980/90s Mercs, says Scott.

Customers need to be prepared for repairs leading to surprises. Recently, while doing a simple wiper repair on a W116 S-Class, I discovered the carpets were soaking, caused by a leaking heater matrix. That's a dashboard-out repair, at least a day's labour. Seals degrade and matrixes corrode, but at least you can get them overhauled.

So far I've yet to encounter this on 'later' cars such as the 201 and 124, however some suffer blocked matrixes. The cheap fix is using our steam cleaner to clear the system, sometimes adding baking soda to dissolve the blockage, and then flushing it through. If that fails to work, then the matrix has to be sent away for overhaul.

Prevention is better than cure, so antifreeze should always be used because it inhibits corrosion, which causes blockages. Customers add chemicals to the coolant to stop water leaks, but this also causes blockages. Although seemingly a cheap fix for a leaky water pump, over time the chemical hardens inside the matrix, blocking it. Realistically, the water pump will eventually need replacing so it's more of an expensive mistake than a cheap fix.

Talking of mistakes, having the wrong coolant can have disastrous consequences. Sometimes classics come in with pink coolant, known as 'organic' coolant, intended for modern aluminium engines. Although lasting longer, it doesn't inhibit corrosion that can occur in engines made of iron and steel. Yes, 'non-organic', which is turquoise, needs to be changed more frequently, but it prevents damage to the cylinder-head gasket and stops the water channels running through the engine block furring up. Non-organic feels slippery, its lubricant prolonging water pump life. So when I see older cars with pink coolant it tells me that whoever serviced the car didn't understand the issues involved, begging the question of what else they didn't know about.

I've known instances of the uninformed fitting the wrong suspension coil springs because they've used the VIN to order the parts, not realising that for these particular parts the VIN is no longer relevant to cars fitted with aftermarket air conditioning systems such as Diavia. The added weight of the air con means the springs aren't strong enough and the car ends up with a nose-down attitude. Also, a car with Diavia will need a longer belt for the compressor, so the VIN gets you too short a belt.

Convertibles have their own issues, for example water entering the boot where the pump for the powered hood is located, causing it to seize. But often pumps can be overhauled, so the fix needn't be expensive.

I advise customers to MOT even exempt cars, because it's good for a record of condition and mileage, and useful in the event of an insurance claim. It seems people are using their classics less, especially here in London because the ULEZ discourages it.

But in any event, I'm kept busy doing what I enjoy. CM

"WHILE DOING A SIMPLE WIPER REPAIR ON A W116, I DISCOVERED THE CARPETS WERE SOAKING, CAUSED BY A LEAKING HEATER MATRIX. THAT'S A DASHBOARD-OUT REPAIR"

⇨ *Scott Thompson is proprietor of independent Mercedes specialist Lymington Motors in London Tel + 44 (0)208 8309404*

Quick guide

W111/W112 coupe (1961-1971)

The pillarless four-seat coupe is a long-established Mercedes-Benz tradition. Tim French looks back at the luxurious Fintail-based W111 two-door introduced back in 1961, the model which started it all

IMAGES John Colley/Mercedes-Benz Group AG/Motorcar Studios

THIS PICTURE
The ultimate version is the 280SE 3.5, out in 1969.

BELOW LEFT INSET
This denotes the last and largest-engined model.

BELOW FAR LEFT
M117 high tech for its time, with digital injection.

On a Friday in February 1961, at the then new Daimler-Benz Museum at the Untertürkheim factory in Stuttgart, one of the most breathtaking luxury coupes ever built was unveiled. Conceived to exploit the lucrative US market, the Mercedes-Benz W111 coupe was a skilful reworking by Paul Bracq of the vast Stateside pillarless coupes of the late 1950s, repackaged in a more useable size. There was nonetheless nothing like it in Europe, certainly not that would be built in comparable numbers.

The new coupe began life humbly engined. The 220SEb for all its size and presence relied on the 2.2-litre six-cylinder Fintail engine (to avoid tax penalties under German fiscal laws), with Bosch fuel injection producing 118bhp,

This is how it started, in early 1961 the 220SEb Coupe appearing.

and as a result was not the high performer its appearance suggested, with 0-62mph in around 13 seconds. That said, mechanical refinement was impressive, and there followed a continuous evolution until production ended in mid 1971 that saw the W111 become an effortlessly powerful car.

It began a year into production, with the introduction of the 300SE Coupe. This used an all-alloy, three-litre engine which initially produced 158bhp but which was later tweaked to 168bhp, and ran with powered brakes and a then exotic air suspension, Stuttgart reasoning that the higher level of equipment, including extra chrome trim

SPECIFICATIONS

Mercedes-Benz W111 coupe

ENGIN CC/CYL/BHP/TORQUE 2,195/6/118/140 (220SEb), 2,496/6/148/159 (250SE), 2,778/6/158/177 (280SE), 2,996/6/168/184 (300SE), 3,499/V8/197/211 (280SE 3.5) **TRANSMISSION** 4-speed automatic/4, 5-speed manual **WEIGHT** 1,410-1,650kg

YEARS PRODUCED 1961-1965 (220SEb), 1962-1967 (300SE), 1965-1967 (250SE), 1968-1971 (280SE), 1969-1971 (280SE 3.5) **NUMBER BUILT** 10,479

All figures from Mercedes-Benz

on the side of the body, warranted a different designation, W112. The 220SEb ran until 1965 when it was replaced by the 250SE with its 2.5-litre, 148bhp engine.

In 1968, the W111 received a facelift, the most noticeable changes the lower bonnet line and slimmed down grille, plus the rubber tipped bumpers. At this point the 280SE, using a newly developed 158bhp 2.8-litre unit arrived, and the following year was joined by a new model which all but shared its name but was a big step up – the 280SE 3.5, as in our main photo.

This was Mercedes' first modern V8 coupe, and with an adventurous engine design at that, given the electronic regulation of the 3.5-litre V8's Bosch D-Jetronic fuel-injection, and computerised ignition. In fact, this was a step too far for the time, and made the engine run less smoothly than the straight-six with mechanical fuelling, no doubt one reason the carmaker brought back a mechanical system during the 1970s.

However, it was good for close on 200bhp and a healthy 211lb ft torque. As with the preceding W111s, the 280SE 3.5 was available with a manual gearbox, but a four-speed automatic was fitted to most (it was standard equipment in the UK), operated either by a floor selector, or a steering column shifter.

The W111 is a wonderful combination of Mercedes pomp and superiority, and raffish sportiness, and the very act of sliding into the driver's seat and taking hold of the large, white steering wheel with its chromed ring horn makes you feel good about things. So much of the interior furnishing is exquisite, from the beautifully detailed minor switches to the lovely grain of the wood cappings.

There is performance to be unleashed from the 280SE 3.5, but ultimate pace wasn't what even the flagship model was about, so if you wanted a sports car then the near neighbour in Stuttgart, Porsche, was the place to shop. A four- not three-speed gearbox was a bonus for the day and shifts smartly.

Unsurprisingly, the chassis of all five models was set up primarily for comfort, not communication, the recirculating ball steering lacking in feel and fast cornering inducing much body roll. However, the ride is utterly luxurious, aided by the tall 185 section tyres on just 14-inch wheels, bumps disappearing into the tyre walls and the softness of the coil springs. The 250SE, and the 280SE and 280SE 3.5 have hydro-pneumatic self-levelling at the rear, while the ride quality is elevated to magic carpet level on the 300SE, equipped with the air-sprung suspension from the 600 limousine.

Of the 28,916 W111 coupes built, by far the biggest seller was the first model, the 220SEb notching up 14,173 sales. The 250SEb found 5,259 homes, the 280SE 3,797, the 3.5-litre V8 version 3,270 and the 300SE 2,419. A total of 7,013 of the identically badged and specced cabriolet variants were delivered in the same production period.

As for values, the cabriolets have soared away from the coupes, the best 3.5s breaking the £500,000 threshold at international auctions. Coupes are therefore a relative bargain, typically fetching half the price or less of dropheads. This must be partly because four times as many coupes were made, and reasonable examples are still be had for under £100,000. The 3.5 is the one people want most, while the 300SE with its trick suspension and evolved Gullwing engine has a particular following. The W111 was replaced by the R107-based SLC, which was a stylistic anti-climax, and five decades on has probably helped frame the striking beauty and authority of its predecessor. CM

TOP 10 FACTS

- **The W111 coupe was based on the Fintail**
- **Newly recruited Paul Bracq styled the body**
- **The last Mercedes-Benz to be virtually hand built**
- **Five variants were built, 2.2- to 3.5-litre V8**
- **Due to its high spec, the 300SE was coded W112**
- **V8 the first car engine with digital management**
- **A total of 28,916 were manufactured 1961-1971**
- **Top seller was the 220SE, at 14,173**
- **In a 2022 auction a 280SE 3.5 made £300,000**
- **Values are just half those of the cabriolets**

"SO MUCH OF THE INTERIOR FURNISHING IS EXQUISITE, FROM THE BEAUTIFULLY DETAILED MINOR SWITCHES TO THE LOVELY GRAIN OF THE WOOD CAPPINGS"

The fascia, wheel and instrument design is early 1960s perfection.

Seats are large, generously padded and comfy... in the front, at least.

In 2022 in California, RM Sotheby's sold this 280SE 3.5 for $379K (£292K).

PICTURE PERFECT ICONS

February 1954, International Motor Sports Show, New York: W198 300SL launched

The story of how Mercedes' US importer, Max Hoffman, persuaded the carmaker to build a road-going version of the highly successful 1952 300SL sports racing car to boost the marque's then staid image in America is well known. But familiarity doesn't dilute how sensational the coming together of Rudolf Uhlenhaut's engineering genius, Friedrich Geiger's superlative futuristic styling and Hoffman's marketing push into New York high society was when the 'gull winged' coupe landed 70 years ago.

Context is so important: while the pre-war Daimler-Benz was well financed and powerful, by 1945 it was little more than a smoking ruin, a company theoretically no longer in existence. Seven years after the end of World War Two, Mercedes-Benz was back in business but still under-resourced to the extent that the 300SL racer had to make do with the engine from the 300S 'Adenauer' saloon (itself a re-purposed truck unit), along with the big saloon's drum brakes.

The compensating factors were design brilliance: low weight, thanks to a tubular alloy space frame chassis and alloy bodywork, a low centre of gravity thanks to the 45 degree slanted engine installation, and slippery aerodynamics drawing on Mercedes' pre-war expertise in this field. Much of this was carried into the 1954 road car, and arguably no 'supercar' since has made quite the same impact as the 300SL Gullwing.

The 1,400-unit run was the basis for the high-end SL model line that's evolved over seven decades. In this issue we celebrate SLs from the classic years: volume-produced models, unknown one-offs, the exotic alloy-bodied Gullwing, these and others are all here.

Sleeping beauty

This 500SEC was laid up in a garage for years, apparently unwanted. Until, that is, Mark Lewellyn and his dad became aware of its fate and set about persuading its owners to part with it. David Sutherland describes how they managed that

IMAGES STEVE HALL

“The 500SEC spent years unloved in a garage, rakes and shovels propped up against the driver’s door, cement bags gradually solidifying in front of it”

Sunningdale Carriage Co Ltd

Mercedes-Benz

Our Ref:CB/MS

24th April, 1989

Invoice No: 9934

To:

Supplying one new Mercedes-Benz 500SEC finished in Nautic Blue with Cream Leather Upholstery, complete to manufacturer's specification:

	£42,220.75
Car Tax	£42,220.75
Supply & Fit Reflective Number Plates	3,518.38
Supply & Fit Radio/Stereo	30.00
Factory Collection for one Person	315.20
	150.00
VAT @ 15%	£46,234.33
12 Months Road Fund Tax	6,935.14
	100.00
	£53,269.47

Chassis No: 126 044 2A 476106
Engine No: 117 965 22 024914
Stock No: 9934

JACKS

LEFT
Mark Llewellyn and his dad knew the 500SEC when bought new...

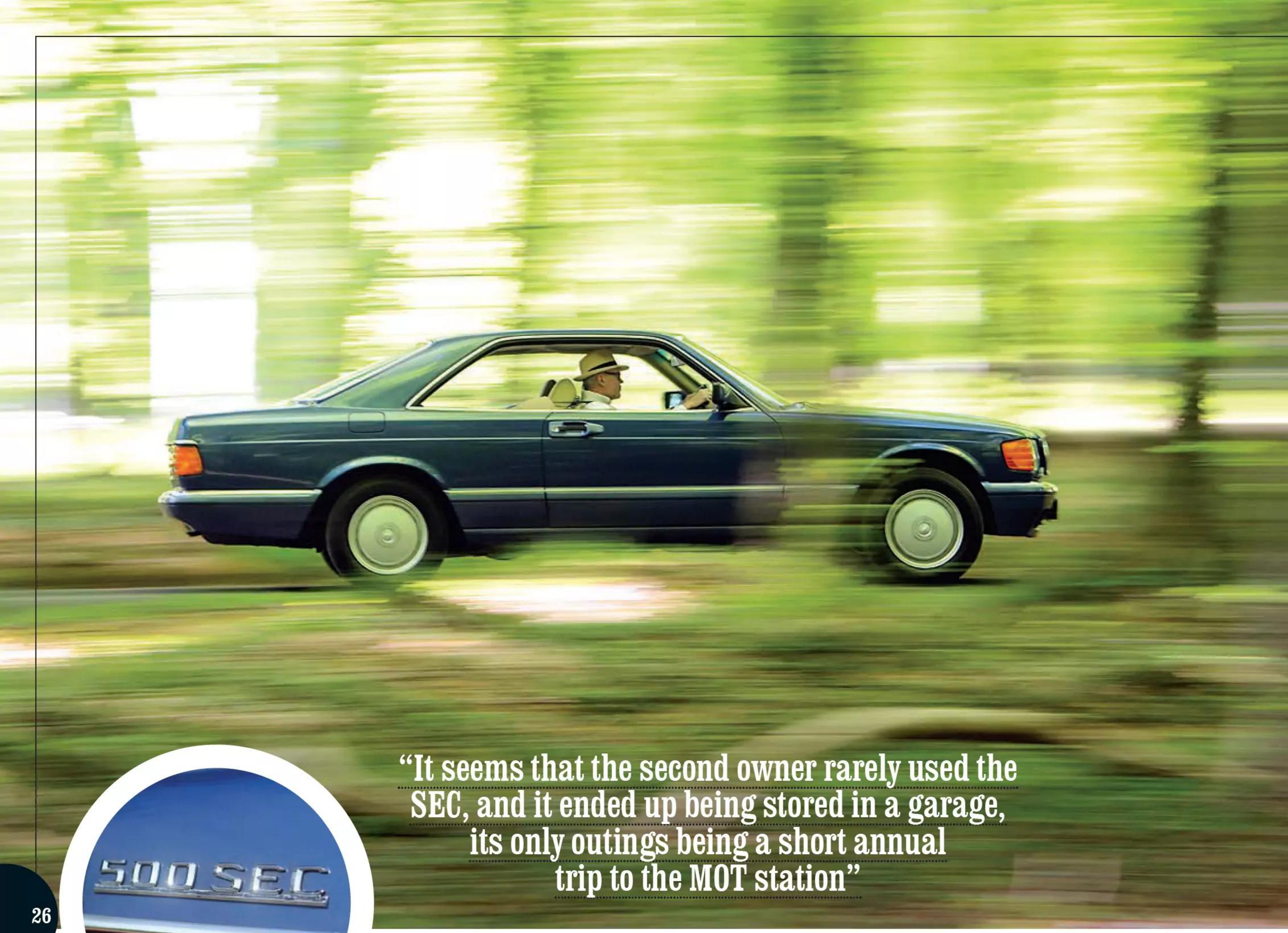
LEFT INSET
...so when it came up for sale decades later they were well placed to buy.

It’s a tantalising fantasy that will have played out in the imaginations, or during the sleeping hours, of many classic car enthusiasts. You are alerted to the car of your dreams, which is being disposed of by a grieving widow more interested in tidying her late beloved husband’s effects than monetising them, hence his old Mercedes is being offered to anyone who can promise a good home, in this case you. As the doors to the barn creak open, the sunlight exposes the dusty but unmistakable shape of the large Stuttgart coupe you’re told hasn’t moved for years and so probably isn’t worth a great deal. Thank you for taking the trouble to visit, and would you like it, you’re asked, almost apologetically. You look at the sad-eyed, vulnerable lady to say “yes please!” – at which point the 7am alarm goes off and it’s time to get up and go to work.

But for broadcast engineer Mark Lewellyn, his ‘barn find’ dream was one he was able to turn into a reality. The exceptionally well preserved, 1988, 126-series 500SEC photographed here spent years unloved in a garage, with rakes and shovels propped up against the driver’s door, cement bags gradually solidifying in front of it and an ever increasing layer of dirt deadening the paintwork.

“I put my head through the driver’s open window, and thought, ‘It’s good for 230,000 miles,” Mark recalls. “Then I looked again and, oh, it’s 23,000 miles!” He doesn’t wish us to reveal the price he paid, but stresses that it was much more than the seemingly disinterested offers made by a few others. The widow was happy to see it go to Mark, which was important to him.

After the sweet joy of filling the ownership paperwork, the next ‘moment’ was starting the SEC for the first time in six years. “I jump-started it from a Lexus, and I cranked the engine for quite a bit,” Mark recalls. “Finally it started and revs stuttered up to 1,200rpm, then fell to 1,000rpm. It then dropped to normal tickover speed and ⇨



"It seems that the second owner rarely used the SEC, and it ended up being stored in a garage, its only outings being a short annual trip to the MOT station"

Specifications

Mercedes-Benz 500SEC (C126)

ENGINE M117 4,973cc V8
POWER 261bhp@5,200rpm
TORQUE 299lb ft@4,000rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed automatic
WEIGHT 1,650kg
0-62MPH 7.2sec
TOP SPEED 147mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 23.4mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 1981-1991
NUMBER BUILT 30,184

All figures from Mercedes-Benz, and for a post-September 1987 model as pictured

ABOVE
Driving the 500SEC in warm weather with the windows down is lovely.

LEFT
Not exactly spacious but the rear cabin takes two and has easy entry/exit.

RIGHT
Nicely original, down to the dealer-fitted Blaupunkt Casablanca head unit.

BELOW LEFT INSET
The button to operate the ingenious front seat recline system.

⇨ the engine ran without a murmur."

That was four years ago, and despite there being an interesting collection of classic and other vehicles overflowing out of Mark's rambling garage at home in Surrey, the 500SEC remains a firm favourite. One pleasant surprise has been how little of the expected major work was needed. "The exhaust silencers prolapsed all over the A272 when I first gave it some beans, I'm sure due to sitting in a garage for years full of water," he concludes, "and I think there's a slight chuffing from one of the manifolds, but there's been no new spark plugs or leads, not a sausage. I put it into to Mercedes-Benz Hindhead because I really wanted the official star stamp for its 24,000-mile service."

Mark also booked a dry ice mobile cleaning session with The Blast Smith, which explains the brightness of the 36-year-old paintwork, and the gleaming underside. The years of non-use did not cause any rust issues, and even the underneath of the rear parcel shelf – a notorious corrosion spot on 126 SECs – is clean and solid looking.

But why, you may ask, was a 500SEC as good as this 'abandoned' in a garage and pretty well forgotten about, way past the point when 126 coupes began to rise in price? Mark knows why, because he and his father John had been aware of the Nautic Blue Mercedes since it was purchased new in

ABOVE
Given M-B's safety priority a headlamp wash/wipe system was standard kit.

LEFT
The 500SEC was the top selling C126, nearly 30,200 over 11 years.

BELOW LEFT
The clumsy door handle is the SEC's one botched styling detail, many say.

BELOW
The leather, instruments and big wheel make for a classic 1980s Benz cabin.

Driving the 500SEC

This 126 coupe belies its 36 years, David Sutherland reckoned after a delightful South Downs drive in it

Had I not seen the photos of Mark's 500SEC sharing space with garden tools, building materials and lots of dust, I would have found it hard to believe I was behind the wheel of a one-time barn find. There is no evidence of the years of neglect, although Mark tells me that not a lot other than cleaning needed done to make it usable. He took to long-standing Mercedes specialist John Haynes near Worthing in West Sussex, where it was pronounced in good condition. The paintwork looks particularly smart, not least because Nautic Blue is a less common colour and to my eyes a welcome change to the various silvers of most SECs.

The 500SEC feels like a 24,000-mile Mercedes – but three years old, not 36. The leather is fresh, the instrument markings unfaded, and if there are any creaks and rattles from the trim, I didn't hear them. No nasties from the suspension or steering either. A screech from the transmission was sometimes to be heard on take-off, but Mark's present to-do list isn't a long one.

With 126 SECs, it's tempting to think that the 560SEC with its extra mid-range grunt is the only show in town, but the 500 does have its virtues. While it lacks some of the effortless urge of the 5.5-litre M117, it is smoother and sweeter, its character more disciplined Germanic compared to a slightly woofly American nature. It's certainly spritely compared to the 380 and 420 models, both of which feel underpowered much of the time.

I always look forward to a pillarless Mercedes, and the 126 is one of the best to use. You're sitting higher than in, say, an R107 SL, and the top of the door is the perfect height to support your elbow, or arm if you're inclined to drape it over. Up to 60mph there is very little wind buffeting with all the glass lowered. The full-size Mercedes coupe doesn't get any better than this, I feel.

June 1988 through Sunningdale Carriage Co, then the Mercedes-Benz dealer in Ascot in Berkshire, and collected in person from the Stuttgart factory by a company executive in Egham. The price, including the Blaupunkt Casablanca radio/cassette player and factory collection fee, was £53,269.

John knew the family, and also the next owner, who lived in the area. However, it seems that the second owner rarely used the SEC, and it ended up being stored in a garage, its only outings being a short annual trip to the local MOT station. By the time these visits ceased in 2013, the Benz had still covered under 24,000 miles, a mere 2,000 in the previous seven years.

After the second owner passed away the Mercedes coupe became not just imprisoned in its garage, but almost ⇨

Some days feel like work but not this one, says Editor Sutherland.

⇨ forgotten about, until five years ago. "We'd always known it was there but had been indifferent to it," says Mark "I'd not paid SECs much attention, remembering them as £1,500 bangers. But when John visited the widow with a view to buying a modern Toyota she was disposing of, there it was – the car we'd last seen probably in 2004 or 2005."

Mark and John went back the next day to discuss buying the Mercedes, and learned that the family had been trying, if perhaps half-heartedly, to sell it. "Through their solicitor, they'd been offering it around, including contacting We Buy Any Car, who just thought it was another old Mercedes with no MOT and offered them hardly anything,"

ABOVE
Not need to forego any boot space if you buy a four-seat Merc coupe.

LEFT INSET
Mark's dad John the irst to find out that the family were selling.

F1 favourite

In the 1970s top racers had 450SEL 6.9s, and by the 1980s were driving 126 coupes

Mercedes-Benz had no presence as a participator in F1 in the 1970s and 80s but often the paddock car park was packed with Stuttgart hardware, those who were there recall.This

BELOW
Nigel Mansell collecting his new 500SEC from Sindelfingen in 1982...

BELOW
...and in 1987, while living in Monaco, bought this left-hooker 560SEC.

LEFT
The Bruno Sacco era arguably saw Mercedes styling at its most discreet.

ABOVE LEFT
These '15-hole' wheels came to the 126-series at the autumn 1985 facelift.

says Mark. "When I made my offer, the widow told me, 'That's great'. She was very happy, because it was just about to be towed away."

Original SEC flagship

What Mark bought was the original five-litre range-topper in the SEC line-up, before the 5.5-litre 560SEC was added to the line-up at the facelift in September 1985. Introduced in 1981 to replace the 107-series SLC, and arriving two years after the 126-series S-Class saloon on which it was based, it was a stablemate to the 380SEC, whose Bosch K-Jetronic, 3.8-litre M116, two-valve engine produced 201bhp and 232lb ft of torque. It used an enlarged version of the same M116 V8, giving 227bhp and 299lb ft and redesignated M117; every C126 built used the same four-speed automatic transmission.

"To compensate for the structural rigidity lost due to the absence of B-pillars, the front A-pillars were reinforced with high-strength tubes and the roof frame stiffened"

To compensate for the structural rigidity lost due to the absence of B-pillars, the front, A-pillars were reinforced with high-strength tubes, and the roof frame section was stiffened, too. The SEC still tipped the scales at slightly less than the 126 saloon, nonetheless. Inside, the SEC was also a reproduction of the saloon, with the same fascia and instruments. The wheelbase was 30mm longer than the predecing SLC's, and rear legroom was better, and if not actually generous, then adequate for adult occupants, while the 30mm lower roof line compared to the 126 saloon did not noticeably reduce rear headroom. Due to the pillarless side windows, we saw the seat belt 'butlers' for the first time, which electrically presented the belts from their shoulder level mounts to front seat occupants. ⇨

ABOVE
Of all the different eras of the distinctive Mercedes dash, this is a favourite.

BELOW
With a sweet driveline and cosseting ride the C126 is a great pleasure to drive.

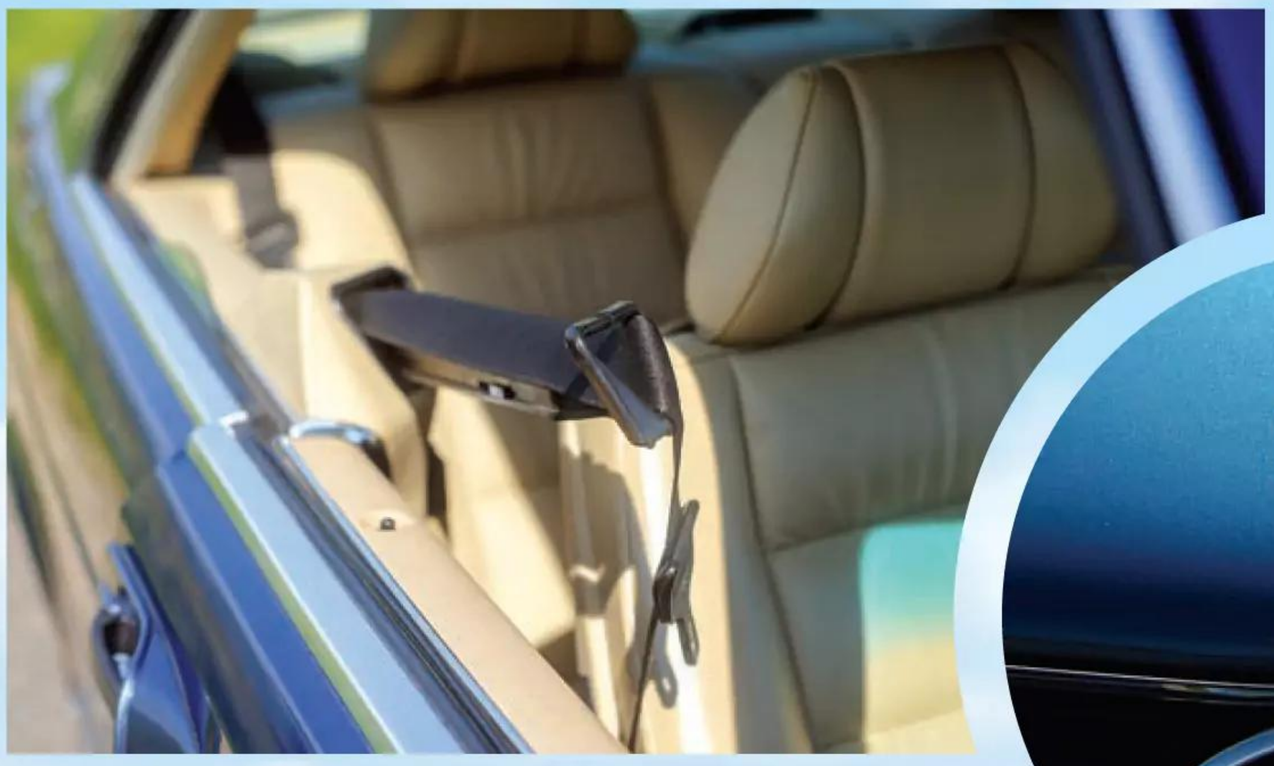
BELOW LEFT
The seats are comfortable and provide a fairly high up driving position.

BELOW
Ayrton Senna was still an F1 rookie when he purchased his 500SEC.

BELOW
Andrea de Cesaris was another driver unable to resist the Stuttgart deal.

was partly because Mercedes offered drivers a massive, hard to resist discount on the price. Lotus driver Nigel Mansell collected one of the first right-hand drive 500SECs from Sindelfingen in 1982, and remained a C126 fan throughout the decade, driving a left-hand-drive, Monaco-registered 560SEC for two years and 50,000 miles in the late 1980s.

Even in his first year in F1, 1984, and driving for Toleman, Ayrton Senna enjoyed glorified road transport, also picking his 500SEC from the Mercedes factory. Keke Rosberg, 1982 champion, also later owned a 560SEC. The second of the Mansell along with the Senna and Rosberg cars are well documented and remain in the classic Mercedes community. Two other SEC owners in F1 were Andrea de Cesaris and Martin Brundle, the latter claiming that he made more money selling his on at the end of the F1 season that was paid to him for a whole season's driving!



LEFT
The SEC's electric seat belt 'butlers' minimise effort when buckling up.

BELOW INSET
Being a 'sporty' Benz, the SEC has the nose star, not the raised three-pointer.

The biggest news, though, was the introduction of a third model, the 560SEC, fitted with a stroked, 5.5-litre version of the 500SEC unit that was good for 268bhp and 317lb ft of torque. The 560SEC looked almost identical to the 500SEC, but ran 215-section tyres instead of 205s, and came with self-levelling rear suspension, and extra interior equipment, including memory equipped electric front seats.

By now, BMW and to a lesser extent Audi were becoming more serious rivals to Mercedes-Benz, particularly in terms of engine output, so two years later, in autumn 1987, all three engines were uprated, the 420SEC now 228bhp/247lb ft of torque, the 500SEC 261bhp/299lb ft and the 560SEC 296bhp/336lb ft. These were the last developments, production ceasing in October 1991.

The change back from an SL- to a saloon-based flagship coupe proved a good move, total production of 74,060 some 11,000 more than that of the SLC, over a similar lifespan; indeed 126 SEC sales easily topped those of the 1992-1998 C140 that replaced it, and also of the two models after that, the 1998-2006 C215 and the 2006-2014 216-series.

The top selling model was the 500SEC, with 30,184 built from 1982 to 1991 – but arguably the most popular was the 560SEC which found 29,929 customers in just half that time. The 380SEC notched up 11,267 sales, and the 420SEC was a comparative rarity at 3,686.

Any way you care to judge it, the original SEC, part of the celebrated Bruno Sacco styled W201/124-/126-series extended family of the 1980s, is already remembered as the most loved of Mercedes' big coupes from any era. It must surely be considered modern classic royalty, nothing less. CM

⇨ The 1986 season revamp introduced slightly different bumpers, body side claddings with a plain instead of the original ribbed surface, and road wheels that at 15 inches in diameter were an inch larger than previously, as well as being a cleaner looking 15-hole design to replace the 'Mexican hat' rims. There were bigger brakes too, and work was done on the differential to quieten it.

However, underbonnet uprates were more significant. The 'entry' 380SEC was replaced by the 4.2-litre 420SEC, power rising by 14bhp to 215bhp and torque by 11lb ft to 243lb ft, while the 500SEC engine switched to electronic ignition and electro-mechanically regulated Bosch KE-Jetronic fuelling, boosting output by 14bhp to 242bhp (torque remained unchanged).

ABOVE LEFT
Every SEC from 380 to 560 was mated to a four-speed auto gearbox.

ABOVE
Mark thought the Merc had done 240,000 miles, not a barely run-in 24,000.

"Any way you judge it, the SEC is already remembered as the most loved of Mercedes' big coupes from any era"

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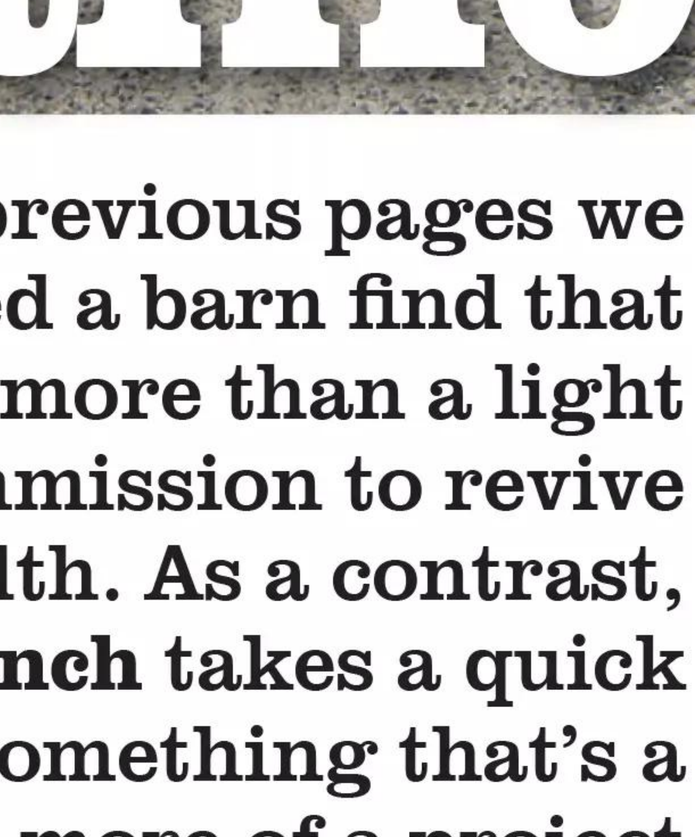
Rough diamond

On the previous pages we described a barn find that needed no more than a light re-commission to revive it to full health. As a contrast, Tim French takes a quick look at something that's a little bit more of a project

MAIN IMAGES EDWARD HALL CLASSIC MERCEDES



RIGHT
The 3.5-litre W109 was registered in the UK in 1970, two owners since.

Whatever the circumstances of ownership, it's unlikely that when a car is taken off the road and locked away the intention is to leave it there for decades. It often just turns out that way: out of sight, out of mind. The weeks turn to months, which become years, during which the car becomes almost forgotten about. Even if it isn't, making it roadworthy again becomes ever more difficult and expensive as time passes. The death of the owner is often the time the car finally emerges, when family attend to the estate, as in the case of the W109 300SEL 3.5 seen here. Earlier in 2024, 42 years after it was purchased, the deceased owner's daughter offered it to Edward Hall Classic Mercedes in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire.

Supplied new by Mercedes-Benz dealer Charles Sidney of Bradford, the 300SEL 3.5 has had just two owners from new in 1970. The second owner purchased it in the mid to late 1970s, but then garaged and barely used it. The road tax ran out in 1978, this last disc still on the windscreen.

Finished in Silver Grey (DB180) with black leather upholstery, a column-shift automatic, electric sunroof, Becker stereo and electric windows, this exclusive, rare in the UK saloon cost around £6,300, half as much again as a Jaguar XJ6 and the equivalent of about £85,000 today. The Mercedes

RIGHT
Inside, the car was a bit grubby but everything is in pretty good condition.

BELOW
The final tax disc was attached to the windscreen in the summer of 1977.

BELOW LEFT
Inevitably the air springs had sunk down to the ground in over 40 years.

ABOVE
Edward concluded that the Mercedes looks a lot worse than it actually is.

BELOW
The original tool wallet and most if not all of the tools are still in the boot.

“Although the W109 was frankly a sad sight, what lay beneath the rust scarred surface was encouraging, it was discovered after further investigation”

still has all its original books and manual, data card, factory guarantee certificate and service book. There’s even a full service history record with the supplying dealer up until 1976 at 97,681 miles with 13 stamps in the book. The mileage is 100,919 miles.

“This car barely spent eight years on the road,” says Edward Hall. “The last owner’s daughter remembered travelling in the car once as a child over 45 years ago when it was in immaculate condition. Then, for reasons we will never know, the car was entombed for the next four decades.”

In 1982 there was evidently a plan to use the Benz again, as it was taken for, and passed, an MOT test. “But we think that this was the last journey it made, because the odometer now reads four miles over that noted on the MOT certificate,” Edward explains. “The car came to light, as is often the case, after the passing of its owner.”

Retrieving it from the four-decade hibernation wasn’t easy. “It was a nightmare to get out – the air sprung suspension had sunk right down, the brakes had seized and the tyres were rotted away,” Edward reports. “Plus there was a hillock outside the garage door that we had to get it over, but we did it without damaging the car.”

Although the W109 was frankly a sad sight, what lay beneath the rust-scarred surface was in fact encouraging, it was discovered after further investigation. Edward reckons the only panel needing replaced is the bootlid. The underside, for so few years exposed to road salt, is solid and original, and the sills, floors and inner wings are all good.

The interior is generally in remarkable condition. It hasn’t suffered from damp, or rodents or UV damage, and most of the trim and fittings simply need cleaned – although considering how long the car was laid up, it doesn’t look particularly dirty inside. However the M116 V8 engine was seized, which was hardly surprising.

As a potential project, Edward rates this 300SEL 3.5 highly. “It’s a super original car and perfect for a restoration,” he tells us. “It hasn’t been welded, painted or filled so you wouldn’t have to undo someone else’s bodging.”

Nonetheless, Edward decided to sell the car on rather than undertake a rebuild. “On a personal level I would have loved to restore it, as there’s always the joy of turning something around,” he explains. “But it wouldn’t have made commercial sense for the business.” The Mercedes was quickly snapped up, going “to someone who’s taken on various projects previously.” CM

BELOW
The M116 V8 engine is going to need an awful lot of work, as it’s seized up.

African dream

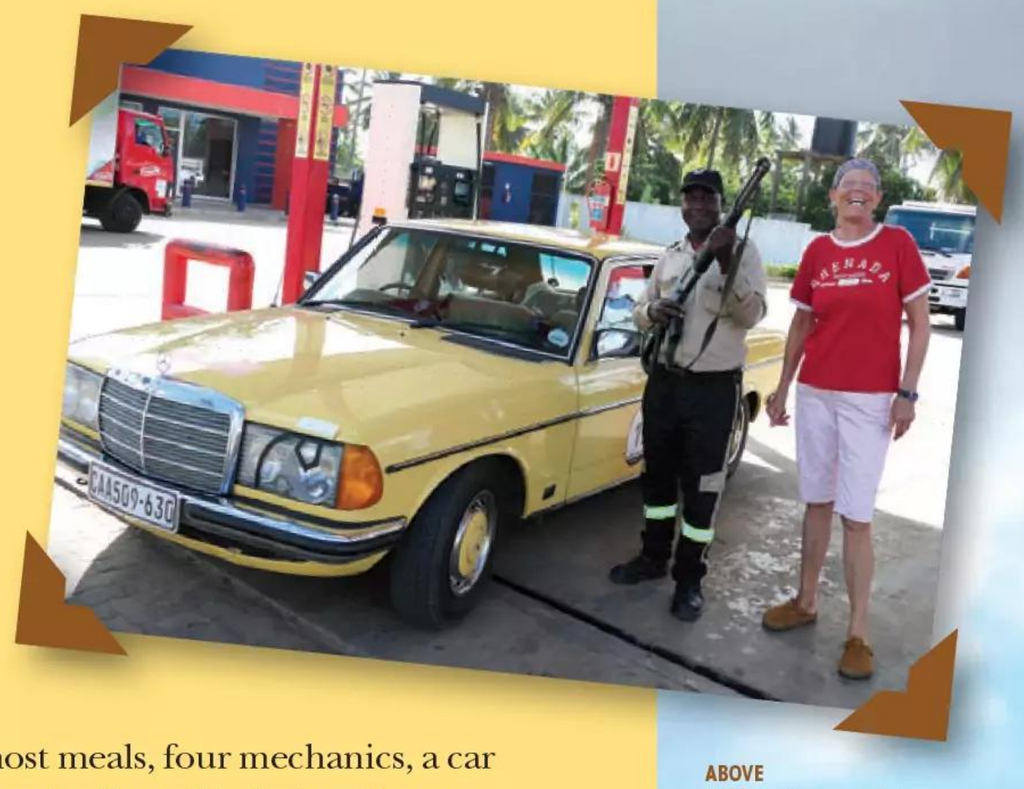
When **Karen** and **John Eriksen** found themselves unable to resist undertaking a classic car adventure across the southern tip of Africa, they needed to buy suitable wheels. What better choice than a base-level 123-series saloon, asks Karen

IMAGES KAREN ERIKSEN

ABOVE LEFT
Karen and John didn't know what to expect but liked what they found.

ABOVE
It was a good way of seeing a lot of Africa in a relatively short time.

Where to start? Almost 5,000 miles, seven countries, 25 cars, 16 nationalities, uncountable border crossings, African villages, people everywhere, wild animals – it seems a blur. Our classic car rally around sub-Saharan Africa traversing from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean was the trip of a lifetime.



ABOVE
Karen discovered that fuel station security in Mozambique can be high.

BELOW
At Hout Bay, Cape Peninsula, a seaside suburb of Cape Town.

The idea started years ago after a friend took part in the Peking to Paris, the Mount Everest of classic car rallies first run in 1907. We watched the video and were hooked. We explored what else the international rally scene offered, settling on Africa: Destination Rally was organising a 25-car rally leaving from Cape Town, the cars pre-1980.

So, thinking this would make things easier, we bought a Mercedes W123 in South Africa, built in South Africa in the Mercedes factory in East London, which prided itself on producing even better quality than Germany. In Third World countries, the model was popular due to its reliability, ability to travel on rough roads and modest need for maintenance. We would see how that went. A four-cylinder, carburettored 230 from 1979 with only 135,000 original kilometres (84,400 miles) on the clock. We christened her 'Bee' due to her beautiful Sahara-yellow livery, and bought her unseen, naturally.

Destination Rally's boss Bruno Leunen from Belgium is a well-respected veteran of the travel industry who knows his rally clients' needs. The Africa event package included all the accommodation, most meals, four mechanics, a car trailer, two doctors and rally staff to help with any imaginable problem. We would drive north from Cape Town, see Namibia's natural sights including the Etosha National Park, go up the remote Caprivi Strip to Botswana's Okavango Delta, admire the Victoria Falls in Zambia, stay on a houseboat on Zimbabwe's Lake Kariba, conquer Mozambique and Eswatini and finish on the coast near Durban four weeks later. What could go wrong?

We arrived in Cape Town a whole week before the rally start, just in case our local mechanic, who was a busy man of few words, hadn't prepared Bee to husband John's instructions and the rally standard. With trepidation, we first set eyes on Bee in his workshop in Claremont. We needn't have worried, ⇨

"ONE DAY AFTER A SLUGGISH AND MISFIRING MORNING WHEN OVERTAKING TRUCKS BECAME IMPOSSIBLE, BEE STOPPED IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE AND WOULDN'T START AGAIN"

ABOVE
John spent almost as much time underneath the 230 as on or in it.

TOP
Some of the highways weren't much more than dusty or muddy tracks.

⇨ she was immaculate inside and out, however she hadn't been driven since 2008, we learned, so had required quite a bit of work. With the high purchase price and upgrades plus the new sheepskin seat covers, we were moving towards Rolls-Royce investment levels. For family peace reasons I kept the true figures from John (*Have you told him yet? – Ed*).

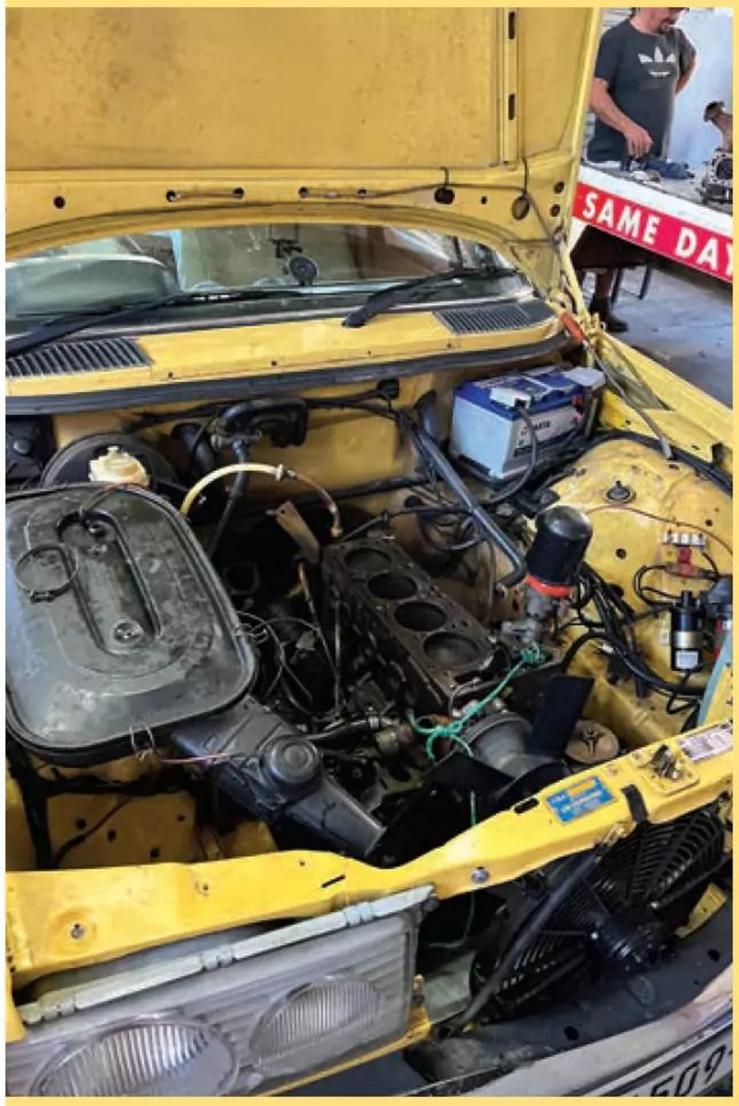
The good news was the mechanic had sourced essential and extra spares, tools, replaced rubbers, tyres and so on, while a lot of engine components were rebuilt or brand new. I connected the new tripmeter, put up brackets for phone and GoPro as the navigator and cameraman. She looked ready and so were we.

Rally participants gathered at the Table Bay Hotel on Cape Town's Victoria and Albert waterfront the afternoon before the Monday start. We queued to get our road book and useful rally merchandise like safari shirts, cool bags and water bottles. In the car park we counted four 911 Porsches, two Volvo Amazons, a 1934 Lagonda and 1947 Bentley, an Aston Martin DB6, a Peugeot, Mustang and a rare Nash Healey from 1953. The fleet included five Benzes: a 1959 220S Ponton from Austria, two Pagodas, us and a W114 280. Most cars wore previous rally stickers – if Bee hadn't glistened in sunny yellow she could have been considered the ugly duckling in this star-studded car flock. Half the people were Belgian or Dutch, most others from the UK.

Day one of the rally turned out a soft opening with a short drive to the wine regions east of Cape Town. At the first meal, at the Le Franshoek Hotel, feelers went out: who would become a lifelong friend? On day two, according to the road book we looked at a long, 350-mile drive on tarmacked main roads to Springbok near the border to Namibia. Daily drives in the book were 250-400 miles, it was clearly go, go.

ABOVE
Wildlife could appear at any time, so it made sense to always look out for it.

BELOW
Fortunately a new head gasket was sourced and Bee was on its way.



LEFT
For a 1979 W123, Bee's 133.3K mileage is really quite modest.

ABOVE
MB-Tex vinyl gets hot in the sun, but probably the best trim for this event.

BELOW
The pair bought almost a boot full of kit for best chance of surviving Africa.

BOTTOM
Only day two, and 'Bee' overheated and had to be trailered to a garage.

On the mountain roads to Springbok, with lots of trucks to overtake, Bee worked hard. Two-thirds in before waypoint 28, marked in the book as a petrol station, the engine overheated, and we slowly rolled into the shade near the fuel pumps. The second new coolant hose had come off – wrong diameter by 2mm – and we had cooked the engine. Was the cylinder-head warped or was it just the head gasket, were two of the many questions beyond my expertise. John under the bonnet with several helpful bystanders, I pulled out the compulsory satphone. By dusk Bee was on the rally trailer and we, deflated, in the back seat of the mechanic's car. Worst case scenario, this could be the end, on day two! And just to slow things down, a public holiday the next day. But Desmond was a bulky car magician with a stethoscope, and three days later with a new head gasket biked up from Cape Town, we started chasing the rally, now in northern Namibia.

After driving on the uninteresting northbound motorway for two days, with one stay looking out over the Kalahari desert, we rejoined the team in blustery Swakopmund on the Atlantic coast, having basically missed Namibia's most famous sites. "At least we're still in it," John rightly said, and it was nothing a big seafood platter accompanied by a chilled Rosé couldn't fix. The others had seen dunes, rhinos and more, and the German-owned Peugeot, driven to Cape Town from Tanzania, had broken down twice and then smashed its windscreen. Fixed with an improvised Land Rover screen, it would be shipped – mid-rally – to Beijing so as not to miss the start of the Peking to Paris. Well, somebody's got to do it.

Day three for us began in thick fog with an eerie drive through the flat desert along the forlorn skeleton coast, shipwreck included. Tarmac turned into gravel, corrugation, rocks and a car-breaking track. Dutch Nicky and Frans's black 250SL Pagoda on her inaugural trip in their ownership was the first fatality. Arriving much later in the hotel car park on the trailer, the diagnosis was terminal, and she was shipped home, just like that. Her Dutch mechanic had underestimated the prep needed for the roads of Africa, and the pair hired a 4x4 with air con.

Bee revelled in the conditions, sort of, and to our surprise and having given lunch a miss, we were first car home. The driver relieved! And Bee and her new friends got a free wash in the car park; rally boss Bruno knows how to keep his clients happy.

Bee had some issues on and off as a consequence of the overheating and likely historical problems, fair enough considering she was 45 years old and had been a sleeping beauty in a car collection for 16 years. So John's favourite place in the afternoon or morning was under the bonnet, Kiwi rally mechanic Pablo soon his best friend. One day after a sluggish and misfiring morning when overtaking trucks became impossible, Bee stopped in the middle of nowhere and wouldn't start again. Watched by a group of small local children, we flagged down our immensely competent Danish friends Ib and Mogens, rally royalty, who produced gloves and tools and helped John diagnose. When only one possibility was left, the battery almost empty and Ib eyeballed something, Bee started first try and ran flawlessly the rest of the day. Carburettor, timing chain, points, electrics were frequent topics of conversation from now on.

We drove on, every day different. Getting up around 5am, on the road in the early pack so the four-cylinder didn't have to work too hard keeping up with the sixes and eights, we would sometimes join for lunch, sometimes not; three meals a day and sitting in the car all day was not good for the waistline. We had found our tribe and sat with each other at most meals, lively conversations about former rallies, cars, life and only rarely politics.

We became close friends with Christof and Len in the well-prepared and rally-seasoned Mercedes Ponton that never had a single issue. Michael and Elly from Vancouver Island had also bought a Mercedes in South Africa, a W114 from 1976, recently judged Most Original Car in a competition; its originality kept the mechanics very busy. Michael and Jeremy in their open 1947 Bentley Speed 8 drew crowds wherever they went. Elegant Frenchman Frederic in his silver 250SL Pagoda fearlessly overtook the endless convoy of trucks. As days went by a Volvo and the Mustang were sent home, a 911 almost, and several other cars ended up on the trailer but repairable. The four-wheel-drive hire car fleet grew, allowing everybody to continue. ⇨

On the home stretch towards Durban, after nearly 5,000 miles.

"A LIFESAVER WAS OFTEN THE HEAVILY USED NATURE STRIP THAT WE VEERED ONTO WHEN TWO MASSIVE TRUCKS NEXT TO EACH OTHER WERE POWERING TOWARDS US IN AN OVERTAKING MOVE"

The roads were often unlike anything we had seen before. 'Pothole' had had no meaning to me, a German. The main problem was how they could surprise us, with Bee hurtling down major roads. Parts of the National Highway N1 in Zimbabwe from Lake Kariba to Harare were more of a 4x4 track, and we dodged road-wide potholes you could lose a car in. Some roads we negotiated in first gear with oncoming trucks wandering everywhere over the road in slalom as we did. The mud of one road was raked down by some workers in front of us so we could drive on it. A lifesaver was often the heavily used nature strip that we veered onto when two massive trucks next to each other were powering towards us in an overtaking move. The drivers of buses were lunatics, while cows, goats, donkeys and pigs could surprise us at any time.

⇨ The frequent border crossings were a challenge, the bureaucracy astounding and tedious. Bruno had hired local help for the procedure, but sometimes it still took hours. The imported cars had *Carnet du Passages* to show at the borders. We had a South African car registered in a friend's son-in-law's name, sometimes that made it easier, sometimes not at all. The procedure was always too long, hot and with endless forms.

The Victoria Falls and the Royal Livingstone Hotel were highlights, with zebras grazing next to us at dinner. The serious white water rafting on the Zambezi River with its hellish descent and ascent almost finished us off. The overnight stay on a boat on Kariba Lake was something completely different again. But our main buzz was driving through countless villages, seeing the local people walk everywhere, women with heavy loads on their heads, men on donkey or oxen carts, the many kids waving. Fuel stops offered the opportunity to chat to attendants, but due to the clapping pace we saw local life mainly from the car, although we still saw a lot of it.

ABOVE
There had to be some R&R, here cruising on the Okavango River.

LEFT
Leopards in the Phinda Mountain Lodge private game reserve, SA.

BELOW
Unlike Karen and John, some had done this classic rally lark before.

ABOVE INSET
280SL needed attention in the Namibian desert, and later dropped out.

ABOVE
Two of the event's five Mercedes sandwich this fine 1947 Bentley.

Every country was different, based on their colonial and post-colonial history, Mozambique being the most positive surprise. In this country of now around 30 million people, Portuguese colonisation lasted almost 500 years. Independence in 1975 was followed by a Marxist regime and a lengthy civil war, now the country suffers regional terrorism and abject poverty. But in contrast to Zimbabwe with its frozen, unhappy looking people after decades of Robert Mugabe's regime, Mozambique was friendly and colourful.

After a spell in the lofty mountains of Eswatini, on perfect roads we drove the final kilometres toward Durban, processing impressions and comparing notes on what was most memorable. Seeing Africa like this, so much of it, felt like a huge achievement, and had been exhausting, fascinating, sobering and, due to our friendly group, great fun. With now just over 140,000km, Bee is still a toddler in W123 terms, and shipped from Durban to Australia, she's now part of the family. CM

Mercedes-Benz 230 (W123)

Engine **M115 2,307cc 4-cyl** Power **108bhp@4,800rpm**
Torque **137lb ft@3,000rpm** Transmission **4-speed manual** Weight **1,350kg**
0-62mph **13.7sec** Top speed **106mph** Fuel consumption **22.8mpg**
Years produced **1975-1980** Number built **195,920**
All figures from Mercedes-Benz

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TIMEWATCH
1997: CLK coupe launched

The first CLK sold strongly in five years, and its 209 successor also did well.

Face of the future

By the 1990s, Mercedes-Benz knew it had to change to survive, and in 1997 launched the 208-series CLK. It was closely based on Stuttgart's first ever design study, **Tim French** explains

IMAGES Mercedes-Benz Group AG

For decades until the mid-1990s, Mercedes-Benz's mainstream models had been conservatively styled and aimed at an equally reserved customer base. It was a strategy that had worked over many years, buyers appreciative of the high quality engineering and build delivered, and rewarding with strong brand loyalty. But in the century's ultimate decade it was becoming clear that demographics were working against Stuttgart, the old guard of customers beginning to fade away, forcing the car maker to confront a younger breed of motorist who wanted the sportier driving experience offered by BMW, Alfa Romeo, Audi and others. It might not go down well with some, but Mercedes-Benz was going to have re-invent its models, build a wider range – and also reduce its famously high costs, said to be a result of the sway that engineers enjoyed over accountants. Had Mercedes, then not a big numbers player in the global car industry, not grasped this particular nettle, it might well have found it impossible to surive as an independent marque in an ever more competitive and consolidating European car market.

In the second half of the 1990s, the Mercedes product revival campaign was in full swing: following the R170 SLK, a mini SL, presented in April 1996, the 208-series CLK made its debut in January 1997 – the much anticipated replacement for the 124-series coupe discontinued almost a year earlier. This second new production vehicle within the expansion of the product portfolio was first presented to the public at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, and made it clear that the winds of change were blowing through Mercedes-Benz.

The CLK underlined how serious Mercedes-Benz was about breaking into new segments. The brand's goal was to address additional and younger target groups with new vehicles and thus strengthen its base in the market. The next products in this strategy were also already set for launch: the A-Class and M-Class also made their debut in 1997, followed by the CLK Cabriolet in 1998.

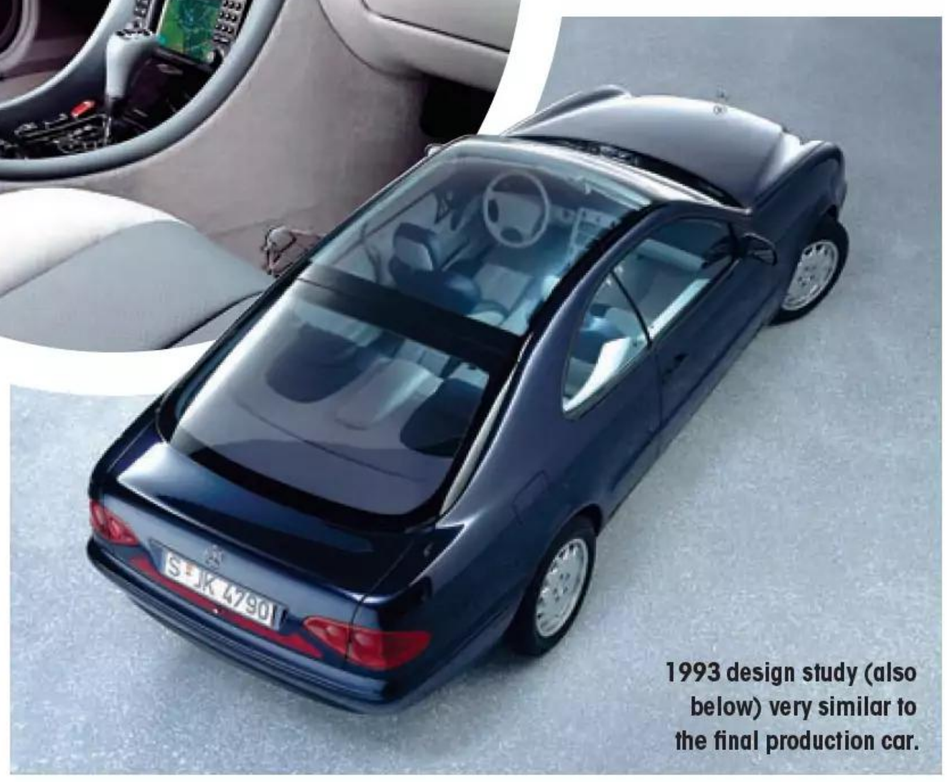
Such was the importance of the CLK to Stuttgart, that its story, as far as the public were concerned, began in March

ABOVE
Mercedes wanted to match the CLK's modern exterior with a cutting edge cabin.

RIGHT INSET
Bright colours were introduced to appeal to 'youthful' customers.

ABOVE
The radical 'four eyes' nose epitomised the out with the old approach to styling.

"IT WAS BECOMING CLEAR THAT DEMOGRAPHICS WERE WORKING AGAINST STUTTGART, FORCING THE CARMAKER TO CONFRONT A YOUNGER BREED OF MOTORIST"



1993 design study (also below) very similar to the final production car.

1993, when a design study caused a genuine sensation at the Geneva motor show. This wasn't simply an elegant, four-seater coupe, but one with a new vehicle face for the brand, characterised by four 'eyes': a slender radiator grille, four single, elliptical headlights, two large ones on the outside, and two smaller ones on the inside. The teasing also applied to the fastback rear end with its large glass section; was this what a future vehicle of the brand would look like?

"That was exactly the point, to familiarise the public with new design elements," said Peter Pfeiffer, who at the time played a key role in designing the coupe study, alongside Mercedes' highly respected head of design, Bruno Sacco. "It was the company's first ever show car," explained Pfeiffer, emphasising the significance of the exercise (since then, Mercedes has of course often used motorshow design studies to test out new styling directions).

In fact, the four-eyed face went into series production in 1995, on the 210-series E-Class. Mercedes believed the reaction in Geneva to the question of how well the radical new four-seater coupe with the Mercedes star would be received in the market was unambiguous – there would be a good number of buyers, the carmaker concluded. Its appeal did not seem to have been dented by the lack of a pillarless body, an important hallmark of previous Benz coupes.

When the unveiling of the actual production model followed almost four years later in Detroit, the CLK with its distinctive nose section looked remarkably similar to the study from Geneva, and was proof of how close to series ⇨

ABOVE
The 1997 CLK had big wheels to fill, the 124 a much respected coupe.

RIGHT
The 208-series CLK was introduced at the Detroit motor show in early 1997.

TIMEWATCH
1997: CLK coupe launched

"MERCEDES-BENZ SURPRISED THE WORLD BY ADOPTING SUPERCHARGING, A MEANS OF FORCED INDUCTION THAT, DUE TO COST AND RELIABILITY, HAD BEEN SHUNNED"

ABOVE RIGHT
Far right is Peter Pfeiffer, who worked on the CLK alongside Bruno Sacco.

RIGHT
By the 2000 Geneva motor show the M-B product 'revival' was in full swing.

⇨ production Mercedes-Benz design was long before the first car rolled off the production line. "We are not trying to create a crazy demonstration car packed with nonsensical showmanship that causes short-term astonishment but then disappears into oblivion after only a few motor shows," Bruno Sacco later commented.

Although it was assumed to be the replacement for the 124 coupe, the CLK was not based on a 124 floor assembly but that of the the 202-series C-Class saloon, with which it shared other engineering aspects. However, numerous aspects were very different to its stablemate, not least the fundamentally new body design, which signposted the independence of the model series. In common with the 202 there was a choice of different trim and equipment lines, starting with Sport and Elegance. A wealth of standard equipment common to both models included traction control (TCS), exterior temperature display, remote bootlid opening, heat-insulating glass and an asymmetrically split folding rear seat backrest to increase boot space.

The range was broad. The entry model was the CLK200 with a four-cylinder, naturally aspirated engine producing 134bhp, while the CLK200 Kompressor used the same M111 motor but supercharged to give 190bhp. At the time, Mercedes-Benz had recently surprised the world by adopting a means of forced induction that, due to cost and reliability issues, had been shunned by most other carmakers.

Mercedes had not used supercharging since its pre-war Silver Arrows grand prix cars (time would prove that the blown four-cylinder units as well as V8s enjoyed exemplary reliability and longevity). Six-cylinder models were also offered along with two V8s, the 4.3-litre, 275bhp CLK430 and, from 1999 the mighty CLK55 AMG toting 342bhp and Affalterbach chassis upgrades.

It all paid off: the 208-series coupe was very well received, a total of 233,367 units produced at the Bremen plant in the five years until May 2002. That was 65 per cent more vehicles than the 124-series coupe production yielded over nine years. The best selling model was the CLK320 at 68,778 units.

Daimler-Benz top management, with decision makers including Werner Niefer, Helmut Werner and Jürgen Hubbert, had started to think about re-generating the marque during the late 1980s, and an impressive harbinger of the product campaign came as early as 1990 in the form of the W124 500E, which Mercedes felt was an important starting point for the changing image.

Motorsport also shared in the success. "The desire to dynamise the brand and later to position AMG as the 'sports badge' of Mercedes-Benz worked, as you can see today," is how Norbert Haug, motorsport boss from 1990 to 2013, assessed this period in retrospect. "One of our maxims was not to start in racing series where you can lose inconspicuously, because winning there is also inconspicuous. Those interested in sport soon noticed that Mercedes-Benz was daring to try something new.

"The image in terms of excellent reliability, quality and safety was there," he continued. "Now sportiness was added, which led to extremely positive reactions from the outside and inside, along with the corresponding sales figures."

The entire product campaign was a risk – but a calculated one that paid off. Maybe some older customers no longer wanted to driver Mercedes-Benz cars, but by opening up a new customer base, Stuttgart began to future-proof. CM

★ Headlines of 1997

★ *With 1996 champion Damon Hill out of the Williams F1 team, Jacques Villneneuve had a clear run at the title in the Renault-engined FW19. He duly took the title, but only three points separated him from Michael Schumacher's Ferrari.*

★ *In the wake of the embarrassing 'moose test' by Swedish magazine Technikons Värld, A-Class deliveries, which had begun in October, were suspended for 12 weeks to allow for chassis retuning and for ESP traction control to be retrofitted.*

★ *Renault's Megane Scénic (below) was voted 1997's European Car of the Year by 55 motoring journalists from 21 countries. It scored 405 points to win a clear victory. The Ford Ka was second followed by the Volkswagen Passat.*

★ *There was worldwide shock at the news that Diana, Princess of Wales, had died after a car crash in Paris. It happened after the princess left the Ritz Hotel in the French capital with Dodi Al Fayed, the son of Harrods owner Mohammed Al Fayed.*

★ *An American woman became the first person to swim from the United States to the Soviet Union. Lynne Cox, 30, took two hours and six minutes to cross the Bering Strait which separates the Arctic and Pacific oceans – and the two superpowers.*

Renault

LEFT
V8 CLK55 AMG was a marvellous range-topper.

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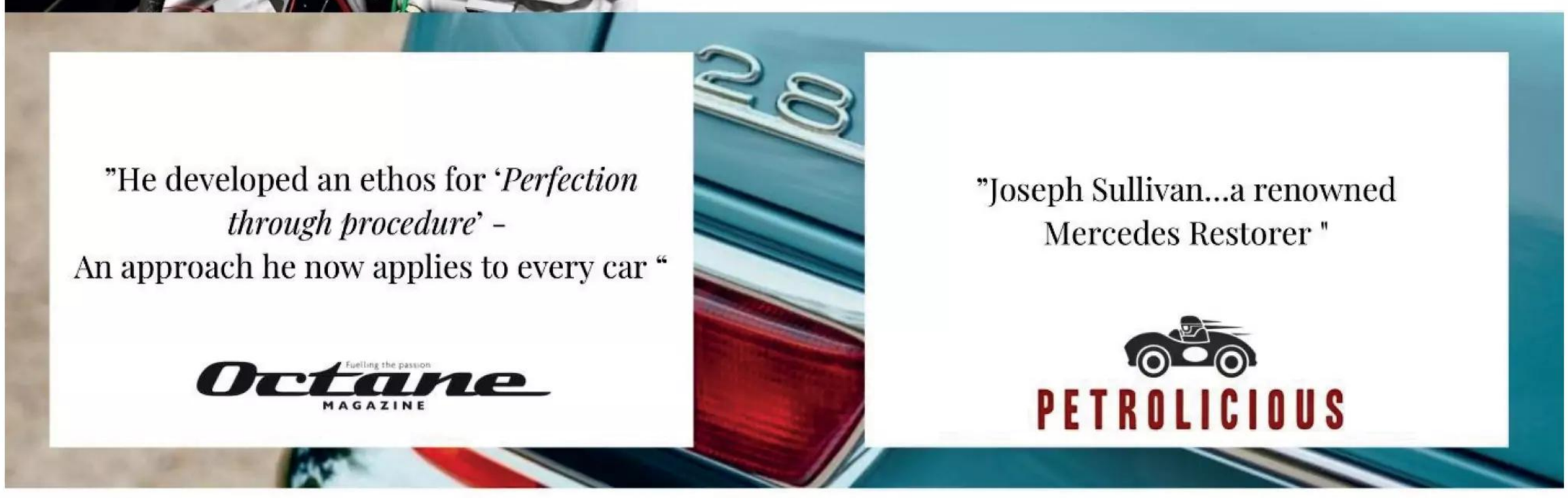

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Road and track

The SL has carved out a special niche.* David Sutherland *takes a closer look at all of them

IMAGES Tim Andrew/Derek Goard/James Lipman/Terry Oborne/RM Sotheby's/ Josh Sweeney/Richard Truesdell

Seventy years ago the 300SL Gullwing was launched, aimed at boosting the staid image of Mercedes-Benz in the US. It not only achieved that, but laid claim to being the first 'supercar'. It was built for just two years and nine months, but began a glamorous sports car bloodline that continues to this day, and here we consider no less than 20 models from the classic years – mainstream and motorsport – that have helped make the letters 'SL', standing for *Sport Leicht*, or Super Light – such a celebrated badge. Many you'll be very familiar with, but others are fascinatingly obscure, special projects at Stuttgart that only enhance the powerful SL aura.

This example had a makeshift screen protector fitted mid-event in Mexico.

W194 300SL Sports Car (1952)

While the first road-going *Sport Leicht*, or Super Light, was the W198 300SL unveiled in February 1954 in New York, the SL story began in 1948 when Mercedes' gifted engineer Rudolf Uhlenhaut, began sketching out what would become the company's return to international motorsport in 1952. It was the W194 300SL, built on a tiny budget and using existing components including a three-litre, straight-six truck engine with three carburettors and 170bhp.

Due to the engine's modest power compared to that of rival racing engines, Uhlenhaut concentrated on low weight and aerodynamic efficiency (the engine was dry-sumped to allow a lower engine height), the streamlined alloy body fixed to a featherweight tubular chassis.

The 300SL in both 'gull-winged' door coupe and open roadster form, was entered in long distance events in 1952 and piled up trophies, including victories at Le Mans and the arduous Carrera Panamericana across Mexico. Ten were built – it's not known how many still exist, but one still owned by Mercedes-Benz was restored in 2012. The original 300SL was replaced for 1953 by the W194/011, featuring evolutionary improvements. But it never raced, as the carmaker decided to switch to Formula 1 for 1954.

1952 was M-B's racing return, the 300SL winning the Carrera Panamericana.

ABOVE INSET
This is the interior of the 300SL Mercedes-Benz Classic restored in 2012.

RIGHT
In 1954 this was the world's most stunning vehicle, no question.

ABOVE RIGHT INSET
Its engine was the first in a road car to be fuel-injected.

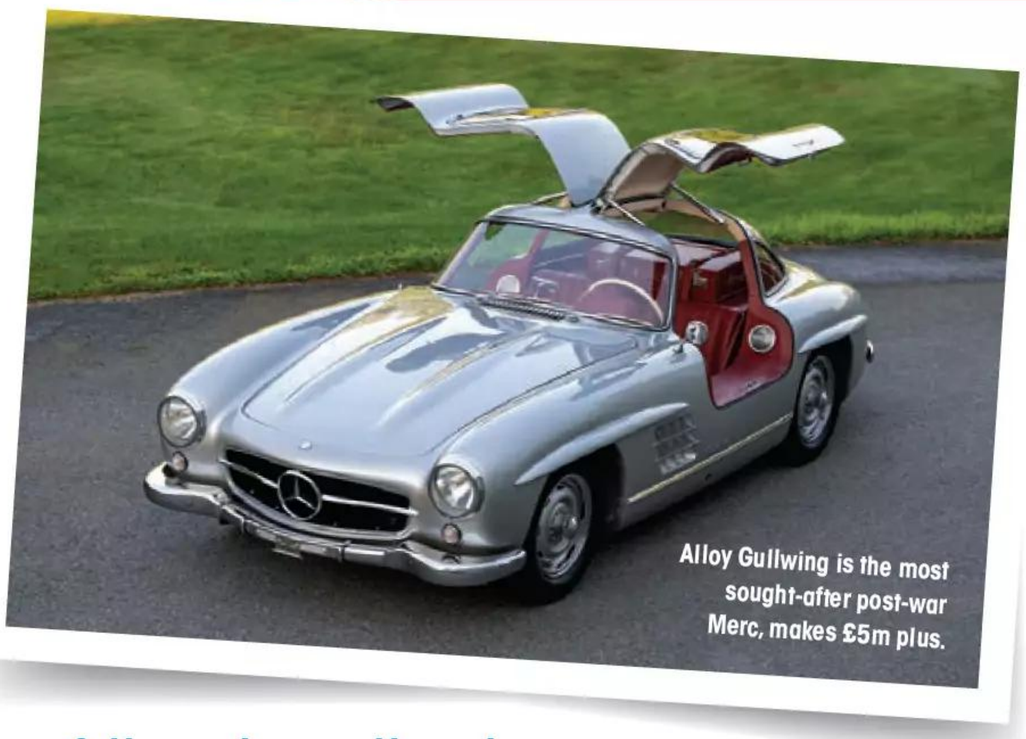
Gullwings came with a fold-down steering wheel; this is a wood rimmed item fitted later.

W198 300SL Gullwing (1954-1957)

Based on the highly successful competition W194 300SL of two years earlier, the W198 version was nudged – make that pushed – into production by the marque's visionary, New York-based US importer Max Hoffman, who insisted that capitalising on motorsport success was assuredly the best way to boost Mercedes' staid post-war image in America.

It was built around a light alloy, tubular space frame clothed in low slung aerodynamic bodywork with top-hinged doors, and was the first full production car with a fuel-injected petrol engine. All this made it the decade's most stunning car when unveiled in early 1954 in New York.

The three-litre engine was mated to a four-speed manual gearbox and delivered a top speed of over 160mph, depending on the final drive ratio. A total of 1,400 were made in under three years until 1957, all in left-hand drive form and mostly delivered in North America.



Alloy Gullwing is the most sought-after post-war Merc, makes £5m plus.

Alloy-bodied 300SL Gullwing (1954-1957)

After the Gullwing's 1954 launch, there was something more exotic still to come: a special version with all alloy bodywork and increased engine power. Just 29 out of the 1,400 300SL Gullwings built were this spec, equipped with a higher powered engine. Unsurprisingly they are very highly prized, but also require more careful treatment and maintenance, due to the vulnerability of the paper-thin alloy body panels.

Scarcity means Alloy Gullwings rarely come up for sale, with six seen at public auction in the last dozen years. However two cars, both from 1955, were offered for sale by international auction house RM Sotheby's in 2022: in its Arizona sale for £6.83m ($5.33m) and at Monterey for $5m (£3.9m). In 2024, the same auctioneer offered a particularly well preserved example under sealed bids, hence the price isn't known – the following feature gives full details of this particular car.

LEFT
Alloy-bodied Gulwings have exactly the same interior fittings as the metal cars.

'149' is the *Sonderteile* 300SL that M-B gave Stirling Moss to race.

W198 'Sonderteile' 300SL (1954-1957)

Mercedes-Benz quit Formula 1 in the aftermath of the 1955 Le Mans tragedy, but the factory maintained a low level of circuit motorsport involvement for two years after that, including supplying specially prepared 300SLs for top race drivers to use. Their *Sonderteile* (special parts) engines ran with an 'NSL' competition camshaft, special 'R3' fuel-injection pump, 'F3' venturi and a bespoke racing exhaust, all of which raised power from the three-litre M198 straight-six engine by 25bhp to around 240bhp. The springs and dampers were stiffened, a larger oil tank installed, and distinctive Rudge knock-off wheels with specially ventilated drum brakes fitted. The lightweight alloy bodywork, fitted to 29 special order cars, was not used, the logic being that the greater solidity of steel would serve the car better under rallying conditions.

In 1956, former Silver Arrows driver Stirling Moss entered a Sonderteile 300SL long distance road races in addition to his duties as a Maserati driver, for example the *Tour de France Automobile*, a Nice-to-Paris dash in September. In the same year the American, Paul O'Shea, drove one in the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) series, taking a class championship.

RIGHT
Paul O'Shea drove this one in US sports car racing.

Compared to the 300SL the 190SL was high volume, 26,000 made.

W121 190SL (1955-1963)

A year after launching the 300SL Gullwing in 1954, Mercedes added what was effectively a budget alternative – but that didn't make it cheap, because although half the price of a 300SL it was double that of a basic Ponton saloon. It was in fact based on a shortened, four-cylinder Ponton platform and has that car's 1.9-litre engine, but with twin carburettors.

Compared to the 1,885 300SL Roadsters made, the 190SL, which was discontinued in 1963 at the same time as the 300SL, was mass-produced at nearly 26,000. The modernity of the Pagoda which replaced it showed up how old fashioned it had become both in looks and performance; drive a 190SL today and it feels tame. In fairness, Mercedes never billed it as a sports car, rather a comfortable and well-appointed tourer, which in its day it was, and it's no less charming for its lack of pace. Improved brakes and better engine mounts appeared early on, and minor updates including new door locks, numberplate lights and a larger screen for the optional hardtop followed later.

TOP INSET
By 1950s sports car standards the 190SL was exteremely plush inside.

ABOVE INSET
1.9-litre engine has twin carbs but performance is pretty mild if we're honest.

Not a video game – the Moss 300SLR was actually driven in central London.

W196S 300SLR (1954-1955)

As well as contesting F1 as of mid-season 1954, Mercedes-Benz returned to the Sports Car World Championship in 1954, fielding a W199R grand prix car with two-seater bodywork on a 20mm extended wheelbase and, taking advantage of less restricted engine capacity rules, a three-litre straight-eight. Its winning streak was 1955 when Stirling Moss posted his record breaking victory in the Mille Miglia, a 1,000km dash across Italy, in which team mate (and senior driver) Juan Manuel Fangio came second. The were also victories in the Eifel Race, the Swedish Grand Prix, the Tourist Trophy in Ireland and the Targa Florio in Sicily, enough to win Stuttgart the championship.

However, the Mercedes was also at the epicentre of the Le Mans tragedy in 1955, when the 300SLR driven by Pierre Levegh made contact with Mike Hawthorn's Austin-Healey on the main straight catapulting the 300SLR into the crowd and killing 84 people including Levegh. At the season's end in October, Stuttgart announced its withdrawal from sports car racing and F1.

The 300SLR was a two-seat grand prix car; Moss and Denis Jenkinson on the '55 Mille Miglia.

BELOW
Two coupes were built to race in 1956 but never did.

W196S 300SLR 'Uhlenhaut' Coupe (1955)

During 1955 Mercedes had been preparing a coupe version of the 300SLR, for use in the Carrera Panamericana in Mexico after the end of the season, and into the 1956 Sports Car World Championship calendar. This was to give drivers the option of an open or closed car, but after Mercedes abruptly quit top level motorsport it never raced.

Instead, chief engineer Rudolf Uhlenhaut adopted the two examples built as his personal transport, thus the virtually unsilenced street race car became a familiar sight and sound around the Stuttgart factory. Mercedes-Benz famously retains its racing cars in perpetuity, but in May 2022 sold one of the pair to an unnamed buyer, for a record price of €135m (about £116m).

Deft shifting was needed to avoid trashing the gearbox.

FAR LEFT
Mercedes gave Doug Steane 190SLs to race

LEFT
This is him many years later with a race replica.

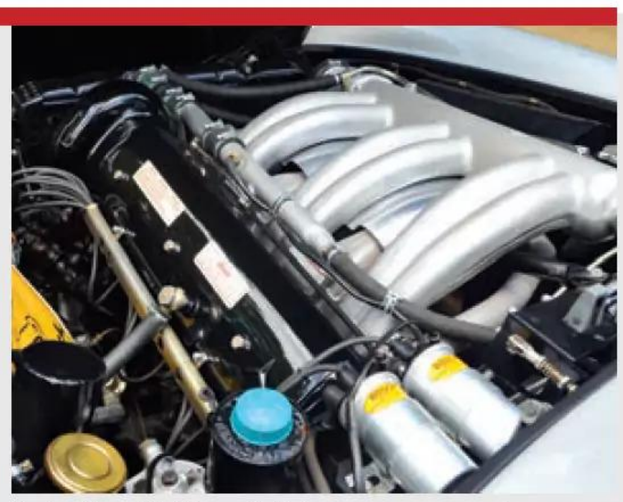
Macau Grand Prix 190SL (1955-1956)

In 1954 and 1955, Mercedes-Benz was glorying in runaway F1 success but still found time to supply a one-off 190SL for a British driver, Doug Steane (at the time serving in the British army), to enter in a far-off race, the Macau Grand Prix, run on the south coast of China. His good connections with the local Mercedes-Benz dealer enabled him to obtain a factory-prepared car which he drove from pole position in the 1955 GP, but owing to fuel starvation and a pit signal mix-up he did not win.

Two months before the 1956 race, another 190SL with cut down windscreen and stripped of its bumpers appeared. Just how much race preparation had been carried out on the 190SL wasn't revealed, not even to Doug, but to him it felt lighter and had an aluminium bonnet and tonneau cover. Springs and dampers had been changed, and there were special light metal brake drums and extra engine cooling. An additional fuel tank had also been fitted. This time he won the race, but not before crashing into a sentry box due to the heavy rain, and being stuck in third gear.

Mercedes made the 1957-launched 300SL Roadster more 'civilised' than the Gullwing...

... it was more comfortable and had normal opening doors.

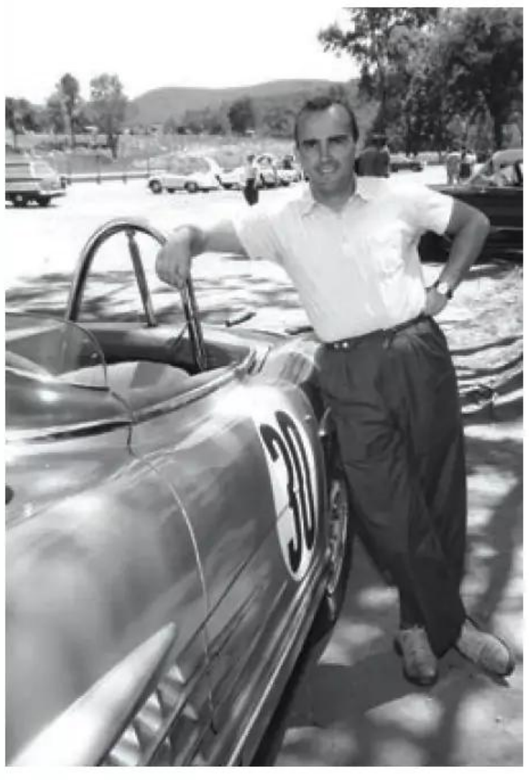


Engine benefited from Gullwing race car power increase.

W198 300SL Roadster (1957-1963)

The 300SL Roadster that replaced the Gullwing in 1957 was intended as a more practical car, thanks to conventional doors cut into the carried-over alloy frame, less nervous handing (due to a low-pivot rear axle reining in the transverse spring's camber change) and a more inviting interior. Mercedes' US importer Max Hoffman had wanted to broaden the 300SL's appeal by offering it as a convertible, and the Roadster's easier-to-live-with nature helped it become the darling of the Hollywood set and other prominent celebrities.

But those lucky enough to experience a drive in a 300SL Roadster will nonetheless enjoy a car that, despite its hedonistic image, is still engaging and thrilling. No 300SL had factory power steering, so getting round corners is a muscle-building effort, and the brakes are poor (unless it's one of the late, disc-brakes examples), but the engine has a fantastic, eager mechanical note and the shift on the manual four-speed gearbox (automatic wasn't offered) has a satisfying movement once you're used to it. The Roadster engine incorporated the Gullwing's more powerful, competition engine option.



Paul O'Shea in 1957, racing the SLS in the SCCA and winning.

W198 300SLS (1957)

Mercedes-Benz wanted to link the 1957 launch of the 300SL Roadster in the US with motorsport success, and retained reigning champion Paul O'Shea for a third year to drive it in the Sports Car Club of America series, a calendar of races around the US. But the car was barred from the productiuion class because an insufficient number has been built. It was therefore decided to enter the 'D Sport' class for modified vehicles, which of course required, quickly, a suitable car to be built, which led to the emergence of a pair of modified 300SLs, which the team called the 300SLS.

Neither of the two SLSs exist, and there aren't many photos; copies have been built.

It ran without front or rear bumpers, and featured a specially shaped cockpit canopy with an air intake slot, and a small, low windscreen, these and other measures paring weight down to 1,040kg, which was 360kg less than the production 300SL. The engine used a light alloy rather than iron cylinder block, while a sportier camshaft lifted output. O'Shea won the championship – but both cars built disappeared without trace at the end of the season. You will sometimes see a '300SLS' at classic events, but it will be a replica.

So stunning inside and out was the W113 in 1963 it made the 190SL, and even the 300SL, look old-fashioned.

W113 SL Pagoda (1963-1971)

By comment consent the SL Pagoda is a gorgeous, lithe, sexy and perfectly proportioned shape – and just think how amazing it must have looked back in 1963, when lots of cars on the road still had running boards! It was launched at that year's Geneva motor show, the Pagoda nickname collected due to the inverted shape of its hardtop. The striking looks are essentially a result of the vertical headlamp clusters, the tall wheels and tyres, and the large glass area in the relation to the low height of the body. But it was clever as well as pretty, with pioneering safety features such as crash deformation zones and a padded steering wheel.

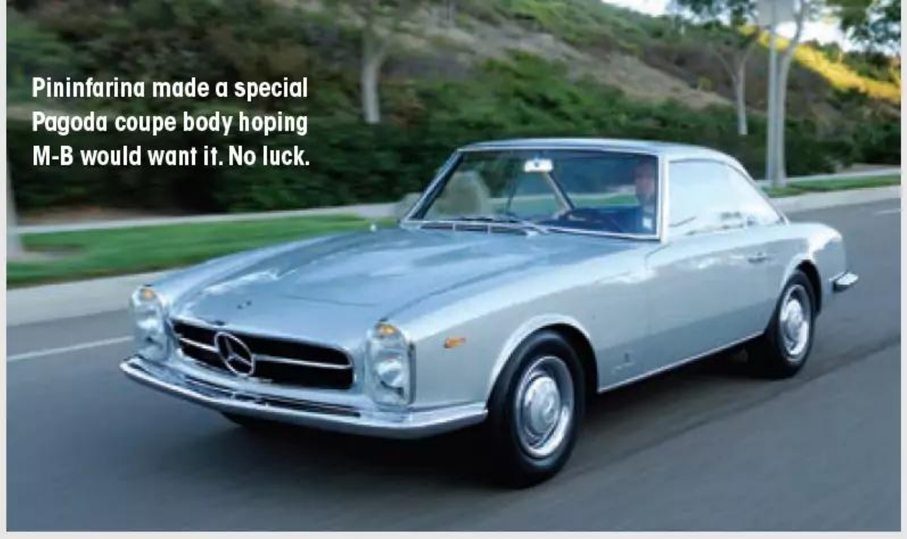
The roadster began life as the 2.3-litre 230SL, then three years later became the 2.5-litre 250SL, this iteration including a model built with sunny California in mind, the 250SL 'Coupe' (option 'Code 471') which came with a hardtop but no hood, and thus a slightly enlarged space behind the rear seats. All Pagoda variants are much the same to drive, but the most sought-after is the 280SL, made from 1969 to 1971.

A short but effective rally career beckoned for the W113.

Spa-Sofia-Liège winners Böhringer (right) and Kaiser.

W113 230SL rally car (1963)

For a number of years prior to the W113's launch, Mercedes-Benz had prepared rally 220SE Fintails, piloted by work drivers including Ewy Rosqvist and Eugen Böhringer. For 1963, the new roadster was added into the rally effort, and Böhringer, the principal driver, showed his versatility by mastering the tactile roadster that could hardly have been more different to drive than the bulky Fintail. With Klaus Kaiser in the co-driver's seat of a pre-production Pagoda with a 300cc increase to 2.6-litre and reinforced suspension among other modifications, he won the Liège-Sofia-Liège Rally. The same pairing entered the 1964 event and came third overall, marking the end of the Pagoda's brief works rallying career.



Pininfarina made a special Pagoda coupe body hoping M-B would want it. No luck.

W113 230SL Pininfarina Coupe (1963)

Following the Pagoda's 1963 launch, Sergio Pininfarina, head of the Italian car design house bearing his name, decided to create a coupe that Mercedes itself might want to offer. The task was assigned to an American, Tom Tjaarda, who was briefed to design a special version of the 230SL that it could be put into production at the Pininfarina factory in Turin.

Pininfarina had embarked on the project without any agreement with Mercedes-Benz, but the gamble failed. The carmaker wasn't interested, and with no production potential the one-off coupe was sold off to West German publishing magnate Axel Springer. Over the years it had a succession of owners, mostly in America, the longest tenure being with the noted collector Weston Hook, from 1997. At Pebble Beach, California in 2022, Gooding & Company sold it for $1,215,000 (about £1.09m).

Inside, the Italian coachbuilt W113 was Stuttgart standard.

W113 SL Pagoda V8 (1964)

LEFT
Waxenberger led Mercedes in search of the lost horsepower.

A Pagoda with the a 6.3-litre V8 engine was a project initiated by Erich Waxenberger, a middle ranking engineer at Daimler-Benz during the mid 1960s, and with a well documented thirst for power and speed. Having developed the 230SL for rallying during 1963 and 1964, the Bavarian-born enthusiast turned his attention to shoe-horning the recently developed M100 6.3-litre V8 into the pretty roadster. In the 600 limousine it produced 247bhp and 369lb ft torque, which would have given the Pagoda half as much power again and two and a half times more pulling power.

Waxenberger, also a respectably good racing car driver, carried out testing himself on the *Nordschleife* section of the Nürburgring circuit in Germany, and using racing tyres clocked a best time of 10min 30sec. But, perhaps inevitably, the car never progressed further than the prototype stage, the V8's weight rendering the car excessively nose heavy, and its power too much for the tyres and the rear swing-axle.

LEFT
Roof down, V8 under the hood, now where's that sun drenched So Cal highway?

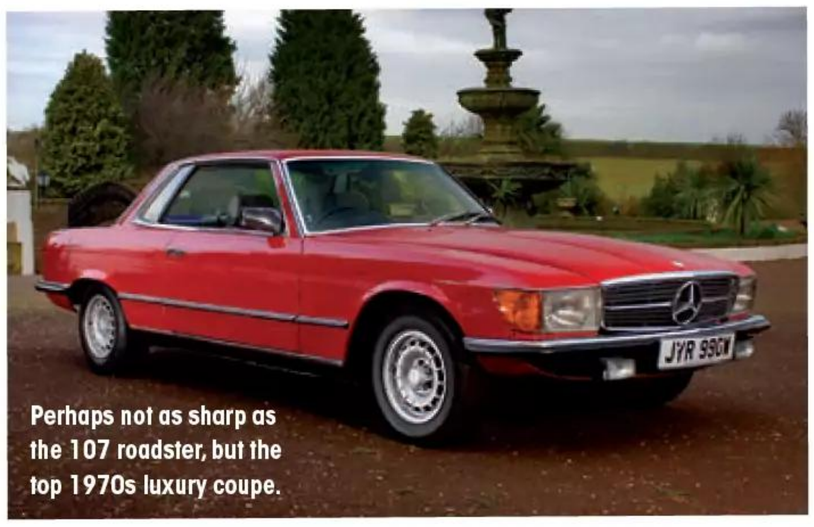
R107 SL (1971-1989)

The R107 SL which arrived in 1971 was purpose-built for eight cylinders, by then deemed essential to fully exploit the wealthy North American market. V8 motive power gave the W113's replacement a whole new character, that of a laid-back boulevard cruiser rather than a vibrant roadster.

The first R107 was the 350SL with the M116 3.5-litre installed in European cars, but the M117 4.5-litre derivative for America; in 1973 the bigger-engined model was made available in Europe. The six-cylinder 280SL was introduced three years later in reaction to the 'energy crisis' of the time and was livelier than its 2.8 litres might have suggested, but the R107 matured into the consummate roadster in 1980 when the five-litre 500SL replaced the 450SL, offering useful extra and super sweet engine refinement.

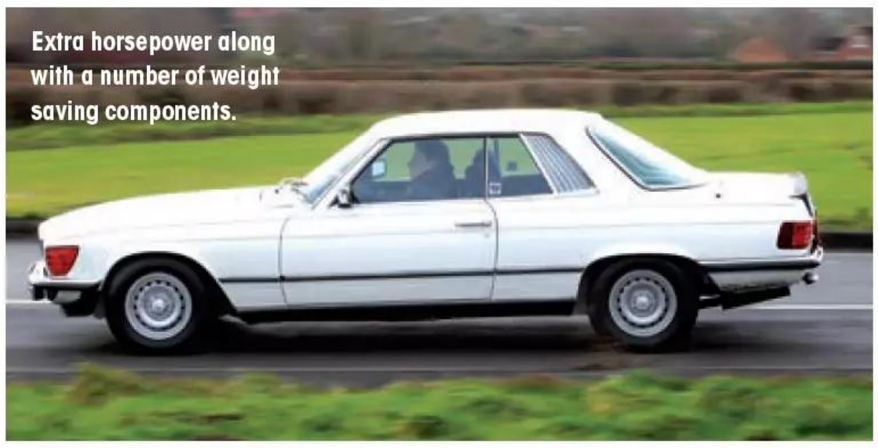
This was joined in autumn 1989 by the 300SL with Mercedes' excellent new three-litre M103 motor, the single-cam unit so much smoother than the twin-cam M110 of the 280SL. At the same time the US, Australia and Japan only 560SL was added to the range. Over 237,000 R107s were produced, the 450SL the top seller with some 66,300 delivered.

Classic 1970s Benz interior: stylish and so well made.



Perhaps not as sharp as the 107 roadster, but the top 1970s luxury coupe.

From the dashboard forward the SLC was identical to the R107 SL roadster.

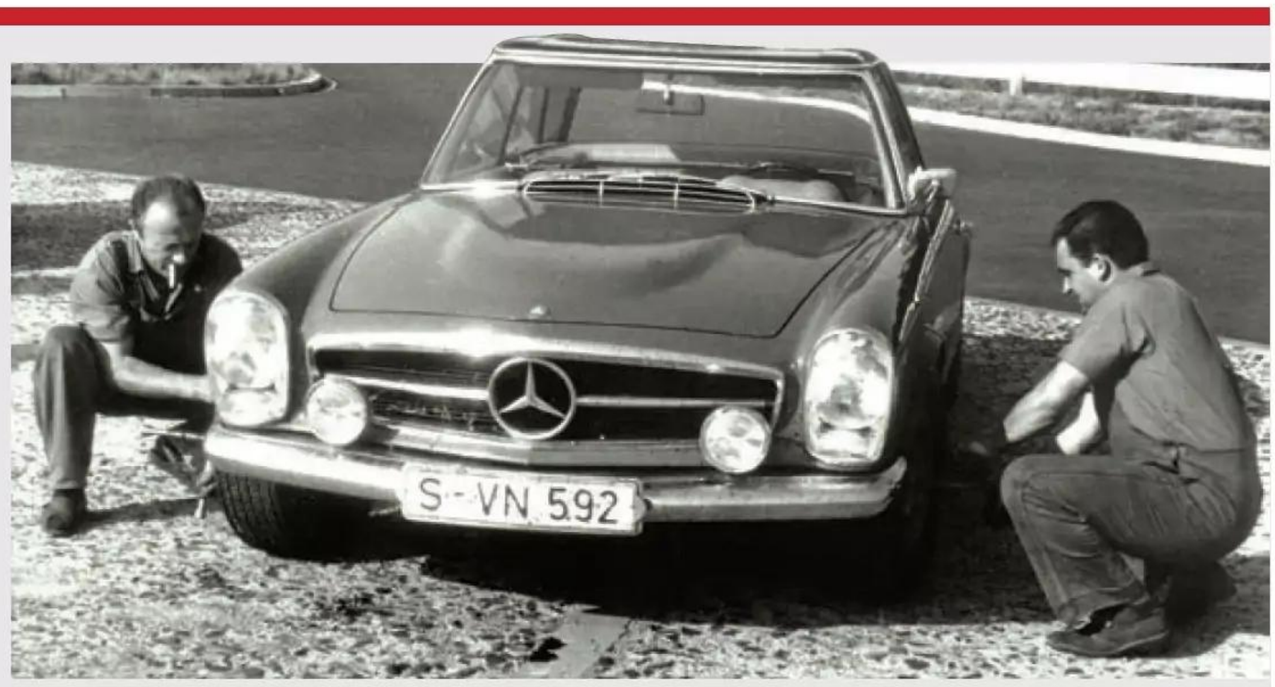

Extra horsepower along with a number of weight saving components.

C107 SLC (1980-81)

The C107 series, built for 10 years from 1971, draws mixed opinions in the classic market, its bulkier girth over the R107 roadster that it was based on just too much for some sensibilities. But it does have the key advantage of being much cheaper to buy than the R107; although values have risen lately, it's still a bargain luxury coupe.

The top production model was the 4.5-litre 450SLC, but the 380SLC introduced for the final year of production, 1980, with its 3.8-litre, all-alloy V8 shouldn't be overlooked, as it isn't seriously disadvantaged on power and has the added advantage of a four- rather than three-speed automatic transmission. As with the R107, it was built in 2.8-litre, M110 twin-cam 280SLC form.

The SLC has classic Mercedes grandeur in abundance and still turns heads. And for a car designed in the late 1960s is surprisingly taut to drive, with decent roadholding and braking, once you're used to the dead feel of the recirculating ball steering steering and the very large steering wheel. And there's some added practicality over the R107 in that it offers proper, if slightly cramped, rear seats.



Dropping the M100 V8 into the Pagoda chassis sounded good in theory but engine weight rather spoilt the idea.

C107 450SLC 5.0/500SLC (1978-1980)

You could be forgiven for not realising that you were looking at a rare, motorsport homologation Mercedes-Benz, there being little visual differences between it and any other C107 SLC. The changes were mostly unseen on the car that qualified Stuttgart's top coupe for the 1978 World Rally Championship: a specially built all-alloy five-litre engine producing 237bhp and 296lb ft torque, aluminium bonnet, bootlid and bumpers, and lightweight wheels.

All there was on show outside was the badge, a small bootlid spoiler and a different finish on the lower side bodywork, the interior left standard apart from the seats being located slightly lower. It was made available in May 1978 as the 450SL 5.0 and evolved into the 500SLC in March 1980, receiving a four- instead of three-speed automatic gearbox and a slightly modified version of the M117 engine; 2,769 of both models were made, all left-hand drive. In motorsport, the C107 performed merely adequately, winning rallies but too large and heavy for its own good and generally not matching rivals' pace.

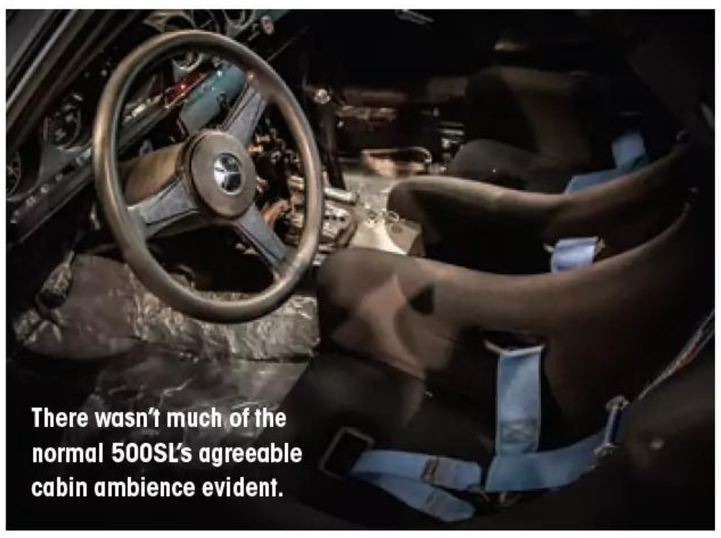
Down and dirty in the '79 Rallye Bandama; Hannu Mikkola, Björn Waldegård won.

BELOW
The cool looking 500SL Rallye never made the start line.

R107 500SL Rallye (1980)

In three seasons of participation in the World Rally Championship from 1978 to 1980, Mercedes spent considerable time and money attempting to make the SLC a winner in this ultimate rally series. There were victories but not on the grand scale team boss Erich Waxenberger had hoped for given the budget, as the coupe turned out to be simply too heavy, and too harsh on tyres to be properly competitive.

Mercedes had planned to rally the lighter and lither W201 190E 2.3-16, with 1980 WRC champion Walter Röhrl at the wheel, but in the interim run the R107 500SL in 1981, which would hopefully be less cumbersome than the SLC. However, Audi launched its all-wheel drive Quattro, instantly rendering everything else uncompetitive, causing Mercedes to quit international rallying at the end of the 1980 season. The 316bhp-engined 500SL Rallye, four of which were built, was thus stillborn, although the Mercedes Museum in Stuttgart retains one, which is sometimes brought out for classic events, much to enthusiasts' delight.



There wasn't much of the normal 500SL's agreeable cabin ambience evident.

R129 SL (1989-2001)

The R129 SL introduced in 1989 to replace the long-running R107 was an enormous step forward technically. It introduced multi-valve six-cylinder and V8 engines, a five-speed automatic gearbox, adaptive suspension dampers (ADS) and a rollover protection system, based around pop-up rear headrests, that reportedly took four and a half years and nearly £9m to develop. Integrated bumpers meant a separate 'federalised' US-spec model was no longer necessary. It was an attempt by Stuttgart to re-establish Mercedes-Benz as a technological leader, the much loved but clearly old-fashioned R107 having come to signify how the marque had been ceding ground to rivals.

As with the R107, the R129 would enjoy a lengthy life, its 12 years in production sufficient for not one but two facelifts. When the roadster went on sale across the world in the second half of 1989, three models were offered: the three-litre 300SL, the multi-valve 300SL-24 and the five-litre, V8 500SL. Various engine updates occurred including a switch from straight-six to V6, however the SL60 AMG introduced in 1993 and equipped with the Affalterbach-built, six-litre M119 V8 stands out very clearly as the collectors' favourite.

ABOVE
The jewel in the R129 crown has to be the six-litre SL60 AMG.

RIGHT
Some say the R129 was the last 'over-engineered' Benz.

R129 SL73 AMG (1999-2001)

The SL73 AMG deserves a separate mention because it was the ultimate R129, available in the last three years of R129 production. With its 7.3-litre V12 pumping out 525bhp and 553lb ft torque, it was by a big margin the most powerful Mercedes-Benz of the day. The bigger engine was created out of the existing SL600's M120, its cylinder-block bored and stroked out, and running with a revised crankshaft, titanium pistons, big-valve cylinder heads and a sports exhaust system. The transmission was the regular SL five-speed automatic, except with the change-up and down points tweaked by AMG to ensure the 'box could handle the torque.

The visual treatment comprised a spoiler/skirts bodykit, and a few interior upgrades including a 320kph (199mph) speedometer, AMG steering wheel and special walnut trim on the centre console and doors. Precisely how many SL73s were built remains a mystery, partly because the SL73 was created out of an already registered SL600 and thus was not an additional unit. It's likely that about 85 were built in Affalterbach.

TOP
Wood and leather... with a liking for the former in this case.

ABOVE
The 7.3-litre, V12 M120 engine is a sight to behold.

In March 2024 in Miami, RM Sotheby's sold this SL60 AMG for £470,000.

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The boss!

In the previous article we listed 20 SL models from the 1950s to the early 2000s. Here we take an in-depth look at the most revered, sought-after and valuable one of all – the alloy-bodied 300SL Gullwing, just 29 of which were built during 1955 and 1956

IMAGES RM Sotheby's

What started as a streamlined design borrowing heavily from Porsche's 1951 Le Mans race car quickly developed into one of the most distinctive and beautiful shapes on four wheels. The 300SL Gullwing's stunning looks were matched only by its space age engineering, performance and world beating pedigree which earned its works-prepared variants convincing victories in many premier sports car races between 1952 and 1956, including the 24 Hours of Le Mans, the Carrera Panamericana, Mille Miglia and Liège-Rome-Liège (as well as multiple Sports Car Club of America and European rally championships). The Gullwing is, without doubt, the sports car of the 20th century – an icon among all the post-war sports car designs which absolutely captivates collectors today.

However the rarified zenith of the 300SL's road-going development is the *Leichtmetallausführung*, or light metal version, a brilliant example of which is photographed and described here. Commonly known as the 'Alloy' Gullwing, it is unequivocally the ultimate production version of Mercedes-Benz's most celebrated creation.

The Alloy Gullwing's extremely limited availability and special, competition-bred configuration is equalled by its

The zenith of the 300SL's road-going development is the Leichtmetallausführung, *or light metal version, commonly known as the 'Alloy' Gullwing*

historical significance within the pantheon of post-war sports car designs. All the most important race victories achieved by the 300SL were, in fact, secured by one of these lightweight competition specimens. Distinctive in many ways from their standard steel-bodied brethren, of which 1,371 examples were produced, these super rare and historically significant alloy coupes were purpose-built for competition.

The Alloy Gullwing was the brainchild of Mercedes-Benz engineering chief, Dr Fritz Nallinger who, in response to requests from potential customers, proposed a special 300SL for sale to motorsport privateers at a board meeting in late February 1954. Hence, to forestall those customers from purchasing competing British or Italian products, Mercedes-Benz offered option SA 55060 *Aufbau* Coupe in *Leichtmetall-Ausführung* (light metal, coupe body).

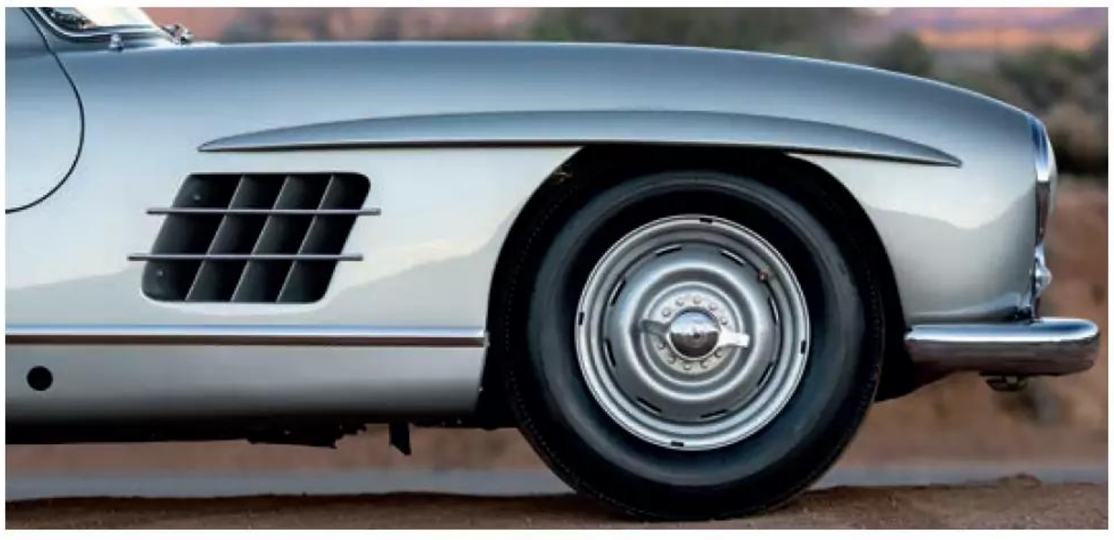
A standard Gullwing has an aluminium bonnet, bootlid, side sills, door skins, belly pans and instrument panel, while the alloy car has these plus an all-aluminium body. Initially, a prototype lightweight Gullwing was constructed using additional alloy components for the engine and wheels, with all the windows except the windshield replaced by Plexiglass. In the event, only the all-aluminium body and the plexiglass side and rear windows were approved for production.These changes reduced weight by 95kg, thus making the Alloy Gullwing especially competitive against British and Italian sports cars. It was also outfitted with race-bred features including the high-performance *Sonderteile* (special parts) 'NSL' engine which utilises a competition camshaft, higher compression, unique butterfly throttle valve, and recalibrated fuel distributor to deliver close to 240bhp, compared to the standard Gullwing's 212bhp (When the 300SL Roadster was launched in 1957 it effectively used the special parts motor).

Production dates, chassis numbers

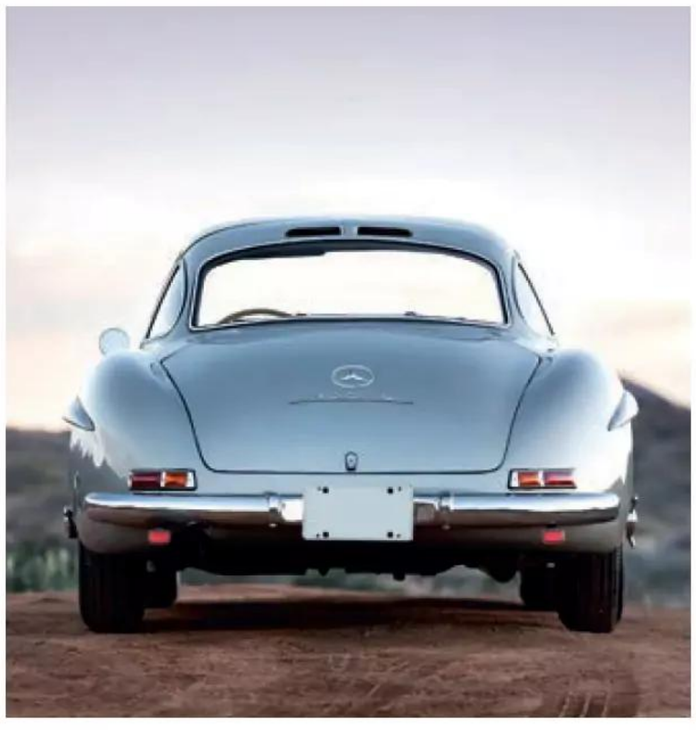
Rudge centre-mount wheels came as standard, as did special vented front brake drums. Finally, the suspension was revised with exclusive springs and shock absorbers which provided improved high-speed handling. Mercedes-Benz greenlit production for February 1955 at the added cost of DM5,000 per unit; factory records show just 29 examples were made available to privateers (24 in 1955, 5 in 1956).

Bar the bodywork, all the alloy car's upgrades were in fact available from the options list (*Sonderausstattungen*) and could be added to any steel car if a customer wished. Some of these options such as the springs and shock absorbers might have different characteristics to allow for the lighter alloy body weight, but they were essentially alike. At the time of delivery, the only deviation is that the alloy car would come with an extra differential, offering the owner a choice of axle ratios for competition purposes.

Aside from a magnet test, the alloy-bodied cars can be identified by their body numbers, which contain '043' in place of the steel cars' '040'. However, and oddly ⇨

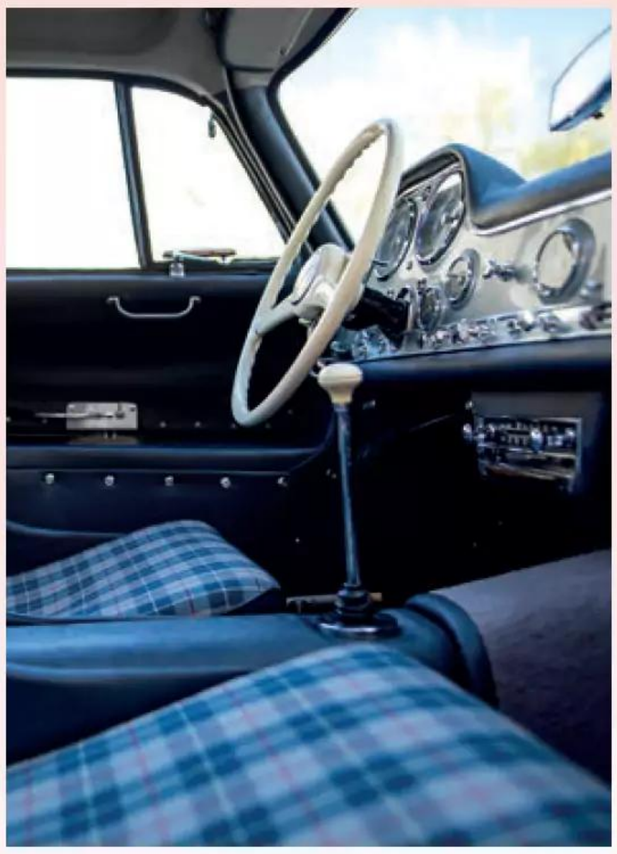


LEFT
All alloy cars came with the centre-locking Rudge wheels, for quick changing.



BELOW LEFT
The two-spoke steering wheel folded down to ease cabin entry and exit.

BELOW
At first, the regisatration plate this Alloy Gullwing displayed was Moroccan.



LEFT
All Gullwings came with a four-speed manual 'box, but with gearing options.

FAR LEFT
The alloy-formed car accounted for 29 out of the 1,400 Gullwings made.

BELOW
As on the steel car, the alloy body has these very distinctive air intakes.

BELOW LEFT
A 270kph speedometer was among the special factory options specified.

⇨ enough, the first eight aluminium body cars shared an '040' chassis number designation with their steel brethren, this designation not changed to '043' until the ninth alloy car rolled off the production line.

This car's provenance

Chassis number 198.043.5500332 was completed in May of 1955 as one of only two Alloy Gullwings completed that month. Fascinatingly, this car would not be delivered to the usual markets of Europe or the United States, but was ordered by Joesph F Weckerlé of Casablanca, Morocco, the official Mercedes-Benz agent in Casablanca, making it the only alloy example delivered new to Africa. Finished in attractive Silver Grey Metallic (DB180) over a blue vinyl/blue gabardine fabric interior (L1), it was handsomely outfitted from the factory with the high-speed 3.42 rear axle, an uprated metric 270kph speedometer and Becker Radio.

ABOVE
Due to limited luggage space, fitted luggage was very common on 300SLs.

ABOVE LEFT
The blue gabardine fabric is the trim the Alloy left the production line with.

BELOW
It looks almost the same as the steel car... until you press on the softer body.

By 1962, 5500332 had journeyed to the United States and was in the ownership of Mercer D Helms of Montgomery, Alabama. In 1975, Helms sold the Gullwing to Jack F Bryan Jr of Dallas, Texas. At a time before Gullwings had achieved true icon status, Bryan clearly saw the importance and significance of the car, and decided to have it fully restored. The company he chose was the Gullwing Service Company of Topsfield, Massachusetts, which would later become Paul Russell and Company. A restoration shop considered one of the very best in the business today, Russell's specialty, both today and in the days of the Gullwing Service Company was of course Mercedes-Benzes, and 300SLs especially.

Photo restoration record

An accompanying photograph album illustrates the progress of Russell's team upon the body and mechanical components. This restoration work was completed in late 1979, handwritten work orders on file showing a then-astronomical $45,000 ($191,000 in today's money) spent in returning this special Gullwing to road going perfection.

This car was ordered by Joesph F Weckerlé of Casablanca, Morocco, making it the only alloy example delivered new to Africa

Alloy 300SL Gullwing

Specifications

Year 1955

Engine/power
2,996cc/240bhp

Chassis no.
198.043.5500332

Engine no.
198.980.5500346

Body no. A198.043.5500013

Auction

Sotheby's Sealed
300SL Alloy Gullwing

When March 13-22, 2024

Pre-sale estimate
Undisclosed

Price achieved Undisclosed

With the 300SL refinished in its factory original colour combination, Bryan collected the car in Massachusetts personally, and rather than having it transported home, drove it straight back to Dallas himself!

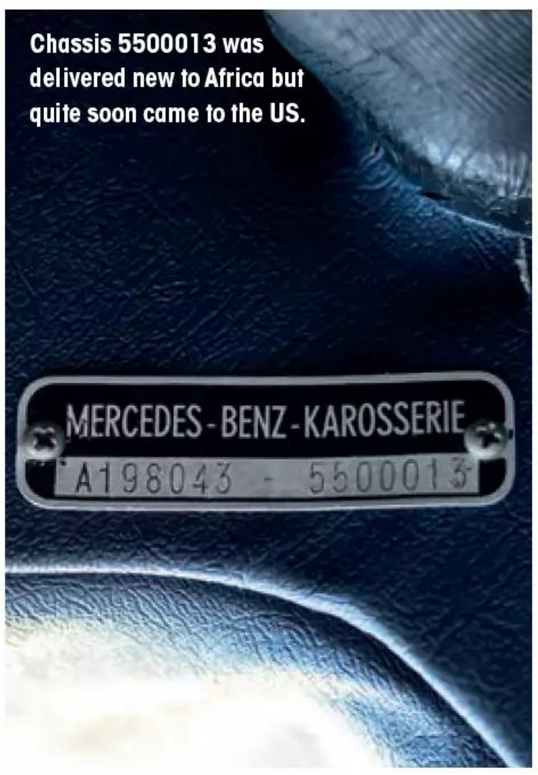
An active member of the Gull Wing Group, Bryan took his alloy 300SL to the GWG's 1980 national meeting, and as it was in such immaculate condition following its restoration, it was no surprise that received a tremendous amount of attention once it was seen by fellow Gullwing enthusiasts. Given its quality, the car caught the eye of Hyatt Cheek, who was, at that time, president of GWG. Both Cheek and Bryan were already well acquainted, both hailing from Dallas and clients of Paul Russell from the Gullwing Service Company.

Cheek purchased 5500332 from Jack Bryan in 1982 and, two years later, he was elected president of the Mercedes-Benz Club of America. Despite owning a fabulous collection of Mercedes-Benzes, and the 300SL being in top condition, he did not hesitate in driving it regularly on MBCA and GWG events across the country, as well as on the Colorado 1000 and Texas 1000 events. Many of the car's driving exploits with Cheek are covered by regular mentions in the member publications of each respective club. Considering how often it was driven, it should come as no surprise that maintenance was never overlooked, invoices on file showing regular routine maintenance expenditures with Paul Russell and other marque specialists.

Following three decades in Hyatt Cheek's ownership, the Alloy changed hands in March of 2013, bought by a collector from Vancouver, Canada, who kept the car in the United States, it becoming the centrepiece of an outstanding collection. In 2021, the Gullwing was returned to Paul Russell for an inspection and test drive prior to ⇨

BELOW
The actual purpose of this distinctive styling cue was to deflect road wheel dirt.

BELOW LEFT
There have been many SL models since, but '300SL' remains the iconic name.



Chassis 5500013 was delivered new to Africa but quite soon came to the US.

⇨ being sent to the factory-owned Mercedes-Benz Classic Center, then in Irvine, California for a comprehensive inspection to validate authenticity and originality. Upon inspection, Michael Kunz, the Center's senior manager for over 20 years said, "This is absolutely one of the finest Alloy Gullwings."

Since the auction consigner's acquisition in early 2022, every effort has been made to ensure all 'housekeeping' items in that report were brought up to the highest possible standard. It was proudly displayed at the 2023 GWG convention in Quebec City, Canada, where it was driven from Maine to Quebec alongside other 300SLs.

Finding an Alloy Gullwing that has zero question marks regarding its provenance is becoming increasingly difficult, and this example has been meticulously documented throughout its life. It is accompanied by a large history file consisting of multiple binders chronicling its history in both documentation and photographs.

Alloy body in original condition

Industry veterans will know that the trade-off of the alloy Gullwing's lightweight nature and additional performance is the fragility of the bodywork. As most were raced in period, many sustained damage in addition to the bodywork deteriorating at the mounting points where the aluminium bodywork meets the steel chassis. As of today, almost all lightweight examples have been re-skinned or repaired at some point in their past. However, notes on file from this car's time with the Gullwing Service Company illustrate only minor aluminium stress repairs inside the engine bay, highlighting its purity.

As it sits today, the car retains its original chassis, engine, bodywork, rear axle, and front kingpins. The gearbox, although not original to the car, is a correct-type replacement unit, dated 1957. This was replaced by Paul Russell during the car's restoration in 1979, a letter in the car's history file confirming this. Such a level of originality puts it within a category of its own within the Alloy Gullwing hierarchy. Further separating it from the pack, which cannot be understated, is its near exclusive record of maintenance from Paul Russell's famous workshop since 1975, the association with this restoration facility is a point of desirability.

It retains its original chassis, engine, bodywork, rear axle, and front kingpins. This level of originality puts it in a category of its own within the Alloy Gullwing hierarchy

In the case of this particular example, it is the provenance and originality that sets it apart it from its peers further still. Having been spared from the crucible of motorsport in its early years and curated by passionate individuals over the following decades who understood its significance showcases exactly why it is in such extraordinary condition today. CM

⇨ *All text and images appear courtesy of RM Sotheby's Tel +44 (0)20 7851 7070 Web www.rmsothebys.com, with additional information supplied by Edward Boyd of the Gull Wing Group Web www.gullwinggroup.org*

BELOW
Sonderteile **engine gave a bit under 240bhp against the standard car's 212bhp.**

BELOW RIGHT
The fascia panel is alloy, but it was the same on every Gullwing produced.

Bruce Greetham Classic Benz

scan me

SALES
RESTORATIONS
APPRAISALS
INSPECTIONS
SOURCING
DETAILING

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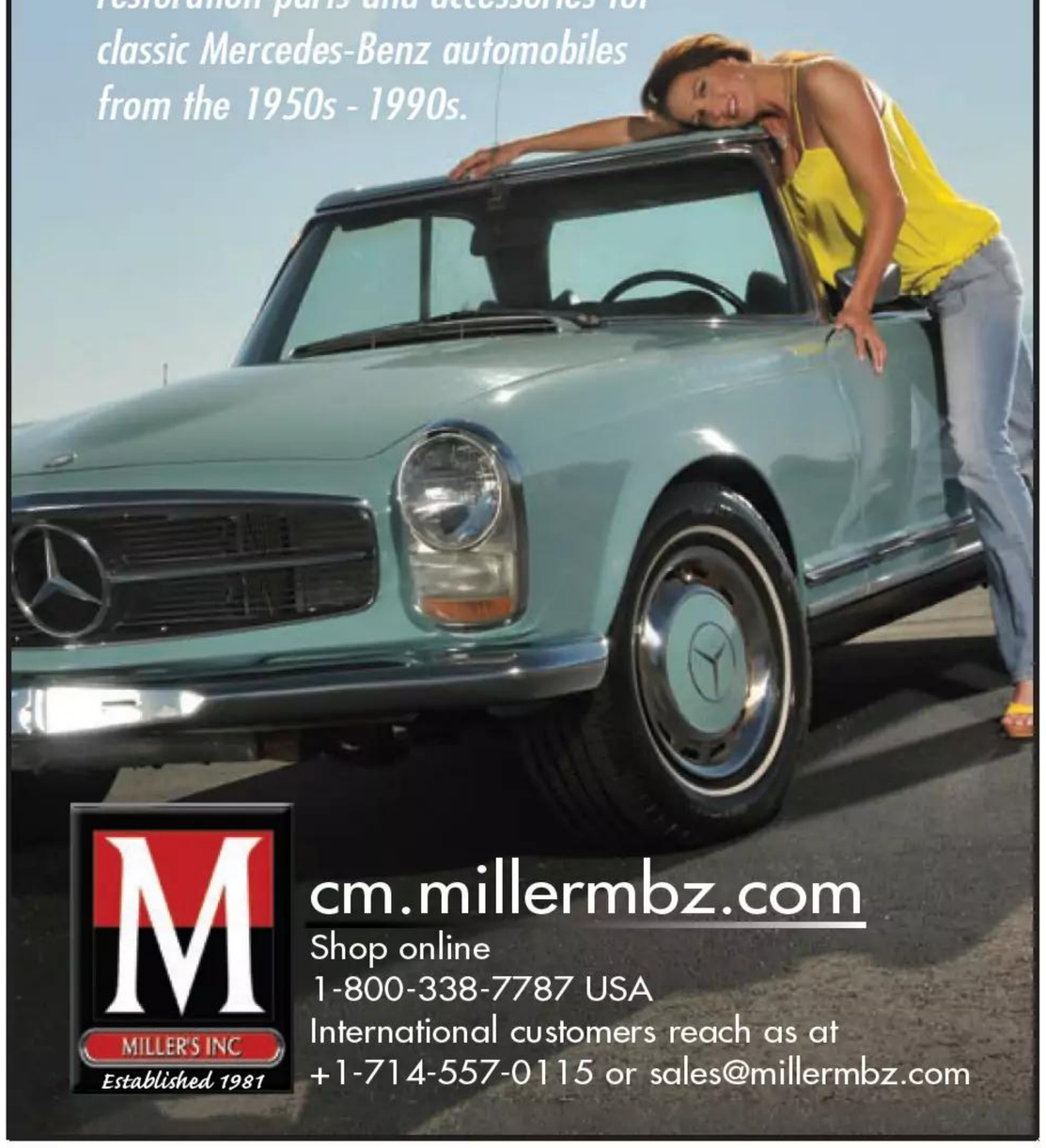

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SETUP SCIENCE

IMAGES Jonathan Fleetwood and SLShop/John Colley/RM Sotheby's

The motor industry has developed ever more efficient ways of getting the correct amount of fuel and air into the cylinders

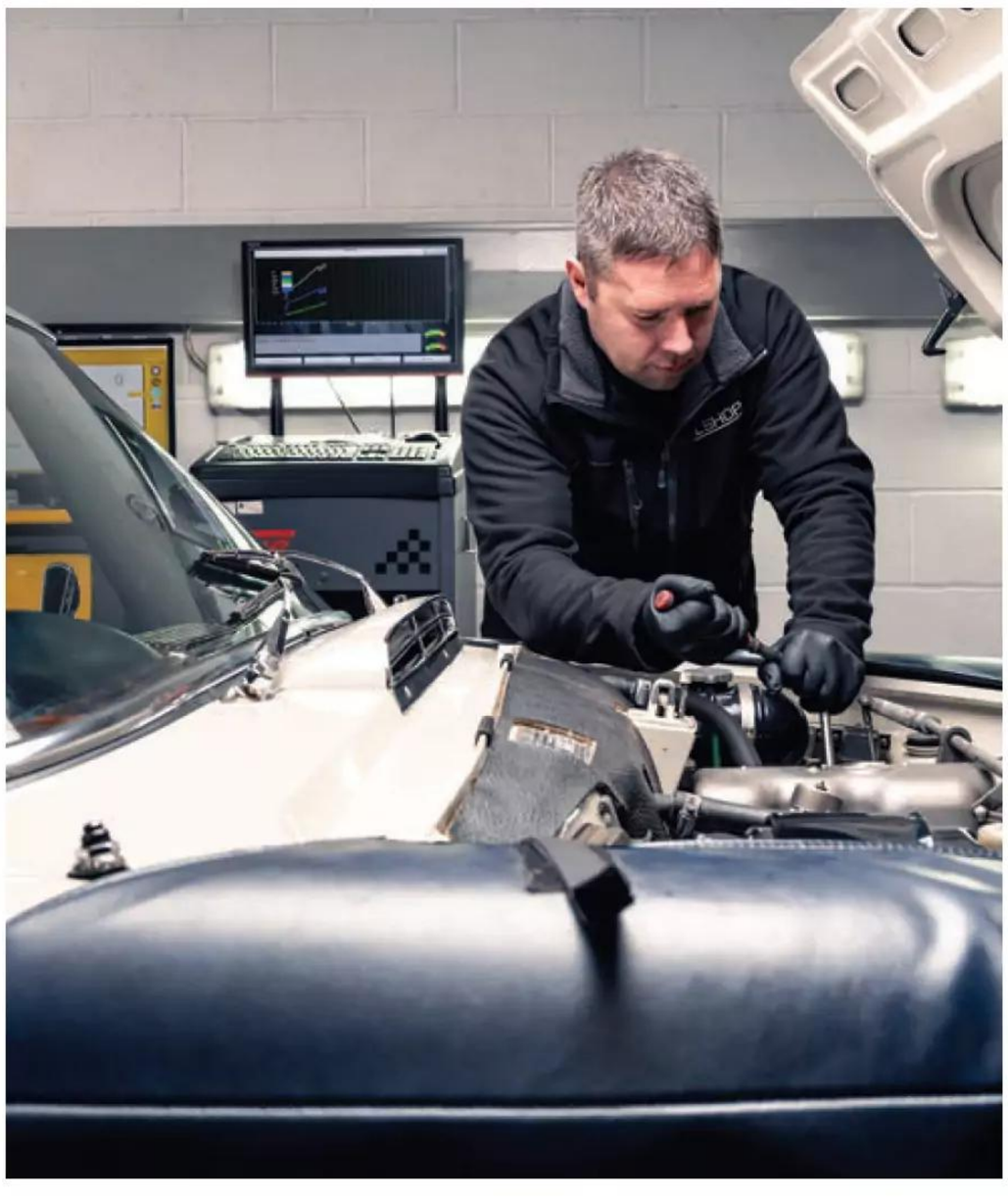
Many of us have felt that annoying momentary hesitation from our car under acceleration, or a misfire when the engine is put under load, or higher than expected fuel consumption under certain driving conditions.

It can be very difficult for a workshop technician to pinpoint the causes, and impossible for most owners. Hence the dynamometer, or rolling road as it is more commonly known, is a key technical aid for modern and not so modern cars, simulating on-road driving conditions and allowing accurate and repeatable measurements to be taken, and setup changes made to eliminate the problem.

Rolling roads are part and parcel of the modern auto workshop landscape, but not seen in the classic car world. Until recently, that is, because what is claimed to be the first one in the business is now up and running at Warwickshire classic ⇨

LEFT
SLShop's rolling road, the first in a classic workshop, will be useful for owners...

BELOW
... because setting up, say a Pagoda, is well beyond the scope of most people.



Out-of-true carburetion or fuel-injection can ruin driving pleasure and is difficult to fix. But one classic Mercedes-Benz specialist now offers a rolling road remedy, and here we take a closer look at it as well as explaining the technicalities of fuel systems

⇨ Mercedes specialist, SLShop. "We're the only dedicated Mercedes specialist to provide this service in-house," says SLShop boss Sam Bailey. "Our technicians are competent in all aspects of the various systems found on classic Mercedes vehicles – carburetion, mechanical fuel-injection, early air flow injection technology and more up to date electronic fuel-injection."

Focus on drivability

What can customers expect once their car has been correctly set up on a dynamometer? "Primarily a better driving experience," says Sam. "It's not always about more power, in fact we've often seen vehicles that have been 'tuned' at motorsports companies that are extremely unpleasant to drive on the road. Our focus will always be on drivability, so you will enjoy your car to its maximum." Specifically, you can expect a smoother power delivery, better acceleration, improved fuel economy, better cold starting, a smoother idle and a lower engine operating temperature.

It's part of SLShop's engine diagnostic procedure on cars in the workshop, but also offered as a stand-alone engine check and setup, indeed as an 'experience day'. Here, customers can bring their vehicle in and watch, real time, as measurements are taken and key indicators such as power and torque curves are plotted and printed, after which the findings can be discussed in detail with the technician carrying out the test.

Since the internal combustion engine was invented, the motor industry has been striving to develop ever more efficient ways getting the correct amount of fuel and air into the cylinders under all conditions. So let's take a look in detail at some of the technicalities, past and present.

Bosch supplied injection pumps for the W198 300SL, the first fuel-injected car

ABOVE
A rolling road road makes remedying an out of sorts fuel system so much easier.

BELOW
An SLShop setup can be an 'experience day', watching the process.

Fuel/air mixture

For petrol/gasoline pumped into an engine to burn completely, the ratio of fuel to air (the stoichiometric ratio) is 14.7:1 by weight.

To put that into context, air has density of 1.204 kg/cubic metre at 'normal' atmospheric temperature and pressure. So, to provide enough petrol to completely combust one cubic metre of air, 82 grams or 0.106 litres of fuel is required. If we consider an R129 500SL with its five-litre engine idling at, say, 1,000rpm, then every minute, if it was not controlled by restricting the intake system with the throttle, it would consume 2,500 litres of air and need 0.265 litres of fuel.

If we consider it now running on a wide open throttle at 5,000rpm, it would need 1.325 litres of fuel per minute or 79.5 litres per hour. Hence the importance of precisely controlling fuel delivery under differing conditions to maintain the correct air-fuel ratio.

How fuel-injection works

Let's draw a comparison with the humble kitchen tap. When you turn on the tap, the longer it is open, the more water flows through, and the flow is also affected by the mains pressure – if the pressure is lower, the flow rate is less. The size of the tap plays an important part too.

It's precisely these factors – time, pressure and size – that modern EFI (electronic fuel-injection) systems control. The fuel pressure is usually controlled by a mechanical fuel pressure regulator, and fuel pressure is set between 3 and 4.5bar, while the fuel injector 'orifice' size is a function of the design and cannot be varied in normal operation of the engine.

So that leaves us with time as the variable, providing the required changes in fuel delivery. Modern electronic injectors can be opened and closed in milliseconds, this allowing fuel delivery quantities to be adjusted. The opening times are controlled by a microprocessor-driven ECU (electronic control unit).

Fuel-injection gave the relatively small-engined 300SL a big power boost.

What an ECU does

The ECU receives information about the real time conditions under which the engine is operating, and then performs multiple calculations to establish the correct injector opening duration for optimum fuelling. Typically, those inputs – transmitted to the ECU as electrical signals from a series of engine sensors – include the following: engine coolant temperature, ambient/intake air temperature, throttle position, load on engine, crankshaft position, engine speed, exhaust gas composition, and knock sensor (which detects over-advanced ignition timing).

What does the often heard term 're-mapped' mean? It's effectively the changing of the manufacturer's calibration of both fuel delivery and injection timing. Re-mapping requires software that can interact with the ECU, and make adjustments to the original calibration or 'map'.

Evolution of SL fuel-injection

Bosch was the leader in diesel engine fuel-injection, and so it was inevitable that it should develop a petrol-injection system with operational similarities. Bosch supplied injection pumps for the W198 300SL (the Gullwing being the first fuel-injected production car) and also the later, six-cylinder 220SE Ponton and the 'Adenauer' saloon and 300Sc two-door derivatives. Then for the W113 SL of 1963, Mercedes chose Bosch to develop injection hardware.

ABOVE
The Bosch system on the 300SL marked a crucial advance for fuel-injection.

This was a purely mechanical, utilising an in-line injection pump with individual elements for each of the six cylinders. It was known as an MFI system –mechanical fuel-injection. Fuel was delivered to this pump at relatively low pressure, the high pressure necessary for atomisation of the fuel developed by the stroke of the individual elements within the pump. Calibration was achieved by varying the amount fuel entering the individual elements within the fuel pump, which would then be forced by pressure through each of the nozzles positioned within the inlet air tracts of the manifold before entering the cylinders.

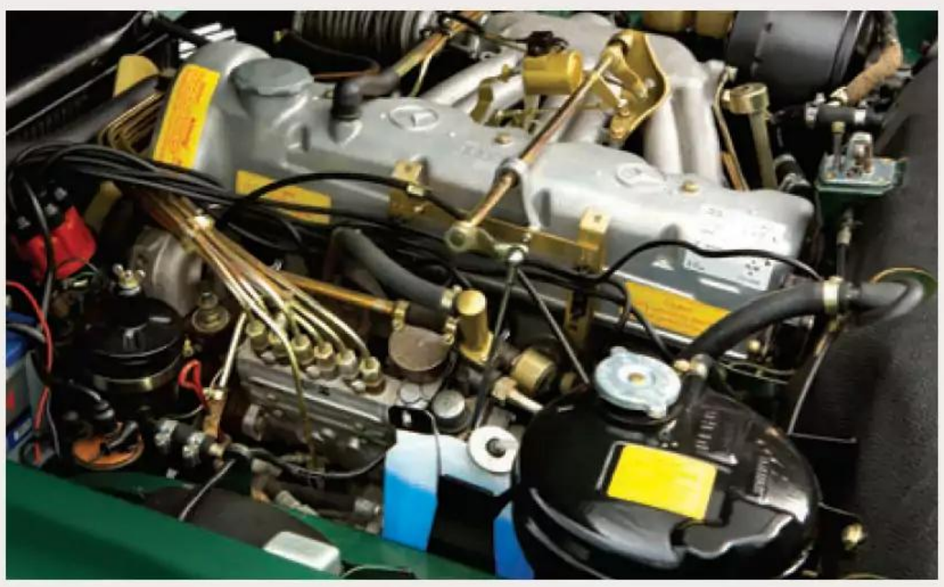
There were basic provisions in place to compensate for engine temperature and atmospheric pressure, while enrichment for cold starting was directly linked to the throttle position. The installation of the pump had to be 'timed' with the engine, and in a similar way a distributor had to be installed. On-car adjustments were limited, and the system was complicated and expensive to maintain. SLShop presently has its own in-house strip and rebuild/calibration facilities for these pumps, and as part of its W113 Pagoda rolling road experience day, offers include a tour of the re-build operation.

There was much evolution between 1972 and 1990. During that period, R107 SL production took in three major changes to what was by then the AFI (air forced injection) system in Europe, as well as a unique variant for cars bound for the United States.

Somewhat ironically the first variant, D-Jetronic, was not dissimilar to the EFI systems around today, the injectors controlled electronically (as in today's EFI). But the control system technology was unsatisfactory, with limited computing power contained within the ECU. The main control parameter was the manifold absolute pressure (MAP). The sensor providing this information was expensive to ⇨

BELOW LEFT
Following its 300SL work, Bosch supplied the fuel injection for the Pagoda...

BELOW
... however it's a difficult system to set up, due to a complex throttle linkage.



⇨ produce and also unreliable in service, being difficult to diagnose as faulty. In-car maintenance and adjustments were limited to the checking of sensor operations and throttle position settings.

By 1975, D-Jetronic had been superseded by K-Jetronic, K for 'continuous', this the first time an air flow meter was used, effectively a device to measure the volume of air entering the inlet manifold of the engine. Obvious, you might think, considering the need to calculate the fuel requirement in proportion to the volume of air. However, initially it was not used for that purpose, but to provide a mechanical leverage onto a piston that would control the fuel delivery within the metering unit.

Introduction to electronics

'Continuous' meant that fuel under pressure was constantly supplied to the fuel injectors, which were a simple nozzle with a valve requiring pressure to be opened. Once the engine was running, it continuously injected fuel and the amount delivered was in direct relationship with the movement of the air flow meter controlled by the movement of a piston in the metering unit. Fuel was supplied to the metering unit by a high-pressure pump. Some electronics were involved, especially in the area of idle speed control, but no ECU controlled the fuel delivery.

The next stage was KE-Jetronic. Driven by the need for greater control over emissions and the promise of improved fuel economy, a degree of electronic control was introduced. Outwardly similar to D-Jetronic, there were however few interchangeable parts. Fuel was delivered in the same way, the difference being that fuel system pressure was now not controlled by a mechanical pressure relief valve, but by an electronic actuator controlled by an ECU. This provided greater accuracy and faster response to changing conditions. KE-Jetronic can be operated in both an open-loop and a closed-loop configuration by the addition of a lambda sensor (measuring oxygen in the exhaust gas), as in early R129 SLs.

A final mention should be made of a system developed for the US market prior to the introduction of the KE variant, called K Lambda and seen on cars imported from the US. It's not the same as a closed-loop KE system, more of a modified K-Jetronic system operating on a closed-loop basis with lambda sensor control.Little information is available, and being specific for the US market it's sensitive to modern fuel compositions. Also, identifying and sourcing parts is difficult.

RIGHT
Autumn 1985-on R107 500SLs have the semi electronic KE-Jetronic...

BELOW
...which raised power from the five-litre M117 V8 by 14bhp to 241bhp.

The carburettor

The word 'Carburettor' is derived from the French verb *'carburet'* to combine with carbon, or in in this case, to enrich a gas (air being a combination of gases) by combining it with carbon or hydrocarbons such as petrol.

Carburettor development is a classic example of engineers solving the same problem with different approaches. There are many names you'll probably have heard of: Solex, Zenith, Webber, Holley, Dellorto, SU, Stromberg and Amal among them.Carburettors are either fixed-jet or variable-jet design, while physical designs include down-draught, side-draught, single-barrel and multiple barrel.

Carburettor tuning is a task attempted by many and mastered by few. The type SLShop most frequently

ABOVE
The 190SL uses the 190 Ponton 1.9-litre engine, but with twin carburettors.

LEFT
With 104bhp on tap, the 'junior' SL wasn't as fast as its sleek looks suggested.

Carburettor development is a example of engineers solving the same problems differently

LEFT
Partriotically, M-B gave 190SLs Webers but they struggle to stay in tune.

FAR LEFT
SLShop has developed a package of parts to get them operating correctly.

encounters is that on the 1955-1963 W121 190SL Roadster, the twin side-draught Solex setup – which often go out of tune and are notoriously difficult to set up. "Many of these cars have been modified to replace the Solex items with Weber units of similar design," Sam points out. "We're fortunate to have the rolling road facility and the benefit of advanced gas analysers which enable the tuning process to become more of a precise science than a 'black art'. We've built up a stock of the various components needed to make fuelling adjustments with instantly measurable results."

Low pressure life

A carburettor engine does not 'suck' fuel in. Air enters the engine due to low pressure, created within the inlet manifold by the downward stroke of the piston on the induction cycle. We should also mention the Venturi and Bernoulli principle, dating back to 1738 when it was discovered that with an increase in the speed of a fluid (and in our case, air can be considered to be a fluid) the pressure within that fluid decreases.

The Venturi reduces the size of the bore that the air must pass through to enter the combustion chamber so, for any given volume of air, the rate of flow or speed will increase and the pressure will drop, hence varying sizes of Venturis commonly referred to as 'chokes' are used to increase or decrease the air flow speed and subsequently vary the pressure differential within the carburettor, compared to atmospheric pressure.

Joining the jet set

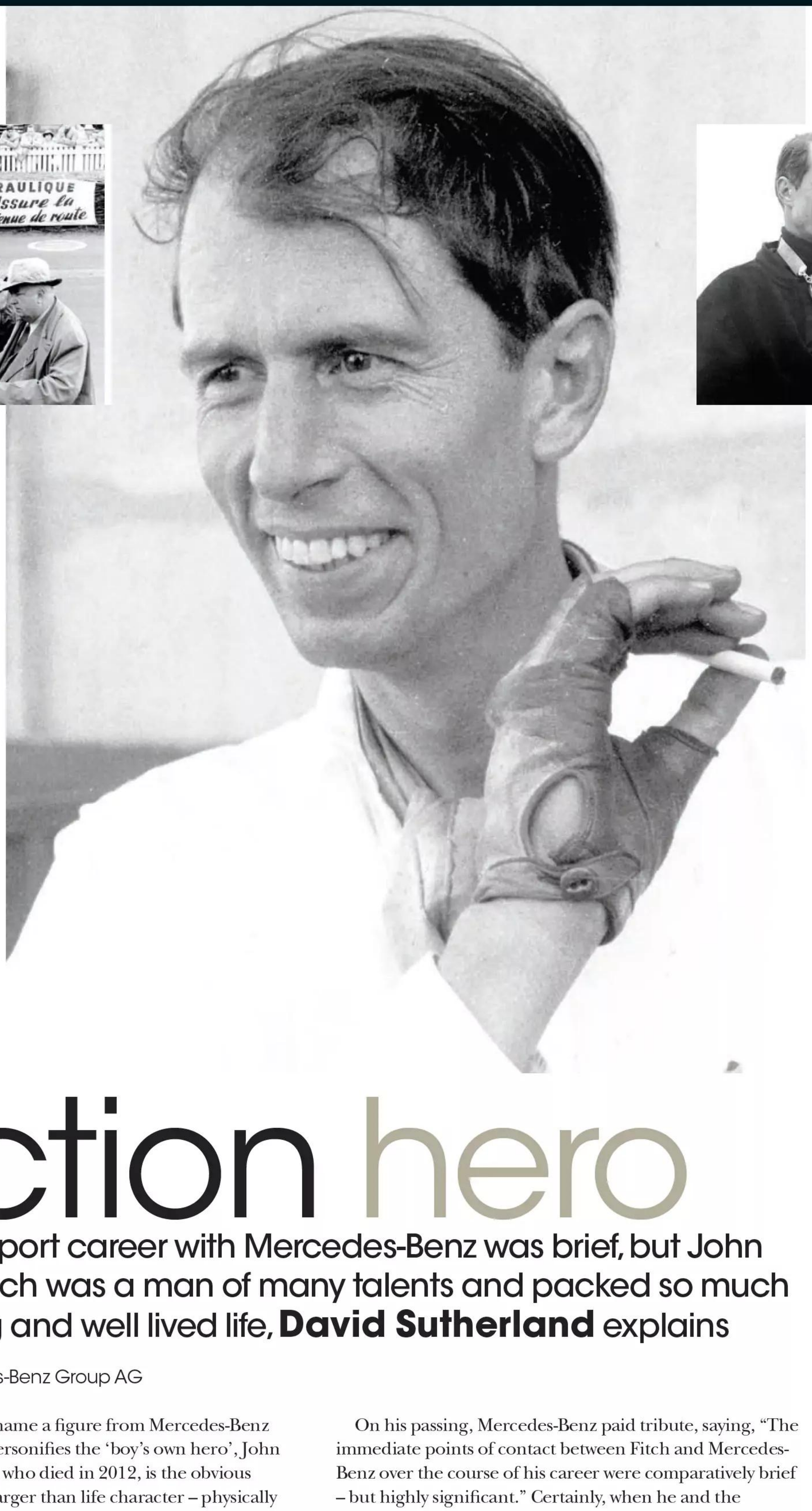
As an example, we know that the bore of the Solex 44PHH carburettor fitted to the 190SL is 44mm but these are actually choked down to between 36 and 32mm. This is for the purpose of increasing both the speed of the air entering the engine and the pressure differential across the carburettor.

Air at a higher pressure will always move towards air at a lower pressure, and it's this movement of air through the carburettor chambers that allows the mixing of the fuel with the air to form a combustible emulsion which is ignited by a spark once compressed within the cylinders. We can also use the jet size to tune the carburettor, and it is this ability to vary the jet sizes (by physically changing the jets) and vary the pressure differentials that enable us to control the air-fuel ratio in a carburettor. CM

⇨ ***The text for this feature is based on a technical article produced by SLShop Tel (0)1789 337070 Web theslshop.com***

ABOVE
With team mate Pierre Levegh (middle) prior to the Le Mans tradegy.

RIGHT
Film star suaveness, but John Cooper Fitch was a racer and engineer too.



ABOVE
Carrera Panamericana Mexico, 1952 with team manager Alfred Neubauer.

ABOVE RIGHT
Fitch third from left, with the winning 1952 Carrera Panamericana race team.

RIGHT
Fitch (at wheel) and Eugen Geiger in their Carrera Panamericana 300SL.

BELOW
Clearly still time for happy snaps despite the Mexican event's gruelling nature.

Action hero

His motorsport career with Mercedes-Benz was brief, but John Cooper Fitch was a man of many talents and packed so much into a long and well lived life, **David Sutherland** explains

IMAGES Mercedes-Benz Group AG

If you want to name a figure from Mercedes-Benz history who personifies the 'boy's own hero', John Cooper Fitch, who died in 2012, is the obvious choice. This larger than life character – physically as well as figuratively, given his super tall, slim stance – was a fighter pilot, prisoner of war, sailor, racing driver, carmaker, film producer, race track director and road safety expert. Although living to 95, he never really grew old: in 2005, aged 88, he attempted to set a new class speed record on the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah in a 300SL Gullwing, success elusive due to a faulty fuel pump and rain rather than any human failing on his part.

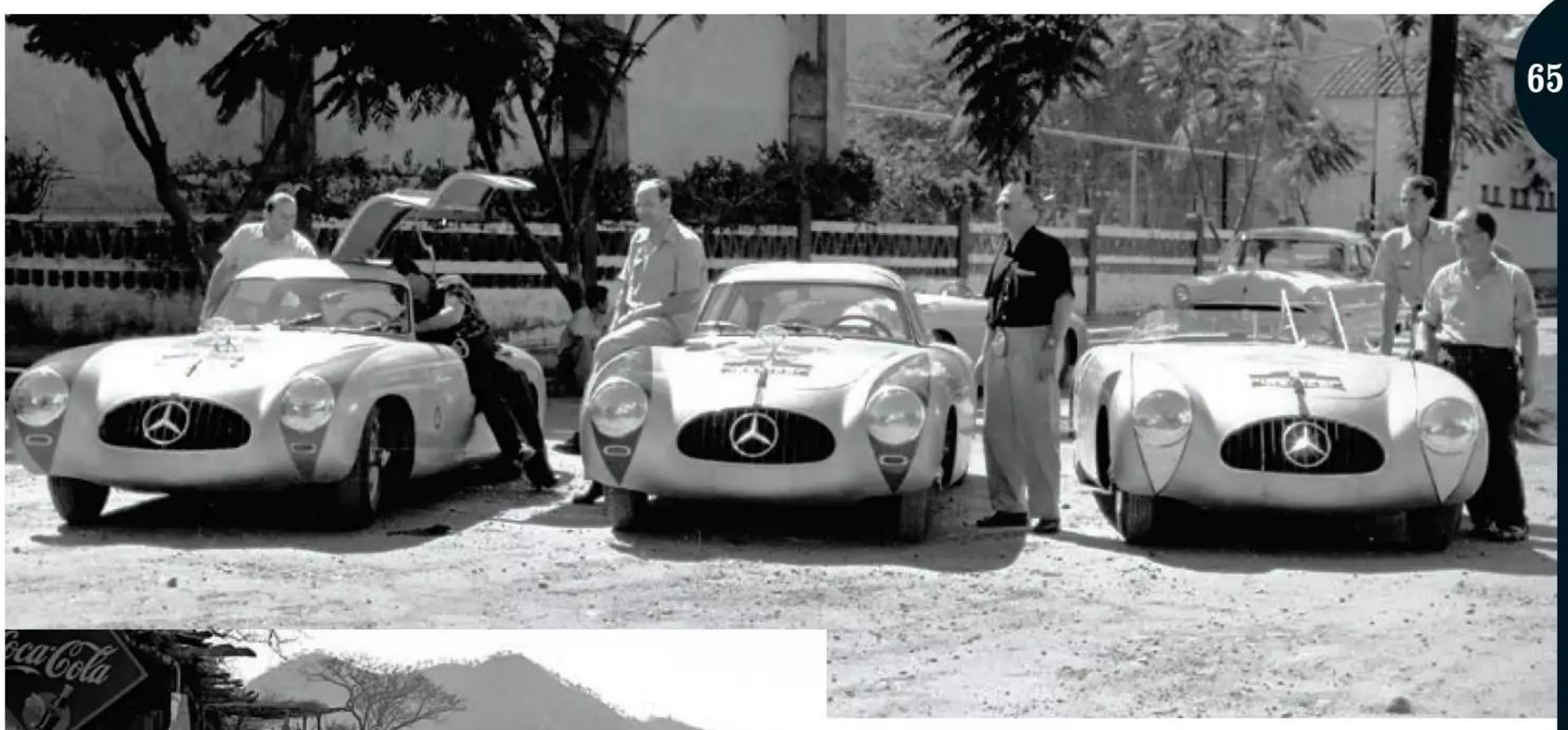
On his passing, Mercedes-Benz paid tribute, saying, "The immediate points of contact between Fitch and Mercedes-Benz over the course of his career were comparatively brief – but highly significant." Certainly, when he and the carmaker did work together, the results were most fruitful.

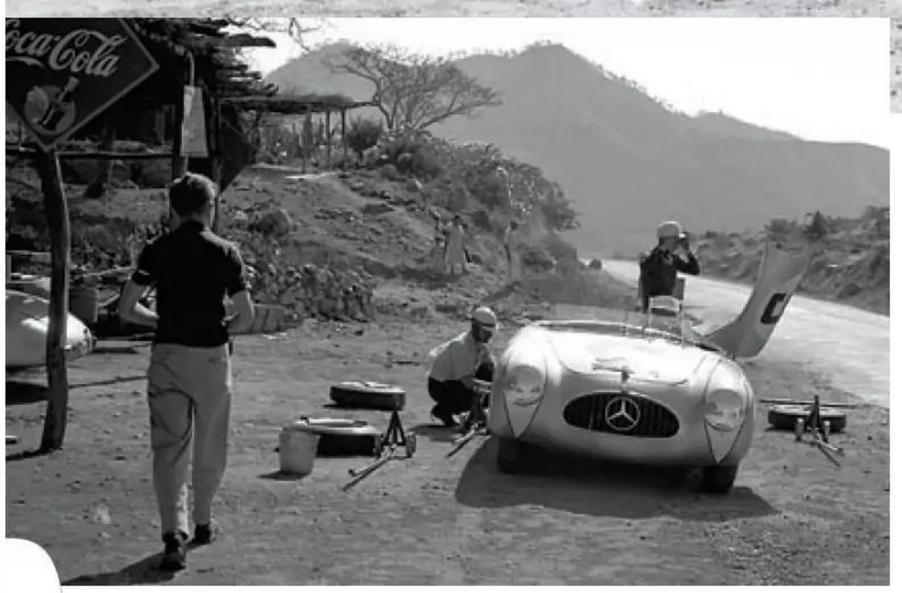
In 1952 at Le Mans, by which time Fitch was the Sports Car Club of America champion, and competing in a Chrysler-powered Cunningham C2R (built by famous, wealthy racing driver Briggs Cunningham) at the French 24-hour race, he was invited by Mercedes chief engineer Rudolf Uhlenhaut to attend a forthcoming test day at the Nürburgring track in Germany. At that event Fitch not only impressed Uhlenhaut

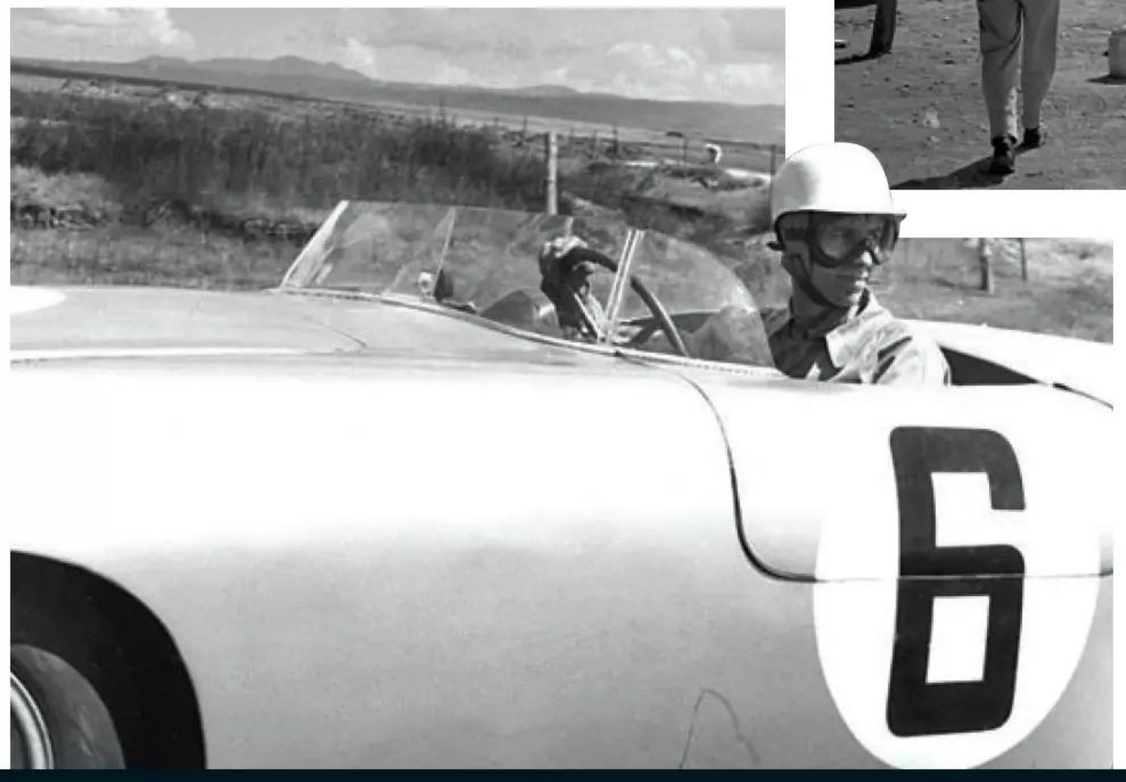
BELOW
In Mexico Fitch and Geiger were the pair driving the 300SL roadster version.

BELOW LEFT
A 'pit stop' in Mexico on the 340-mile stage from Tuxtla Gutierrez to Oaxaca.

"ALTHOUGH LIVING TO 95, HE NEVER REALLY GREW OLD: AGED 88, HE ATTEMPTED A SPEED RECORD ON THE BONNEVILLE SALT FLATS IN UTAH IN A 300SL GULLWING"







LEFT
As on the coupe, the doors flipped upwards due to the high-sided chassis frame.

and Mercedes team manager Alfred Neubauer with his lap times in the 300SL sports racing car, but sought to persuade Neubauer to enter that November's Carrera Panamericana, in which Fitch had participated in 1951, the challenging and dangerous 2,000-mile road race from the bottom to the top of Mexico.

"I put in a pitch to Neubauer that Mercedes should do the Panamericana," Fitch recalled in an interview with *Motorsport* magazine in 2010. "'*Unmöglich,*' he said. 'Impossible. We don't have the budget, we don't have the time to organise it, it's too big, too far away.' But the following week I sent him a dossier about the race, road conditions, altitude, temperature, rainfall. I heard nothing more until the end of October, barely three weeks before the race, when I had a telegram asking me to go to Mexico City at once." ⇨

"AS A US ARMY AIR FORCE PILOT HE WAS BASED AT DEBDEN IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND FLYING P-51 MUSTANGS ESCORTING USAAF BOMBERS ON RAIDS"

⇨ Fitch found himself part of a three-car team, 300SL coupes for Hermann Lang and Erwin Grupp, and Karl Kling and Hans Klenk, and an open roadster version for himself and navigator Eugen Geiger. Fitch's race did not go well because although positioned second at one point, he suffered steering problems and was eventually disqualified after he returned to the service garage for repairs and restarted the stage. But the race he persuaded Mercedes to enter was a triumph for Stuttgart otherwise, yielding a 1-2 victory headed by Kling/Klenk.

Following the 1952 season, in which the 300SL surpassed all expectations by winning an armful of international races, the Mercedes team sat out 1953 and half of 1954 while preparing its F1 comeback, to race in championship grands prix for the first time since 1939. In 1955, as well as contesting grands prix with the W196 in open wheeler and closed bodywork form, the Silver Arrows team also entered the Mille Miglia of that year (part of the World Sport Car Championship), fielding the 300SLR, effectively a more powerful, two-seat adaptation of the W196R. Stirling Moss with navigator Denis Jenkinson famously won this challenging 1,000-mile dash across Italy at an astounding average speed of 99mph. There were smaller headlines for Fitch, who drove a standard 300SL Gullwing in the event's GT class, although his was an impressive achievement, finishing fifth overall and first in class, knocking an hour off the class record.

However, Fitch's contribution was more than just his piloting the Gullwing, it was later revealed. Originally 'Jenks' was to have been his co-driver, and some time before the race Fitch had suggested to Jenks that rather than using a pad of paper for pace notes, every corner and hazard should be written on a continuous roll of paper that could be mounted in a box and rolled out continuously during the race. "Then Stirling asked Jenks to go with him, and of course I agreed, and Jenks took the roller idea with him," Fitch explained to *Motorsport*. "History tells how well it worked!"

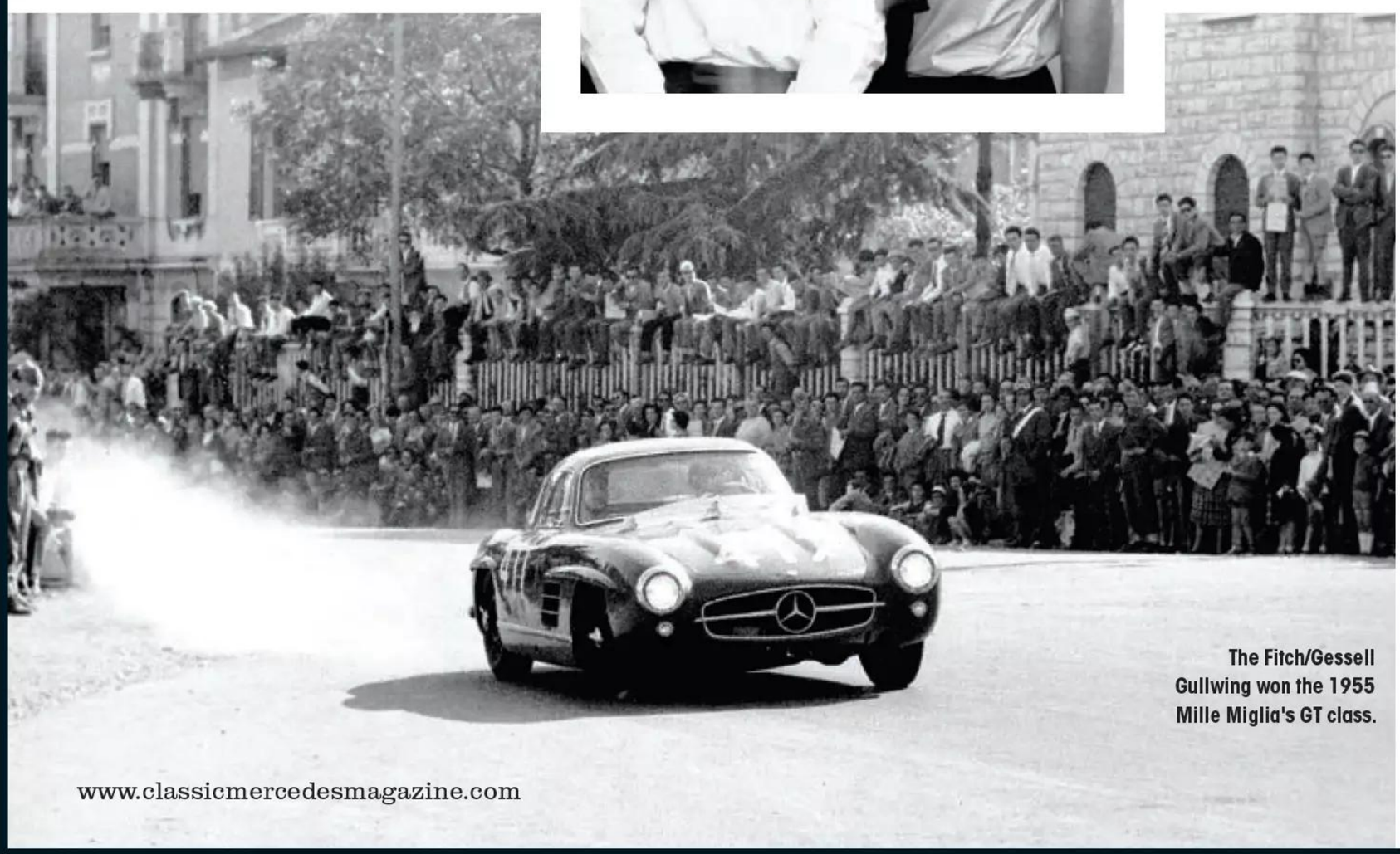
Fitch's faultless Mille Miglia drive led to an invitation from Neubauer to drive one of three 300SLRs at Le Mans six weeks later. Sadly, this provided Fitch with a ringside seat to motorsport's worst tragedy, due to him being partnered with Pierre Levegh, whose car was launched into the spectator terrace after making contact with an Austin Healey that had swerved to avoid hitting another, slowing car. Levegh, along with over 80 spectators died, Fitch witnessing the mayhem and confusion from the nearby pits, in the company of Levegh's wife as the race continued, for seven hours after the accident.

But Fitch had been far closer to danger a decade earlier, when as a US Army Air Force pilot he was based at Debden in Cambridgeshire and flying P-51 Mustangs escorting USAAF bombers on raids over Germany. Fitch was also believed to be the first pilot to shoot down a Messerschmitt 262, the early German jet fighter.

ABOVE
Fitch didn't enjoy the same star status within the team as Stirling Moss (right).

ABOVE LEFT
Silver Arrows collected drivers and management, with wifes and girlfriends.

LEFT
Kurt Gessell was Fitch's 300SL Gullwing co-driver in the 1955 Mille Miglia.



The Fitch/Gessell Gullwing won the 1955 Mille Miglia's GT class.

The Targa Floria in Sicily was another 1955 event for Fitch, in a 300SLR.

John Cooper Fitch: A racing life

Born: August 1917, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA
Died: October 31, 2012, aged 95, Lime Rock, Connecticut
World War Two: US Airforce pilot flying Mustangs in combat duty
Early racing career: MG TF in sports car racing; home-built Ford V8 powered Fiat; Jaguar XK120 at Sebring; cars built by Briggs Cunningham at Le Mans
Mercedes-Benz races: 1952 Carrera Panamericana (300SL); 1955 Mille Miglia (300SL), Le Mans (300SLR), Tourist Trophy at Dundrod (300SLR), Targa Floria (300SLR)
Final race: 1966 Sebring 12 Hours in a Porsche 904 (retired)
Other activities: Helped produce the 1954 film *The Racers*, assisted with development of the original Chevrolet Corvette; invented the impact absorbing Fitch Barrier; designed cars including the Fitch Sprint and Fitch Phoenix; director Lime Rock Park race circuit, Connecticut
Racing high point: First in class in a 300SL in the 1955 Mille Miglia
Low point: His Mustang fighter was shot down over Germany in 1945 and he became a prisoner-of-war

RIGHT
From left: Fitch, Karl Kling, Hermann Lang, Hans Klenk (at rear) and Erwin Grupp.

FAR RIGHT
During a break in the Targa Floria with Moss, Hans Herrmann, Peter Collins.

On the Tourist Trophy Race, Dundrod circuit in Northern Ireland.

He was based in North Africa for a spell, but on February 20, 1946 his circumstances changed dramatically when he was shot down in the course of a low level attack on a train in Germany. He was lucky to bail out in time, breaking his arm on the aircraft's tail fin in the process, and even luckier to avoid being found by enraged, pickaxe bearing locals bearing down on the wreckage intent on finishing off the pilot, he reckoned. Fitch spent the last three months of the war as a prisoner of war, although for a short period after WW2 ended he flew as a test pilot based in Ohio.

Fitch was not destined to lead a mundane life. He came from a wealthy, established family in Connecticut, his interest in racing passed down from his stepfather George Spindler, a director at the Stutz Motor Company and who ⇨

A 1986 reunion at the Nürburgring with drivers plus W196R and W154.

LEFT
At a 2002 event marking the Carrera Panamericana he was in 50 years earlier.

FAR LEFT
Cockpit close-up shows how little protection 1950s racing drivers had.

⇨ raced at Daytona and also in the Indianapolis 500. However, he recalled that visiting Europe in the immediate pre-WW2 years and being impressed by European racing with its far more frequent cornering and gearchanges than at home in the US was what truly ignited his passion.

His racing began after WW2, when having set up a car dealership in the New York suburb White Plains, he competed in an MG TC in sports car events. One of his pit crew, Elizabeth, became his wife, their 60-year marriage producing three sons.

After his first stint with Mercedes-Benz in 1952, and by the following year the Fitch family living in Paris, John entered a variety of international races, winning the Sebring 12 Hours in Florida, but experiencing his worst accident at a 12-hour race in Reims in France while driving a Cunningham C5R. Due to what he believes was untimely gust of wind, the car took off but fortunately ended up on the ground the right way up and not on fire. Fitch was injured, but not seriously, and attributed his survival to the five-point safety harness – unheard of in a racing car at the time – he was wearing. This would shape a further aspect of his career.

Fitch continued racing Briggs Cunningham's car into 1954 but that year saw him take an entirely different view of motorsport – as a film producer. For Hollywood's *The Racers*, released in 1955 and based on the life of pre-war Silver Arrows ace Rudolph Caracciola, Fitch helped mock up the race circuit in Monaco (as there was no race that year), organise the crash scenes, and even serve as a stand in driver for the star Kirk Douglas, who never came to Europe for the filming. His contacts within the principality's high society almost certainly helped him gain access to the necessary locations.

"RETIREMENT, IF THAT WAS THE APPROPRIATE TERM, SAW HIM DEVELOP THE FITCH BARRIER, WHICH IS NOW IS IN USE ON AMERICAN HIGHWAYS"

Fitch never drove in a grand prix for Mercedes-Benz, the second of his two F1 entries the Italian Grand Prix at Monza in September 1955, in which he finished ninth in a Maserati. The last of his five races for Mercedes was the open road Targa Florio in Sicily in a 300SLR the following month with co-driver Desmond Titteringham, yielding a fourth place. Fitch then returned to live in the US, racing for a further 11 years, his drives including Chevrolet Corvettes (General Motors hired him to develop it as a race car), Jaguars, Maseratis and Porsches.

His last race was at the age of 48, in 1966, in a Porsche 904 at Sebring, which he shared with his long-standing friend and racing car supplier Briggs Cunningham, then 11 years his senior. However, in 2010 the 92-year-old Fitch came to Le Mans for a lap of honour at the wheel of the same Corvette that had given him a class win there in 1960.

Retirement, if that was the appropriate term, saw him develop the Fitch Barrier, which is now is in use on American highways, a project that was inspired by the Le Mans catastrophe. Ever since then he had sought to work out a way of containing high speeds car accidents. Fitch also had a long-term association with the Lime Rock Park race circuit near his ancestral Connecticut home.

John Cooper Fitch does not rate among the fastest and most successful racing drivers. Yet if the mould that produced this extraordinarily versatile, free-thinking individual still exists, it has yet to be re-used. CM

⇨ *Our thanks to journalist Simon Taylor and* **Motorsport** *magazine for some source material*

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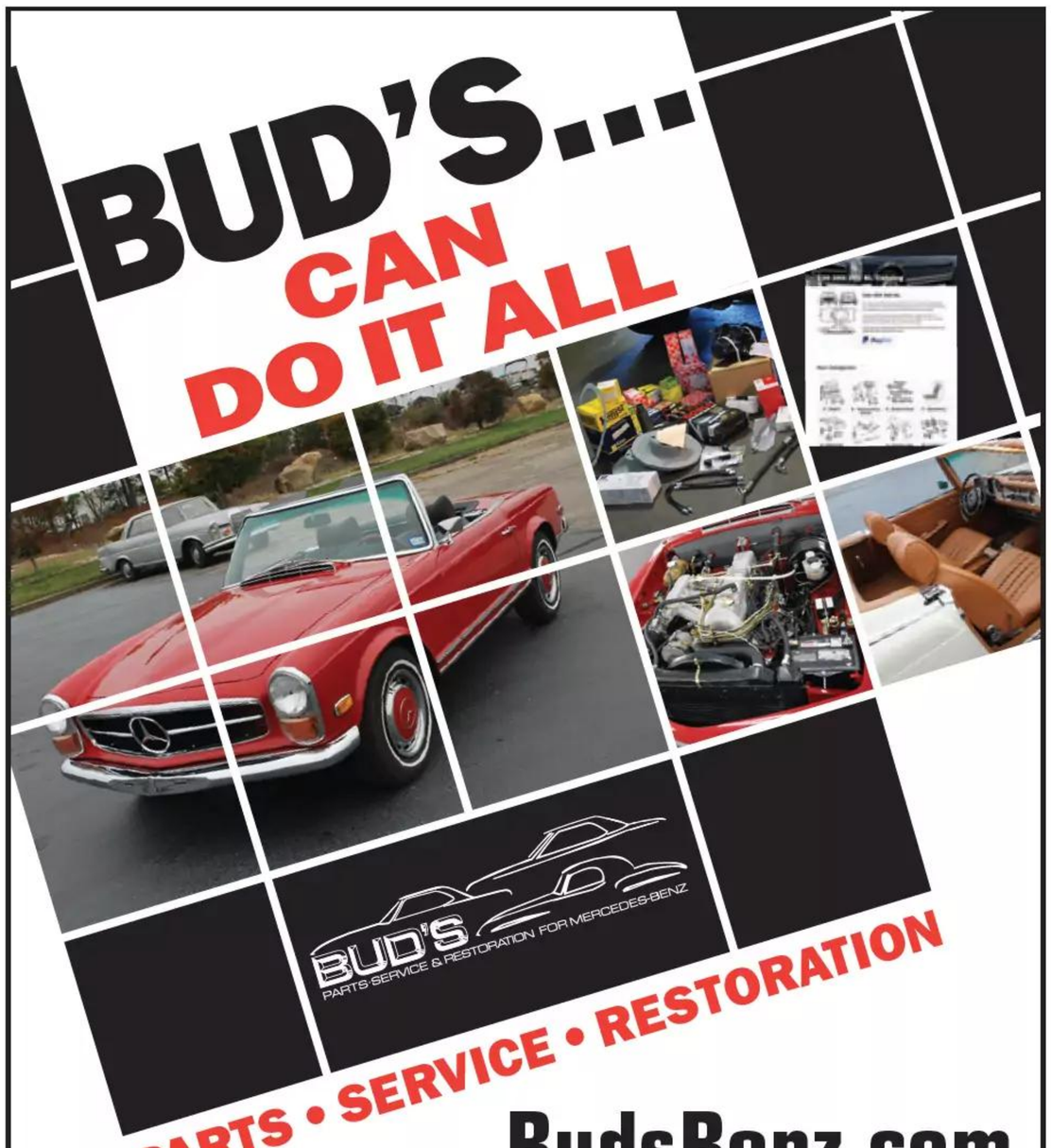

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Upper class

Mercedes-Benz made a surprisingly late start in India, not officially exporting cars there until the mid-1990s. But the first model offered for sale, the W124, made a big impact – eventually, as **Paranjay Dutt** explains

IMAGES Paranjay Dutt

In the Indian context, the W124 has always been slightly late. From its market introduction to its eventual appreciation by the classic car community, the 124-series saloon is much more than simply a mid-sized Merc from the 1990s. That it was the first Mercedes-Benz product which the German carmaker manufactured (OK, assembled) and sold in India makes its story worth exploring. As the W124 completes four decades of global existence, I jumped behind the wheel of a well-maintained, Indian-made example to find out what the fuss is about. It's also the 30th year since Mercedes-Benz officially set foot in India.

Thirty years? That seems odd because in the 'developed' markets if you were to look at what happened three decades ago, it would be the announcement and launch of the 210-series E-Class. But things were different in India – a market that had just opened up to foreign companies. Despite the lack of a formal subsidiary, Mercedes-Benz was a well-known brand, and in the mid-1990s, with a partner it was already familiar with (Tata Engineering and Locomotives Company had earlier co-manufactured Mercedes-Benz trucks), it was determined to expand its influence. And what could've been a better product to start with than a Bruno Sacco-designed car, whose reliability and longevity were verified not just by company reputation but by happy owners around the world. And at a price that, while out of reach for many, would appeal to the exact client Mercedes-Benz would look at on the global stage.

Instrumental in the deal was Ratan Tata, the man responsible for guiding the Tata Group towards success, and also launching indigenous products like the Tata Nano (the world's cheapest car), the Tata Indica (which changed the Indian hatchback scene to a large extent; the City Rover ⇨

"Mercedes-Benz was determined to expand its influence, and what better product to start with than a Bruno Sacco-designed car, whose reliability and longevity were verified"

Indian experience

Mumbai-based businessman Perseus Bandrawalla, also a W124 owner and curator of the annual Mercedes-Benz Classic Car Rally in India, tells us more about the mid-size Mercedes' place in the country's auto culture

Paranjay Dutt

It wasn't just the late arrival or the high purchase cost that led to the car's lowly sales, but also that it was a very different market back then. In the mid-1990s in India, the concept of going to an authorised service centre didn't exist, as people would rather give their car to their trusted mechanic. The problem was also that even the large garages had no experience with fuel-injection or electronics, as the locally produced cars were carburettored. Furthermore, not many mechanics were equipped with scanners, spare parts, or even the knowledge to fettle the 124, which was equipped with the latest technology including anti-lock brakes, airbags, hydraulics, fuel injection and so on.

Now, it's the best of both worlds if you want a classic car with modern engineering. And at the same time, everything is designed to last. That's what has endeared the W124 to not just the millennials but also to the Gen-Zs. Given how popular the W124 is, the official dealers themselves are now quite familiar with it. Spare parts aren't an issue, with some being readily available. The parts which need to be ordered from Germany don't take too long, either. What many people don't realise is that original spare parts are now available at prices very similar to what they retail at abroad.

If you spoke to someone 15 years ago about the 124, they'd mention that it was the E-Class that flopped in India, whereas now, they too would agree that it's one of the finest cars made by Mercedes-Benz. It's a car that's built well, looks unlike anything else on the market, and has a prominent place in Indian automotive history, so it's safe to say that every penny spent on it is likely to be worth it. That's because the 124, which I liken to Apollo 11, owing to its monumental status, is going to pay you back with endless driving pleasure.

ABOVE LEFT INSET
Perseus Bandrawalla is a mover and shaker in India's classic car world.

BELOW LEFT
By the time the 124-series got to India in 1996, the the 210 had replaced it.

BELOW
A customising touch is the part wood, part leather-rimmed steering wheel.

"Right now, an excellent W124 can be bought for around half a million Rupees (or about £5,000), which isn't bad at all"

⇨ story isn't worth discussing), and even the buyout of Jaguar Land Rover from Ford. In what seemed like the right hands with a strong product, Mercedes-Benz India's journey began. Backed by the greatest of intentions, the W124 looked like it could make an amazing start. Only it didn't.

In the early days just one model was sold, the entry level four-cylinder 220.

The factory was set up in Pimpri, Pune in 1994, and the first cars rolled out in 1995. It was priced at a little over two million Indian Rupees, which according to the exchange rates from 1995, was about £33,000. While not short in quality or speed (the cars were limited to 180kph, or 112mph), the 124 was hampered by the fact that it was nearing the end of its life cycle. A hand-me-down for a new market! This, in turn, led to dismal sales – reports suggest volume of under 2,500 cars, before it was replaced by the 210-series in India.

But despite the lowly sales, Mercedes-Benz effectively set up the premium car segment in India, and can also be credited with making a sizeable impact on the local youngtimer/modern classic movement in India. Arriving earlier on the scene than rival manufacturers, Mercedes established itself sooner, and paved its way straight to the Indian enthusiast's heart.

The 124 soon became available on the used car market at more affordable prices, although not so cheap that anyone with a wad of cash could buy one. Buoyed by this sense of exclusivity, the 124-series (officially, India only got the saloon) soon became a dream car that people could actually buy, and that remains the case today. Right now, an excellent W124 can be bought for around half a million Rupees (or about £5,000), which isn't bad at all.

That was the 124, but what happened to Mercedes-Benz India? The German carmaker, upon realising its strategy wasn't working out as planned, soon made some drastic changes. The first step was to launch the 210-series (which was already available globally soon after the 124 was ⇨

Specifications

Mercedes-Benz E220 (W124)

Engine	M111 2,199cc 4-cyl
Power	148bhp@5,500rpm
Torque	155lb ft@4,000rpm
Transmission	5-speed manual
Weight	1,390kg
0-62mph	10.6sec
Top speed	131mph
Fuel consumption	31.4mpg
Years produced	1992-1996
Number built	105,346

All figures from Mercedes-Benz

⇨ introduced in India), followed by the 220-series S-Class and the 203-series C-Class, before continually adding new model lines. Now an independent entity, Mercedes-Benz India leads the Indian luxury segment (its sales figures from the last financial year were above 18,000 units), has a much broader model range, and is far better tuned into its customers' demands.

To round up my acquaintance with the India-spec 124, I drove a well kept example of the E220 and discovered that it perfectly lives up to its image. The saloon feels a great step forwards from the cars of the past, but it doesn't feel too different from a more modern E-Class. One sits fairly low in a much more confidence inspiring position than you'll find in most modern cars. The 2.2-litre petrol engine develops 148bhp, and while it's no match for, say a modern E-Class's four-cylinder, it won't disappoint.

"The 124's popularity can be witnessed at the Mercedes-Benz Classic Car Rally every November or December in Mumbai, where they gleam proudly"

Manual gearboxes aren't common on new cars in the E-Class segment, but the Indian W124s were supplied with a manual transmission and it works perfectly on the E220. On the move, the Mercedes is stable but supple, sufficiently holding off road imperfections to let the four-pot engine work its magic. Of course, the W124 is not what you'd call exciting, especially not in the specification that was offered in India: the E220 and E250 Diesel. While it's a great medium-sized car to waft around in, if I were looking to start my day on an energy-filled note, the 124 might not be at the top of my list. But can one guess its age from the way it drives? It's not as easy as you'd think! This is probably one big reason why owners don't want to let go of their cars, and why demand for them remains strong here.

The 124's popularity can be witnessed at the Mercedes-Benz Classic Car Rally that takes place every November or December in Mumbai, where they gleam proudly among much rarer siblings. Armed with the 124, the Indian fan is no longer afraid to step into the world of modern classics. Some owners have restored them, some have modified them (with more power – there's even one with a Toyota Supra straight-six engine, which of course won't thrill the purists). The appeal isn't limited to the Indian-assembled models alone – there are some neat 124 estates, and even an ex-government 124-series ambulance.

In India, the craze for the 124-series has been on the rise for years, and there's no end in sight. That must be quite an achievement for a brand which started its Indian innings on the wrong note, managing only a fraction of the expected sales, and witnessed many prospective buyers back out from buying an 124 E-Class in 1996. Those people missed out on a world-class car, of that there is no doubt. CM

ABOVE RIGHT
Indian customers only got the basic 124, but at least it came with alloy wheels.

RIGHT
The car Paranjay tried was a sweet low miler, which he found drove beautifully.

Peter Jarvis

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RHD, finished in signal red with cream hide interior, headrests, rear seats, cruise control, ABS, light up vanity mirrors, tinted glass, hard & soft tops, automatic, power steering, spare wheel unused, complete with all tools, stereo system, power windows, virtually a one owner, last owner for 33 years, this car is just remarkable condition, 86,000 miles from new, full history, garaged, papered from new, drives like new, very difficult to find a better one of this last model.

Mercedes 300SL Sports 1989 — £45,750

Mercedes sports 300SL 1988/9 finished in astral silver, with navy blue interior and matching soft top, complete with hard top, rear seats, over mats, tinted glass, stereo system, light up vanity mirrors abs, alloys, power windows, automatic, power steering, spare wheel never used, complete with all tools, only one previous owner, only 23,000 miles from new, with excellent service history from new, new MOT by Mercedes and recent service, with tracker and immobilizer, garaged from new, just magnificent throughout. £59,750.

Mercedes 300SL Sports 1988/9 — £59,750

Finished in gleaming unmarked classic white, with black hide interior, rear seats, hard and soft tops, automatic, power steering, power windows, ABS brakes, alloys, stereo system, 69,000 miles, service history, complete with all tools, new Mot supplied on purchase, only three previous owners, always garaged, drives superb, excellent example.

Mercedes Sports 1985 280SL — £27,750

Finished in unmarked gleaming signal red, with hard and soft tops, rear seats, headrests, overmats, stereo system, power windows, tinted glass, complete with all tools, auto, power steering, only 87,000 miles from new, all original paperwork from new. Absolutely first-class history, with only one previous owner, amazing condition, drives smoothly just like new, pampered and garaged from new, probably one of the finest available.

Mercedes Sports 280 SL 1981 with personal reg number — £27,500

Finished in brilliant smoke silver with, beige hide interior, hard and soft tops, headrests, light up vanity mirrors, expensive stereo system, power windows, tinted glass, air con, alloys, abs bakes, air bag, srs, power steering, automatic, complete with all tools, 49,500 miles, history garaged from new. This car is just breath taking.

Mercedes 560SL sports 1988 LHD — £44,750

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UNDER THE HAMMER

The classic market is increasingly interested in 'pre-merger' AMG cars, with prices of top models rocketing. Here we look at eight AMG conversions, all sold by Bonhams in its 'AMG Rediscovered' online auction held in June

IMAGES BONHAMS

Practical power

LOS ANGELES, USA

All the cars over these six pages are from the estate of the late AMG importer and Mercedes enthusiast Barry Taylor who lived in the San Francisco Bay area, and we start with a big capacity AMG conversion, a 5.2-litre V8 123-series estate

AMG Rediscovered

Auctioneer
Bonhams

Auction Online
From Los Angeles, USA

Dates
June 17-24, 2024

Lot 208
Mercedes-Benz 500TE AMG Estate

The Mercedes-Benz 123-series replaced the W114 in 1975 as the company's mid-sized volume sales leader. The fresh, modern styling by Friedrich Geiger and Bruno Sacco struck a chord with buyers, who eagerly queued for this handsome new Mercedes model the moment it hit showrooms. In fact, demand was so strong that some customers resorted to paying thousands of Deutsch Marks above list for gently used models to avoid the long backlog from the factory.

It was Stuttgart's own strict quality control measures that delayed production, and the 123's enduring popularity meant that the waiting list lasted clear through to the end of production in 1986. Its premium price reflected the obsessive attention to quality and refinement: over-engineered, meticulously built, and astoundingly durable, the 123 was perfect for everyone from affluent families to executives, to heads of state. Famously, base models served as taxis on nearly every continent and can still be found on duty, particularly in harsh environments. Professional drivers so loved the 123 that when its replacement, the W124, arrived in 1985, German taxi drivers took to the streets in protest!

Of course, the W123 is so much more than a taxicab, and is regarded as one of the finest quality mass production cars of all time, with nearly three million built between 1976 and 1986. While the four-door saloon comprised the bulk of production, other variants included a handsome coupe, a long-wheelbase limousine, and a stylish, practical estate. Never intended as a performance car, the most powerful factory engine offered was the 183bhp, twin-cam straight-six (M110) petrol. An array of diesel engines was also offered, including the sophisticated three-litre OM617 turbodiesel, known for being efficient, capable, and utterly bombproof. Though none of the engines would ever trouble any Porsches on the Autobahn – which is where AMG expertise came in.

"PERHAPS AMG ENGINEERS HAD THE PONTIAC GTO IN MIND WHEN THEY TURNED THEIR ATTENTION TO THE MILD-MANNERED 123 AND SHOE-HORNED IN THE V8 ENGINE"

Perhaps they had the Pontiac GTO in mind when they turned their attention to the mild-mannered 123 and shoe-horned in the V8 engine from the S-Class into the mid-sized chassis. AMG recognised the potential lurking within, and this 500TE wagon represents the zenith of the legendary tuner's work on the 123. It is one of just a handful of 123 TE estates given the full AMG treatment, and while the extent of these conversions varies wildly from car to car, AMG did so much more than simply squeeze a big engine into a small car. Such was the extent of the modifications that engine builders were allowed to assign their own ID numbers, as this example is reported to wear.

Central to its specification is the Mercedes M117 V8 engine, which replaces the 2.8-litre six it was born with. Records with the car suggest the V8 was massaged by AMG, giving it a 5.2-litre specification (up from the standard five litres) which period literature rates at a healthy 300ps, or 296bhp. The car also wears AMG's iconic bodykit, blacked-out mouldings, period split-rim BBS basketweave wheels, and is finished in its original shade of Astral Silver over a customised red interior.

As one of the first tuning companies to consider the entirety of the car, AMG included revised suspension and larger wheels to handle the additional power from the big V8 engine up front. While no documentation accompanies this car, it wears what is claimed is an AMG ID

Year 1979
Engine 5.2-litre V8/295bhp
Chassis no TP18150-241598 (see text)
Pre-sale estimate US$150,000 - US$180,000, £120,000 - £140,000
Price achieved $138,800, £109,400

ABOVE
T-Model AMG conversions were rare, especially those built up in Affalterbach.

LEFT
The S123's spacious load bay meant the V8 power was mated to practicality.

RIGHT
A full house conversion, with AMG exterior black trim as well engine mods.

RIGHT
An 'AMG Mercedes' sticker would be on pre-merger cars, but not on those after.

BELOW RIGHT
AMGs remained family cars as well as being huge horsepower indulgences.

plate and serial number, lending credibility to the possibility it is one of the few Affalterbach-built examples, although cars were also assembled by AMG distributors in the USA. A look at the firewall shows the original Mercedes-Benz serial number, 123.093.12.008986, has been stamped out, and the replacement number punched in alongside it.

Enthusiasts lucky enough to encounter this 500TE through the years report that the owner, Mr Taylor, was particularly fond of it and used it as his 'shop car' for his business, AMG West. The Mercedes wagon showed 82,894km (51,8000 miles) at the time of cataloguing. CM

ABOVE
Some customers just took the power lift, but this one wanted a custom interior.

ABOVE RIGHT
AMG didn't just drop in a five-litre M117, but increased it to 5.2 litres.

'Pre-merger' what does it mean?

AMG, founded in 1967 by Mercedes-Benz engineers Hans Werner Aufrecht and Erhard Melcher, began by building Mercedes-Benz race cars for private customers but was soon offering power transfusions for road cars: the 123-series, 107-series SL and SLC, and 116-series S-Classes, *writes Tim French.* This reached a peak in the late 1980s, by which time the power-hungry Affalterbach tuner was turning out enormously expensive 126-series S-Class saloons and demonic SECs with six-litre, 32-valve V8 power

As of late 1993, an agreement with Mercedes-Benz saw AMG building special versions of the 202-series C-Class saloon, 124-series and R129 SL that would be sold in Mercedes showrooms, and with a Mercedes factory warranty.This largely ended the 'pre-merger' era, that is, customers instructing AMG to carry out extensive engine and body modifications on already registered cars, although this was still possible and did happen.

There was never an actual 'merger' between the two automotive firms, but a takeover. In 1999 DaimlerChrysler, as it then was, bought 51 per cent of AMG equity, and acquired the remaining shares in January 2005.

Wider appeal

LOS ANGELES, USA

AMG was modifying the W201 190 as it was launched, and this is an early example of that

Year 1983
Engine/power
2.0-litre/121bhp
Chassis no
WDB2010
2410004827
Pre-sale estimate
$25,000-$35,000,
£20,000-£28,000
Price achieved
$43,700, £34,400

ABOVE LEFT
It was on AMG's stand at the 1983 Frankfurt show.

ABOVE RIGHT
Larger, eight-inch wide wheels have Pirelli P7s.

Lot 214
Mercedes-Benz 190E AMG 'Wide Body'

The W201, or 190 as we have all come to know and love it, was launched in 1982 and remained in production until 1993, and many enthusiasts feel it is the last small Mercedes built to the company's legendary 'bank vault' standards. While it was essentially Stuttgart's first 'compact' car, its sophistication was not sacrificed. Features included a patented multi-link rear suspension that went on to do sterling service in the E- and C-Class, plus anti-dive and anti-squat suspension, ABS anti-lock braking, a single wiper and seatbelt pre-tensioners. The little 190 is a far more interesting car than its understated lines might suggest.

As well it should be, because the £600m investment led to a car that even Mercedes admitted was massively over-engineered; conventional wisdom has it that the W201 was the last car Mercedes built exactly as it wanted to before asking the accountants how much to charge for it – and the W201 was certainly expensive when it was new.

But the 190E really was a car for all seasons and budgets and they're still a very popular choice for the modern classic enthusiast with an eye for engineering and value – and buying one is less an act of faith than a demonstration of your confidence in Teutonic diligence.

This early W201 features AMG's unique flared wing treatment and a distinctive bodykit. Notes suggest it was on the company's stand at the 1983 Frankfurt motor show, though no other documentation to support that claim has been found. Finished in Astral Silver, it is equipped with a standard Mercedes drivetrain, a two-litre, four-cylinder M102 engine and four-speed manual transmission. It's adorned with a full complement of AMG accessories, including bumpers, side-sills, bootlid spoiler, and 8Jx16-inch Penta alloys all around, wrapped in period-correct Pirelli P7 high performance tyres.

The front wings are bespoke items, while the rears are suitably flared to accommodate the widened wheels and tyres. In classic 1980s fashion, the front grille, wheel centres, and bumpers are colour-keyed to the body.

The 190E's interior is appropriately kitted-out for 1980s action with desirable and rare Recaro C sports seats trimmed in grey fabric, with their signature bolster-mounted adjustment controls. Additional add-ons include a four-spoke, leather-bound AMG wheel and unique wood trim. CM

BELOW LEFT
The 2.0-litre engine in this 190E was left standard...

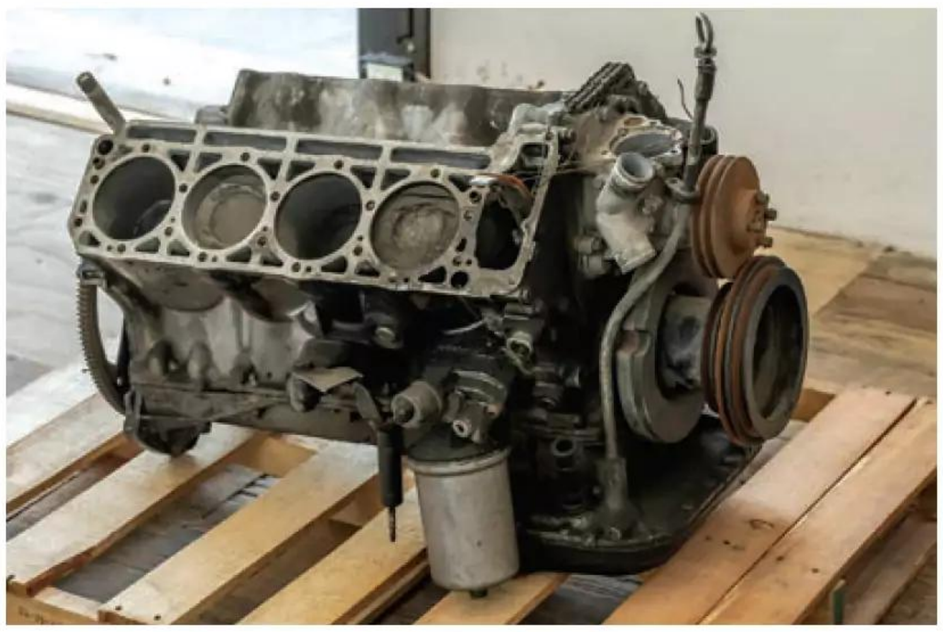
BELOW
...but the interior wasn't, brimming with AMG parts.

"THIS EARLY W201 FEATURES AMG'S UNIQUE FLARED WING TREATMENT AND A DISTINCTIVE BODYKIT. IT WAS ON THE COMPANY'S STAND AT THE 1983 FRANKFURT MOTOR SHOW"

Super saloon

LOS ANGELES, USA

The AMG V8 came with, rather than in, the 500SEL but the car still made over twice its estimate



Lot 203
Mercedes-Benz 500SEL AMG 6.0

Introduced at the Frankfurt motor show in the autumn of 1979, the 126-series had been in development since its 116 predecessor entered production in 1972, demonstrating the engineering team's total dedication to building the finest saloon car in the world. Bruno Sacco's styling team led a masterclass in timeless design, creating an S-Class that was understated yet with a commanding presence. Offered in standard, long-wheelbase, and SEC coupe form, the 126 could be tailored to suit just about any whim, while a variety of six- and eight-cylinder petrol engines provided ample motivation.

For the luxury car buyer with a frugal streak, more miserly five- and six-cylinder diesel engines were also offered. In keeping with S-Class tradition, the big car oozed quality from every surface. Every function and feature of the 126 was carefully considered and engineered for precise, reliable operation, earning it countless accolades from the press and public alike throughout its lengthy, 13-year production run.

AMG created many of its most memorable and desirable models of the pre-merger era using the 126 as a basis. Whether in coupe or saloon form, a 126 with the AMG treatment is an icon of the 1980s. It was also the first application of the double-overhead-cam, 32-valve cylinder-heads on the M117 V8 engine – which was developed into the mighty six-litre version that appeared in the 'Hammer' super saloon. In the 126, the hot V8 engine brought massive performance.

This 500SEL, a long-wheelbase 126 saloon, was delivered new to the European market and it's reported in notes left by Mr Taylor that it was previously used by AMG co-founder Hans Werner Aufrecht, although additional supporting documentation has not been uncovered. Finished in black over grey upholstery, it is fittingly well-equipped for the company boss, with a full AMG bodykit, sport seats, AMG wood trim, and Penta wheels. The car is presented in very good cosmetic condition, with its rare and desirable AMG styling parts intact.

Year 1985
Engine/power 5,953cc/385bhp
Chassis no WDB1260371 A086730
Pre-sale estimate $18,000-$25,000, £14,000 - £20,000
Price achieved $63,250, £49,800

As offered for sale, the engine had been removed from the bay, and the California Emissions Lab data plate affixed to the chassis indicates this car has the big-displacement 5,953cc, M117 V8. The accompanying engine was in long-block form and in otherwise unknown condition, and the rare AMG double-overhead-cam, four-valve cylinder-heads had been removed but were included in the sale. Close inspection showed that pistons fitted to the block show evidence of the necessary clearances required to accommodate the four-valve heads. The remaining mechanical condition has not been evaluated, and the car will require extensive recommissioning. CM

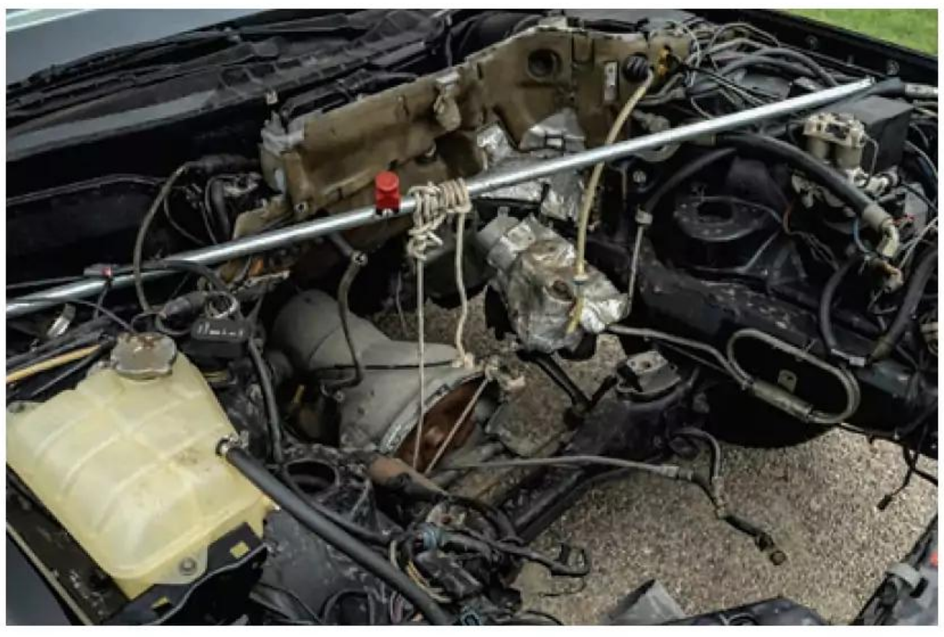
"THIS 500SEL WAS DELIVERED NEW TO THE EUROPEAN MARKET AND IT'S REPORTED IN NOTES THAT IT WAS PREVIOUSLY USED BY AMG CO-FOUNDER HANS-WERNER AUFRECHT"

ABOVE LEFT
Separated from the car, but a verified AMG six-litre V8.

ABOVE
The bodywork is actually in very good condition.

BELOW
The interior remained low key, just a few AMG mods.

BELOW LEFT
A dismantled engine, but still a near £50K price.



Blue Shoe Benz

LOS ANGELES, USA

That was its nickname, following a reported appearance in a training shoe advert

Lot 216
Mercedes-Benz 230E AMG

When the 124-series launched in 1984 it proved to be a worthy 123-series successor, with superb build quality, Mercedes-Benz attention to detail and timeless, understated styling by the masterful Bruno Sacco and his team. Like the 123, the 124 was offered in saloon, coupe and estate form, a two-door cabriolet added later. While hardly a high performer, it did offer capable high-speed cruising, very sure-footed handling and Stuttgart's legendary bank-vault construction.

The boffins at AMG in Affalterbach did their typical superlative work with the 124 platform, ranging from simple cosmetic upgrades to the full-chat six-litre, 183mph 'Hammer' saloon – a legend for anyone who read *Road & Track* in the 1980s. Despite its boxy lines, the W124 was deceptively slippery, and AMG further enhanced that with bumpers, side skirts, and rear spoiler that lowered the coefficient of drag to an impressive 0.24Cd.

This 1985 230E is an early W124, equipped with a 2.3-litre engine and manual gearbox. Presented in dark blue, it features a full-dress AMG bodykit and interior upgrades, and it shows evidence of mechanical tweaks such as a tubular exhaust manifold. It's believed the car was used in-period for either an Adidas or Puma trainer advertising campaign, earning it the nickname 'The Blue Shoe'. Additionally, it's suggested this early example was used as a test bed for aerodynamic testing of the bodywork that would eventually be applied to the Hammer series, although supporting documentation for this has not been uncovered. Inside, the car features an AMG steering wheel and gauges. CM

Year 1985
Engine/power 2,299cc/123bhp
Chassis no WDB1240231 A005661
Pre-sale estimate $28,000-$35,000, £22,000-£28,000
Price achieved $25,300, £19,900

LEFT TO RIGHT
Electric Recaro seats and a special steering wheel.
The colour earned it a role in a shoe advert, it's said.
It was decided to leave the M102 engine as standard.

Hot baby driver

LOS ANGELES, USA

AMG boss Hans Werner Aufrecht adopted this 190E as his company car and gave it a power hike

Lot 206
Mercedes-Benz 190E AMG

According to notes left by Mr Taylor, this Euro-market 190E was reportedly the personal transport of AMG's Hans Werner Aufrecht (as was the 500SEL AMG in this article). Finished in a rarely seen shade of Manganese Brown over cream beige velour upholstery, it left Stuttgart equipped with options including air conditioning, power steering, sliding sunroof, central locking, electric windows and headlamp washers.

Being the apparent 'company car' of AMG's founder, it naturally enjoyed the full-dress treatment from the catalogue. It wears a full bodykit to include bumpers, side skirts, rear spoiler, and colour-keyed 16Jx6.5-inch AMG Penta alloy wheels. The slightly lowered and stiffened AMG suspension gives it the desired restrained aggression that defines the cars of Affalterbach from this period. Aufrecht's 'office' was suitably upgraded with electrically controlled Recaro C front seats upholstered in beige velour trim, which remain in excellent condition. The dash is adorned with Carpathian Elm veneer wood trim, a Blaupunkt Bremen cassette stereo, and an AMG four-spoke steering wheel to finish the sporty and luxurious cabin. Lastly, the accompanying AMG West documentation shows the addition of an AMG Stage 3 engine package, raising output to a claimed 181bhp, and endowing the 'Baby Benz' with a welcome dose of performance to match its stellar looks.

During its time in the Barry Taylor collection, this car was on static display and would require mechanical recommissioning before use. It is a rare example of the 190E getting the full attention of AMG engineers. CM

Year 1984
Engine/power 1,997cc/181bhp
Chassis no WDB201024 10030176
Pre-sale estimate $32,000-$38,000, £25,000-£30,000
Price achieved $52,900, £41,700

TOP TO BOTTOM
Aufrecht's one-time daily driver boasted 181bhp.
A set of 16-inch Penta rims are body coloured.
These Recaros are the best car seats ever, some say.

Champagne fizz

LOS ANGELES, USA

With its distinctive paint, this 280E cuts a dash but it has AMG power to match

Year 1980
Engine/power
2,746cc/225bhp
Chassis no
123.033.12.066427
Pre-sale estimate
$22,000-$30,000,
£17,000-£24,000
Price achieved
$39,100, £30,800

Lot 212
Mercedes-Benz 280E AMG

Alongside its highly regarded customer motorsports services, AMG offered an extensive range of tuning and styling parts for Mercedes-Benz road cars, hence weel-heeled enthusiasts could have just about anything from simply styling updates to a full drivetrain conversion – their budgets and imaginations were just about the only limiting factors. This European-market W123 280E is an example of an extensively modified early pre-merger AMG, featuring a full complement of parts and accessories, along with a tuned M110 straight-six engine. This car came comprehensively equipped from the factory, with numerous options and extras including Champagne Silver metallic paint, Palomino leather upholstery, automatic gearbox, electric sunroof, Tempomat cruise control, Behr air conditioning, front seat heaters and headlamp washers.

While there is no documentation to support the claim, owner Mr Taylor believed that early in its life it was handed to AMG in Affalterbach for comprehensive updates. These included an AMG bodykit, blacked-out exterior trim, colour-keyed black and Champagne Silver BBS alloy wheels, and engine tweaks that reportedly raised the output of the twin-cam six to a hearty 225bhp.

As part of the Barry Taylor collection, this rare 280E AMG has been stored indoors. It shows signs of shelf-wear but otherwise is in very good order with, importantly, its highly desirable AMG parts intact. CM

LEFT TO RIGHT
The W123's cabin was left largely in standard spec.
The hallmark AMG black trim was applied subtly.
AMG raised output from the M110 by over 40bhp.

Space rocket

LOS ANGELES, USA

AMG carried out customer conversions after the pre-merger period, including on this 210 estate

Lot 217
Mercedes-Benz E420 AMG Estate

Year 1997
Engine/power
4,196cc/275bhp
Chassis no
WDB2102721
A422118
Pre-sale estimate
$13,000-$18,000,
£10,000-£14,000
Price achieved
$18,400, £14,500

The mid-sized, 210-series E-Class succeeded the venerable 124-series in the mid-1990s, ushering in a new era for Mercedes-Benz styling and design. While some lamented the loss of Bruno Sacco's understated, sharp-edged styling, others embraced this bold new look for Mercedes. Despite some early teething problems, the 210 was ultimately a resounding sales success, and became a worthy bearer of the E-Class torch.

With AMG and Mercedes-Benz cementing their partnership in the early 1990s, the opportunity to offer new options across the line grew dramatically. AMG offered a fully reworked 210 with a five-litre engine known as the E50 AMG, which later evolved into the mighty E55 AMG, but many of the tuning parts could be fitted to 'cooking' versions as well.

The car offered here from Barry Taylor's estate is a European market E420 wagon, equipped with the factory standard 4.2-litre M119 four-cam engine. Aside from its relative rarity as a V8-powered estate, this car was highly optioned with a number of special-order features from the AMG catalogue. Build records show it was ordered via the Coblenz Branch in Germany, with additional text indicating it was delivered to AMG with Code 772 (AMG Styling Package) and fitted with a host of options.

The option sheet spans two pages to include niceties such as a designo interior, xenon lamps, AMG sports suspension, decorative stitching, additional, leather covered options, Alcantara headlining and sun visors and much more. It's believed Mr Taylor used this E420 as his 'shop car' after retiring his 123-series 500TE AMG estate from this duty. CM

TOP TO BOTTOM
All its options were chosen from the AMG catalogue.
Cabin has a number of leather-trim AMG parts.
The standard 4.2-litre V8 provides plenty of grunt.

All images and descriptions appear courtesy of Bonhams Tel +44 (0)20 447 7447 Web www.bonhams.com

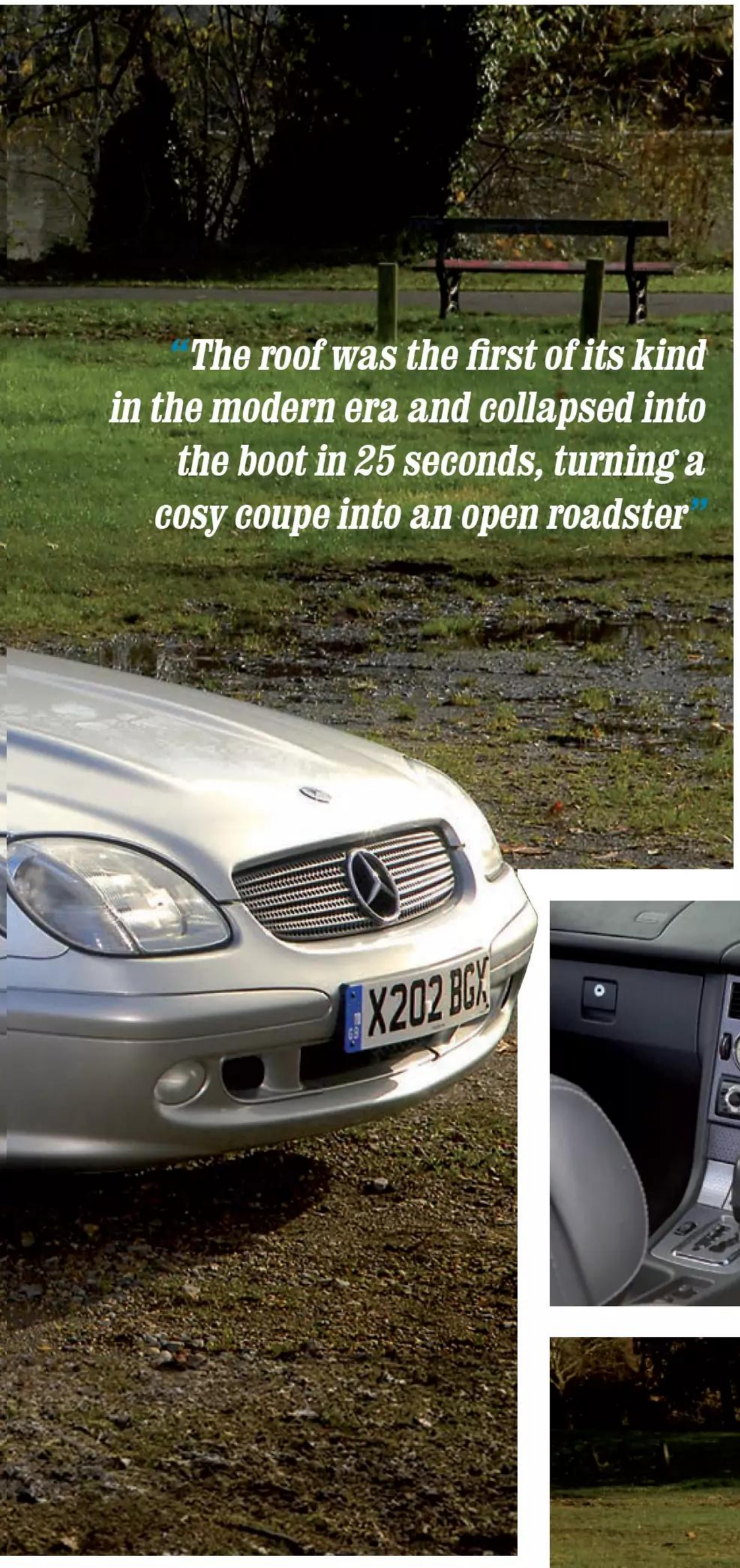
Small wonder

IMAGES Terry Oborne

The best examples of the first-generation R170 SLK are gaining momentum in the classic market, and the V6 SLK320 we consider here is more sought-after than the supercharged four-cylinder model. What should you look for when buying, given that the earliest cars are now 24 years old?

Thanks to its super-stylish compact body, amazing folding metal roof system and a price that was affordable by Mercedes-Benz roadster standards, the original R170 SLK was no less than a sensation when launched in late 1996. The 'junior' SL instantly hit the spot, dealers needing to do little more than sit back as orders poured in and delivery queues lengthened; in the early months of production, cars in the UK changed hands for over the list price of £29,000, even against a quite generous supply from Stuttgart, some 2,400 delivered in the UK in its first full year on sale (twice the SL volume), sufficient for it to out-sell the Porsche Boxster and Toyota MR2 combined.

For its vario-roof alone, the SLK ('K' for *'kurz'*, or 'short') was an engineering marvel. The roof was the first of its kind in the modern era and collapsed into the boot in 25 seconds, turning a cosy coupe into a full, no compromise open roadster, and with pop-up roll over protectors. A joint-venture company, Stuttgart-based CTS GmbH (Car Top Systems) had



"The roof was the first of its kind in the modern era and collapsed into the boot in 25 seconds, turning a cosy coupe into an open roadster"

sole model for the UK, and no doubt for some the powerplant was the R170's least likeable aspect; powerful enough but sounding unrefined.

Mercedes management claimed a six-cylinder model was not necessary, as customers would be happy enough with the four-cylinder engine. However, that mindset changed when at the mid-term facelift in January 2000 the normally-aspirated, 3.2-litre V6 SLK320 was added to the R170 range.

Production of the R170 ceased 20 years ago, to make way for the more aggressively styled R171, and while the series is showing a glimmer of collectability, this is still a cheap Mercedes roadster. There are still quite a few SLK320s around for sale, prices ranging from £2,000 to £15,000, so how does it differ as an ownership prospect to the SLK230 K?

Specifications

Mercedes-Benz SLK320K (R170)

Engine M112 3,199cc V6
Power 215bhp@5,700rpm
Torque 227lb ft @3,000-4,800rpm
Transmission 5-speed auto, RWD
Weight 1,405kg
0-62mph 6.9sec
Top speed 151mph
Fuel consumption 27.2mpg
CO2 emissions 245g/km
Years produced 2000-2004

All figures from Mercedes-Benz; fuel consumption according to NEDC combined

Design & engineering

The SLK was based on a C-Class platform, its styling overseen by legendary Mercedes designer Bruno Sacco in his final years at Mercedes-Benz, and was notable for its short overhang and clipped tail. It was not intended to be a 'proper' sports car, more a tourer and hence with quite soft chassis settings including Mercedes' traditional recirculating ball steering that prioritised shock absorption over feedback.

For the four years from launch to the February 2000 facelift, the SLK ran unchanged, save a few specification tweaks. Aesthetically, the revamp saw Mercedes' usual type of mid-term ⇨

BELOW LEFT
The R170 interior was of higher quality than found in the C- and E-Class.

BELOW
Standard DIN slot means you'll see various brands of ICE head units fitted.

even been established to make the roof. And inside, the SLK was a delight: well-built and an appealing combination of a modern design but with some interesting retro details such as sunken instrument dials.

Yet it arguably did suffer from one weakness – the engine. Mercedes offered only four-cylinder units, the principal model the SLK230 Kompressor using the then new M111 supercharged, 2.3-litre four-cylinder producing 190bhp and 207lb ft torque. This car, in five-speed automatic transmission form was the

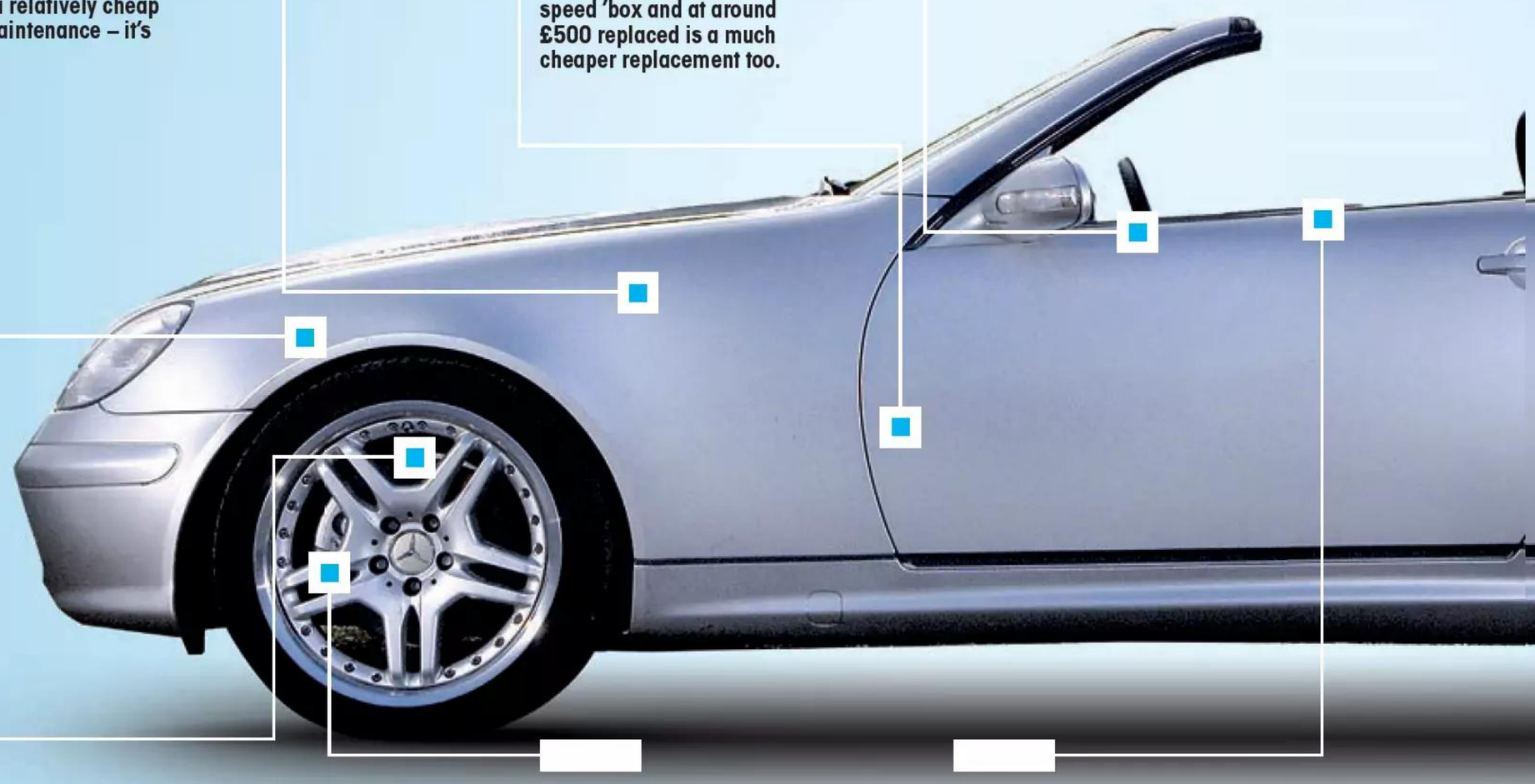
What goes wrong

Engine
The M112 V6 has proved bulletproof according to Steve Dickins of Milton Keynes-based independent Mercedes specialist Autoclass. "It's very reliable, and we don't do very much to them. If you see oil on the ground underneath the car, it will almost certainly be from the engine rocker covers or the oil filter housing, and in both cases the cure is a simple gasket and seal change."

A failed engine crank position sensor will make the engine difficult or impossible to start when hot. "This is a relatively cheap fix and can almost be considered preventative maintenance – it's a very common fault on Mercedes with this V6."

Gearbox
The automatic gearbox sensor plate can fail, trapping the transmission in 'limp home' mode. However the five-speed's plate is less complex than that in the later, seven-speed 'box and at around £500 replaced is a much cheaper replacement too.

Steering
A 'wandering' or vibration in the steering usually means the steering damper is worn out. This damper normally requires replacing at around 100,000 miles or 10 years, and is relatively cheap, and a new one returns some steering feel.



Water pump
The water pump can eventually give trouble. "You'll hear it becoming noisy and it will leak out some fluid, and eventually the engine coolant level will fall and cause overheating," Steve says.

Suspension
Early SLKs don't have the chassis electronics of some contemporaries, so there's little to go wrong. However, mileage and sheer age can take their toll on the suspension, so ideally get the car on a ramp for checks on ball joints, bushes and related components. "Particular attention should be paid to the subframe bushes, because if these require changing, it's at least a day's work for a garage to replace all four," warns Steve.

Brakes
Brakes should feel powerful, and free of vibration through the pedal. Make the usual checks for the remaining life of the brake discs; the bigger the lip on the outer edge of the disc, the less time it has left.

Interior
Although the SLK's interior was made to a superior standard than some other Mercedes of the same years, the interior can now look worn. The trim plastics have a coating which can peel off, and broken indicator stalks are common.

"The SLK320 not much quicker than the SLK230, but the normally aspirated V6 is so much sweeter and smoother than the four-cylinder motor"

⇨ updates, including restyled front and rear bumpers, new sill trims, painted radiator grille and stainless-steel exhaust tips, while the side indicators were moved from the wings to the door mirrors. Inside, the original carbon look gave way to aluminium style trim, the steering wheel was redesigned and wood trim became an option for the first time.

However, the standout aspect of the mid-term revamp was the arrival of the SLK320 using the M112 three-valves-per-cylinder V6 already in other models, and giving 215bhp at 5,700rpm and 227lb ft torque at between 3,000 and 4,800rpm. A six-speed manual gearbox was offered for the first time on UK-bound SLKs, including on the V6 variant. Wheels were 16-inch alloy with 205/55 front and 225/50 rear tyres; 17s were optional and many 320s have them.

From then until the end of the short production life there were no engineering or aesthetic changes, but – perhaps with customer demand not quite as hot as it had been at first – there were two limited editions of the SLK320 (and also the 230) released in that period. The first came in June 2002, the SLK320 Limited Edition which was equipped with 7.5Jx17-inch Evolution alloy wheels, black nappa leather, brushed aluminium interior trim and a silver instrument panel with white dials.

The second came as the R170 was in its run-out stage, in January 2004. The SLK320 Special Edition featured a chrome grille and bootlid handle plus bright polished exterior trim strips, and again nappa leather trim, including on the rollover bars; these cars are identified by the 'SLK Special Edition' badges on the wings.

Driving the SLK320
The SLK320 brought a new dimension to the R170 range. It's not much quicker than the SLK230, but the normally aspirated V6 is so much

RIGHT
The majority of SKL320 customers wanted the five-speed autobox...

CENTRE RIGHT
... but a manual six-speed was available and it suits the roadster rather well.

FAR RIGHT
The options list allowed you to add customising touches to the interior.

Central locking

The pump which supplies vacuum power to operate the door locking can be problematic. "This is due to its location deep in the spare wheel recess, water in this area causing the electrics and pump to fail," Steve explains. "But it's easy enough to check if the pump is in good order – if the door locking works, it is."

Roof system

Even though the folding metal roof is complex, with many switches and sensors, it has proved remarkably reliable. Nonetheless it's crucial to check it operates correctly. "It should lower and raise smoothy and quietly, and if it lets water in this could require the replacement of seals, which are not cheap," Steve reveals.

Rear lights

Check that all the lights are working. If a rear light bulb has failed, a new bulb holder or even a complete new lamp may be needed.

Wheels

Some models wear alloy wheels with a high gloss, 'diamond cut' surface finish. The lacquer peels off all too easily, so budget for refurbishment back to the same finish if this is the case.

Bodywork

R170s can be quite rusty, especially around the wheelarches. Corrosion also attacks the underbody, but you will have to raise the car on a ramp to spot this. "By now, some SLK320s will have body filler concealing rust," Steve points out.

ABOVE RIGHT
Optional 17-inch two-piece alloys enhance the SLK's already cute looks.

RIGHT
As standard, 16-inchers were fitted, an inch wider at the rear than the front.

BELOW
It's not as sporty as its Porsche Boxster rival, but still an agile car to drive.

sweeter and smoother than the four-cylinder motor, and – perhaps surprisingly for a Mercedes – is well suited to the manual six-speed gearbox, its shift a big improvement over previous manual Benz 'boxes. Handling is comfort, not sports orientated, with shock-free but largely uncommunicative steering, and soft springing that aides ride comfort but allows the car to roll more through corners than some would like.

The cabin is a tight fit for occupants, and with a high door line you can feel closed in. But the driving position is perfect and the seats supportive, while oddment space is good, including a decent glovebox despite the presence of a passenger airbag. The facia was an interesting design given the blandness of many late 1990s Merc interiors, and it and all the switchgear look well made, the SLK cabin thus retaining the quality feel that some Mercedes models were about to lose. Most SLK320s have leather, which adds to the ambience.

Telltale signs of trouble

- A failed engine crank position sensor makes hot starting difficult
- The automatic gearbox sensor plate can fail, locking in 'limp home' mode
- A grinding noise from front wheels indicates worn bearings
- Front and rear road springs can break
- Roof can stick during lowering and raising
- Surface corrosion on bootlid, rear wings, underside
- Peeling lacquer on alloy wheels
- Wind whistles around roof and window seals

SLK: Thanks, Mazda!

Mercedes' inspiration for the original SLK came from an unlikely source – the Mazda MX-5. The affordable Japanese two-seater, launched in 1989 as a Lotus Elan for the modern world had been a major hit, finding 70,000 per year by 1991 proving that the market for such a model had not died with 1960s sports cars. Mercedes' model planners had in fact been ⇨

Milestones

January 2000 The R170's mid-term facelift, when the SLK320 was added to the range, automatic or manual

June 2002 The SLK320 Limited Edition with 7.5Jx17-inch wheels and special trim was introduced

January 2004 The run-out SLK320 Special Edition arrived at dealers, with nappa leather and special trim

April 2004 R170 ends, replaced by the R171 SLK

What an SLK320 will cost to buy

The SLK320 appears to command a small price premium over the 230, but you will still see cars for £2,000 or less. But the usual rules regarding false economy apply and we recommend regarding £5,000 as the sensible entry point for a car free, or largely free, of problems.The most common price for 320s is presently between £5,000 and £7,000, this bracket offering cars from both private sellers and used car dealers. An SLK in exceptional condition and with low mileage is going to cost up to £15,000, prices of the best cars edging up in recent years.

It's not a car that tended to rack up high mileage, often a second one in the household, so you'll see some with moderate mileage, between 50,000 and 70,000 miles. When looking for an SLK320, it's worth noting that because Mercedes was ahead of the game on emissions, all but the very earliest SLK320s are EU4 rated emissions, thus avoiding the extra daily charge for London's Ultra Low Emissions Zone and possibly others to come.

Price range

£1,000-£2,000 Early SLK320s, almost certainly with rust and mechanical issues, and therefore best avoided

£2,000-£4,000 A runner but in need of quite a lot of TLC

£4,000-£6,000 Sound, but near or over 100,000 miles

£6,000-£8,000 The main price bracket for a sound and presentable SLK320 showing under 100,000 miles

£8,000-£10,000 Late, 2003 and 2004 examples, should be above average condition, with under 70,000 miles

£10,000-£15,000 For this money it must be exceptional and with low mileage and comprehensive history

Typical servicing/maintenance costs
(including labour, VAT)

'A' service £195

'B' service £270

Replace leaking gaskets on the engine rocker covers £220

Replace the engine water pump £450

Renew a failed automatic gearbox sensor plate £530

Fit a new engine crankshaft position sensor £240

Fit new front brake discs and brake pads £295

Install replacement folding roof seals £1,275

Four premium brand tyres (225/45 R17 front, 245/40 R17 rear) £470

Servicing and parts prices from Autoclass, Milton Keynes

"There were questions over whether such a roadster would steal sales from the R129 SL, and could be built cheaply enough to still yield a profit"

ABOVE
The bootlid keyhole was removed in 2000, eliminating a rust trap.

ABOVE RIGHT
Simple front end design quite similar to that of the 1990s 140 coupe.

RIGHT INSET
Healthy Mazda MX-5 sales convinced M-B to go ahead with the SLK.

BELOW
A metal folding roof and rollover hoops were compactly engineered.

BELOW RIGHT
Most R170s came with leather, some colours extremely eye-catching.

⇨ considering a small, civilised roadster since the late 1980s – but the popularity of the Mazda hastened Stuttgart's re-entry to the niche it had all but created with the 1955 190SL, but then gradually let go of as subsequent SLs grew in size.

There were questions over whether such a roadster would steal sales from the R129 SL, and could be built cheaply enough to still yield a profit given that it would have to be priced much lower than the SL. But the carmaker took a chance and scored a major success, the SLK remaing popular until retired from the Mercedes line-up in 2020 after three model generations.

Verdict

The R170 was the most practical 'small' roadster of its day, and even now as a budding modern classic remains fun and useful in equal measure provided you need only two seats. It also has its own charm when compared to the R171 and R172 models, many liking it for it being the pure, original SLK series.

Is the SLK320 better than the 230K? Its on-paper performance is little different, and it lacks the supercharged four's mid-range punch. But it brings the six-cylinder refinement many seek in a Mercedes. Automatic or manual? The majority are the former, so if you want to swap gears yourself you won't have such a wide choice.

But the most important consideration is condition, given that the early cars are now well over two decades old. As we've said, rust can now be serious and isn't always easy to spot. So we'd recommend paying more for a better car, especially as when these cars become viewed as classics, the best examples will be in most demand. CM

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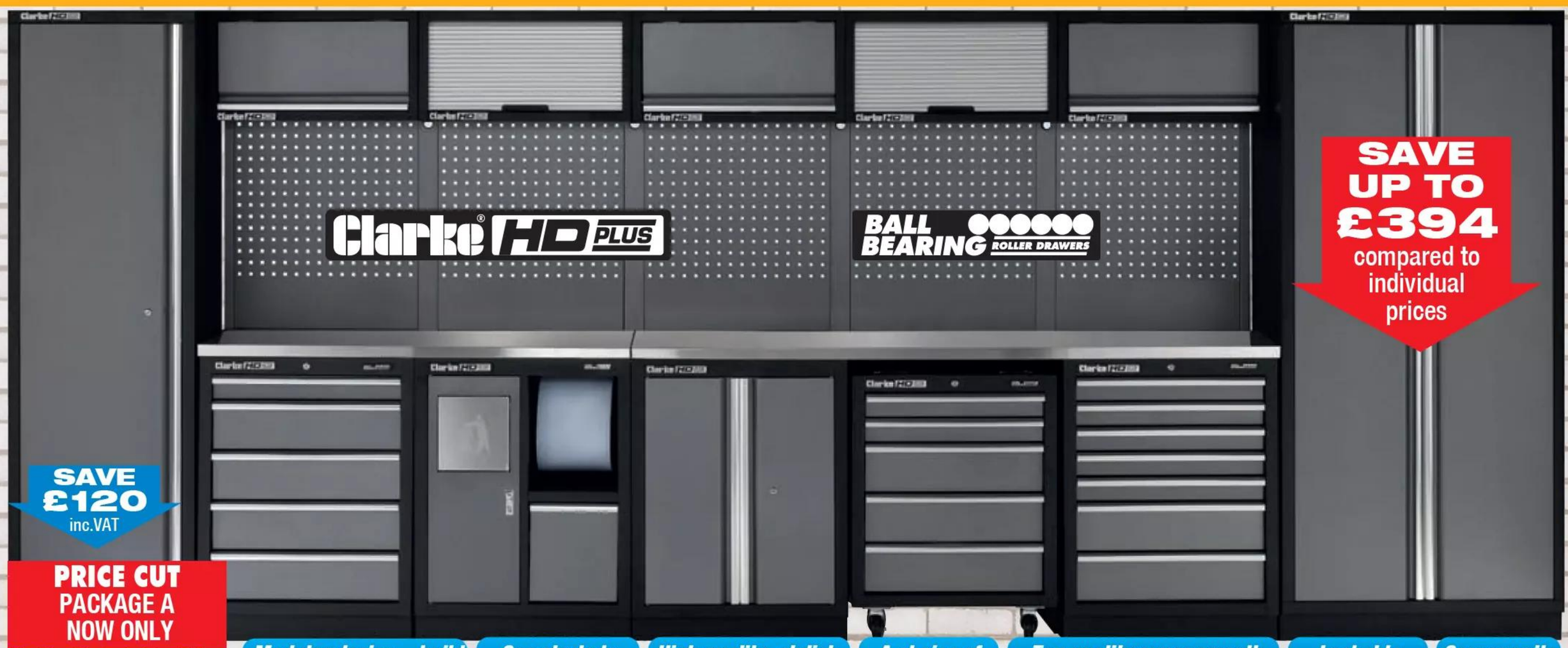

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ALL THE CLASSICS

Need a quick, convenient summary and a guide to the value of the classic Mercedes-Benz model you are considering buying, or just want to find out the full picture of what models Mercedes has manufactured down the years? Over the next four pages we review every Mercedes road car offered from the late 1940s until the end of the 'young classic' era in the late 1990s, listing cars' key specification details and a likely top and bottom price

Values

The values given are based on asking prices in the UK and internationally, and also achieved prices at local UK and major international classic auctions. The lower figure in each price range is for a car that is complete and running, and excludes dismantled cars. The higher value is for one in exceptional original or restored condition, and includes the buyer's premium paid at auction

W136 170 (1946-1955)

The pre-war, 'suicide'-doored W136 saloon and cabriolet got Mercedes-Benz back in business after World War Two. The 170V saloon resumed in 1947, using a four-cylinder 1.7-litre engine, and was replaced by the 170S in 1949, with more power and a more spacious body. The last-of-the-line model was the 1953-1955 170S-V. W136s date from a time when German cars of any kind were extremely rare outside Germany.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,697cc/4/38bhp - 1,767cc/4/44bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Values** £15,000-£30,000/$20,000-$40,000 **Article** Winter 2014

W186/189 300 (1951-1962)

Called the 'Adenauer' because German Chancellor Conrad Adenauer used them while in office throughout the 1950s, the 300 marked Mercedes' return to limousines of some pre-war grandeur. All models used a straight-six three-litre engine, which gained fuel-injection when the big four-door, also available as a cabriolet, was revamped in 1957 with an elegant, pillarless body, as seen here. Values are rising significantly.

Engine/cyl/power 2,996cc/6/113-158bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 11,413 **Values** £20,000-£80,000/$25,000-$120,000 **Article** Autumn 2017

W187 220 (1951-1955)

Part of the effort to increase the Mercedes-Benz model line in a short time, in order to boost factory production, the 220 introduced in 1951 was a six-cylinder car based on the 170V. Besides the four-door saloon which was the prime seller, it was offered in two-door coupe, convertible Cabriolet A and Cabriolet B form, and also as a four-door 'open tourer' model. Later cars had a more powerful 2.2-litre engine.

Engine/cyl/power 2,195cc/6/79-84bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 18,467 **Values** £20,000-£40,000/$25,000-$50,000 **Article** Winter 2018

W188 300S/Sc (1951-1958)

This model began the Mercedes tradition of offering a two-door based on the top Stuttgart saloon, in this case the 300 'Adenauer'. Hand-built by specially selected craftsman, the 300S was super luxurious and correspondingly expensive, and was offered as the Coupe, the Cabriolet A or Roadster with a simpler hood arrangement. In 1955 it became the 300Sc, gaining fuel-injection for the three-litre engine.

Engine/cyl/power 2,996cc/6/148-173bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 760 **Values** £350,000-£750,000/$472,500-$1.01m **Article** Autumn 2015

W120/W121 Ponton (1953-1962)

Nicknamed 'Ponton' after the clever, easily removable engine and subframe assembly, these four-cylinder models were a technical milestone thanks to the 'three-box' design and integrated body and chassis offering much increased crash safety. It was built in 1.8-litre petrol and diesel form (180, 180D), later graduating to 1.9-litre units, and became Mercedes' first big volume model in the 1950s.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,767cc/4/40bhp - 1,897cc/4/74bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 442,963 **Values** £10,000-£30,000/$15,000-$40,000 **Article** Spring 2023

W180/W105/W128 Ponton (1954-1959)

A year after the four-cylinder Ponton made its debut, the six-cylinder models followed, using the same front subframe and suspension, but with a new and more sophisticated rear axle, and distinguished by their longer nose and added exterior chrome trim. All used the same freshly engineered 2.2-litre overhead camshaft engine, the 220, 219 and 220S with a single carburettor, the 220SE using fuel-injection.

Engine/cyl/power 2,195cc/6/84-113bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 111,035 **Values** £15,000-£40,000/$20,000-$50,000 **Article** n/a

W198 300SL (1954-1957)

The world's first supercar, featuring a fuel-injected engine and a lightweight spaceframe chassis, and the model that re-established Mercedes' engineering credentials after World War Two. Gullwings have long been the ultimate Mercedes classic of the post-war years, especially the 29 alloy-bodied examples built for racing customers, and it's authoritatively estimated that 95 per cent of the 1,400 made survive. They have become so valuable – even in poor condition they are likely to fetch £1m or close to it – that their owners now rarely drive them other than at exclusive classic car events.

Engine/cyl/power 2,996cc/6/212bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 1,400 **Values** £1m-£3m (alloy bodied)/$1.35m-$4m **Article** Issue 1

W121 190SL Roadster (1955-1963)

While the 300SL Gullwing was Mercedes' 'halo' car, the similarly styled but smaller bodied 190SL launched a year later was intended as a far less expensive, volume model, and thus did without the spaceframe, instead borrowing the humble four-cylinder Ponton saloon underpinnings. Performance from the 1.9-litre, four-cylinder engine was thought modest even at the time, but the compact Mercedes roadster was nonetheless a comfortable and stylish tourer.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,897cc/6/104bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 25,881 **Values** £70,000-£200,000/ $95,000-$270,000 **Article** Autumn 2023

W120 Ponton Bakkie (1955-1958)

The Ponton pick-up was built for one specific reason: to sidestep import duty on cars imported to South Africa, where Mercedes-Benz had a significant presence by the mid 1950s. Partially built-up Ponton chassis were delivered to various contractors there, who assembled and sold the Bakkie (meaning pickup), which qualified as locally manufactured. All vehicles were 1.7-litre petrol, although a number of them were later converted to use a diesel engine.

Engine/cyl/power 1,767cc/4/51bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 400 (estimated) **Values** £20,000-£30,000/ $25,000-$40,000 **Article** Summer 2017

W180/128 Ponton (1956-1960)

Although they were derived from the six-cylinder Ponton saloon launched two years earlier, the elegant coupe and cabriolet models oozed extra style, and found much favour with affluent US customers. Built on a 120mm shortened chassis, the first models were the 220S Coupe and 220S Cabriolet using the Ponton's regular carburettored 2.2-litre engine, this giving way to the same unit with fuel-injection and more power in 1958, these cars badged 220SE.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,195cc/6/105-118bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 5,371 **Values** £70,000-£150,000/$90,000-$200,000 **Article** Summer 2018

W198 300SL Roadster (1957-1963)

Introduced as a more 'civilised' replacement for the Gullwing, the 300SL Roadster of 1957 used conventional side-hinged doors and ran with modified rear suspension that was less nervous on the limit. The interior had a more luxurious feel, too. For many years Roadster values lagged behind those of Gullwings, but there is now evidence from intenational auctions that it is catching up on price on its coupe stablemate.

Engine/cyl/power 2,996cc/6/237bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 1,858 **Values** £700,000-£1.5m/ $1m-$2m **Article** Issue 4

W111/112 Fintail (1959-1968)

For the first two years, the Fintail was offered only in six-cylinder form, and the sole engine was a 2.2-litre, the best model being the fuel-injected 220SEb. This was displaced as the flagship by the three-litre 300SE of 1961 boasting a high specification including air suspension, and its own W112 designation. Six-cylinder models are recognisable from the fours by the vertical front lights, longer nose, and added brightwork.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,195cc/6/94bhp - 2,996cc/6/ 168bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 344,751 **Values** £20,000-£90,000/$27,000-$125,000 **Article** Sum 2023

W110 Fintail (1961-1968)

The Fintail in four-cylinder form defined the Germany car industry of the 1960s and was a vehicle with wide appeal, its spacious body just as suitable for family transport as it was for taxi work. Coming two years after the six-cylinder Fintail, the production life of these shorter-nosed saloons was divided into two phases: cars built until mid-1965 were the petrol 190c and diesel 190Dc, and thereafter the 200 and 200D.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,896cc/4/79bhp - 1,988cc/4/ 94bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 622,453 **Values** £10,000-£30,000/$15,000-$40,000 **Article** Autumn '17

W111/112 Coupe/Cabriolet (1961-1971)

The W111 two-door, built on the Fintail platform and unveiled in February 1961, offered Americans a near American-sized pillarless luxury coupe. It, and the cabriolet, started out with the staple Benz 2.2-litre six-cylinder engine which gave the 220SEb modest performance. But the W111 progressed through 2.5-, 3.0- and then 2.8-litre incarnations, culminating in 280SE 3.5 V8 guise, the model which, especially as a cabriolet, has risen in value above the rest.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,195cc/6/118bhp - 3,499cc/V8/ 197bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 35,931 **Values** £50,000-£300,000/$70,000-$400,000 **Article** Sum '17

W113 SL Pagoda (1963-1971)

Made in 230SL, 250SL (1967) and final 280SL form (1968), the W113 SL is regarded as one of the prettiest of Mercedes' post-war roadsters. It's also still a surprisingly modern drive – provided the complex fuel-injection linkage is set up properly, and the suspension springs and dampers are in good order. A few 250SLs were built up in 'coupe' format, with no canvas roof and with a slightly extended rear cabin. The 280SL is the most sought after of the W113s.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,306cc/6/148bhp - 2,778cc/6/ 168bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed **Number** 48,912 **Values** £40,000-£200,000/ $50,000-$270,000 **Article** Spring '21

W100 600 (1963-1981)

The 600's aero-engineered hydraulics, new V8 and perfect, Paul Bracq styling saw Mercedes-Benz displace Rolls-Royce as the maker of the 'best car in the world'. The biggest seller was the SWB 600, but LWB Pullmans and open-topped landaulets were available, too, and the bespoke nature of the car ensured that no two examples shared exactly the same interior specification. Prices have risen fast of late, especially of those cars with a famous/infamous former owner.

Engine/cyl/power 6,332cc/V8/247bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 2,677 **Values** £70,000-£400,000/ $90,000-$540,000 **Article** Autumn 2013

IMAGES Tim Andrew/Stefan Bau/John Colley/James Mann/Terry Oborne/Craig Pusey/Darin Schnabel/Dan Trent/Richard Truesdell/*Classic Mercedes*/Mercedes-Benz Group

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W108/109 (1965-1972)

The W108 was launched to replace the six-cylinder, W111/W112 Fintail, which was felt not to be sufficiently distanced from the four-cylinder models to fully exploit the luxury market. It began modestly as the 2.5-litre twin-carburettor/fuel-injected 250S/250SE and three-litre 300SE, but the most memorable model was the W109 300SEL 6.3 of 1968, the world's first 'super saloon'. More V8 models followed to give added appeal in the US.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,496cc/6/128bhp - 6,332cc/V8/247bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 383,100 **Values** £15,000-£90,000/$20,000-$120,000 **Article** Winter '23

W110/111 Universal (1965-1968)

Prior to manufacturing its own estate cars, Mercedes farmed the assembly work out to specialist firms, IMA in Belgium commissioned to produce Stuttgart's first 'proper' wagon, the Fintail-based Universal. This could be purchased in four-cylinder, short-nose W110 form as the 200 petrol and 190D/200D diesel, but, confusingly, also as the short-nose, round headlamp W110 230 (seen here) or the long nosed, vertical lamped W111 230S, both with six-cylinder power.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,988cc/4/54bhp - 2,306cc/6/118bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 2,750 **Values** £15,000-£40,000/$20,000-$50,000 **Article** Winter 2015

W114/115 'Stroke 8' (1968-1976)

To replace the by then dated W110 Fintail, for 1968 Mercedes conceived the 'New Generation' or 'Stroke 8' W115 (four-cylinder) and W114 (six-cylinder) saloons featuring a much plainer body. A multiplicity of engines saw service, but the best one, many believe, was the free-revving, 2.7-litre, twin-cam M110, installed just before the 1973 facelift. At the facelift the front quarter windows disappeared, and a padded 'safety' steering wheel was fitted.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,988cc/4/54bhp - 2,746cc/6/182bhp **Trans** 4/5-speed **Number** 1,843,328 **Values** £5,000-£25,000/$7,000-$35,000 **Article** Winter 2017

W114 'Stroke 8' coupe (1968-1976)

The 'Stroke 8' coupe that was introduced almost a year after the saloon was slightly lower, but had the same wheelbase and overall length, leaving it with a very long boot. At the time some thought this did not look right, but it is now part of the car's charm. The two-door was built only as a six-cylinder, but in that respect shared the saloon's engines, the M110-engined 280CE introduced in 1972 usually the favourite model.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,496cc/6/128bhp - 2746cc/6/182bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed **Number** 56,521 **Values** £10,000-£30,000/$13,000-$40,000 **Article** Spring 2015

R107 SL (1971-1989)

Able to claim by far the longest production run of any SL generation, the elegant R107, with its lazy V8s and comfortably sprung suspension, was designed for North American tastes. The six-cylinder 280SL was introduced as an 'economy' model in 1974, and, at the other end of the spectrum, the 5.5-litre 560SL arrived at the 1985 facelift, but the 1971-1980 450SL achieved the highest worldwide sales tally, nearly 66,300.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,746cc/6/175bhp – 5,547cc/V8/227bhp **Trans** 3/4/5-speed **Number** 237,287 **Values** £10,000-£100,000/$13,500-$135,000 **Article** Sum 2019

C107 SLC (1971-1981)

Mercedes-Benz did not replace the W111 coupe/cabriolet with another S-Class-based design, instead building the next generation flagship two-door on the R107 SL, stretching the wheelbase 360mm but using the same interior and engines, 2.8-litre six-cylinder up to a five-litre V8. Recently collectors' interest in C107s has picked up, the homologation 450SLC 5.0 and 500SL built from 1978 to 1981 the most coveted.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,746cc/6/175bhp - 4,973cc/V8/237bhp **Trans** 3/4/5-speed **Number** 62,888 **Values** £10,000-£50,000/ $13,500-$70,000 **Article** Spring 2018

W/V116 S-Class (1972-1980)

The W116 SE and stretched V116 SEL models brought with them the title 'S-Class', and defined that model's role as the default director-level car. The 350SE/SEL and 450SEL 3.5- and 4.5-litre V8s were the most delivered models, but the range was topped and tailed by the extraordinary 450SEL 6.9 and the six-cylinder 280SE/SEL, and there was even a turbodiesel specially engineered for North America. The 116-series is increasingly attracting collectors.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,746cc/6/154bhp - 6,834cc/V8/282bhp **Trans** 3/4/5-speed **Number** 473,035 **Values** £15,000-£70,000/$20,000-$95,000 **Article** Spring 2017

W/S123 saloon/estate (1976-1985)

It is said that the 123-series was Mercedes' most thoroughly engineered model to date when it appeared in early 1976, and the level of attention to detail and build quality supports that view. The saloon came first, offered with a variety of petrol and diesel engines, while the estate model that followed a year later was almost a model in its own right, featuring a space-saving rear (self-levelling) suspension, and a tailgate that was part of the safety cell.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,988cc/4/54bhp - 2,746cc/6/182bhp **Trans** 4/5-speed **Number built** 2,588,657 **Values** £10,000-£40,000/$13,000-$50,000 **Article** Winter 2018

C123 (1977-1985)

Unlike the preceding W114 coupe, the C123 used a shorter wheelbase and overall length than the saloon, lending a more balanced appearance. Pre-1980, the entry model was the carb fed 2.3-litre 230C, replaced by the more satisfactory fuel-injected 230CE, while the top model was the 280CE with its 2.8-litre M110 six with 183bhp. Two diesels were built for North America only, the 1977-1982 naturally aspirated 300CD and 1981-1985 300CD Turbodiesel.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,307cc/4/108bhp - 2,998cc/6/123bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed **Number** 99,884 **Values** £10,000-£40,000/$13,000-$50,000 **Article** Autumn '22

W/V126 S-Class (1979-1992)

With its discreet lines and impressive technical and safety innovations, the 126-series consolidated the S-Class as the luxury car of choice, beating the BMW 7-Series on prestige, and the Jaguar XJ6 on build quality and reliability. The choice model is the 1985-on 560SEL, while the North America only turbodiesel 300SDL and 350SDL have a cult following. There are few signs of values picking up, so SE and SEL 126s are still big bargains.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,746cc/6/154bhp - 5,547cc/V8/296bhp **Transmission** 4-speed **Number** 818,036 **Values** £10,000-£30,000/$13,000-$40,000 **Article** Autumn '19

C126 SEC (1981-1991)

After the C107, the S-Class-based SEC saw Stuttgart back in the luxury coupe market proper. Its glorious pillarless body and all the refinement of the 116 saloon made it very popular despite high purchase prices. Mercedes didn't bother with a six-cylinder version, the base model initially the 380SEC with its 3.8-litre V8. The most popular model was the five-litre 500SEC, but the one that collecters like most is the 1985 launched 5.5-litre 560SEC.

Engine/cyl/power range 3,839cc/V8/201bhp - 5,547cc/V8/296bhp **Trans** 4-speed **Number** 74,060 **Values** £20,000-£60,000/$25,000-$80,000 **Article** Autumn '21

W201 190E (1982-1993)

Returning to the 'small' car market to compete with the BMW 3-Series and Audi 80 proved a good move for Mercedes-Benz, considerably increasing Stuttgart's annual output. Initially there were two-litre carburettored and fuel-injected models (190, 190E), but diesels and a 2.6-litre petrol six-cylinder followed. Solidly built and without complex electronics, the W201 is DIY-friendly and inexpensive to maintain. This is now a Mercedes young classic rising in value.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,997cc/4/104bhp - 2,599cc/6/164bhp **Trans** 4/5-speed **Number** 1,879,629 Values £3,000-£15,000/$4,000-$20,000 **Article** Autumn 2018

190E 2.3-/2.5-16/Evolution/Evo II (1984-93)

Mercedes-Benz launched the BMW M3 chasing 190E 2.3-16, a homologation model, to legalise the W201 in motorsport. It began in 2.3-litre form with a Cosworth-designed 16-valve cylinder-head, and in 1988 at the W201 facelift became the 2.5-litre 190E 2.5-16. As DTM competition mounted, in 1989 it was developed into the Evolution, and the following year the Evolution II, this ultimate model now making huge prices.

Engine/cyl/power 2,229cc/4/175bhp - 2,463cc/4/232bhp **Values** £15,000-£40,000/ $20,000-$50,000; Evo/II £60,000-£250,000 /$80,000-$340,000 **Article** Sum '22

124 saloon/estate/coupe/cabriolet (1984-97)

The 124-series kicked off in 1984 with the W124 saloon, the S124 estate following in 1985, and the pillarless C124 coupe brought glamour in 1987 in 200CE, 230CE and 300CE form. The two-door format was further exploited with the A124 cabriolet launched in 1991, Mercedes' first full four-seat drophead for 20 years. Some prefer the pre-1992/1993 cars, with their two-valve engines, and the star badge on the grille top.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,996cc/4/120bhp - 3,199cc/6/217bhp **Trans** 4/5-speed **Number** 2,729,120 **Values** £4,000-£16,000/$5,000-$20,000 **Article** Winter 2022

R129 SL (1989-2001)

This SL model is regarded as the last of the 'young timer' generation, with traditional Benz styling and build quality. It was offered with a wide range of engines, from a 2.8-litre six (SL280) to a 7.3-litre V12 (SL73), but popular choices were the 500SL/SL500 and SL320. Lacking the R107's sweet looks, the R129 is only now appealing to collectors, the six-litre SL60 AMG (1993-1998) particularly sought after.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,799cc/6/190bhp - 7,291cc/V12/ 518bhp **Trans** 4/5-speed **Number** 204,940 **Values** £8,000-£50,000/$11,000-$70,000 **Article** Winter 2013

W124 500E/E500/E60 (1991-1995)

When Mercedes-Benz instructed Porsche to install the SL's five-litre V8 in the W124, an all-time great 'Q-car' emerged. Looking like any other W124 apart from wider wheelarches, the 500E (badged E500 from 1993) delivered a velvet punch while cossetting its occupants. It wasn't built in right-hand drive form, but it was sold in the UK nonetheless, and of late has gained in collectability, especially the E500 Limited, introduced towards the end of production.

Engine/cyl/power 4,973cc/V8/316-322bhp **Transmission** 4-speed automatic **Number** 10,479 **Values** £20,000-£70,000/$25,000-$95,000 **Article date** Spring 2019

W/S202 C36/C43 AMG (1993-2000)

The original 'hot' C-Class sold by Mercedes-Benz used the M104 four-valve engine, enlarged from 3.2 to 3.6 litres and with bigger valves, while the chassis was uprated. The C36 feels like a traditional tuned car with more harshness and less ride comfort. The C43 AMG that replaced it in 1997 added much refinement, its 4.2-litre V8 as smooth as it was powerful. The C36 was only ever a saloon, but the C43 was a wagon too. Both models are on the cusp of classic status.

Engine/cyl/power range 3,606cc/6/276bhp - 4,266cc/V8/302bhp **Trans** 4/5-speed **Number** 5,221/3,857 **Values** £7,000-£15,000/$9,000-$20,000 **Article** Winter 2018

C/A/W/S124 E36 AMG (1993-1996)

The 124-series in its four body forms was among the first wave of 'official' AMG sold through Mercedes-Benz showrooms from 1993 and 1994. All used the 3.6-litre AMG tuned engine seen in the C36 AMG, while springs and dampers were similarly uprated and a bodykit was optional. Production numbers were never released, but we do know the UK sales: 24 coupes, 14 cabriolets, 12 saloons, and seven estates. They command higher prices than regular 124s.

Engine/cyl/power 3,606cc/6/2276bhp **Transmission** 4-speed automatic **Number** undisclosed **Values** £20,000-£40,000/$25,500-$50,000 **Article date** Issue 2

Classic classifieds

C123 230CE 1985, 190,000 miles, metallic silver blue, automatic, blue cloth interior, sunroof, pillar-less, family owned since 1985. Current MOT. £5,000. Tel: 07973 563777. Cambridge. ***[FGW28]***

CLK240 This car benefits from a smooth but punchy V6 engine that is great in Comfort mode and then more of a beast when in Sport mode. The inside is immaculate with original Mercedes mats. The leather interior is in great condition, £3,200 ONO. Tel: 07872 538823.
West Midlands. ***[FGW21]***

CL500 1998, with only 35,250 miles authenticated by previous MOTs, Brabus wheels and exhaust. MOT until May 2025, two-tone silver and black leather, light burr walnut steering wheel, dash and auto shift. CL reg included, £18,000. Tel: 07970 288908.
South Wales. ***[FGW20]***

SL500 2003, FSH, full MOT, two keys, new AMG alloys, recent tyres, private plate inc, 93,000, red leather, selling very cheap due to fuse/relay issue, still drives well but displays false alarms due to electrical problem. I have owned this car for the last six years without issues, £3,995. Tel: 07485 749696.
Plymouth. ***[FGW17]***

W108 280SE 1971. Originally from South Africa, it was imported to Cyprus in its early life, where it stayed until I imported it to the UK. The body is incredibly solid, with the exception of the rust in these photographs, which requires a full restoration. The car is all taxes paid and requires UK registration. £POA. Tel: 07734 102121.
Hertfordshire. ***[CM48W1]***

R129 SL500 1992, well presented non-catalytic converter model dark blue with tan interior. Well documented service and maintenance records and invoices. Very good soft top, roll bar and wind deflector. Immobiliser and alarm. Two keys. MOT until 10/24. 104,000 miles (could be good for another 104,000 or more). A future classic. £7,500. Tel: 07970 989051 or 01873 853435. Abergavenny ***[FGW18]***

R129 SL280 1995, 110,000 miles, three former owners, Azurite Blue/mushroom leather, MOT August 2024. Well maintained example, full M-B/independent specialist history, hardtop stand included, owned since 2020, dry stored each winter with bespoke dust cover and battery isolator,
£6,950. Tel: 0131 5579246.
Edinburgh. ***[FGW16]***

310D T1 van 1994, 2.9 diesel, 140,000 miles, professional conversion to camper van, sofa/double bed, four-burner gas hob, three-way fridge, shower, WC compartment with who, inverter, storage and hanging cupboards, fly screens, curtains, bike rack, Fiamma wind -out awning. £3,750. Tel: 0773 7447566.
Suffolk. ***[FGW26]***

E250 BlueEfficiency Sport Cabriolet 2012 (62 reg) petrol, AMG Edition, 2-door, Petrol G-Tronic+ Euro 5 (s/s) (204 ps), 96,000 miles, 3 owners, full MB S/H from the last service, a very recent gearbox service, and a full service. It is fitted with factory parking sensors front and rear. Heated Seats, electric folding mirrors and cruise control. It has all the handbooks and two keys. Immaculate condition for age and runs like a dream. Private plate not included. £7,495. Tel: 07734 102121.
Hertfordshire. ***[CM48W2]***

SLK Roadster Looking for a Mercedes enthusiast who is keen on a project! Reluctant sale of my beloved Silver SLK Roadster 1st Gen emerging classic. Good power and drives well. Stylish red and black interior in good condition. MOT passed 06/07/23, 149,277 miles, two previous owners, 2 sensors required in the roof & air con unit needs replacing. Interested? Call Maria on 07957643473 to discuss further. Staines,
Surrey ***[CM48W4]***

190E 2.6 Rebuilt, 92,900 miles, metallic gold, refurbished interior, over £9,000 spent, show condition, asking £11,995 ono. Consider PX up to £5,000. Tel: 07797 483619.
Prestatyn, Wales. ***[FGW19]***

C126 500SEC 99,000 miles, Arctic White, black leather interior, ESR, air con, AMG monobloc alloys on Pirelli P Zero tyres, bills, history, tools, jack, triangle, M-B first aid kit, £11,750. Tel: 07737 447556.
Suffolk. ***[EFW3R]***

380SL 1984, automatic, 85,560 miles, RHD. Anthracite grey, black leather, walnut trim, rear seat, extensive and interesting history, three previous owners, current (M-B Club member) 23 years, historic tax class (MOT, ULEZ, tax exempt). Repainted, bills of £12K+ excluding servicing, garaged with dehumidifier, original service handbook toolkit, hardtop stand, custom cover, £19,950. Tel: 07876 744320. Romford. ***[EFW18]***

R230 SL350 2004, average mileage for year, 11 months MOT, many new parts, Obsidian Black/refurbished black wheels/ privacy glass, beige interior all standard equipment working including roof, dry stored, new tyres, VGC, £6,750 ono. Tel: 07786 982445. Somerset. ***[FGW9]***

S500 LWB Lorinser 63,000 miles, 1997, comprehensive service records, had major service at M-B Edinburgh including transmission service, electric heated black leather seats, electric heated reclining rear seats, rare factory Bose audio system, Command, CD, electric glass roof. Tel: 07970 529906 Edinburgh. ***[FGW12]***

CLK230 K Cabriolet Evolution 2.3-litre, red top, supercharged engine, 99,367 genuine miles, one previous lady owner, in very good overall condition. Roof and everything else works as it should. MOT until July 2024, some service history and bills, £1,395. Tel: 07785 712087. Liverpool. ***[FGW14]***

W123 300CD Saloon 1981, auto, ascot charcoal cloth upholstery, solid, unmolested, no rust, approximately 120,000 miles. £950. Tel: 07737447556. Suffolk. ***[FG]***

W201 190E 1990, Arctic White, automatic, very good blue block cloth interior, ESR, spare wheel, M-B splash-guards, tools, hack, triangle, first aid kit, bills and history, £2,650. Tel: 07737 447556. Suffolk. ***[EFW5R]***

380SL 1984, automatic, 85,560 miles, RHD. Anthracite grey, black leather, walnut trim, rear seat, extensive and interesting history, three previous owners, current (M-B Club member) 23 years, historic tax class (MOT, ULEZ, tax exempt). Repainted, bills of £12K+ excluding servicing, garaged with dehumidifier, original service handbook toolkit, hardtop stand, custom cover, £19,950. Tel: 07876 744320. Romford. ***[EFW18]***

SL500 Silver, excellent condition, FSH, three owners, 54,000 miles, dry stored, £6,000. Tel: 07519 919802. Birmingham. ***[FGW4]***

W124 200E Avantgarde 1990, metallic silver blue, automatic, spares or repair, £450. Tel: 07737447556. Suffolk. ***[EFW4R]***

W123 230E 1981, 120,000 miles, metallic silver blue, four-speed manual, good blue cloth interior, air con, MB alloys, service history, spare wheel, tools, jack, triangle, first aid kit, £2,850. Tel: 07737 447556. Suffolk. ***[EFW6R]***

W116 450SE 1979, 95,000 miles, automatic, metallic magnetite blue, bamboo leather interior, A/C, excellent chrome, Mercedes-Benz splashguards, owner's wallet, histories, spare wheel, tools, jack, M-B first aid kit, fire extinguisher, £12,750. Tel: 07737 447556.Suffolk. ***[FW1R]***

C123 280CE 1983, 80,000 miles, automatic, flat Sahara Beige, olive cloth interior, ESR, air con, excellent chrome, M-B splashguards, spare wheel, tools, triangle, M-B first aid kit, history, £12,500. Tel: 07737 447556. Suffolk. ***[EFW2R]***

560SEC 1992/J-reg, last of these built, 140,000 miles, Almandine red with cream leather interior. Respray and recommissioned four years ago. Great car, happily drive it anywhere, regularly taken to car shows and meets, drives really well, £21,500 ONO. Tel: 07721 508657. Mid Beds. ***[FGW8]***

INTERNATIONAL MERCEDES

450SL 1980, automatic, 230,000km, RHD, silver blue, tan leather interior, Walnut finish, all original, rust free, hard & soft tops, regularly serviced at authorized M-B dealerships or workshops. Maintenance history documented from the first day of purchase. V8 engine. £32,000. Tel: 00 27 844444292. Email: aroussos@gmail.com. Johannesburg, South Africa. ***[CM48W3]***

SL60 AMG 1998 Only 49 RHD, 24,500 miles, panoramic hardtop, fantastic drive! Tel: +49 1739514613. Waldkirchen, Germany. ***[FGW13]***

560SEL Delivered new to US Embassy in Canberra in 1989. Fully optioned including reclining rear seats, outstanding condition, AU$38,000. Tel: +61 439856997. Athelstone, Australia. ***[EFW19]***

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Classic classifieds

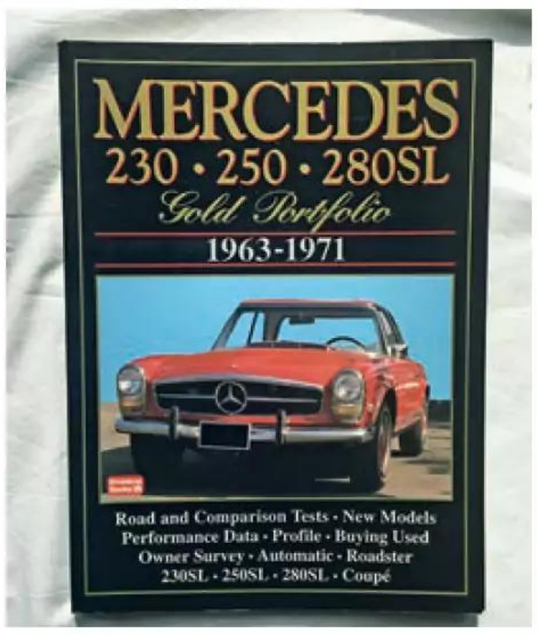
PARTS, MISC & ACCESSORIES

Genuine W202 C-Class wheel plates Four in good condition, silver, £60. Tel: 07961 380971.
Romford. ***[FGW10]***

Genuine AMG 20-inch alloys Refurbished and diamond cut, part numbers A2214013402, A2214013302, 8.5JX20 ET43, 9.5JX20 ET43, with Falkon Azenis 285 25 ZR20 93Y and 255 30 ZR20 92Y tyres, 5mm lowest measurement with even wear, very good condition, couple of chips on one wheel Tel: 07985 201291.
Cambridgeshire. ***[FGW3]***

2014 E220 AMG part LED headlamps Car exported to Spain, new lamps fitted to pass ITV examination, in good working order, part numbers A2128261191 or A2128261291, £1,200 for the pair. TEL: 0034 722174407.
Stirling. ***[EFW1]***

Set of refurbished W126 flat faced alloys With very good tyres, £450. Large quantity of W123 steel wheels, some with tyres, sets of four W123 wheel trims, various colours, various W123 spares too many to list. Tel: 07747 447556. Suffolk. ***[FG]***



230-250-280SL Gold Portfolio 1963-1971, Brooklands books, 172 unmarked pages, £13.95, as new condition. Tel: 07399 359072. No texts. ***[EFW11]***

R107 SL rear bumper complete, original Mercedes with parts stickers 1989. New parts, old stock, £1,200. No messages, collection only. Tel: 07503 739538. London. ***[CM48]***

Water pump and 2x radiators one new, fits W124, £100. New track rod ends boxed, £25. New 20x wheel bolts chrome, £20. Wheel nuts x16, M12x1.5, £10. Swiss caravan s/steel kettle boxed, £15. Small car cover very good condition, £10. Google hub, new, boxed, £100. Crime mags swap for aircraft mags. Tel: 01277 200530. ***[FG]***

REGISTRATIONS

Two fantastic numberplates Both on retention – M5500B (£1,250 ONO) and SALLUTE (£3,250 ONO). Tel: 07950 741778. ***[EF]***

X60 JOE Personal plate Currently on retention certificate ready for immediate transfer, £1,800. Richard. Tel: 07967 024311.
Southampton. ***[FGW1]***

MOY 3D personal plate Currently on retention certificate ready for immediate transfer £600 Tel: 07967 024311.
Southampton. ***[FGW2]***

Two numberplates on retention NKZ 433 (£350) and S16CNS (£300), open to offers. Tel: 07980 933829 or email: nickstilwell59@gmail.com
Hampshire. ***[EF]***

OV12 BYE numberplate On retention, £3,500 ONO. Tel: 07766 570973.***CM46P5R]***

WANTED

Parts Wanted for R129 Steering idler arm bushing for a 2001 SL500 Silver Arrow. Have tried the usual parts places in the UK and Europe without success! Tel: 07359 017584.
Winchester. ***[FG]***

Front door locks and keys For handles on 1988 230TE (124-series). Tel: 01277 200530. ***[FG]***

The copy deadline for Issue 49 is Wednesday 9th October

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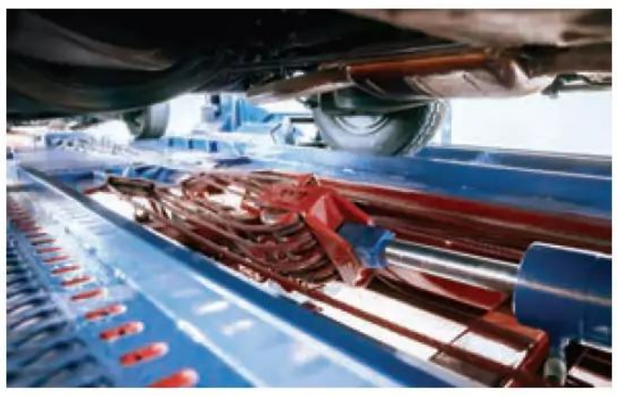
Load hero

Mercedes salutes its classic car transporter with a place in the Museum. Tim French takes a look – and explains how it got to its position on the fifth floor

IMAGES Mercedes-Benz Group AG

Every newly manufactured Mercedes-Benz begins its life on a car transporter, so it is surely appropriate that after a lifetime working the road, one should follow the cars it once delivered into the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart. Hence the Mercedes 1624 Car Transporter pictured here, laden with a quartet of the passenger car models from its era – a 123-series 230E saloon and 280CE coupe, and 126-series 380SEC and 500SEC – occupies a position in the Museum's Gallery of Carriers.

The Mercedes-Benz 1624 Car Transporter, which is a forerunner of today's Actros and Atego trucks, belonged to the so-called New Generation of heavy- and medium-duty lorries built from 1973 to 1988. The 'NG' trucks were of a completely new design and appearance, and helped Daimler-Benz expand its sales in the medium and heavy truck market. The diesel engine displaces 12.8 litres and generates just under 240bhp. Its enormous but under-stressed motor made the 1624 suitable for tasks involving the long-distance haulage of heavyweight cargo, and it could be ordered in a wide range of different versions.



ABOVE RIGHT
The Museum crane in action, the 'basket' able to bear 20 tonnes.

RIGHT
Super strong cables do the heavy lifting on the 1624 Car Transporter...

BELOW RIGHT
...assisted by the vehicle's heavy duty hydraulic system.

Common sight on German roads in the 1970s and 80s. The wait soon over!

When you think about it, a car transporter is an extraordinary vehicle. With its vertical uprights, cross struts and loading platforms, its structure appears highly rigid. But the need to load cars of different sizes on two levels requires loading platforms can be raised, lowered and tilted. This museum exhibit has a hybrid drive, the power generated by a central hydraulic system, with steel cables transferring this to the required points via guide pulleys and pulley blocks. By comparison, on today's car transporters numerous hydraulic elements perform these movements which, when entrusted to an experienced operator, can look like mechanical ballet.

Even before the 1624 Car Transporter is loaded up with its consignment of modern classic Benz-age it weighs in at around seven tonnes (its towing weight allows a six-car trailer to be hitched up), and for some that figure will spark the question of precisely how it was possible to raise this exhibit to its light-flooded position on the Museum's fifth floor. This was made possible by the construction of the Mercedes-Benz Museum and the integrated logistics. Commercial vehicles are an integral part of the Museum concept and, accordingly, the building was designed to take their weight. This was especially so in the Collection rooms, whose floors and walls can bear loads weighing many tonnes.

"EVEN BEFORE THE 1624 CAR TRANSPORTER IS LOADED UP WITH ITS CONSIGNMENT OF MODERN CLASSIC BENZ-AGE IT WEIGHS IN AT AROUND SEVEN TONNES"

Then there are the logistics. A large door can be seen on the inside wall, which leads to the atrium (a central hall) via a connecting passageway. The heavy-duty lift installed there raised the car transporter to its lofty height and then rolled it through the door to the allocated space. Simples.

This was all well within the capabilities of the Museum's crane system, which is able to carry up to 40 tonnes, while the payload of the suspended crane basket is 20 tonnes. Nonetheless, the 1624 wasn't loaded with cars until it had been parked in position in the exhibition area. The vehicle in the crane basket in the photograph, incidentally, is the Mercedes-Benz O 1000 from 1938 that was converted into a mobile post office just after World War Two and used in Austria for many years (featured in *Classic Mercedes*, Winter 2023). It was hoisted into position in December 2005, a short time before the new Museum opened to the public. CM

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