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# Mercedes

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**R129 SL**

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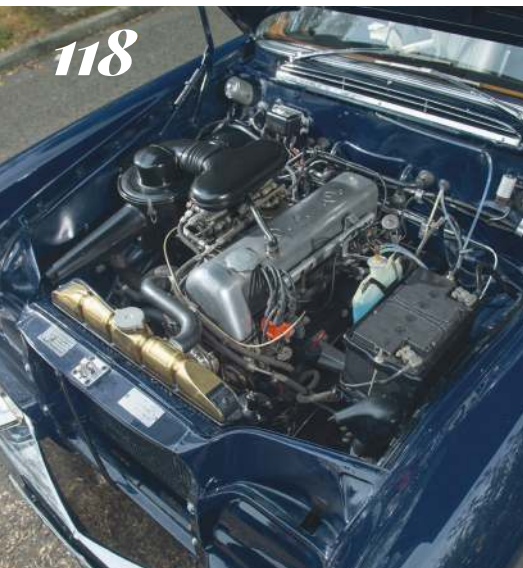
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## MIX AND MATCH

**I'VE MANAGED** a variety of motoring magazines over the years, but none of the titles I've been in charge of have afforded me as much of an opportunity to explore a wide variety of vehicle types as *Mercedes Driver*. Super saloons? You got it! Load luggers? Let's do it! Drop-tops? Step right this way! Such is the diversity of the Mercedes product range, there really is a Benz to suit all tastes.

As an editor always on the hunt for a theme to apply to each issue of the magazine he pulls together, this mix of motors makes my job far easier than if Mercedes only specialised in the production of sports cars. It also enables me to use our humble bimonthly as a fantastic showcase of how rich in appeal the Mercedes scene is. Take this issue, for example. From a 1964 W111 200 'Fintail', to a nearly new W205 AMG C63 S chucking out a phenomenal 585bhp, we've bridged the gap between old and new, taking in a W100 600 and a W126 420 SEL along the way. The cars might be different, but the passion each owner has for their chosen chariot is exactly the same.

We've also used this issue to mark the start of our celebrations for the R129 SL's thirtieth birthday. Yep, you'll note this edition of

*Mercedes Driver* is significantly heavier than the last. That's because we've included a bumper fifty (yes, fifty!) pages of content dedicated to the R129 and its time-served predecessor, the R107 SL. Buying guides, model history, recommended products and real-world features star in this special bonus section. Check it out.

This is the fourth issue of *Mercedes Driver* following its relaunch at the back end of last year. While the editorial tone of this new incarnation of the magazine has proved popular, one element I felt was lacking was the presence of a 'staff project' for our loyal readers to follow and engage with. Needless to say, I'm delighted to reintroduce K192 VBD, our W201 190E 2.6, to these pages. There's much work to be done, but I'm looking forward to getting stuck in and bringing the car to various meets, the first being the H-Town Classic & Dub Club *Porsche vs Mercedes* gathering in Hitchin on the 29th April. See you there!



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# TREASURE MAP

Take to the high seas of tuning and a contemporary  
AMG will reward like never before

WORDS Emma Woodcock PHOTOGRAPHY Tom Gidden



Modern motors know how to shake their money makers. From Porsche's 911 GT2 RS to the comparatively humble Volkswagen Golf R, the story is always the same: take a steel snail or two, pump the boost way past atmospheric pressure and stand back. We're living in an age of powerful bounty, where 500bhp has tumbled from supercar statistic to mainstream reality, but we could have even more. It's just waiting to be uncovered. With electronic controllers ready to be cracked, and drivelines leaving the factory with a healthy safety margin, today's performance cars are itching for emboldened buyers to go the whole hog.

Enter Chris Greenwood, professional pig roaster (yes, really!) and long-time fast car fan with no prior Mercedes experience. That was all about to change. "I used to own a BMW M4," he explains. "It was great fun, but when it was stolen late last year, I decided to mix things up a bit." A Bimmer with even more power was on his shopping list, but he was also taken with the idea of buying a C205 AMG C63 S coupe.

He ummed, he ahed and, in the end, the V8 Benz won out. Sifting through a country of potential purchases, Chris found a wide selection of cars, but few met his exacting specification requirements: the optional red leather was a must, as was lashings of factory-fit carbon-fibre. An appropriate C63 soon appeared at Redline Specialist Cars, a performance car jamboree selling luxury limos and limited-run McLaren as often as it shifts German hotrods. Chris had to take a look.

Two hundred miles up the road, he found himself

standing in front of a 2018 AMG C63 brooding in Obsidian over dusky nineteen-inch alloys. Filigree and finished in a Tantalite Grey close to the flattest black, they're details marking out the car he was looking at as an S. Other vital clues include red brake calipers, an electronic rear differential, a slish-slash diffuser and AMG Performance pewes trimmed in Nappa leather. Oh, and the not insignificant matter of 503bhp and 516lb-ft torque, a good thirty-four and thirty-seven click bumps over the standard C63.

## CROWNING GLORY

Critically, the object of Chris' desire also sparked with AMG Exterior Carbon Fibre packages one and two. The former coats the front lip, diffuser and sills in lacquered weave, while the latter spreads the lightweight material to the door mirrors and rear lip spoiler. The result is subtle, but deeply decadent. Chris was sold and so was the car. It was soon on its way to his home in Essex.

The drive south revealed deep-rooted differences between M-Power and a four-litre C-Class. "What really surprised me was how quiet the Mercedes is until you select Sport Plus mode. Moreover, it's a super-comfortable car, as well as being extraordinarily fast. In comparison, the M4 was much louder and far less sophisticated." With a tuned Ford Focus ST track car and a work van on his driveway, the black Benz brought something new to the Greenwood household.

Before long, however, the speedfreak was itching to put his own stamp on the awesome AMG. Sure, the twin-turbocharged V8 had enough power to pound asphalt at fifty paces, but it could – and would – pack

**Below** Twin-tone red and black leather wraps itself around the seats, door cards and dash furniture, while cool carbon decorates both the inside and outside of the AMG monster

**Facing page** Stealth-like Obsidian Black paintwork is interrupted only by flashes of chrome and radiant red



## New breed

Introduced in 2015 and debuting in the W205 C63, the four-litre, turbocharged M177 V8 marked a pronounced departure from the naturally aspirated, 6.2-litre earth puncher employed by the earlier W204 C63 (read all about the model by ordering the previous issue of *Mercedes Driver* at [bit.ly/issuesmd](http://bit.ly/issuesmd)). Swept capacity was down, but with direct injection and an all-new design, power wouldn't fall with it. The V8's technical *piece de resistance* grabbed headlines. Nestled between cylinder heads, the turbos sit in a 'hot V' formation, shrinking overall engine size while ensuring speedy spool. Importantly, the W205 C63 uses 32% less fuel than the W204 C63.





## THE DRIVE SOUTH REVEALED DEEP-ROOTED DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BMW M-POWER AND A FOUR-LITRE MERCEDES C-CLASS



more punch. The meat man's M4 benefited from a custom remap, and it was now time to book the Mercedes in for its own electronic giddy up.

### LONDON CALLING

Only one firm – GCAP Performance ([gcappperformance.co.uk](http://gcappperformance.co.uk)) – was offered the chance to pick the Mercedes' brains. There's a good reason for that. After another company's patchy and unsuccessful work left Chris' former daily hack (a BMW 335i M Sport, since you asked) without the extra go he craved, only GCAP main man, Gary Conway, and his team had been able to sort out the mess. Hours later, the straight-six Bimmer was flying higher than ever before. Months after that, another bout of ECU tuning at GCAP yielded the same results for Chris' M4. Based in Notting Hill, Gary's guys know their way around a circuit board.

Gary also boasts extensive experience of working specifically with C205 AMGs. "We used one as a research and development vehicle when the model was first launched," he confirms. "We always get hold of a demo car and work through a base map on our dyno before releasing any software updates to the public. Nothing gets offered commercially until we're completely happy." The process isn't all about gains; GCAP is every bit as interested in what a knock sensor won't permit as what a carefully coerced ECU will.

That first demo car was subjected to serious surgery. Locating the ECU 'boot' pin (a vital



DRIVER

Q&A



**CHRIS GREENWOOD**

#### Occupation

Founder and head chef at Hungry Hog BBQ

#### First Mercedes

This one

**Favourite Mercedes**  
AMG GT Coupe

#### Best thing about your AMG C63 S

I love the carbon dash

#### Worst thing about your AMG C63 S

Even with the driving seat on its lowest setting, my head still touches the roof!



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620LB-FT TORQUE, ALL DYNO-PROVEN**







connector used whenever the AMG's electronic systems kick into life) required extensive exploration, while the map's prototype status meant pinning direct to the main circuit board. The process is physically invasive, but it proved a success. Indeed, by the time customer C63s reached the GCAP workshop, Gary and his gang had developed a less intense access route to bigger bhp: working through the OBD port, GCAP can now map any modern Mercedes without having to handle the host vehicle's ECU.

## GERMAN EFFICIENCY

When the S suffix first made its appearance back in 2016, Gary spent time studying the mechanical differences between models. "Authors of Mercedes literature chose their words very carefully," he continues. "We weren't sure whether the S would use the same ECU and mechanical componentry as the standard C63." His deep digging highlighted the fact the boys at Benz kept hardware the same, allowing GCAP's pre-existing C63 base map to be installed with confidence. "We always start with that base. It hugely cuts down on the amount of time spent getting ready for custom mapping. This approach also brings welcome cost benefits to GCAP customers!"

In tuning terms, the base map Gary speaks of sits between stock specification and Stage 1, a catch-all term for a car which has been modified, but hasn't experienced many (or any) hardware upgrades. Let's call it Stage 0.5. This half-stage wears all the benefits and improvements found in the demo car process,

## Next level

The standard W205 AMG C63 produces 469bhp and 479lb-ft torque with a 0-62mph sprint time of 4.1 seconds. Compare this to the 503bhp and 516lb-ft torque generated by the S, a tricked-out C63 capable of the same dash to 62mph from rest in exactly four seconds, with the coupe version's aerodynamic advantages reducing that figure down even further to 3.9 seconds. All W205 C63s make use of a seven-speed automatic transmission sending power to the rear wheels. The C63 S also boasts a top speed of 180mph. Three-stage adaptive suspension, speed-sensitive steering and big red brake calipers with 390mm front discs round out the package.

from widened ECU parameters to basic timing, boost and fuelling alterations.

With the first steps in place, it's then time to beat a fresh path for each individual C63. Ignition timing sees close attention, with small changes yielding remarkable power gains, while boost levels are largely maintained. "Modern turbocharged motors don't use old-school mechanical wastegates," Gary explains. "They fight you every step of the way. Electronic wastegates are safer and can be configured more accurately, although it's worth noting standard AMGs run formidable pressure levels." An owner's use pattern also impacts the final map: cars running on super unleaded fuel can handle more aggressive alterations than those filled with regular low octane pump petrol.

A few hours after its arrival, Chris' C63 was complete and hotter to trotter. A Pipercross air filter now sits in the airbox, a simple change suggested by Gary as a quick and easy power boost. Not that first glance suggests there have been updates. After all, the cool coupe looks exactly as it did when it rolled off the production line. Drop into the driving seat and that illusion quickly falls away. "The power is there straightaway," Chris smiles. "It wasn't exactly a slouch before, but GCAP's work has delivered a safe and reliable 585bhp with a massive 620lb-ft torque, all dyno-proven. As an added bonus, the crackle from the exhaust when you let off the throttle is incredible!" Proof, if proof were needed, this AMG C63 S really is black gold.



# Livewire

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## New AMG GT R Roadster revealed

*Go al fresco with 585bhp limited-run sports machine*

**A**MG is combining “the freedom of the open-air driving experience” with aerodynamic technology garnered at the race circuit to deliver the GT R Roadster, a 585bhp bi-turbo V8 drop-top revealed at the recent Geneva Motor Show. Limited to just 750 units, the new model is based on the existing GT R coupe and is reported to be just as comfortable on the race track as it is on the road, in part thanks to the appointment of adjustable coilovers with active axle rear steering, advanced aerodynamics and intelligent lightweight construction, all combining to deliver highly dynamic handling characteristics. In other words, it’s a drop-top

GT R with specification pretty much identical to the GT R hard-top. Apart from the lack of roof, obviously. That said, the included soft-top is a triple-layer fabric part wrapped around a lightweight aluminium, magnesium and steel structure, as per other R190 Roadster models.

“The new GT R Roadster is the essence of two worlds blending to deliver out brand pledge, Driving Performance, in a very special way. First, there’s the special flair of AMG GT Roadsters to consider, but the thrilling vehicle dynamics brought to the GT R Roadster prove Mercedes has once again developed a brand-defining sports car. It embodies AMG in form and function, enriching the GT family with a highly exclusive variant,” said Tobias Moers, Chairman of the Management Board of Mercedes-AMG GmbH.



The immense power delivered by the GT R Roadster delivers its maximum bhp and 700Nm torque across a wide engine speed, ranging from 2,100rpm to 5,500rpm. The four-litre eight-cylinder powerplant sprints to 62mph from standstill in 3.6 seconds with power delivery up to the top speed of 197mph. You’ll note those are the same claims Mercedes makes about the GT R coupe.

Like the hard-top, the Roadster’s low-slung front section and the forward-inclined AMG-specific radiator grille create a distinctive ‘shark nose’, making the car seem as though it’s sitting much lower to the ground than it is. At the same time, this shape lowers the vehicle’s back pressure point, thereby enhancing the flow of cooling air and the awesome AMG’s aerodynamic performance.

Air curtains on the outside of the front apron calm airflow, improving aerodynamic efficiency. Thanks to their narrow, vertical





openings, these parts also guide air towards the wheel arches, where flow is directed through cooling slits towards double radiators. In fact, much of the car's aerodynamic design and airflow profile is concealed in the underbody in front of the engine. Weighing around two kilograms, this carbon-fibre element is speed sensitive and automatically extends 40mm downwards depending on the drive program selected. The process involves considerable change in airflow and results in what is known as the Venturi effect, essentially 'sucking' the car onto the road, a behaviour reducing front axle lift by around forty kilograms at 155mph. The slick aerodynamic profile retracts when low speed is returned.

The driver feels these advantages through precise steering at high speed, with vastly improved directional stability felt at all times. Additionally, when the aerodynamic profile is extended, the radiator air outlet opens at the front and guides air towards the double diffuser. This pins the rear of the car to the asphalt while reducing the temperature of operating hotspots, such as the high-performance composite brake discs, which benefit from channelled cool air.

As you might expect, the GT R Roadster will come with a hefty price tag. So big, in fact, Mercedes hasn't yet finished adding zeroes to the long line of zeroes already jotted down. Well, you know they say: "if you have to ask..."



### Top Gear 600 SEL on display at Beaulieu

Stripped of their plush interior fittings and modified to survive a gruelling six-hour endurance race at Silverstone, Matt LeBlanc's Bentley Turbo R, Chris Harris' Mercedes 600 SEL and Rory Reid's Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow are quite unlike any normal race cars.

In episode four of the current series of *Top Gear*, each presenter was challenged to buy a second-hand car for the same price as the UK's cheapest new motor, the Dacia Sandero. Unsurprisingly, with a budget of £6,000, the trio aimed high and snapped up three special executive saloons with powerful V8 and V12 engines before competing in the Birkett Six-Hour Relay Race. The trio of cars swapped leather seats for beefed-up suspension and roll cages to create unlikely looking race cars. Check 'em out by visiting the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu, where each car is currently on display as part of the venue's *Top Gear* exhibition.



### 2019 BTCC gets underway in style

Just before we went to print with this issue of *Mercedes Driver*, the British Touring Car Championship announced its return by hosting an action-packed media day at Brands Hatch. Star drivers and amazing-looking cars strutted their stuff for a day of testing in advance of the first round of this year's competition, which gets underway at the same venue in early April. Among cars fighting for position at the front will be the wide-arched Mercedes A-Class weapons driven by Aiden Moffat (Laser Tools Racing), Daniel Rowbottom (Cataclean Racing) and Adam Morgan (Mac Tools). We'll be sure to bring you regular race reports throughout the season, which promises to thrill thanks to a higher standard of driving and even closer action than we've seen in recent years. And don't fret if you can't get to a race - they're televised live on ITV4!



# New CLA Shooting Brake due in autumn

Manufacturer hopes to snare extra sales by appealing to young fans of outdoor sports

**T**he new Mercedes CLA will be available as in Shooting Brake guise from September. Just like the four-door CLA coupe, the Shooting Brake puts its own spin on what Mercedes calls "sensual purity" and turns the interior into "a coolly designed user interface for intelligent digital technology". From the striking 'shark nose' at the front of the vehicle to the clean-edged doors and rear quarters, the overall design displays elegant aesthetic swooping towards a gently muscular rear, a feature increasing the CLA's functionality by offering a generous amount of room for whatever luggage you might be carrying around.

Mercedes considers the CLA Shooting Brake to be just as much of a designer piece as the coupe, revelling in the idea of the new model encouraging user spontaneity, be it an impromptu shopping spree or sports and outdoor activities where additional space is required. As you'd expect, the interior displays the same high quality ambience of the coupe, but offers passengers extra space in the shoulder, head and elbow areas.

Today's world of high-tech gadgetry and

digital communication is integrated into the CLA's cabin in a creative and pioneering way. Thanks to Mercedes-Benz User Experience (MBUX) with intelligent interior assistants and refined voice recognition, operation of complex functions is becoming more natural and far simpler. Indeed, great emphasis is placed on individualisation in the new CLA Shooting Brake, with an increasingly diverse range of apps downloadable from the online 'Mercedes me' service and called upon by driver or passenger via MBUX.

This new CLA is aimed at a demographic of car buyers who, just a few years ago, wouldn't have dreamed of considering a Mercedes when drawing up their shopping list of potential purchases. More specifically, young people with an interest in outdoor sports and an appreciation for design are who Britta Seeger, Member of the Board of Management of Daimler AG responsible for Mercedes-Benz Cars sales, cites as the Shooting Brake's target market.

Like the previous model, the new CLA Shooting Brake will be manufactured at the Kecskemét assembly plant in Hungary. The new arrival lands in dealer showrooms in September. Watch this space!







### Mercedes F1 presence at Donington

Visitors to the 2019 Donington Historic Festival (3rd-5th May) will enjoy a hugely entertaining three days of action on the circuit, plus a jam-packed programme of off-track entertainment, including a display of Formula One cars, with some taking to the track for demonstrations. Cars already confirmed include an ex-Nelson Piquet Benetton B190, the 1984 Toleman Hart machine that powered Ayrton Senna to stardom, a 1991 Dallara BMS-F191, a Hesketh from 1977 and an extremely rare Honda R8 1082. This was the test mule for the KERS systems developed in F1 ahead of the 2009 season. When Honda pulled out of the series at the end of 2008, the car was passed to Brawn GP before finding its way to the current Mercedes F1 team, who decorated the unique motorsport machine in the famous colours of the all-conquering Silver Arrows that have marched to every F1 title for the past half-decade. Additional F1 machinery is expected to be confirmed ahead of the Festival. See you at the front!



### Electric dreams at Hemmels

We recently reported on news classic Mercedes restoration specialist, Hemmels, was saved from administrators by Richard Butterfield, self-confessed car obsessive and founder of global brand implementation outfit, Principle Group. Butterfield now holds rank as Hemmels' majority shareholder. Under his watch, the company is expected to significantly increase output through better management, a recruitment drive and vastly improved productivity. To tie in with the firm's new lease of life, Hemmel technicians are gearing up for the creation of their first electric vehicle, a project due to start in August of this year. Classics running on thoroughly modern powerplants is nothing new, but knowing the high standard of Hemmels work – one of the firm's restorations, a 1968 W113 280 SL, takes pride of place at Mercedes-Benz World – we can't wait to see what the boys in Cardiff produce.

## See you there...

### BTCC AT BRANDS

The first three rounds of the 2019 Kwik Fit British Touring Car Championship will take place at Brands Hatch Indy Circuit on Sunday 7th April, with the entire race day broadcast live and in high definition on ITV4. In addition to the three high-profile BTCC showdowns, there's a packed race support package, with Porsche Carrera Cup GB, Renault UK Clio Cup, Ginetta GT4 SuperCup, Ginetta Juniors and British F4 categories. Further information at [btcc.net](http://btcc.net)

### 2019 LONDON MOTOR SHOW

Hosted at ExCeL, the London Motor Show is the largest automotive show in the UK and will showcase the latest technologies and innovations from some of the world's leading brands. Industry experts will also be on-hand to answer questions and demonstrate new tech. The event takes place 16th-19th May and is ideal for those wanting great insight into new automotive technologies. Visit [bit.ly/londonmotor](http://bit.ly/londonmotor)

### LETCWORTH CLASSIC CAR SHOW

The thirtieth anniversary of the Lettoworth Garden City Classic & Vintage Car Show is being celebrated on Saturday 1st June with a display of 500 retro rides, including those exhibited by members of Mercedes-Benz Club UK, who have a stand at the event. Take a look at [bit.ly/mbclubevents](http://bit.ly/mbclubevents) for event information.



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## PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

### VBOX VIDEO HD2 TWIN-CAMERA MOTION CAPTURE SYSTEM

Following three years of intense research and development (and countless hours of on-track testing), VBOX Motorsport's superb Video HD2 motion capture system ensures quality and outstanding reliability by making use of an aluminium billet housing, solid connectors, a built-in power backup and a solid video pre-buffer.

Billed as VBOX's most sophisticated race car video data logger yet, the twin 1080p bullet camera system (which makes use of the latest Sony Exmore HD sensor, delivering superb colour reproduction and sensitivity) provides real-time footage with an HD graphical overlay featuring track maps, speed, G-force readouts, lap timers and the ability



for you to add virtually any additional imagery that you can think of. The only limiting factor is your imagination!

32 CAN channels for ECU logging are included, as is the ability to preview the cameras over WiFi using a dedicated smartphone app. SD card or USB recording

is offered, and as if you needed any more convincing, VBOX Video HD2 is already the favoured multi-camera motorsport motion capture system of Gymkhana video star, Ken Block, as well as some of the world's most famous, high profile race car manufacturers.

Outstanding customer support is provided free of charge for the lifetime of the product, enabling you to get the very best out of your HD2 system. This really is a feature-rich bit of kit. Explore all its functions by visiting the VBOX Motorsport website (where you can also place your order).

**Price: £2094**  
[vboxmotorsport.co.uk](http://vboxmotorsport.co.uk) or call 01280 823803





## GTECHNIQ HALO

Gtechniq has released details of HALO, its chemically bonding, ultra-dense flexible film design for vinyl and PPF finishes. The density of the coating is claimed to improve dirt and water repellence, preventing staining from dirt ingress as well as reducing 'yellowing' caused by UV light. Compatible with all types of gloss, matte and satin vinyl, HALO works on self-healing films and is available to order in 30ml or 50ml bottles.

**Price: From £49.99** [gtechniq.com](http://gtechniq.com)



## SUBSCRIBE!

Have each and every issue of Mercedes Driver delivered direct to your door (at no extra cost) by subscribing to the magazine. You'll get a big discount off cover price, plus you'll receive the mag before it hits newsstands. As if that wasn't encouragement enough, you'll also receive a stack of free detailing products. Billy bargain!

**Price: £21 (overseas may vary)**  
[bit.ly/subscribeMD](http://bit.ly/subscribeMD)

## BLUE PRINT OIL FILTERS

An oil filter protects your car's engine by keeping lubricant free of dirt and contamination during a prescribed service life. Microscopic wear particles, dust and soot from combustion must be filtered efficiently to prevent degradation to bearing surfaces, damage which can easily lead to increased engine wear. Blue Print supplies oil filters with premium quality filtration media boasting the efficiency and capacity to protect between extended service intervals. With over 2,300 part numbers in its family of filtration solutions, the company offers one of the most extensive ranges available in the aftermarket. Visit the website of Blue Print's parent company, Bilstein Group, for a Mercedes application list.

**Price: Varies**  
[bilsteingroup.com](http://bilsteingroup.com)



## YOKOHAMA ADVAN NEOVA AD08RS

A re-engineered version of Yokohama's immensely successful Neova AD08R semi-slick tyre, the AD08RS has been fine-tuned to meet Europe's ECE R117-02 S2WR2 road regulations, rules promoting environmentally sound performance. Whilst keeping the tread pattern that earned the AD08R a strong reputation for excellent control in dry and wet conditions, not to mention superior resistance to abrasion, the AD08RS uses a new compound reducing rolling resistance. Consequently, this new performance tyre achieves excellent handling and low fuel consumption that's sure to satisfy drivers craving speed and fun on four wheels. A range of tyre sizes from 15-inches to 19-inches with a high number of profiles is to be rolled out following the product's successful launch at the recent Geneva Motor Show.

**Price: Varies**  
[yokohama.co.uk](http://yokohama.co.uk) or  
call 01908 625625



## RIMBLADES 'RIMSAVERS' WHEEL PROTECTION

Launched in 2016, RimSavers are ultra-lightweight wheel protection and styling products from alloy rim accessories specialist, Rimblades. Made from a semi-rigid plastic, the product has a wall thickness of just 0.35mm, offering outstanding high-speed performance against heavier wheel protectors from rival manufacturers. Complete with the latest 3M Very High Bond (VHB) fixing tape and supplied in four 1.9-metre lengths, RimSavers will fit wheels measuring up to 22-inches in diameter and are cut to size at the point of installation. Weather protection seals prevent degradation of the 3M adhesive, while a small ABS injection-moulded joining kit is included to hide the start and end points of the fitted product. There's no need to remove your car's wheels and applying RimSavers is a job which can be carried out in the street, on your driveway or in the warmth of your garage. Simple.

**Price: £44.99**  
[rimblades.com](http://rimblades.com) or call 01823 432144







## TILE PRO TRACKER

Some of us spend fifty percent of our lives looking for our keys. Fact. This nifty tracker from Tile should put paid to hours of searching by communicating with the accompanying smartphone app to register the location of your lost property. Better still, there's an option of alerting fellow Tile users you've misplaced your belongings, allowing them to chip-in if you're out of the device's 300ft signal range.

**Price: £30** [thetileapp.com](http://thetileapp.com)



## WO-WO WASH MITT

Duncan and Neil Pratt-Thompson have designed a lambswool wash mitt that can be used across the face, spokes and rim of a wheel thanks to a deep pile that does a great job of trapping dirt without damaging painted or polished surfaces. The part is sold complete with its own mesh carrying bag. Oh, and in case you were wondering, Wo-Wo is an abbreviation of "wax on, wax off." Mr Miyagi would be proud.

**Price: £16.99** [wo-wo.co.uk](http://wo-wo.co.uk)



## RECOMMENDED READ FORMULA ONE 2019: THE CARLTON SPORTS GUIDE BY BRUCE JONES

Published by Carlton Books, the world's best-selling Grand Prix handbook is an essential resource for the seventieth season of the Formula One World Drivers' Championship. Now in its twenty-third edition, this terrific tome keeps fans fully up to speed with the twenty F1 drivers, from title rivals, Sebastian Vettel and

Lewis Hamilton, to up and coming racers, Sergey Sirotkin and Pierre Gasly. All ten teams are examined in detail, as is each challenging track. A review of 2018's dramatic F1 season is included, information highlighting changes in race regulations for 2019. Ninety colour photographs, helmet illustrations, circuit maps and mind-bending statistics make this a must-have book for F1 fans everywhere.

**Price: £8.97 from Amazon (RRP £14.99)**  
[carltonbooks.co.uk](http://carltonbooks.co.uk)

## SEALEY ELECTROSTART BATTERYLESS POWER START

Unlike traditional boosters, this quick-start 12V jump kit from trusted tool manufacturer, Sealey, doesn't require an internal battery pack. Simply connect to a flat vehicle battery and the unit will draw power, fully energising itself in a matter of minutes. It then pushes full power back through the starting system, enabling safe and easy jump starting. If your Benz's battery is faulty or is holding a charge of less than five volts, this compact power source can be pre-charged using another car battery. A whopping 1600A of muscle makes the part suitable for petrol engines with up to six-litres of displacement and diesels packing up to four-litres.

Ideal for cars which have been retired from the road during the winter months and have lazy batteries needing a small helping hand when coming out of hibernation.

**Price: £201**  
[mccormicktools.co.uk](http://mccormicktools.co.uk)  
or call 0191 377 3737



## HERTZ UNO SPEAKERS

In-car entertainment distributor, Four Car Audio, has announced the arrival of the Hertz Uno replacement speaker range. Designed as entry-level drop-in replacements for consistently poor standard factory speakers, Uno-branded products feature much of the DNA enjoyed by Hertz's high-end speakers. Uno coaxials reach surprisingly low, providing forceful-yet-musical bass thanks to a specially shaped faceplate, while patented V-cone technology employed in the Uno range ensures sound gets into the listener's ears instead of hovering around the knees! Uno component tweeters are equipped with an angular acoustic lens to further help with dispersion. The complete range consists of three pairs of two-way components and four pairs of coaxials, as well as a shallow-mount twelve-inch subwoofer. Find your perfect fit at the Four Car Audio website.

**Price: From £49.99**  
[fourcaraudio.co.uk](http://fourcaraudio.co.uk) or call 01869 346301







## THINKWARE DASHCAM

Thinkware's X550 dashcam delivers up to ten times more brightness than offerings from other manufacturers thanks to its all-new image signal technology and real-time video processing functions. The X550 can also boast improved video storage, a lane departure warning system, a front collision warning system and full 1080p HD recording at thirty frames per second.

**Price: £169** [bit.ly/thinkwarex550](http://bit.ly/thinkwarex550)



## WORX HAND CLEANER

It's all too easy for DIYers and automotive technicians to forget the fact they work with potentially harmful substances. Worx all-natural hand cleaner is the effective solution, and a product that no spanner-wielder (from the humblest hobbyist to the best qualified professional) should do without. Plant-based, 100% biodegradable and certified by both EcoLogic and Green Seal, Worx is 100% free from borax, phosphates, harsh solvents, petroleum products or mineral spirits, alcohol or antimicrobial agents, pumice, sands, soaps, nuts and legume shells.

**Price: From £9** [bit.ly/worxhandcleaner](http://bit.ly/worxhandcleaner)

## WEBCON WEBER 40 DCOE AIR BOX FILTER ADAPTOR KIT FOR 190 SL

This kit from the leading global manufacturer and distributor of carburation and engine management systems allows the use of the 190 SL's factory air box intake assembly when the host vehicle is running twin Weber 40 DCOE carburettors. The UK-made hardware features auxiliary Venturie sleeves, twin billet air box adaptors, all gaskets and the necessary mounting hardware. The carburettors can be bought as part of a bigger kit from Webcon.

**Price: £159**

[webcon.co.uk](http://webcon.co.uk) or call 01932 787100



## CHIPEX FACTORY FINISH UBER SUPER CONCENTRATE CAR SHAMPOO

Car care specialist, Chipex, is hitting the detailing scene hard right now, as evidenced by the introduction of its Uber Super Concentrate Car Shampoo. Comprising a chloride salt-free super concentrated formula producing a lush foam and fragrance, the product (sold in 500ml bottles) takes good care of cleaning your Mercedes, leaving a smear-free, factory finish and an anti-static coating to help keep your pride and joy cleaner for longer. Readily biodegradable, the product's carefully balanced ingredients are claimed to ensure prevention of salt chalking and watermarks before drying. Interested? Of course you are! Order Chipex products direct from the company's website and take advantage of a 10% discount.

**Price: £12.95**

[chipex.co.uk](http://chipex.co.uk) or call 01295 258308



## RICHBROOK TYRE PRESSURE AND TREAD DEPTH POCKET GAUGE

This digital tyre pressure and tread depth gauge from automotive accessories specialist, Richbrook, allows you to quickly and easily check your car's, erm, tyre pressure and tread depth. Measuring just 60x40mm, the item is conveniently portable and made from sturdy materials with an easy to read to display screen. Pressure is registered in psi, bar kPa and kg/cm<sup>2</sup>, while an air bleed function allows for a precise setting. The gauge comes complete with its own storage pouch and is offered at a pleasing price point.

**Price: £19.95**

[richbrook.co.uk](http://richbrook.co.uk) or call 01328 862387

## ROAD ANGEL SPEED CAMERA DETECTOR

The Road Angel brand is back bigger, bolder and better than ever before! Announcing the road traffic and travel specialist's return to the main stage is this sensational speed camera detector. The safety conscious (absolutely not those who want to know when they should be slamming on the stoppers, ahem!) need not look any further for peace of mind thanks to live speed camera updates, laser gun detection, school proximity alerts and black zone warnings. Enabling you to keep your driving license blemish-free for life, this dash-mounted delight takes speed awareness to a whole new level.

**Price: £249 plus annual software subscription**

[roadangelgroup.com](http://roadangelgroup.com) or call 0330 320 3030





# NO DRAMA

Getting to grips with a classic Mercedes isn't as daunting as you might think, suggests star of stage and screen, Gary Mavericks

WORDS **Dan Furr** PHOTOGRAPHY **Ade Brannan**









**T**reading the boards can be a tricky game to play. "It's famine or feast," quips accomplished RADA alumni, Gary Mavers. "The work can be inconsistent, meaning an actor might have long periods where he or she needs to occupy their time engaging in a different pursuit." If the Liverpoolian's name seems familiar, then chances are you've been a keen viewer of *Peak Practice*, *Casualty* or *Emmerdale* in recent years, or you've seen Gary commanding the stage in any of the popular plays he's performed in. What you probably won't be aware of is his enduring love for classic cars wearing the three-pointed star.

"It all started with a W113 230 SL I bought thirty years ago," he recalls. "The car had been partly restored by the previous owner, but there were many key components missing, including clocks, interior trim and bits of the soft-top framework. In truth, I jumped in at the deep end without really knowing what I was letting myself in for, but righting that Pagoda's many wrongs was a brilliant, if somewhat difficult, learning curve in the maintenance of a vintage vehicle."

Approaching the work methodically, and with not an insignificant amount of 'trial and error', Gary soon discovered fear of the unknown to be the biggest barrier to getting to grips with the upkeep of a classic. "The vast majority of jobs required when it comes to maintaining an older car can be carried out by owners at home," he says. "Granted, some tasks will be trickier than others, and it's true to say certain makes and models can be unusually complex, but with patience and common sense, owners can avoid horrific bills from specialists by jumping in with a set

of spanners and the will to succeed. Besides, doing so will foster a further understanding of the car being worked on, thereby encouraging an even more enjoyable driving experience."

At this stage in our conversation, it's clear Gary advocates custodians of classics to be 'hands on' when dealing with their four-wheeled friends, but what is it that drew him to his W113 and the wider back catalogue of retro Mercedes metal in the first place? "In the late 1980s, when even the earliest Pagoda was little more than twenty-five years old, it seemed to me as though the model was from a completely bygone era! The lashings of chrome, the polished wood interiors, the curvaceous styling. I was smitten. Compare a car from twenty-five years ago to what's on the road today, and there isn't anywhere near the same leap forward in terms of styling." He's got a point, and one which has seen his name appear on the logbook of many more old-school Benzes, desirable cars he went on to recommission from the comfort of his garage at home.

## DRIVING QUESTION

A variety of W108s came and went, each subjected to a nut and bolt restoration. The same was true of a W111 cabriolet and a rare 3.5-litre coupe variant of the same model. New Mercedes cars also graced the Mavers driveway during this time ("I bought a brand new CLK 320 and a new W124, both wonderful-looking drop-tops"), along with exotic older sports cars from Alfa Romeo and Porsche. Adopting the old adage *stick to what you know*, however, Gary always felt more comfortable under the bonnet or behind the wheel of a Mercedes, hence his decision to buy

**Below** Massively over engineered, the 600 successfully entered a marketplace previously dominated by Rolls-Royce

**Facing page** Gary isn't afraid to use his W100, with the car offering ample room to take him and his family wherever they might want to go



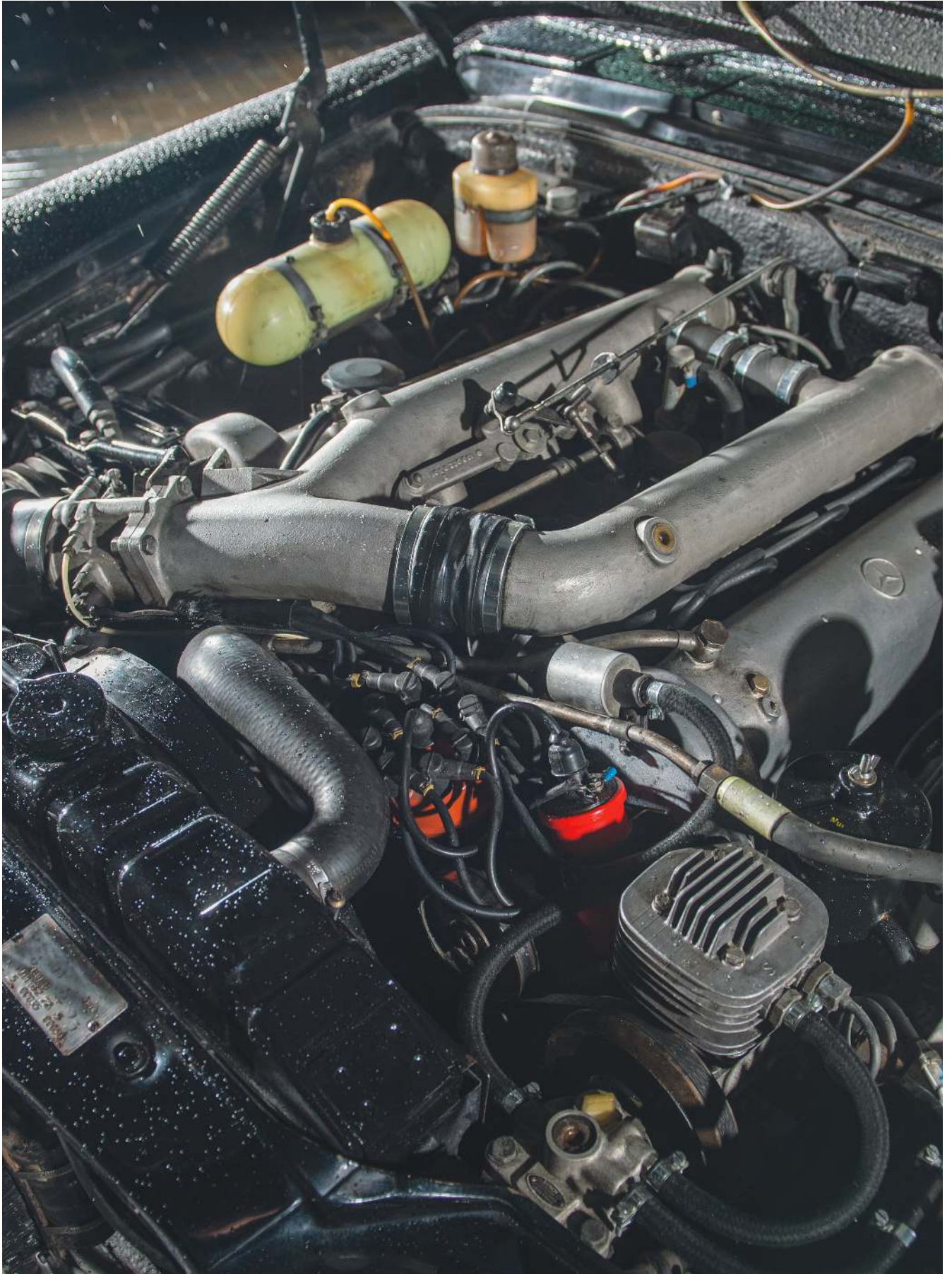


### Class act

The W100 600 is regarded as one of the finest cars of all time. 2,677 examples were assembled between 1964 and 1981, the vast majority (2,190) being short-wheelbase sedans. 304 long-wheelbase Pullman 600s were also produced, cars designed to be chauffeur driven. 124 six-door Pullmans were built, with the remaining fifty-nine 600s being Landaulets (a limousine with a convertible top over the rear passenger compartment). The W100 was a big hit with rich and famous musicians, actors and business tycoons. It also proved popular with royal households and governments all over the world.











## DRIVER

## Q&amp;A



## GARY MAVERS

**Occupation**  
Actor

**First Mercedes**  
W113 230 SL

**Best thing about your W100 600**  
It's an amazingly engineered car

**Worst thing about your W100 600**  
It's a model which can break you, both mentally and financially!



a short-wheelbase W100 600 import from South Africa a few years ago.

"I've owned three W100s to date, all rare right hand-drive models," he reveals, before going on to tell us working on *Der Große Mercedes* is quite unlike dealing with any other classic Merc. "The 600 is a completely different animal to a W113 or a W108. In many respects, you have to forget everything you know about spanning classic cars and start again. I liken working on a W100 to serving an apprenticeship. These are massively over-engineered cars and require you to fully commit. There are many, many things which can go wrong, none of which will forgive you for leaving them unattended."

## PLAY FOR TODAY

It's something the buyer of his African import quickly discovered. "I'm still in touch with the guy," smiles Gary, hinting at time-served knowledge of the ultra-luxury Benz making him a dream come true for 600 owners in need of technical support. "Don't get me wrong, working on a W100 isn't rocket science. Most jobs are fairly straightforward, but this is a Mercedes which started production almost sixty years ago, meaning there's always going to be something in need of attention. The key is not to be put off by fear of the car's convoluted hydraulic systems, which may only be in need of fresh seals when things go wrong."

He hopes his can-do approach to working with older cars encourages many more enthusiasts to think twice about shelling out for expensive repair







bills. "I remember asking a specialist how he managed to successfully complete what struck me as a fiddly job," continues the petrolhead from Huyton. "He clammed up, refusing to answer, other than to say 'with great difficulty, Gary'. I was frustrated at this lack of knowledge sharing, behaviour which prevents many owners from getting to grips with their cars when jobs need doing." Almost as a reaction to the barriers he – and many other owners of older cars – has experienced, he's been more than happy to work on fellow enthusiast-owned Mercedes machines, not least of all the flat-black 600 you see on these pages.

## RUNNING TIME

"It's a W100 sold new in Australia, hence the fantastic bodywork," he grins. "A friend bought the car after it had been imported to the UK, but he soon came to the conclusion he'd bitten off more than he could chew. I ended up getting stuck in, carrying out a few jobs until I was asked if I wanted to become the car's fourth owner." Before long, the stunning 6.3-litre V8 was making its way to chez Mavers, where it underwent even more corrective surgery. "There was a lot to do, but importantly, money had already been spent in the right places. For example, the massive history file accompanying the car highlights thirty-five grand spent renewing the pneumatic suspension, including wishbones, air bags, valves and all supporting hardware."

At the time of the W100's design, factory bigwigs favoured the use of the M189 three-litre

'big six', but due to the new model's massive size, weight and numerous energy-sapping hydraulic systems (powering the seats, sunroof, boot lid and automatically closing doors), the 300bhp M100 V8 was developed. The hand built single-cammer boasted double the displacement of the M189, although a significant number of ponies were required to take care of the 600's hydraulic-driven creature comforts.

"While nobody should be put off the idea of buying a W100, it's not a model not for the squeamish," smiles Gary. Talking of which, he's readying this particular 600 for sale. "I fancy a new challenge," he confirms. "I like the idea of restoring a W109 300 SEL 6.3, once the world's fastest four-door, a feat helped by the use of the 600's eight-cylinder engine." Helping to promote the sale of his enormous saloon is Norman Shum, founder of prestige car auction website, Norman's Pond (visit [normanspond.com](http://normanspond.com)).

In addition to his online automotive sales service, Norm is the main man behind Cars and Coffee Liverpool, an informal gathering of petrolheads in the North West. Norm and Gary met at one of the outfit's regular meets, leading to the appearance of the actor's W100 in the list of currently available classics on the Norman's Pond website. "I'll be sad to see the car go, but it's time to move on," he reflects. And with that, under the colourful illumination of Liverpool's Royal Liver Building, the *Grand Mercedes* disappears into the night, ably fulfilling its role as one of the most desirable classic cars ever built.

## Curtain call

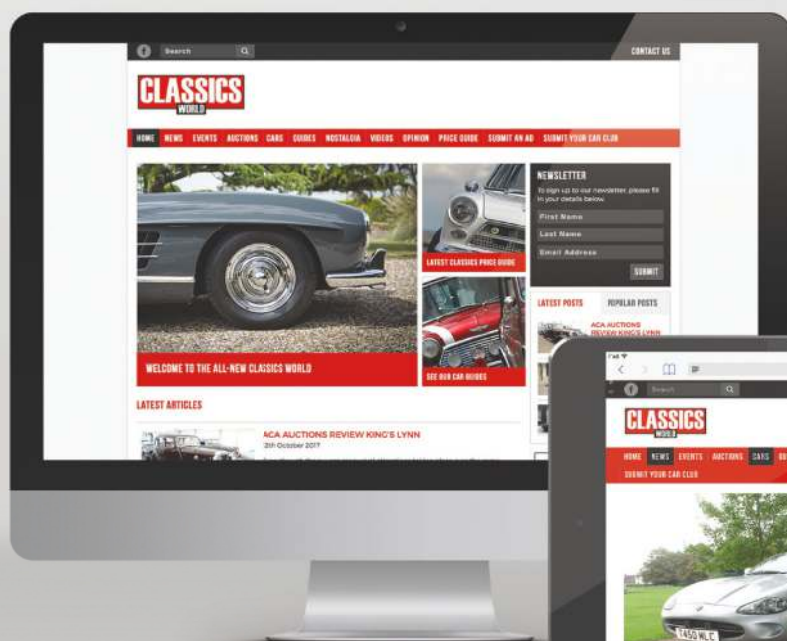
Premium online auction outfit, Norman's Pond, is no ordinary place to buy and sell vehicles with provenance. "It's a service offering input from the wider car-loving community, where bidders have access to a huge amount of information about each sale, plus the opportunity to interact with interested parties across social media," explains company founder, Norman Shum. "Ease of transaction is our unique selling point, where complete transparency and low commissions, not to mention access to super-detailed information about each car, is key," he adds. Visit the website at [normanspond.com](http://normanspond.com), where you can bid on Gary's superb 600.





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**TORQUE** *Specialist*

## Gerry Conway

Fitting modern electrical equipment in place of parts matching original specification will ensure your classic Mercedes operates better than ever...

**W**hen my brother and I started our car audio and security system business, Air and Sound (visit [airandsound.co.uk](http://airandsound.co.uk)), in London back in 1986, many of the cars now recognised as modern classics were brand new. As automotive electrical experts, we'd frequently be asked to install aftermarket kit into these factory fresh four-wheelers. Today, we see many cherished examples of these now-vintage vehicles roll in and out of our Notting Hill workshop, but respecting the value of originality, current owners are focused less on upgrading in-car entertainment and more on maintaining the operation of electrically operated standard features, such as power windows, heated seats and central locking.

It's true to say the passage of time hasn't been kind to many older cars. Wiring is certainly something which proves problematic when it comes to keeping a classic in rude health. It's not always decay or wear and tear causing issues, though. The high financial value of many older Mercedes models has resulted in enthusiasts and investors shelling out big bucks on recommissioning or restoration work. All too often, wiring that hasn't been moved for decades is suddenly disturbed by heavy-handed technicians. This less than sympathetic treatment of fragile equipment causes breakages which stop electrical systems operating successfully.

A common example of what I'm describing concerns the removal of a classic car's door panel. The wiring travelling into the door from elsewhere in the body is unlikely to have been displaced prior to the point the panel is unbolted, yet I've been asked to replace a high number of broken looms where this simple action has caused the failure of basic electrical functionality. Fortunately, even if Mercedes main dealers don't list the required motors, relays or harnesses in their catalogues of currently available parts, I'm able to repair, rebuild or replace faulty components wherever necessary.

Another challenge faced by owners of older cars wearing the three-pointed star is the presence of wiring and other hardware relating to defunct



security systems which haven't been removed (or installed!) properly. It can be surprising how much of a negative impact forgotten-about immobilisers or thought-to-be inactive alarms can have on your car, and I regularly find myself removing huge amounts of spaghetti-like cable from motors treated to what probably seemed like sensible upgrades in the 1980s and 1990s. If faced with an array of offending aftermarket equipment, it's best to remove all of it in an effort to return the car's electrics to their OEM state before advising the owner on a modern, fit for purpose security solution.

Today's technology has delivered highly efficient automotive electrical equipment suitable for retro-fitting into older vehicles, including classic Mercedes passenger cars. This kit can be particularly beneficial if the newer part is smaller in size than what it's designed to replace in a cramped engine bay. Far from taking away from the character of a retro ride, the act of fitting modern electrical components is likely to ensure your four-wheeled friend operates with increased levels of safety, reliability and improved performance long into the future. Feel free to contact me with your requirements.

**Above** Gerry and his brother founded Air and Sound in the mid-1980s, when many of the modern classics the company is now being asked to repair were sold as brand new cars!

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*Modern technology has delivered highly efficient automotive electrical equipment suitable for retro-fitting into older vehicles*



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**TORQUE** *Enthusiast*

## Phil Hillyard

Modifying your Mercedes isn't something you should shy away from. It's an activity which will result in a car perfectly suited to you as an individual...

**A**s a vehicle technician at an independent German marque specialist, I'm no stranger to the idea of modifying a fast car. Granted, not every customer that walks into the workshop I'm stationed at wants to alter their pride and joy by way of uprated suspension, bigger brakes, engine upgrades or a fresh set of wheels, but there are many Mercedes owners who like the idea of owning a car that isn't the same as the one parked on a driveway two streets away.

Change for change's sake can be a dangerous (and expensive!) pursuit, but there's nothing wrong with the idea of modifying a vehicle in order to suit your own driving style and the environment where you're most likely to be putting the pedal to the metal. For example, your Mercedes may spend most of its time at the track, in which case, chassis equipment designed for circuit use will undoubtedly provide you with a more satisfying drive than gear intended for the road.

When it comes to modifying, determine where you'd like to make changes that suit you as an individual, but also those that provide function in addition to form. Aftermarket bonnet vents are a good example of this, where toasty engine operating temperatures can be diminished by allowing hot air to escape through ventilation which can be styled in any number of ways with a variety of finishes. NACA ducts? No problem. Louvred metal? By all means, if that's what floats your boat! The choice is yours.

Modern, turbocharged AMG's are a modifiers dream come true thanks to a constantly increasing number of tuning parts hitting the aftermarket from manufacturers and tuners able to extract big bhp from today's performance Mercedes powerplants. As has been highlighted across recent issues of *Mercedes Driver* magazine, a significant hike in horsepower brought about by updates to mappable factory engine management is far from unusual. Moreover, the ability to manipulate the electronic brain of a modern Mercedes in order to unlock a high number of trapped ponies by pairing software updates with traditional hardware is one of the reasons models like the A45 AMG have proved so massively popular, and why many performance car enthusiasts are abandoning the



marques they've spent years aligning themselves with in favour of this new breed of Mercedes metal.

Of course, Benzes have an enviable reputation for being so good from factory that many owners like to leave their cars exactly as they rolled off the production line. There's nothing wrong with doing so, especially if you're dealing with a naturally aspirated car unlikely to deliver a huge increase in engine performance regardless of the time or money you care to throw at it. That's said, many of us will always be looking for ways to improve and personalise our cars, no matter the amount of poke they deliver. After all, what might be perfect for one driver isn't necessarily a configuration ideally suited to the next.

Have a go at achieving a setup unique to you and your ride. A more comfortable steering wheel, more responsive brake pads, grippier tyres, a free-flowing exhaust, rims you haven't seen on another Mercedes. These are straightforward modifications that promise to improve the amount of fun you have with your car. I draw the line at beaded seat covers and furry dice, but each to their own!

**Above** Tuning and tweaking an old or new Mercedes is huge fun and is likely to produce a car that reflects your personality more than stock spec ever can

*Many of us will always be looking for ways to improve and personalise our cars, no matter the amount of poke they deliver*





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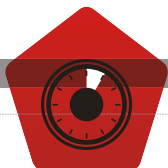
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FIVE MINUTES WITH...

# Sean McGarry



## Who are you and what do you do?

I'm Sean McGarry, Managing Director at engine tuning and mapping specialist, SM Tuning.

## When was SM Tuning established?

I founded the company in 2013. Prior to that time, I was working as a vehicle technician at a garage. I've been playing around with cars since the age of eleven, and I taught myself advanced computer programming skills during my early teens. Put simply, vehicle ECU tuning is the coming together of my two lifelong passions!

## Where is the company based?

Live mapping is a huge part of my business, meaning I travel all over the country to meet customers at their homes or place of work to carry out the jobs they've commissioned me to do. If clients want to come to me, however, I can work on their car out of the advanced rolling road facility I have permanent access to in Stevenage.

## What Mercedes cars do you frequently work on?

A45 AMGs and their derivatives are massively popular and hugely tuneable. I see a lot of them!

**Right** Sean extracts extra power and improves the fuel economy of many modern German sports cars, including AMGs, BMWs wearing the M badge and various Porsches

## What should I choose? Live mapping or a session with you on the rolling road?

This is the question I get asked more than any other. The primary benefit of live mapping is the fact I come to you, meaning you don't need to book time out of your work or home life in order for me to tune your car. Many of my customers, however, like the idea of the rolling road because of its ability to deliver a printable power graph. Live mapping figures are calculations based on ECU datalogging information. In short, there's really no difference between the end result in either working environment, other than the fact a rolling road will provide you with a piece of paper featuring a series of graphs and a sequence of numbers!

## How has your business changed over the years?

Due to OEM ECUs becoming increasingly complex, my job is one of constant learning. Long gone are the days when a few basic wires connected an ECU to the rest of a car. I'm now dealing with vehicles loaded with fibre optic cables, not to mention electronic brains demanding advanced programming. As you'd expect, the tools I use have also changed significantly over the years. It's a case of having to constantly reinvest in the business in order to keep abreast of rapidly advancing automotive technology.

## What's your favourite Mercedes?

The SLR McLaren. I've been a fan ever since I saw the model being put through its paces on *Top Gear*!

## Can we follow your adventures online?

Mercedes Driver readers are invited to visit the SM Tuning Facebook page and my website, which can be found at [smtuning.co.uk](http://smtuning.co.uk)

## Thanks for your time, Sean. It's appreciated!





## PROJECT

# FRESH START

K192 VBD returns to our pages as we get ready to prepare the 2.6-litre four-door for a summer of fun

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY **Dan Furr**

**R**egular readers will remember the W201 190E 2.6 pictured on these pages from its star turn in earlier editions of *Mercedes Driver*. The car was intended to be a project reported on in every issue of the magazine, but due to a change in personnel and a new direction for the title, the 'baby Benz' was put to one side while we concentrated on the relaunch.

As a fan of classic touring cars (I'm

the proud owner of a genuine BTCC Super Touring machine, but that's a story for another day!), the W201 was always a Mercedes I was fond of. Even without the chunky adornments of the 2.3-16 and 2.5-16 DTM-inspired variants, the fab four-door is a good-looking machine, especially when dressed in the twin-tone colour scheme decorating the *Mercedes Driver* 190E, a high-mileage-but-tidy example loaded with perforated grey leather. The opportunity to reintroduce the car to our readers







**Above** The overall condition of our baby Benz is excellent considering the near 200k miles it has covered

**Right** Clarion head unit is the only aftermarket part present

**Facing page** Inline-six will be subjected to a full service in advance of our next issue



was impossible resist, and one which gave me the perfect excuse to rack up plenty of seat time in the boxy six-cylinder saloon.

Approaching the project with a view to 'starting again', I decided the best thing would be for me to live with the car for a while prior to it reappearing in print. I reasoned the miles generated while out and about on *Mercedes Driver* business would give me ample opportunity to discover which jobs I could add to a 'nice to have' list after drawing up a 'need to have' collection of tasks. Consequently, I can confirm that while the K-plater operates largely without fault, I've identified a series of complaints requiring remedial work. **22**



## PROJECT

The rear section of exhaust, for example, is blowing badly. Worse still, the heater matrix has failed, resulting in pink coolant keeping the front passenger footwell damp if the blowers are asked to pump warm air into the cabin. Elsewhere in the car's comfortable cockpit, attention is required ahead of the steering wheel, where instrument illumination is completely extinguished. Drat!

For some bizarre reason or another, a previous owner has seen fit to wrap the car's alloys in rubber with profile differing from wheel to wheel. The front tyres are too big, ensuring contact with the rear of the nearby bumper if asked to turn full lock. The wheels themselves would benefit from professional refurbishment, although that's a job squarely on the aforementioned 'nice

to have' list for the time being!

I was pleased to see the factory first aid kit present and correct. In fact, save for an aftermarket head unit, the car is pleasingly original. A few scrapes and scuffs, plus a discoloured rear bumper, could do with attention to lift the appearance of the old girl, although I'll wait until I've carried out a full service and fixed the previously mentioned faults before busying myself with any of the cosmetic work.

I'm looking forward to getting stuck into the various jobs which need doing. I've already ordered a new heater matrix, so expect a report on what I hope will be a successful fix in a forthcoming issue of the magazine. Subscribe and never miss an update. Point t'internet at the website [bit.ly/subscribeMD](http://bit.ly/subscribeMD)





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2004 BMW E46 318Ci SE 2.0 Convertible, Auto, Silver Grey, 51500 miles, ..... £5,795



1997(P) BMW E36 320i Convertible Auto, Samoa Blue, 62000 miles, FSH, ..... £4,995



1999 BMW Z3 1.9 Roadster, Boston Green, Green/Beige hide, 34000 miles, ..... £5,495



2018 Skoda Karoq 1.5 TSI SE L, Candy White, 1 owner, 5200 miles, ..... £21,995



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2001 Mercedes CLK320 Cabriolet, Brilliant Silver, 76000 miles, FSH, ..... £3,995

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# John Haynes OBE

The man whose name is synonymous with the maintenance of cars

WORDS **Malcolm Nash** PHOTOGRAPHY **Various**

**J**ohn Haynes, the entrepreneur and creator of the Haynes Manual, founder of the Haynes Publishing Group PLC and the Haynes International Motor Museum, passed away peacefully, surrounded by family, on the evening of Friday 8th February, aged 80, after a short illness. He was born on 25th March 1938 in Ceylon, where his father was the manager of a tea plantation. From an early age, John had a passion for cars, and as a child he loved nothing more than riding around the plantation with his father in their beloved Morris 8 saloon.

In 1950, John moved to the UK with his brother, David, to attend boarding school in Kent. It was at school John's entrepreneurial spirit developed and flourished. He persuaded his House Master to let him miss rugby lessons so he could spend his time converting an Austin 7 into a lightweight 'Special'. He eventually sold the car, making a reasonable profit, and owing to immense interest in the project (over 150 replies to the advert) he decided to produce a booklet showing fellow enthusiasts how he'd built the car. The initial print run of 250 copies sold out in just ten days.

After leaving school, John joined the RAF. He learned business management skills and successfully developed and competitively raced several race cars, including his Elva Courier, which is currently on display in the Haynes International Motor Museum. It was while in the armed forces 'Johnny' met his future wife, Annette. On the way to their wedding, he stopped to buy her an IBM Proportional Space Type Writer as a present. Although not the most romantic of gifts, Annette was delighted with his practical choice, setting the stage for their long and bright future together.

Years later, an RAF colleague bought a 'Frogeye' Sprite in poor condition. He asked



John to assist with the rebuild. John agreed, and quickly realised the official factory manual wasn't written with the average car owner in mind. He bought a camera and captured the process of dismantling and rebuilding the Sprite's engine. The use of step-by-step photo sequences linked to exploded diagrams would become the trusted hallmark of Haynes Manuals. The first – for the Austin Healey Sprite – was published in 1966. Amazingly, the initial print run of 3,000 units sold out in less than three months! To date, over 200 million Haynes Manuals have been sold worldwide.

The rapid growth of John's business culminated in the Haynes Publishing Group floating on the London Stock Exchange in 1979. Success meant he was able to become a prolific collector of cars. In 1985, he founded the aforementioned museum in Somerset as an Educational Charitable Trust,

bequeathing his collection to the charity in order for it to be held for the benefit of the nation. John continued to support the museum throughout his life by donating cars and funding growth, actions resulting in a collection of more than 400 vehicles enjoyed by over 125,000 people every year.

In 1995, John was awarded an OBE for services to publishing. Until 2010, he served as Chairman of the Haynes Publishing Group and continued to play an active role as Founder Director of the business. In this occupation, he supported the firm's executive team as it created world leading content and data solutions serving both drivers and professional mechanics. He combined his role with that of Chairman of Trustees of the Haynes International Motor Museum.

John is survived by his wife Annette, his brother and sister, his two sons, daughters-in-law and his five grandchildren. His middle son, Marc, sadly passed away in October 2016.

Enthusiastic petrolheads across the globe have found themselves buried in the pages of a Haynes Manual at one time or another. John leaves a huge legacy and has helped successive generations of those whose blood has its own octane rating. He will be greatly missed. Mr Haynes, we salute you! 🇬🇧



*Enthusiastic petrolheads across the globe have found themselves buried in the pages of a Haynes manual at one time or another*





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# Talking **corners**

Do you want your Mercedes to corner quickly? In this article, we present our top ten tips for ensuring your pride and joy handles as though it's on rails...



Performance in a straight line is all very well, but being able to corner effectively is equally as important if you hope to cover distance quickly. Best of all, you don't need a particularly powerful car to tackle corners at speed. What you do need, however, is a well-balanced chassis featuring carefully considered enhancements, be they replacement genuine parts or aftermarket components manufactured to custom specification.

Take note of the pointers on the following pages and be amazed at how you can keep up with drivers of more powerful cars when they have to slam on the stoppers in order to make their way around bends without losing talent!



## 1. TYRES

How often do you check your car's tyre pressures? Not only does the amount of air in tyres affect handling, it also makes a massive difference to fuel consumption. Your car's handbook will tell you the recommended pressures you should be filling to, as will a Haynes workshop manual. If you've just had new tyres fitted, be sure to check pressures after the work is complete; many tyre fitters will fit 30psi in every corner, which is unlikely to be suitable for your Mercedes. It's also worth seeking the opinion of other owners and enthusiasts to get an idea of what the most successful pressures appear to be for your combination of car and tyre.

Tyres are arguably the most important component in any handling setup. It doesn't matter how much you've spent on other equipment if you're running poor quality rubber. You can read our handy guide to the design, development, construction and performance of various tyre designs by ordering a copy of the January/February issue of *Mercedes*

*Driver* (visit [bit.ly/issuesmd](http://bit.ly/issuesmd)), but regardless of the make and model of black circles you've fitted, ensure they're in good overall condition. After all, as tyres age, rubber compounds perish, resulting in inhibited grip.

Go for the very best tyres you can afford. The difference between budget and premium products is pronounced, and the hike in price may not be as wild as you might think. At the end of the day, tyres are the only part of your car in direct contact with the road. Don't be a cheapskate.

Lastly, it might be worth looking at an alternative to the manufacturer's recommended tyre size. The standard profile isn't always best for cornering and won't have taken into consideration your preferred driving style, modifications or the environment where you intend to put your car through its paces. Once again, chat to fellow enthusiasts and owners whose cars exhibit the kind of performance you'd like from your own four-wheeled friend.



## 2. WHEELS

Many aftermarket wheels are heavier than Mercedes factory alloys, a trait which will add to the unsprung weight of your car and affect cornering. If you're working to a tight budget, consider a set of wheels from another car in the Mercedes product line. You can guarantee factory quality will be top-notch, plus you're likely to find used OEM wheels cheaper than many new designs. Speak to Wheel Genie ([wheelgenie.co.uk](http://wheelgenie.co.uk)) in Huntingdon if the second-hand alloys you buy are in need of professional refurbishment. If, however, you're determined to get hold of new wheels in an effort to make your Benz stand out in a crowded car park, try to find out the weight of the product before parting with your hard-earned cash.



## 3. STEERING AND SUSPENSION SUPPORTING COMPONENTS

How many people spend hundreds (maybe thousands) of pounds on shiny coilovers, yet fail to address the condition of supporting steering and suspension equipment which may have been in place when the host vehicle rolled off the production line? Before shelling out for new shocks and springs, check the condition of basic suspension components. Replace with new or uprated parts and be amazed at the difference in steering response.

Raise the car and look for movement from the front wheels. Free play can be found from track rod ends, strut tops, wheel bearings and ball joints. Complaints will manifest themselves at the steering wheel and through knocking noises over rough surfaces. Check the rubbers on track rod ends and ball joints for splits or leaks and use a pry bar to check for play in control arms. Replace where necessary, but avoid cheap wishbones like the plague.



## 4. ALIGNMENT

We covered the importance of correcting and customising alignment in our last issue (order a copy at [bit.ly/issuesmd](http://bit.ly/issuesmd)), but it's worth reemphasising how your car's tyres can tell you a lot about the state of its 'tracking'. In short, if you've got heavy tread wear on the inner or outer edges of your tyres, the chances are alignment is out. This should always be checked and corrected after suspension upgrades, but as we previously suggested, it's a feature of your car worth getting checked annually due to the negative impact hitting potholes, bumping kerbs and general wear can have. Properly aligned wheels will deliver sharper handling, improved fuel economy and greater stability in a straight line.

### CAMBER

In short, this is the angle of the wheel and tyre when viewed from the front or rear of the car. You may have heard the terms negative camber (inward tilt) and positive camber (outward tilt) being used when discussing chassis settings. When correcting camber, the bias towards negative or positive tilt will depend on your suspension setup, your driving style and the intended application. Unwanted camber misalignment can occur simply as a consequence of worn bearings, ball joints or incorrectly fitted parts.

### TOE

Toe refers to the angle of the wheel and tyre when looking down from above. Toe-in is the term used when a tyre points inwards, toe-out is used to describe a tyre pointing outwards. A commonly used point of reference to demonstrate what's meant by toe is a pair of feet (of course!). Look down at yours. Imagine them as being a bird's eye view of your car's front tyres. Angle your feet inwards. This is a demonstration of toe-in. Now angle your feet outwards. This is the effect of toe-out.

### CASTER

You've looked at your car's wheels and tyres from the front (caster) and from above (toe). Now it's time to view them side-on! Caster is arguably the most difficult to understand of the three main areas of concern when getting to grips with alignment. The term refers to the displacement of the steering axis from the vertical axis when viewed from the side of your car. If positive caster is present, the steering axis will tilt towards the driver. Negative caster tilts towards the nose of your car. During alignment, caster adjustment encourages self-centring steering, which helps with straight-line stability at speed.

## 5. WEIGHT

Have you considered going on a diet? We're kidding, but reduced overall weight is a simple and cost-effective way to improve handling. For example, think about emptying all the rubbish you're carrying around your car's luggage compartment. Do you really need a metric ton of audio equipment? What about that rear bench?

Most people wouldn't be able to tell the difference between a car producing 300bhp and one producing 350bhp, but everyone can feel the effect of reduced weight. Just driving without a passenger in a car can make it feel quicker, so consider whether you need a second front seat. For the sake of undoing a few bolts, you might end up with a far sharper Mercedes.

Of course, not everyone wants to strip the cabin of their car. It's up to you how far you want to go, but you'll be surprised at how much bulk a stack of trim can amount to. If you are happy to make big changes in this department – perhaps you're thinking about participating in track days or challenging road trips – consider replacing glass with polycarbonate windows. Also think about removing heavy carpets and sound deadening material. Your Mercedes will be noisier and won't retain heat as well as it used to, but it'll sure feel more responsive to your demands!



## 6. FULL SUSPENSION KIT

Cheap coilovers are simply a way of getting your car to sit lower to the ground. They'll do little to improve handling, and in some cases, will have a disastrous effect on the way your car behaves in corners. Yes, fitting them will almost certainly make your Mercedes slower.

At the upper end of the scale, coilover kits from GAZ Shocks, Bilstein and KW Automotive (all three boast a strong line of products for Mercedes cars of all ages) offer a level of adjustment and control allowing you to get the best out of your car on the road and at the track. Ride height, bump and rebound will be configurable by way of a simple on-damper or remote adjuster.

Many coilover kits come with combined damper and spring assemblies for the front with a separate damper and spring setup at the rear. An adjustable spring platform allows you to dial in your preferred ride height at the arse end of the car, but make sure you know what you're buying. A company's flagship coilover kit might sound appealing, but you might be looking at a product designed for hard track or competition use. A less aggressive coilover kit from the same manufacturer might be more appropriate. For example, GAZ GHA adjustable coilovers are ideal for street cars which occasionally venture onto the track, whereas GAZ Gold coilovers are designed for cars which only see road use if they're being driven to and from a circuit.

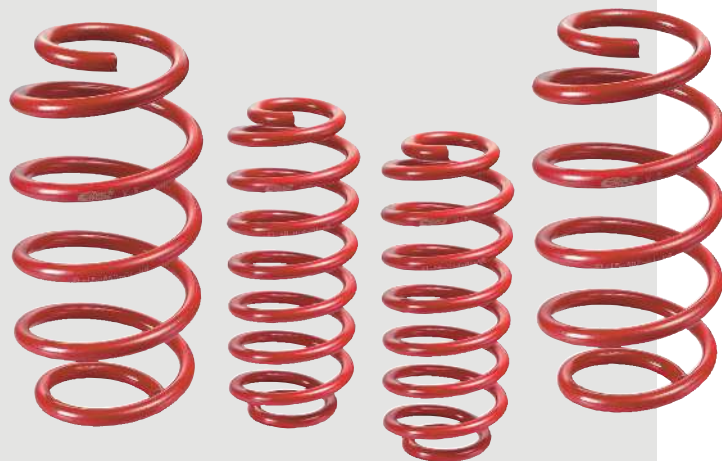
Whether you opt for coilovers or fixed dampers, a full suspension kit is usually the best way to ensure optimum handling. Put simply, a kit complete with all springs and dampers will have been designed for each part to work together in harmony. The brand and specification you choose is down to personal preference. Try to experience seat time in cars equipped with different kits to see which you like best.

## 7. COIL SPRINGS

Up-rated lowering springs may put a strain on standard shock absorbers on older cars. Generally speaking, if the intention is to improve the cornering and handling abilities of your Mercedes, a marginal drop in ride height is preferred. Tired dampers should be replaced alongside springs.

You may find you only wish to replace your car's springs if they're broken, are delivering a horrible ride or are too low as a consequence of a previous owner's badly executed modifications. Like tyres, you get what you pay for. Talk to

other owners about the kit they run on their cars. There's a huge range of brands and products to choose from. Coilover kits offer height adjustability, but there are companies who will make springs to your exact specification. Direnza and Eibach, for example, offer a range of spring options for Mercedes cars. The latter will make custom-profile springs if there's enough demand. Similarly, [coilsprings.co.uk](http://coilsprings.co.uk) provides a bespoke spring manufacturing service for road, rally and race applications suiting new and classic cars.





## 8. ANTI-ROLL BARS

Many Mercedes owners are lucky enough to be able to take advantage of superior anti-roll bars designed and produced by aftermarket suspension equipment manufacturers, such as Eibach and Whiteline. In some instances, thicker OEM anti-roll bars can be transplanted from more powerful cars in the Mercedes back catalogue. Have a search online.

As the name suggests, the effect of a thicker anti-roll bar is less body roll at the end of the car the bar is fitted. Essentially, the part (also known as a sway bar) helps suspension travel at one side of the car to be mirrored on the other. The effect is felt during cornering, where the outside spring is compressed. The anti-roll bar attempts to balance this behaviour by compressing the inside spring, resulting in flatter cornering. The larger the bar, the greater the effect.



## 9. POLYBUSHES

Changing standard (and often worn) bushes for polyurethane parts can make an enormous difference to how responsive your car feels during cornering. The trade-off is stiffer suspension, but don't think you need to fit a full complement of uprated bushes to gain benefits. For example, simply changing steering rack, anti-roll bar or wishbone bushes can have a positive impact on the way your car behaves. Not all polybushes are created equal, though. Stick with known manufacturers, such as Powerflex or SuperPro. Not only will you be able to take comfort from the fact the parts are made by a company supplying world famous motorsport teams, you'll also be able to choose between different compounds suited to street or track use.



## 10. SHELL STRENGTHENING

A strut brace is a simple, bolt-on device which works by limiting 'flex' between the front or rear struts. The benefits will differ between models of Mercedes. A chassis brace works in a similar fashion, claspings the underbody to prevent movement under load. A more extreme example of shell strengthening is to add extra welds to the body, either with stitch welds to strengthen joints or with add-on strengthening plates. Another modification commonly applied to older cars is to stitch-weld joints in the engine bay and areas known to suffer stress, such as those surrounding suspension turrets and the steering rack.

We couldn't pull together a feature about improving cornering without mentioning limited-slip differentials. Speak to anyone in charge of a Mercedes fitted with a limited-slipper – or chat to anyone who has experience behind the wheel of a car before and after a limited-slip differential has been fitted – and we'll guarantee they rave about the positive impact the part has made to the way their car behaves. There are different limited-slip differential designs to choose from, with some more suited to permanent motorsport use than others. We'll cover differentials and how they work in a forthcoming issue of *Mercedes Driver*. Subscribe at [bit.ly/subscribeMD](http://bit.ly/subscribeMD)

## CONTACTS

**GAZ Shocks** [gazshocks.com](http://gazshocks.com) 01268 724585

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# Mercedes DRIVER

PRESENTS

## R107 & R129

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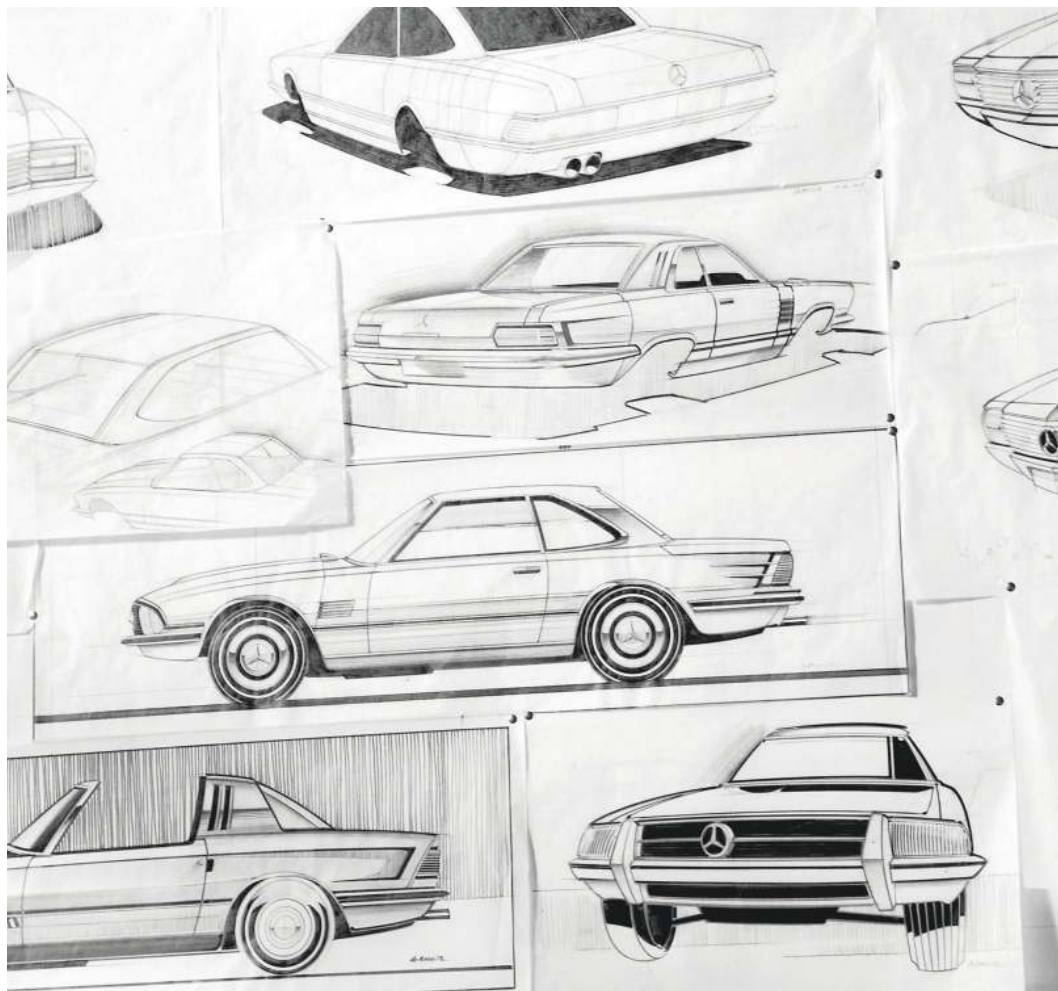
# PACE AND GRACE

The first in a new wave of Benzes, the R107 went on to define the long-legged nature of our favourite manufacturer's elegant GT

WORDS **Richard Gooding** PHOTOGRAPHY **Various**



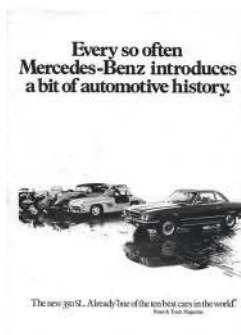




**W**hen the R107-generation SL appeared in 1971, it had to step into the big boots of the W113 Pagoda, a 1960s style icon and one of the most celebrated Mercedes cars ever built. The new arrival also had supreme heritage to live up to thanks to the success of the W121 190 SL and W198 300 SL models. No pressure, then!

Shifting the focus of the *Sport Leicht* (or *Super Leicht*, depending on your persuasion), the W113's six-cylinder engines were ditched, replaced by the brawnier V8s used to great effect in the W116 S-Class. Not immediately considered to be as beautiful as the outgoing SL, the new model was still a handsome machine. Penned by Joseph Gallitzendörfer and Friedrich Geiger, its sharper looks were bang up to date for a decade defined by empowerment, eccentric fashion and lots of brown and orange. Against this backdrop, the R107 was a sleek and stylish sportster.

Presented to the press at Hockenheim on 14th April 1971, the third-gen SL previewed the new look of the Mercedes range to come. Defining features of the delicious drop-top included its horizontal halogen H4 headlamps and huge

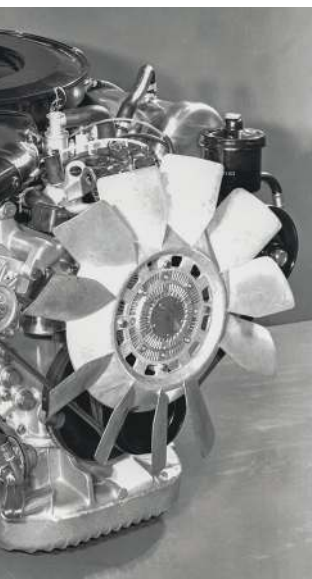


**Above** Sketches penned during early development of the 350 SL show clear styling cues carried into production

indicators, as well as ribbed taillights less resistant to a build up of dirt. In fact, so smart was the R107's presence, its appearance barely changed during eighteen years of production, highlighting what a runaway success the car was for its manufacturer. This despite an original purchase price twice as much as you'd expect to pay for the svelte Jaguar E-Type!

## SAFETY STAR

Bank vault build standards went some way towards justifying the price, as did the time honoured Mercedes values of comfort, elegance, sportiness and tradition. Just like the W113, the new boulevard cruiser had the option of a removable hard top in addition to the standard soft top. Interestingly, an experimental Targa top was made in 1974, but failed to reach production. The SL for the 1970s also took the W113's standard-setting sports car safety to a new level; protection on the road was beginning to become a consideration of paramount importance for car makers at the time of the R107's design, with revised road safety legislation threatening to kill off roadsters for good unless manufacturers upped their game. Mercedes made sure the R107's crash performance was ahead of its time; crumple



## The 197bhp 350 SL kicked off the proceedings, borrowing the potent 3.5-litre M116 V8 from the W108/W109 SEL

### Closed case

A few months after the R107's launch, Mercedes introduced the C107, a fixed-roof coupe version of the then-new SL. The 350 SLC and 450 SLC were full four-seaters and replaced the W111 coupe. A CL forerunner, the SLC's wheelbase was 360mm longer than the SL in order to accommodate the rear pews. Impressively, weight was only increased by 70kg. Before the C107 was killed off by the W126-based SEC in 1981, the 'homologation special' 450 SLC 5.0 joined the range in readiness for the 1978 WRC. A new V8, alloy bonnet and boot, rubber spoiler and front splitter identified the car.

zones were boosted beyond those of the Pagoda, with fifty-percent stiffer A-pillars, deformable interior switches, disc brakes in each corner, a padded dashboard and a matching steering wheel. The fuel tank was positioned above the rear axle to avoid impact in the event of an accident. For the first time, optional three-point inertia reel seat belts attached directly to the seat also appeared. Forget sports car, the R107 was a safety star.

### LOTUS EATER

The 197bhp 350 SL kicked off proceedings, borrowing the potent 3.5-litre M116 lump from the W108/W109 300 SEL 3.5. Performance was on the money, the Bosch Jetronic fuel-injected unit capable of an 8.8 second dash to 62mpg from rest with a top speed of 130mph. Little faster than the 280 SL it replaced, more torque meant an easier drive. Famous fans included Lotus head honcho, Colin Chapman.

With competition including the BMW 3.0 CS, Citroën SM and Jensen Interceptor, the 450 SL joined the fray in the spring of 1973. The bigger-engined R107's 4.5-litre M117 eight-pot produced 222bhp and was cribbed from the W116, although 350 SLs for the American domestic market had been powered by a

**Top right** W198 300 SL 'Gullwing', R107 and W29 500K represent almost forty years in the history of Mercedes sports car production







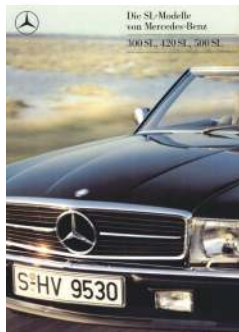


lower-compression 4.5-litre lump since 1972 in a bid to combat emissions regulation. The US has always been, and remains, a crucial market for the SL, and right up to its demise at the end of almost two decades of continuous production, the Stateside R107 was packed with anti-smog kit and boxy Federal-spec impact bumpers.

## ECO WARRIOR


The reactionary arrival of the 280 SL in July 1974 was fuelled by the previous year's global energy crisis. The 182bhp straight-six engined car would be a big SL seller, with W113 devotees being among those most vocal in welcoming the smaller-capacity R107. In contrast to the 2.8-litre car, 1980's 500 SL was a different beast altogether; the 237bhp five-litre beast married the all-aluminium engine from the 450 SLC 5.0 to the pretty convertible's body. Once it picked up its petticoat, the 500 SL could sprint to 62mph from a standing start in 7.8 seconds before romping to a top speed of 140mph.

A slight nip and tuck saw the 350 SL replaced by the 215bhp 380 SL, with further efficiencies including the arrival of a five-speed manual gearbox. Updated self-shifting autos now had four-speed units to play with, while tweaks



**Top** Immaculate engine bay of a 300 SL, the hugely popular entry level R107 available to buy from September 1985

to fuel economy in 1981 allowed greater efficiency from the big V8s. This update came ahead of bigger revisions; in 1985, the 185bhp 300 SL became the successor to the 280 SL, while the 380 SL made way for the 420 SL. The introduction of the latter is of particular note, not least of all because the 215bhp model could be specified with a catalytic converter, a part soon rolled out across the range. More modern Bosch fuel injection (KE Jetronic) became standard, with the system's engine management computer controlling the air/fuel mixture and idle speed. Environmental concerns may have been at the front of the Mercedes engineering team's minds, but factory bosses allowed the 500 SL to continue for another year, subscribing to the 'there ain't no replacement for displacement' adage!

From 1977, joining the R107s emerging from Sindelfingen, forty SLs per month were built in South Africa by United Car and Diesel Distributors (UCDD). An even bigger capacity SL landed in the shape of 1986's 560 SL. With 227bhp from its 5.6-litre V8, the US, Canadian, Australian and Japanese-only model actually had less power than the 500 due to ever-tighter emissions laws, which saw version of the American R107 sink to power as low as 155bhp. 



Technological boosts across the range, however, included the inheritance of equipment from the then-new W124; new four-piston brakes with larger discs and suspension added to the R107's late-in-life appeal.

## DIFFERENT CLASS

The second-longest running Mercedes model of all time – beaten only by the G-Wagen – the R107 ceased production in 1989 after an impressive eighteen-year innings. The 237,287th and last R107 (a Signal Red 500 SL) rolled off the line at Sindelfingen in 4th August that year, five months after its R129 successor arrived on the factory rollers. With a reputation for being bombproof, the R107 remains a coveted sports car regarded as a modern classic, a reputation partly forged by appearances on the small screen during the 1980s. Think Patrick Duffy in *Dallas*, Stephanie Powers in *Hart to Hart*, Michael Brandon in *Dempsey & Makepeace*. They were all filmed putting the SL through its paces. Best of all, even though you might not consider the R107 to be as graceful as a W198 or as beautiful as a W113, it's an SL far more attainable. Get out there and release your inner Bobby Ewing or Jennifer Hart. You won't regret it!

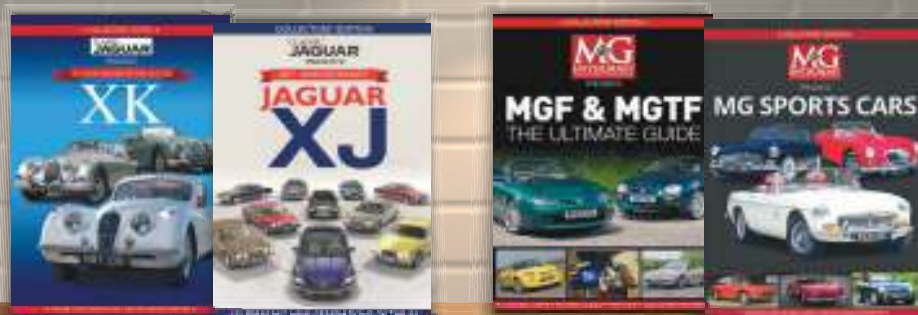
## Rally roadster

The R107 seems an unlikely candidate for a rally car, but that's just what it was set to be. The model's 450 SLC coupe-bodied sibling was super-successful in the 1978 WRC. A five-litre C107 ran in 1979, 1980 and 1981, with the car's winning ways leading to the development of the R107 500 SL rally raider, its lighter weight and shorter wheelbase aiding agility. With Lexan windows, a roll cage and a hard-top, the SL found itself being readied for action with Walter Röhrl and Ari Vatanen waiting in the wings. Sadly, funding cuts meant the four rallying R107 SLs built never turned a wheel in competition.





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**R107 vs W113**





# ROLE REVERSAL

The W113 is considered feminine, the R107 often thought of as masculine. Time with both models challenges those stereotypes.

WORDS **Martin Puthz** PHOTOGRAPHY **Reiner Ratzke**





**P**aoul Bracq can sit back and relax. "The best judge is time," says the legendary French automotive designer, commenting with the deft assurance of a man who knows most of the cars he's shaped are counted among the most beautiful of the twentieth century.

Clearly, he has every reason to be confident, although at the launch of arguably his most enduring design, the W113 SL, the pretty Pagoda was far from the celebrated icon it is today.

"A petite puppy" is how one scribe referred to the car after its introduction at the 1963 Geneva Motor Show, while "feminine" was a term of reference commonly used when talking about the new *Sport Leicht*. You may not see this label as being negative when it comes to appreciating the finer qualities of drop-tops, but despite dazzling sales figures, factory bosses weren't entirely thrilled about the way journalists were promoting the character of the W113. Consequently, when the model's successor was planned, the stylists in Sindelfingen were told in no uncertain terms the new SL needed to be far more masculine than its predecessor.

The idea of a car being a 'he' or 'she' was nothing new. Indeed, the Pagoda's graceful lines, curves in all the right places and stylishly distributed chrome

**An SL screaming for a driver with a headscarf and sunglasses, whose manicured hands close around the large, thin rim of the steering wheel**

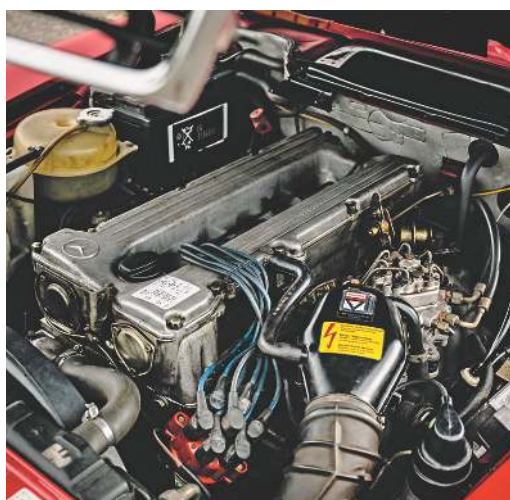
## Sport star

Regularly included in lists of the most stylish sports cars ever built, the W113 Pagoda was popular with established motorsport teams in rallying. In 1963, a 230 SL driven by Eugen Bohringer won the 6,600km Spa-Sofia-Leige rally stretching from Belgium to Bulgaria. The car currently resides in the Mercedes museum in Stuttgart. Later, touring car driver, Dieter Glemser, entered a modified 230 SL into the 1965 Acropolis Rally. Unfortunately, he was given the wrong directions at a crucial point of the competition, costing him a comfortable lead!



**Above** Few cars are as beautiful as the W113, a Bracq design exuding class through the sensitive use of clean lines and simple exterior decoration





jewellery dispense with virile muscle play. Such is the glamour of a W113, it's an SL screaming for a driver with a headscarf and sunglasses, whose manicured hands close around the large, thin rim of the steering wheel. Nevertheless, if one shies away from the gloriously beautiful shape of the Pagoda, instead referring only to factory marketing shtick reducing Bracq's baby to the role of peppy boulevard cruiser, the true – if somewhat unintended – nature of the car is completely missed.

## GET A GRIP

Effortlessly, the gorgeously presented steering wheel glides through the driver's fingers. Changes in direction are not only accurately implemented, but they're also observed without delay. On a fast straight, the chrome nose rises skyward, the six cylinders up front raise their voice and the car proceeds at satisfying pace. The low windscreen encourages fast-paced air to ruffle driver and passenger barnets, while the wide-track chassis – a shortened development of the W111 'Fintail' platform – promotes surefootedness, even when tackling corners at high speed.

The cockpit is a delightful mix of delicate chrome rings, silvery ventilation louvres and perforated leather seats upholstered just as tightly as an

The same complainers who thought of the outgoing model as too dainty at the time of its release now committed their less than positive thoughts about the R107's looks to print

**Above** The R107's long body cuts a fine figure and offers stacks of luggage space, making it the ideal grand tourer



## States of play

Often mistaken as an aftermarket upgrade, R107s destined for the American domestic market sported quad headlights due to territory-specific road safety legislation. From 1974, further changes to US highways laws dictated the need for deep rubber 'impact' bumpers across all cars, including the output of luxury brands, such as Mercedes, Porsche and Rolls-Royce. Further US-specific R107 activity included the shipping of cars with 4.5-litre V8 engines in order to meet strict emissions laws, although low compression pistons helped to maintain adequate performance.



expensive horse saddle. The Pagoda makes driving fun, but it's also a sensual experience of what Mercedes was known for at the time of the W113's release: unconditional quality. The body is reassuringly stiff. Exquisite craftsmanship is displayed everywhere your gaze lands.

## SPLIT OPINION

A W113 with any of the inline-sixes or transmissions offered between 1963 and the R107's introduction in 1971 inspired men and women then just as much as it does today. Daimler executives, however, weren't convinced. When mapping out the R107, they were sure a chunkier body and more grunt would appeal to a far bigger audience of male car buyers. Perhaps predictably, the same complainers who thought of the outgoing model as too dainty at the time of its release now committed their less than positive thoughts about the R107's looks to print, albeit in a way which would suggest time had played a part in shifting their earlier opinions of the pretty Pagoda.

"The R107 lacks elegance" gasped one of Germany's most popular newspapers. The chunky 'stepped' lights which would go on to become a trademark of Mercedes cars for a quarter-century were deemed ugly. The sharp lines of the new SL's bodywork were seen to signal the golden age







of sports car design being resigned to the history books, but where the R107's styling drew cause for complaint, its competence on the asphalt had the opposite effect. Instead of a hydraulic clutch, a torque converter was introduced, delivering a smoother delivery of power and more sophisticated shifting. Power was, of course, effortless, although the newer car carried an extra 200kg of bulk. It felt like a heavy car. Even today, the R107 feels... substantial. It's a quality experienced when releasing the soft top by way of two metal roof release handles stored in the glovebox. It continues with the snapping into mortise locks, and it certainly doesn't stop during the rich driving experience!

### SWITCH AROUND

The M110 engine fitted to the 280 SL attending our photo shoot is more open-minded in the open-top roadster than it is in the same-age W126 S-Class, with double overhead camshafts working to help release a tight 182bhp at 5,800rpm, and yet, unlike the Pagoda, the R107 is less comfortable on big straights than it is being asked to take corners tightly. Unfortunately, this 'heavy metal' attitude goes so far that when compared to the experience of driving a W113, the newer, more wallowy SL sometimes feels as though you're piloting a roofless taxi. Then again,

**The wide range of engine and trim options throughout the R107's long production run allowed for indulgence in comfort and power to suit different tastes and budgets**

**Above** When placed side-by-side, it's easy to see how the W113 and R107 sit close beside one another in the SL's chain of evolution



Le Mans hero, Hans Hermann, once said of the R107, "it radiates sovereignty and masculinity." As far as Mercedes bosses were concerned, the new model was a case of 'mission accomplished'.

## MANY CHOICES

For a roadster in the original sense of the word, the Pagoda was arguably too luxurious, too refined. The R107 was far more of a driver's car, where looks – while still impressive – played second fiddle to the nuts and bolts. Of course, the wide range of engine and trim options throughout the model's astonishingly long production run allowed for indulgence in comfort and power to suit different tastes and budgets. This was exactly what Mercedes had hoped for: a menu of options attracting both men and women in greater numbers than the W113 had ever been able to achieve.

Today, critics of both cars are largely silent. As Bracq suggests, time has long since made its judgement on the styling exhibited by both the W113 and the R107. You're bound to have a preference, and it's true to say each car deserves its place in the ranks of all-time classic sports cars. Take it from us, though, despite the manufacturer's intentions, the R107 has a feminine side and the Pagoda is more far masculine than many would have you believe!



**Right** Both SLs are rare examples of a drop-top looking just as good with the roof up as it does with the roof down



# Buying R107

Prices of presentable R107s are on the rise, making now a good time to get hold of the SL you always promised yourself.

WORDS **Eros Gosub** PHOTOGRAPHY **John Colley**

Once upon a time, the R107 SL was a hugely common sight on the public highway due to an enormous production volume spanning almost two decades. As values have risen in tandem with the model's gathering popularity, however, fewer examples of this iconic SL are being used day-to-day, meaning really good examples are commanding a premium.

## **HEAVY METAL**

Beautiful in its own right, the R107 is also weighty when compared to its W113 predecessor (although lighter than the R129

which followed), an attribute partly down to the bombproof six and eight-cylinder powerplants propelling the model, thick steel construction and second-to-none build quality. All that bulk means you won't be buying an R107 to experience quick and nimble handling – this is no Lotus Elan or Mazda MX-5 track warrior – but it does bolster the model's credentials as a capable cruiser, happy to effortlessly munch motorway miles. Keep this in mind when viewing your prospective purchase: R107s were built to withstand high mileage without fault, meaning an example which has covered a lot of ground isn't something to be repelled by. Indeed, these cars like to be used, and a lower mileage R107 might

not be the best of the bunch to drive or own, plus you'll pay a premium for the privilege of being the custodian of a car that hasn't been enjoyed the way Mercedes intended.

## **TREAD CAREFULLY**

Rust is an R107's biggest enemy, so consider the condition of metal a priority on any third-gen SL you view, regardless of the number displayed on its odometer; when these cars were in abundance at low cost, many were kept outdoors and exposed to all weather. Buy an R107 hiding a multitude of sins and you'll have a heavily depleted bank account and a one way ticket on the road to regret. Bag a good 'un, and your SL will go on forever. Here's what to look for.





## ELECTRICS

Spend time testing all of the electrically-operated features of the SL you're looking at. Power windows, the wash-wipe unit and air-conditioning systems should be near the top of your checklist. You'll also need to make sure the instrument stalks are functioning properly. They have a reputation for being temperamental, as does the control unit for the R107's cruise control system. New parts are easy to come by, although you'll save a few quid by having your cruise setup reconditioned by a well-versed SL specialist.

## EXHAUST

Complete mild steel or stainless exhausts are available to replace tired factory systems nearing the end of their service lives. The required fitting hardware is also available to buy from The SL Shop.

## ENGINE & TRANSMISSION

R107s were built with either an inline-six or 90° V8. Loud ticking on startup, particularly on eight-cylinder engines, followed by smooth sounding operation when the car is at operating temperature may indicate failed exhaust manifold gaskets. Approach with caution, though. V8 manifolds are known for developing cracks. In years gone by, the fix was limited to an expensive replacement manifold, but a variety of specialists can repair leaking pipework, some even able to do so without removing the manifold from the engine bay.

It's good to know that even after an eighteen-year production life, not one of the R107's powerplants stands out as being troublesome. All have a reputation for superior durability and largely trouble-free operation, yet it pays to be prudent. After all, not every owner will have observed the manufacturer's recommended service intervals. Pay special attention to the rear on startup. Does the exhaust emit blue smoke? If so, this may indicate the presence of worn valves or stem seals. The service interval is 70k miles, which is the same

frequency owners are required to change the cam chain and tensioner.

If you think the stem seals need to be replaced, let a specialist inspect the condition of the engine's hydraulic tappets at the same time, especially if the beating heart of the SL you're thinking about shelling out for is producing an irritating ticking or tapping noise from the head area.

Most R107s were loaded with automatic transmission, although 280 and 350 SLs could be specified with a manual gearbox. As you'd expect, the slush box fitted to these cars is just as well-built as the rest of the machine! Even so, the V8s produce more torque, so a gearbox rebuild, if required, would come a lot sooner on a 500 SL than, say, a 380 SL. If looked after properly, however, there's no reason you should fear sticky shifting or sudden loss of power from even the highest mileage cars.

Rear axles are tough, but grow noisier with age. Expect to pay £1,500 for the back end to be rebuilt. Budget £350 for a fresh set of propshaft couplings. Signs of these parts wearing will be a knocking noise through the floor as the propshaft rotates.



## BODYWORK

We're dealing with a model approaching its fiftieth anniversary, so expect corrosion to be present somewhere on the body of the car you're looking at. If it's uncharacteristically spotless, ask the seller for information relating to any previous repairs or corrective paintwork. There should be documentation to confirm what you're told is true.

Despite age-related wear to the exterior, R107s are far more resilient to rot than most machinery of the same vintage. Nevertheless, pay special attention to the sills, chassis legs, the floor and the bulkhead, especially on cars built before 1976. These early R107s feature a frustrating lack of rustproofing. Have a gander at headlamp surrounds, the inside edge of the boot lid, inside rear wheel arches (where dirt and other debris traps moisture), the windscreen frame and door bottoms.

V8s are more likely to have been driven in anger, so also check the front end for significant stone chip damage resulting in exposed metal and bubbling paintwork. Later R107s benefit from wax injection in bodywork cavities, while SLs built after 1986 were treated to galvanised body shells.

Like many older cars, the scuttle drain in front of the windscreen can get easily blocked, leading to wet footwells and a rusty bulkhead. The easiest way to find out whether this is a problem for the car you're inspecting is to unscrew the heater blower's plastic cover on the bulkhead, thereby allowing you to have a good look at the condition of otherwise hidden metalwork.

If you suspect prior leaks (look at carpets for signs of water ingress), see if you can detect corrosion in the floor pans. The same goes for the box sections at the base of the engine bay. Water also likes to work its way into the boot through perished rubbers or failed taillamp seals, so be sure to have a good rummage at the back.

All R107 owners want a matching hard-top for their car, but at the very least, try to secure an SL with a canvas roof in excellent condition (it's worth nothing faded fabric can be brought back to life with DIY restoration tools). Second-hand hard-tops are available to buy through owners clubs or eBay, although paint may be needed in order to perfectly match the colour of the car you're hoping to buy.

Mercedes was one of the first manufacturers to properly support its legacy products, meaning new spares are super-easy to come by.



## WHEELS & TYRES

Depending on the age of the R107 you're looking at, the car will be riding on fourteen-inch or fifteen-inch factory wheels. Small by today's standards, these lightweight rims have stood the test of time, but may be in need of restoration. Keep in mind the cost of correcting bent or cracked rims may prove prohibitively expensive when compared to shelling out for modern reproductions of the same wheels, which are available to order direct from The SL Shop ([theslshop.com](http://theslshop.com)). While you're at it, check for wear on the car's tyres. Significant inside or outside wear may suggest alignment is in need of attention. Cars left standing on poor quality rubber may exhibit bulges in tyre sidewalls. This is an immediate safety concern and will require the appointment of fresh black circles.

## IDENTITY

The car's data plate will provide you with a series of mainly three-digit codes indicating the colour applied at the factory, interior trim options and various other features specified at the original point of sale. Search online for the full list, print it and carry it with you when you go to view the car. Check the codes against your printed list and verify the data you're being provided with tallies up to what's laid out before you.

Make sure you paw through all documentation supporting claims of servicing and maintenance in accordance with the manufacturer's recommended intervals. Demand to see receipts or invoices proving the seller's suggestion of repair work and replacement parts. Be wary of any unexplained periods of the vehicle being off the road. If in doubt, have a full inspection carried out by a marque specialist. If you're in an owners club, check whether this is a service you can take advantage of as a benefit of membership.

Mercedes was one of the first manufacturers to properly support its legacy products



Enter the R107 in question's details into the DVLA's online vehicle enquiry service (visit [bit.ly/dvlaenquiry](http://bit.ly/dvlaenquiry)). It's free to use and will give you key information about the SL you're looking at. Additionally, take a few minutes to view information held on the DVLA's MOT history database (point your browser at [bit.ly/dvlamot](http://bit.ly/dvlamot)). Another free service, it'll provide you with details of all passes, fails and advisories associated with the Mercedes you're thinking about buying. You'll also be able to check registered mileage at the point of each test. Check to make sure all details match what's printed on the car's accompanying paperwork.

Invest a couple of quid in an online history check from [mycarcheck.com](http://mycarcheck.com). You'll get instant confirmation of any outstanding finance, accident history, changes of registration and the number of previous keepers. You'll also be able to tell if the R107 taking your fancy has ever been stolen or been subjected to a change of colour.

### FRONT END IMPACT

The R107's slab of a nose is a magnet for stones being flicked up off tyres on the car or truck ahead. Projectiles can crack the flat-faced headlamp glass, severely damage paintwork or perforate the radiator by travelling past grille vanes at high speed. If the car you're interested in taking home shows signs of dripping coolant behind the front bumper, shine a light onto the fins of the radiator in an attempt to detect damage. The good news is that almost every part you care to think of (including complete or part headlamp assemblies, radiators and grilles) is available as a new, direct replacement from a variety of specialists, including main dealers. Headlamp washer jets can also be replaced with like-for-like items if corrosion is present.





## INTERIOR

MB-Tex was the Mercedes alternative to leather. It's similar, but promises durability without the need for regular moisturising. R107s were also sold with cloth and vinyl, but it's the plastic trim on the oldest cars which tends to suffer, as evidenced by cracks and discolouration as a result of prolonged exposure to sunlight.

The central locking on these SLs is vacuum-operated, so there's potential for this system to have sprung a leak. The tank is fitted under the offside front wing and is known to rot or, in extreme cases, fall off completely!

Heated seats were introduced to the options list in the early 1980s. Failed heater elements may require the assistance of a professional trimmer, such as Awesome ([awesome.eu.com](http://awesome.eu.com)).

## RUNNING GEAR

Suspension-wise, there's very little for you to worry about beyond worn standard components, and even then, Mercedes is well-known for its love of sharing parts across the range of vehicles it manufactures, meaning new shocks, springs, bushes and ball joints are cheap and easy to come by.

All R107s were equipped with power steering as standard. Don't be surprised if steering feels vague; steering boxes can develop play with old age. It's a common complaint and, to a point, can be corrected by adjusting the faulty box. Rest assured, even when it comes to cars where the steering box is beyond tweaking, there are specialists who can refurbish the broken part you're struggling with.

Disc brakes are present in each corner. The servo-driven system is reliable and shouldn't give you cause for concern, but keep 'em peeled for sticky calipers on R107s which haven't seen much road use. An anti-lock stopping system was optional from 1980. Where fitted, look for a warning light on the dash which should extinguish shortly after you start the car.



Many R107s are advertised by sellers wearing rose-tinted spectacles, so be sure to buy with your head, not your heart

### PRICE

There is no shortage of R107s for you to choose from, although trying to pin down a specific colour, engine and interior trim combination may be your biggest challenge. Our suggestion is to buy the best car you can find regardless of its decoration. Low miles doesn't necessarily mean good condition, and your favourite colour doesn't automatically translate as money well spent! Many R107s are advertised by sellers wearing rose-tinted spectacles, so be sure to buy with your head, not your heart. Here's a brief selection of what we found advertised online just before we went to print with this issue of *Mercedes Driver*:

#### 1980 280 SL

Silver paintwork, 140k miles, blue leather interior, in need of full recommission, no MOT, no hard-top, rip in soft-top  
**£6,250**

#### 1981 500 SL

White paintwork, 109k miles, beige interior, restored in 2012, expired MOT, no hard-top, intermittent fuel supply issue  
**£12,000**

#### 1972 350 SL

Dark blue paintwork, 120k miles, red leather interior, full main dealer history, three previous owners, pristine soft-top, matching hard-top  
**£27,500**

#### 1989 300 SL

Pajett Red Metallic paintwork, 7.5k miles from new, Mushroom leather interior, full main dealer history, completely original and immaculate throughout, two owners, cherished car, museum quality  
**£79,950**







## MILLTEK METAL POLISH

Respected exhaust manufacturer, Milltek, has solved a perennial problem for many conscientious R107 owners: how to restore the look of chrome and exhaust pipework to an as-new condition. After several months of testing in all markets and weather conditions, the UK-based company has released a tailored metal polish that will render any SL's stainless steel exhaust system or metal component ready for concours or show duty with the minimum of effort.

**Price: £11.76** [millteksport.com](http://millteksport.com)



## SONIC TOOL SUITCASE

A triumph of creative packaging, the Sonic tool suitcase comes supplied with a colossal number of small tools, all of which are ideal for applications where there's demand for compact equipment. Think club-level motorsport, track days, mobile technicians or R107 owners seeking to minimise the amount of time they spend on the hard shoulder!

**Price: £370** [damar.biz](http://damar.biz)

# R107 Essentials

From products costing chump change to those requiring significant spend, here's a selection of goodies for you and your retro ride...

## MEGUIAR'S MIRROR BRIGHT DETAILING KIT

"Creating something new, but with a solid respect for the traditions of the past." This is how Meguiar's describes its Mirror Bright detailing range, a retro-styled collection of car cleaning products owing more than a passing nod to some of the firm's oldest research and development programmes. Available as individual bottles or as a kit presented in a specially-stitched carry bag, these fantastic fluids include wheel cleaner, detailing spray, polishing wax and shampoo. Each unique formula is designed to complement others in the range, and each is safe to use on all paint types, lacquers, enamels and clear coats. An optional Mirror Bright leather lotion and a sweet-scented air freshener are also available to purchase at the Meguiar's online store, where you can find even more product info.

**Price: Kit £50, leather lotion £12, air freshener £2**

[meguiars.co.uk](http://meguiars.co.uk) or call 0870 241 6696



## CAR COVER SHOP OUTDOOR CAR COVER

Stamford's helpfully-named Car Cover Shop specialises in automotive care solutions dedicated to helping owners of classics protect and preserve their four-wheeled friends for the long term. The company designs and produces a wide range of standard, custom and stretch-fit indoor and outdoor car covers for individuals, owners clubs and OEM manufacturers alike, with *Top Gear* using the firm's 'reveal' covers on the tellybox. Featuring a soft, fleece-like interior lining countering concerns regarding the risk of marred or scratched paintwork, Car Cover Shop's Protector-4 water-resistant outdoor cover incorporates a nifty quad-layer design which allows trapped moisture to escape without letting water seep in. Featuring elasticated ends, double-stitched seams, a Web-Tex securing buckle and a twelve-month warranty, the product comes in sizes ranging from small to 4XL, suiting SLs of all ages.

**Price: From £112** [carcovershop.co.uk](http://carcovershop.co.uk) or call 01780 654088



## RICHBROOK NEVER LOSE VALVE CAPS

Sick and tired of checking your R107's tyre pressures only to find valve caps have rolled away to some dark and distant corner of the automotive universe, never to be seen again? If this sounds familiar, then Richbrook's clever Never Lose magnetic valve caps could be just the product you've been looking for. Incorporating super-strong magnets, these precision aluminium caps come complete with a corrosion-resistant nylon core. Simply place the valve caps on your R107's bodywork (don't worry, they won't cause any damage or scratches to pristine paint) until you're ready to refit them. Hey presto! Your SL's valve caps are exactly where you left them! Each kit comes in a choice of silver or black finishes and is supplied with a locking tool.

**Price: £12.95** [richbrook.co.uk](http://richbrook.co.uk) or call 01328 862387





## PROTEX LEATHER CARE KIT

ProtexWorld has launched a leather maintenance kit designed to clean and re-colour your R107's tired hide. Featuring 500ml of deep cleaner and 250ml of colour restorer (available in black, dark blue, dark green, red, burgundy, tan, ivory cream and dark brown), this twin-bottle offering will mask scuffs, scratches and small cracks whilst conditioning the treated upholstery. Helpfully, to ensure you get the best out of each product, the guys at Protex have added step-by-step video guides to the company's website. Check it out.

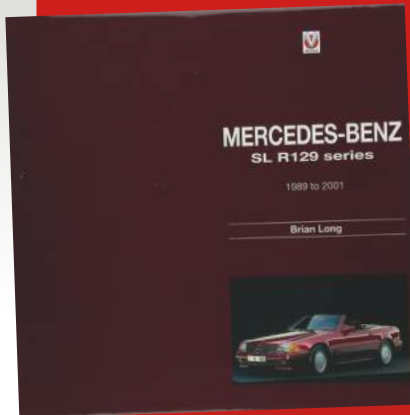
**Price: £21.98** [protexworld.co.uk](http://protexworld.co.uk)



## TACKLIFE TYRE INFLATOR

Tacklife's APC1C 12V digital air compressor pump tyre inflator features a power motor capable of inflating tyres faster than similarly marketed products. Overheat protection, built-in LED lighting, safety light functionality, a three-metre power cable and a maximum pressure of 100psi make this the ideal tyre inflator to keep in your tool chest.

**Price: £35.49** [tacklifetools.com](http://tacklifetools.com)



## RECOMMENDED READ MERCEDES SL: R107 SERIES

Available again after a long absence, Brian Long's 208-page tome detailing the design and development of the R107 (and its C107 hard-topped, four-seat sibling) has been rereleased as part of the *Classic Reprint* series presented by automotive publisher, Veloce. First published in 2010, the high-quality hardback features 355 photographs and illustrations covering everything from factory

assembly to motorsport. Examining the evolution of the R107 from its introduction in 1971 until its demise in 1989, Long – himself an SL owner – details the peerless engineering, specification and exceptional build quality which made the R107 one of the longest-surviving production models of all time. Produced with co-operation from the manufacturer, this coffee table classic is an essential companion and reference book for owners and enthusiasts of the Benz-badged icon.

**Price: £40** [veloce.co.uk](http://veloce.co.uk) or call 01305 260068



## DATATAG ANTI-THEFT SECURITY TRACKING SYSTEM

Recognised by insurers as the number one automotive theft deterrent, Datatag's vehicle security identification system features electronic glass tag responders known as Datadots (invisible forensic DNA) and destruction-free identity labels. Thatcham TQA approval and a design specification applauded by the police has ensured cars covered by Datatag are four times less likely to be stolen and six times more likely to be recovered. There are no monthly charges or fees, just a one-off, low-cost payment protecting your R107 with a lifetime of anti-theft protection, making it virtually impossible for a thief to get away with nicking your pride and joy. This is the most sophisticated identification technology on the market today, allowing law enforcement agencies to instantly identify a stolen vehicle by checking state-of-the-art transponders against a centrally-held database containing details unique to you and your car. Protect your investment with Datatag before it's too late.

**Price: £69.95** [datatag.co.uk](http://datatag.co.uk) or call 03450 700440

## CTEK MXS 7.0 BATTERY CHARGER

Respected automotive battery maintenance specialist, CTEK, has launched a new 7A 12V vehicle battery charger capable of quickly identifying whether the battery on your R107 is capable of holding power. Named MXS 7.0, the charger features a mode which can restore deeply discharged batteries which might otherwise be discarded. In fact, CTEK claims this well-priced product can revive batteries registering as low as 2V! An extended five-pulse-per-second de-sulphation cycle provides maximum opportunity to fully restore battery capacity, while a handy Supply mode can act as a secure 12V power source for your SL if the affected battery needs to be disconnected,

**Price: £114.99** [ctek.com](http://ctek.com) or call 01380 772621

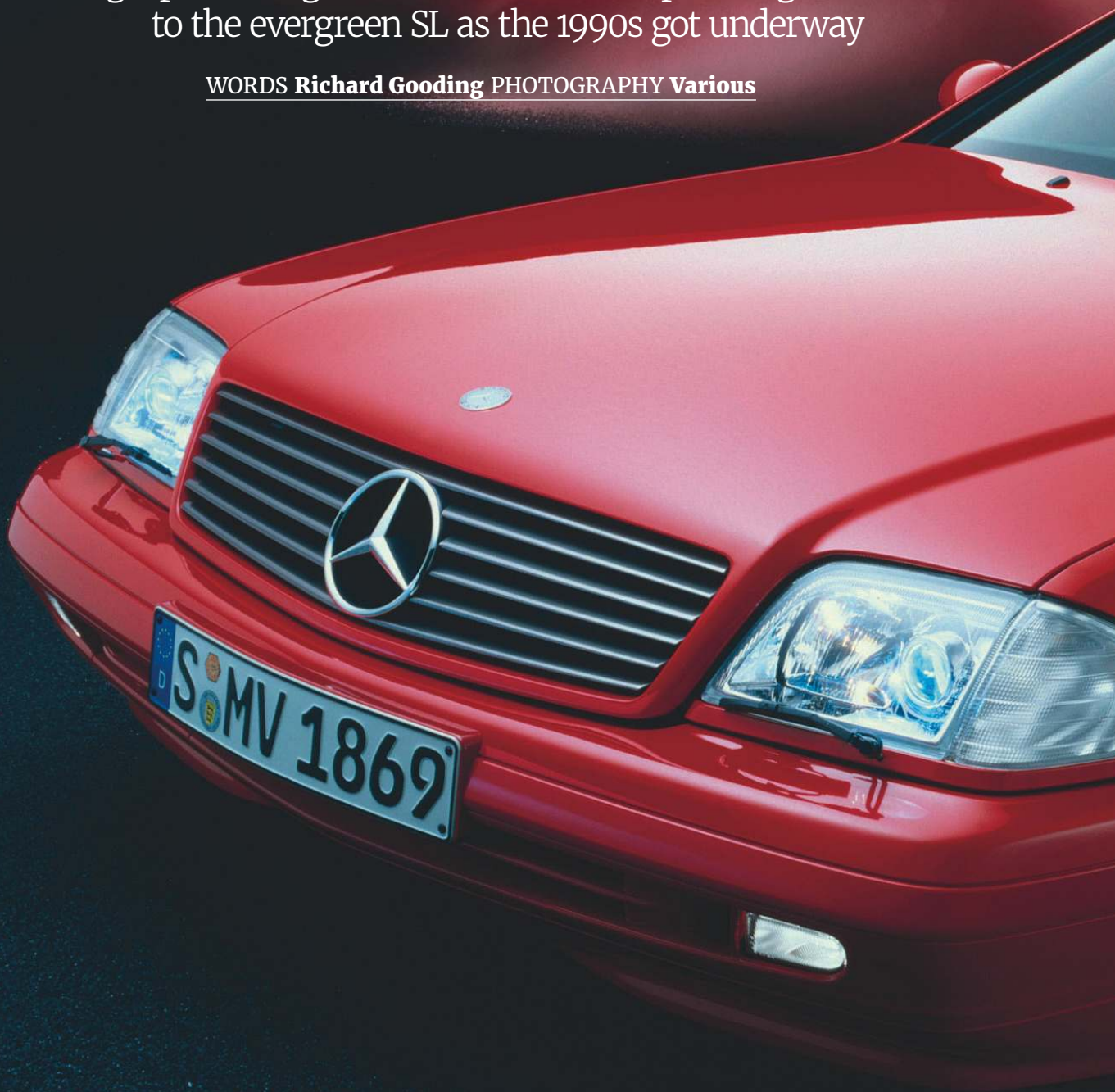




# GENERATION GAME

Mega-power engines and a slinkier shape brought new life to the evergreen SL as the 1990s got underway

WORDS Richard Gooding PHOTOGRAPHY Various







**T**he SL concept was redefined by the R107. Putting the grand back into grand tourer, the '70s smasher's lustier engines, long distance cruising capability and advanced safety features made it a desirable Mercedes standard-setter. Its successor would up the ante further still, characterising the end of what many consider to be the 'bombproof Benz' period of production.

The R129 was unveiled at the Geneva Motor Show on 9th March 1989. The new model showcased a new slippery style and appeared five months before the last R107 rolled off the production line. Recognisable elements from the outgoing model were mixed with a smoother look created by Italian automotive styling supremo, Bruno Sacco. The roadster's wedge-shaped body traded the R107's sharper lines for a more modern design resulting in massive demand. Indeed, the annual production forecast of 20,000 units was soon revised. So big was the order book, a waiting list of seven years instantly formed!

Just as the R107 had done previously, the R129



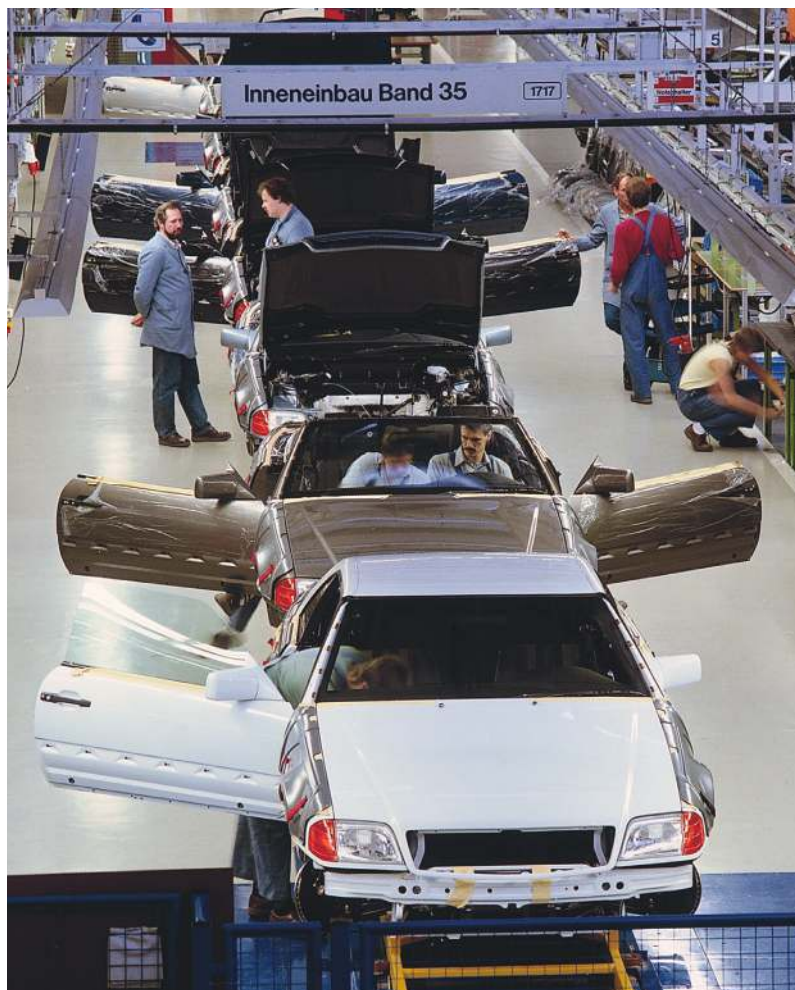
**Above** The five-litre M119 V8 enjoyed a ten-year production run from 1989 through 1999

**Facing page** The R129 600 SL was presented at the 1993 Detroit Motor Show and showcased a panoramic roof

offered new safety features allowing it to be recognised as one of the safest soft-tops on sale. An integral part of the new design was an automatic rollover bar. If rollover was detected, the sensor-controlled bar was electromagnetically deployed by the force of compressed springs within 0.3 seconds. A milestone in the field of automotive safety, the active rollbar could also be popped manually. A reinforced windscreen frame with bonded glass, impact bars in the doors and a side-impact energy absorbing seat design – accompanied by three-point safety belts – added even more driver and passenger protection.

## BOTTOMS UP

Underneath, the R129 was based on a shortened and beefed-up W124 floor pan. Girder cross sections added strength, encouraging torsional rigidity thirty percent higher than the R107. Additionally, the earlier SL's semi-trailing arm rear suspension was ditched in favour of a multi-link independent setup. An optional active system allowed for level adjustment on both axles and speed-influenced height control, hunkering the R129 at high speed. Another



# Badged as the 600 SL, the new arrival was the most powerful car in the Mercedes product range and enjoyed seriously smooth performance with all the hallmarks of a luxury cruiser

## Within limits

Based on 320 and 500 models, the SL Edition of 2000 offered eighteen-inch alloys and Mystic Blue paintwork. In March 2001, a trio of UK-only models were introduced, stuffed with extra kit and special paint. Named after the 1930s Benz racing machines, the £68,940 SL 500 Silver Arrow was limited to just 100 units, featured AMG styling flourishes and an individually numbered certificate of authenticity signed by racing legend, Sir Stirling Moss, while the accompanying Alanite and Almandine numbered fifty cars each and were dressed up SL 280 and 320s with special trim options.

seismic shift was a move from the SL's time-served production home at Sindelfingen to Bremen and the adoption of water-based paints.

As with its W113 and R107 ancestors, the R129 came with a canvas top as standard, but power operation made raising or lowering the soft-top a hassle-free task taking thirty seconds. A 'windbreak' mesh screen reduced blasts of wind around passenger necks, while an extra technical highlight was the arrival of a dual-range four-speed automatic gearbox. Elsewhere, standard kit included electric windows and electropneumatic locking. Electric steering column adjustment was unique to the 500 SL, whereas sixteen-inch wheels and ABS were fitted to all versions of the new sports machine.

## VARIETY PACK

A range of multi-valve engines debuted under the R129 designation, the fourth SL in the marque's long history. Unlike the R107, six-cylinder versions were available from the off. The 300 SL started proceedings with 187bhp, while the M104-powered SL-24 (doubling the number of valves over the 300 SL's M103 powerplant) offered an additional 30bhp. The range-topping 500 SL continued the *Sport Leicht*'s tradition of thumping V8s by







presenting a five-litre M119 lump chucking out 321bhp. Wig-ruffling opportunities came thick and fast thanks to a zero to 62mph time of just 6.2 seconds and a top speed of 155mph.

## NAME GAME

If a V8 didn't cut the Swabian mustard, Mercedes offered something even hotter. In October 1992, the first V12 SL arrived, making its presence felt with a whopping 389bhp. Badged as the 600 SL, the new arrival was the most powerful car in the Mercedes product range, and although the bigger-engined SL barely beat its 500-labelled sibling to 60mph and was just 2mph faster overall, it enjoyed seriously smooth performance with all the hallmarks of a luxury German cruiser. Hot on the heels of the V12 came a change of nomenclature, with all new Mercedes models now starting with their name followed by the reference to engine size. This is why an early R129 might be a 500 SL, where a later example of the same model is badged as an SL 500. At the time of the shake-up, the 190bhp SL 280 – the only R129 with a five-speed manual transmission – and 288bhp SL 320 replaced the three-litre R129s. The first AMG super-SL, the SL 60, followed soon after. With 376bhp, the AMG wasn't the most powerful SL,

## Safety first

Fine looks, growling V8 noise and class-leading nosefeel are all key components of the 'modern classic' experience, but one area where the R129 really shines is safety. From the moment the new *Sport Leicht* shimmied onto the 1989 Geneva Motor Show exhibition floor, it was all Mercedes technicians and public relations executives wanted to talk about, and with good reason. Extensive under floor strengthening, carefully designed doors and tubular A-pillar reinforcements put the R129 at the forefront of structural rigidity, while the model's automatic roll bar was an exciting world first.

**The SL 55 AMG delivered 349bhp from its V8, leaving the SL 73 to romp into the distance with an astonishing 518bhp delivered by its V12**



but it was certainly the quickest. Packing thirty-two valves, its six-litre powerhouse produced 428lb/ft torque and a benchmark spring time of 5.8 seconds. Crikey!

A refresh in early 1995 brought the option of Xenon gas-discharge headlights, a new cruise control system and a five-speed automatic transmission with torque converter lock-up clutch for SL 500 and 600 models. Electronic Stability Program (ESP) was added to the 600, while brake assist featured on all R129s from the start of December 1996. Low key visual changes amounted to redesigned slots located in the wings, just behind the front wheels, clear indicators, a six-bar grille, body-coloured bumpers and skirts. Inside, a digital odometer replaced the age-old mechanical device. Side airbags were added at the same time.

## RAIN SUPREME

A special SL 500 Mille Miglia model was built to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of Sir Stirling Moss's 1955 win of the historic open-road motorsport event which took place in Italy twenty-four times between 1928 and 1957. Resplendent in metallic silver paint and Evolution II six-spoke alloys, forty examples



**Top and facing page** Rare SL 73 AMG is considered by many to be the ultimate R129

**Above** R129 development model kept the 'stepped' rear lights typical of the era's Mercedes product range

landed in the UK. While Mercedes-loving racing fans reached for their cheque books, rain-sensing wipers were being introduced across the range, as were the options of a 'Sport' package and panoramic roof.

Blink and you'd have missed changes arriving with 1998's R129 update. Body-colour door handles were added, as were new door mirrors, bigger wheels, Nappa leather seats (to replace perforated hide) and curve-faced taillights in place of the iconic 'stepped' squares. Fibre-optic digital audio links replaced the analogue copper used in older R129s, a new engine cover appeared beneath the SL's long bonnet and the oil pressure gauge was replaced by an oil temperature readout. Passengers enjoyed the luxury of having a cargo net strapped to the transmission tunnel. Essential equipment, we're sure you'll agree! Shadowing developments which shaped late R107s, ongoing concerns regarding the environment forced fundamental changes to the R129 in 1998. Three-valve technology and dual ignition were the icing on new six and eight-cylinder engine cakes, reducing emissions and the SL's thirst for fuel by up to ten percent. Power benefits came in the form of the 201bhp provided by the entry-level SL





280 and the additional 20bhp offered by the SL 320. In contrast, the SL 500 switched from the M119 DOHC V8 to the single-cam M113 V8, losing close to twenty ponies. Six-cylinder cars were dropped from dealerships in the United States domestic market altogether.


## DOUBLE QUICK

The SL 60 AMG ceased production too, although R129 devotees weren't crying into their coffee and Trübskuchen too much thanks to a duo of new AMGs arriving to replace the despatched model. This new pair of Affalterbach sportsters packed big bhp; the SL 55 AMG delivered 349bhp from its V8, leaving the SL 73 AMG to romp into the distance with an astonishing 518bhp from its V12. 553lb/ft torque enabled the sensational twelve-shooter to shoot to 62mph in less than five seconds, with the added benefit of being able to 'unlock' a stratospheric – and unrestricted – 186mph! As wonderful as this sounded to R129 buyers in period, getting hold of the model proved

**Above** Combining the best of old-school cool with modern mechanicals, superior comfort and a range of engines to suit different requirements and budgets, the R129 is an SL which will happily operate as a daily driver, even in today's busy motoring world

difficult thanks to a strictly limited production run of only eighty-five units.

More prolific was the build of the SL 70 AMG between 1996 and 1997. A 150-unit special edition developing close to 490bhp from a bored-out version of the M120 six-litre V12 (with added longer stroke), the 7.1-litre lout was, like most of the 'big' R129s, a master of effortless performance, elegance and luxury. It contributed to a total production volume of close to 205,000 R129s, with the M119-kitted 500 SL proving the most popular with buyers.

Not quite a classic in its own lifetime, the R129 was certainly regal, attracting Diana, Princess of Wales, as a fan. And while you don't currently need a King's ransom to own one, it won't be too long before prices of the nifty '90s SL rise even more than they already have. The good news is that prior to the arrival of the fifth-gen SL (R230), more than twelve thousand R129s were sold to feverish buyers in Britain, meaning there's plenty of choice if you fancy a slice of slinky SL action. Well, what are you waiting for?! 

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**R129 SL 500**







# PARKLIFE PARTNER

From the busy streets of Maryland to the gardens of Westminster,  
the R129 SL 500 has long been Andrew Cantwell's  
greatest automotive love

WORDS **Emma Woodcock** PHOTOGRAPHY **Dan Sherwood**





**C**losely trimmed, the leaves and branches transcend the messy, base reality of hedges to land under the term topiary. As it cuts across our scene, the verdant borders of Regent's Park reflect an aesthetic sensitivity once so popular in polite Georgian society. Pad away across the grasslands within and you'll see its brick and mortar manifestations, terraces and villas filtering ancient ideas through restrained lines of Neo-Palladianism.

But wait! There's no need to grind away so much shoe leather to appreciate the finer points of less-is-more design. We've got a Blue-Black example right here! A three-pointed star that does just enough to look right. Free of blemish and wearing barely 6,000 kilometres, Andrew Cantwell's SL 500 is the cleanest expression of Bruno Sacco's uncluttered R129 style you're ever likely to see. For Andrew, it's also the endgame to twenty-five years of long-distance dreaming.

It all started with a thirty-mile blast up the Chesapeake Bay. Ensconced in the passenger seat of an acquaintance's then-new R129 500 SL, Andrew found himself flying between Annapolis, Maryland's state capital, and the Baltimore metropolis, carried on the wings of a five-litre bent eight. "I'd never been in a car that felt or sounded quite like it," he marvels. "I can still recall every detail of the trip." The experience was transformative. "I remember

thinking that if I could ever get my hands on a similar R129, I'd have own it!"

This wasn't the first time Andrew lost his heart to well-executed German design. Decades earlier, growing up in the Ballsbridge area of Dublin, today's SL owner was yesterday's emerging car fan thanks to a neighbour and his pretty Porsche. "He was a cardiac surgeon, a delightful gentleman," Andrew reminisces. "He drove around in a beautiful sky blue 911 SC. I was fascinated by this Stuttgart-crested classic. To my young mind, the chap was an elegant human being with a beautiful car."

## PULLED PORK

As childhood gave way to the hectic years of a career, Andrew carried his automotive tastes into a series of increasingly glamorous purchases, culminating in ownership of a 993 Carrera 4. "It was a magnificent 911," he smiles. "I drove it all over Europe. It was a wonderful form of release from the pressures of finding my way as a surgeon." Finished in Turkish Metallic (a complex and special order hue), the air-cooled classic offered Andrew a range of multi-sensory delights, a strength shared by his current SL 500. "Both the 993 and the 964 I owned previously had a fantastically specific scent. You have to love the smell of a car! I get the same sensation when lifting the hood on my R129. It's like standing alongside a Teutonic sky lift. The grease and oil smell exactly alike."

**Above and facing page**  
Andrew's R129 is arguably the ultimate SL 500 find thanks to a lazy life in the custody of a caring owner, just 4k miles from new and a recent recommission



The car had spent much of its life with the original Japanese owner, travelling through Germany before arriving in the UK, where it was subjected to a recommission

Marriage and a growing family saw the 993 depart, replaced by the upright practicality of a late Range Rover Classic. Equipped with a four-litre V8 and a distinct bouquet of Connolly hide, the boxy brute lasted until a Range Rover Sport Supercharged was drafted in as a modern replacement. A few years later, a contemporary Audi S5 Cabriolet marked a return to svelte German motoring, yet Andrew couldn't shake the feeling something was missing...

### OUT OF LOVE

Over two years and thousands of miles, the problem slowly took shape: the four-ringed drop-top just couldn't inspire its driver like the classics of previous decades. "The fact of the matter is I felt let down by modern cars," Andrew explains. "I was buying them, but never falling in love with them. I was left feeling disappointed. I guess you could say the cars I was driving lacked passion. They proved there's something about a classic you can't replace with a modern off-the-shelf purchase." The hunt for an older, bolder replacement was on.

Thoughts quickly drifted back to time spent travelling in an R129 across the mid-Atlantic. Now was the time for Andrew to welcome a *Sport Leicht* into his life. It should have been as simple as that, but when faced with the ennui that infested earlier perceptions of the R107's successor, difficulties soon began to mount. "I was walking around cars I spotted in parking

DRIVER

Q&A



**ANDREW CANTWELL**

#### First Mercedes

My R129 is the first Merc I've owned following years spent playing with Porsches

#### Favourite Mercedes

This is it, the car I've dreamed about my whole adult life

#### Best thing about your R129 SL 500

The timeless design

#### Worst thing about your R129 SL 500

The gear selector doesn't look like it's in the right vehicle!





bays and turning my head in traffic!" he remembers. "To be honest, it was hard to even observe a well-maintained R129 in the early 2010s, let alone find a decent one for sale."

Patience yielded results. Six years after the search started, a pristine 1994 SL 500 strutted its unmarked bodywork and low four-figure mileage onto the open market. Finished in the part-blue, part-green, part-grey tones of *Blauschwarz*, the beautiful Benz was everything Andrew wanted. Further investigation revealed a full history; the car had spent much of its life with the original Japanese owner, travelling through Germany before arriving in the UK, where it was subjected to a recommission process. Classic Mercedes sales, service and restoration specialist, Edward Hall, was given the task of refreshing the retro ride.

## FIVE ALIVE

After three months of not-so-subtle hinting, the SL entered Andrew's life as his fiftieth birthday present. "My wife bought the car, though I twisted her arm to get this particular example," he grins. "I'm lucky to be married to someone who describes herself as a true petrolhead. She's the proud pilot of a B8-generation Audi RS4 Avant Quattro. Its 4.2-litre V8 is Swiss milk to the R129's dark chocolate!"

## Regal Mercs

There's another link between Regent's Park and the uncluttered lines of the R129: both enjoy the royal seal of approval! Late in 1991, Diana, Princess of Wales, swapped her Jaguar XJS for a deep red 500 SL, a move which stoked wide-ranging uproar. In a period when royalist sentiment was low, the scathing words of newspapers and trade unions pushed her to return the car less than a year later. The very same R129 now resides at the Mercedes museum, but it wasn't the last time Lady Di dabbled with German convertibles. Three years later, she was spotted behind the wheel of multiple Audi 80 drop-tops!

We can only hope the buyer matches Andrew's love for the R129 and its just-so sensibility

**Above and facing page** If you're in the market for an R129 and fancy what is undoubtedly one of the lowest mileage examples in existence, then you'll be pleased to know Andrew is looking for a buyer







A return to Edward Hall beckoned. “In all the years I’ve owned cars, I’ve never enjoyed dealing with someone as much as I have Ed and his amazing garage manager, Laurene. The work I commissioned them to do was a big project, involving replacing every rubber and hydraulic seal, dismantling and rebuilding both the convertible roof and its hydraulic cylinders, refreshing the electronic system and resetting the timing. You can introduce a lot of frustration to classic car ownership unless you grab it by the horns.”

## CREAM OF THE CROP

After a month nestled Edward Hall’s Buckinghamshire workshop, Andrew found himself in an R129’s cabin for the first time in a quarter century. Half a mile down the road, with the M119 woofling against a clear sky, it was all too much. “I was so overcome with emotion, I had to pull over and take stock! It was probably my happiest day of 2018!” Andrew’s son is every bit as taken with the open-top 500. “One of his favouring things is for us to hop into the car and head out for ice-cream. He calls my Merc ‘The Eagle Crusader’. I think he may have been watching too many old war movies! Special

**Below** Any 500-badged SL feels rapid, let alone one pulling just as hard as when it left the factory thanks to minimal ground covered and rejuvenating spanner work

family occasions and fun runs is why I’ve enjoyed owning the car so much.” A thousand happy miles rounded out the year.

Family considerations mean that Andrew’s SL 500 dream must soon come to an end, a reality he’s approaching with a reflective mind. “I’d like to keep the car forever. I feel truly lucky to have been in possession of this special example of the R129, but you can’t hold onto things indefinitely. The memories are there, and I’ll always treasure them. There’s an awful lot to be said for involving the happiness of your childhood in the decisions of the present day. It’s a wonderful thing to be able to do.”

With so much thought invested in the car and its recommissioning, this Mercedes won’t be subject to a normal sale. For Andrew, it’s not just about securing the highest bid – dealers need not apply! Any prospective purchaser will have to be deeply invested in this stunning SL’s condition. “I’d like it to go to one of two types of owner: the hardened collector or somebody who wants to use the car day to day, as though it’s a brand new vehicle.” Either way, we can only hope the buyer matches Andrew’s love for the R129 and its just-so sensibility.



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with a one-off £5 joining fee.





# Buying R129

Following years spent living in the R107's shadow, the R129 SL is now in vogue. Buy one before it's too late.

WORDS **Kevin Carter** PHOTOGRAPHY **George Thatcher**

**W**ind the clock back three or four years and an R129 wasn't an unusual sight on the road. Mercedes

promoted the sleek SL as a car "engineered like no other", which is undoubtedly why so many drop-top fans had the confidence to use their fourth-gen SL as a daily driver, with smaller-engined examples proving popular in order to keep commuting costs in check.

"Many of our customers previously wanted 300 or 320 models," recalls James Mann, head honcho at premium sports car

sales specialist, 4 Star Classics ([4starclassics.com](http://4starclassics.com)). "A surge in popularity for the R129 in recent years, however, has seen the value of tidy cars rise, a trend leading many SLs to be retired from the road unless being called into action at weekends when the sun is shining. Reduced use means fuel economy isn't necessarily a massive concern, which is why those same 300 and 320-owning drivers are now choosing five-litre V8 R129s as their preferred SL."

## TRAVEL GUIDE

Fortunately, James and his team have a steady stream of R129s rolling through the 4 Star Classics showroom doors, many cars landing at the company's Hampshire

base fresh off the boat from Japan. "We source excellent, low mileage SLs here in the UK, but we also recognise the amazing condition Japanese cars are often found in thanks to not being exposed to temperamental weather or road salt," he confirms. "The R129 is recognised for weathering well in all meteorological conditions, of course, but if you want a thirty-year-old car that looks like a two-year-old car underneath, Japanese imports take some beating!"

With the R129's thirtieth year encouraging 'modern classic' status and renewed interest in the model, now is a good time to buy before prices rocket any further. Here's what to look out for.





## TRANSMISSION

Six-cylinder R129s were originally offered with four-speed or five-speed Tronic automatic gearboxes. A five-speed manual was also presented as an option, although buyers of SLs propelled by eight or twelve-cylinder engines were restricted to a four-speed auto. Updates to the range in 1993 brought changes to the SL's options list, reducing the number of R129s available to buy with a manual transmission to just one: the SL 280.

Despite many buyers seeking late five-speed Trionics, the four-speed variant has a reputation for being one of the most reliable Mercedes transmissions ever built, with big miles covered before servicing work is required. Regardless of the auto box you end up with, ensure hassle-free, leak-free shifting by changing the unit's filter every 30k miles.

## ENGINE

The R129 SL came with a wide variety of engines throughout its lifetime. Initially, the three-litre M103 twelve-valve inline-six was offered, giving the 300 SL 188bhp. The twenty-four valve M104 powering the 300-24 offered a boost to 228bhp, while the five-litre M119 V8 in the 500 SL delivered a solid 322bhp and boasted thirty-two valves.

"All are excellent engines, with little in the way of problems to report, although early inline-sixes are known to suffer head gasket failure if not looked after properly," James tells us. "Make sure the car you're looking at has good service history. Not only will this give you peace of mind, it'll enable you to sell easier when, at some point in the future, you decide to part with the car."

In July 1992, the line-up was joined by the 600 SL and its M120 six-litre V12, a 389bhp powerhouse of performance packing no fewer than forty-eight valves. Regarded by many as the best lump in the R129 range, it's a torque-tastic thumper with forged internals and sequential fuel injection. It's capable of munching mega miles, plus it brings superior levels of

acceleration and strong top end power to the party. If something goes wrong, however, expect to pay big bucks for repairs, not only due to the premium price of parts, but also because the R129 V12's tightly packed engine bay makes many simple jobs difficult due to lack of easy access.

Autumn 1993 delivered a change to Mercedes-Benz nomenclature and an update to the R129 range. The 300 SL was replaced by the SL 280, a twenty-four valve twin-cammer making use of a 2.8-litre M104 producing 190bhp, while the 300-24 SL was ditched in favour of the SL 320, a 228bhp model making use of a 3.2-litre development of the same engine.

Another change to the R129 catalogue occurred in 1998; in addition to styling updates, new engines were introduced to Mercedes products. Consequently, the ageing SL 280 found itself loaded with an eighteen-valve single-cam V6 producing 201bhp, the SL 320 now enjoyed a 3.2-litre version of the same powerplant, while the SL 500 was blessed with the newly developed M113 V8. Interestingly, the 600's V12 remained unaltered. Take your pick!



## EXHAUST

It's unlikely you'll experience problems with the R129's exhaust, especially if a previous owner has fitted an aftermarket stainless system, but it's worth noting early catalytic converters may require replacement, which isn't a cheap fix. Listen out for untoward noises, including a metallic rattling sound, coming from the underside of the car you're looking at while it's on idle.

## SUSPENSION

While the R129's dampers are robust, the extra weight of V8 variants can put a strain on tired factory components, such as ball joints and drop links. As with any older car, rubber bushes may be past their best. Listen out for knocks or bangs when travelling over bumps in the road. Creaking when turning on full lock might suggest tired top mounts. Be sure to check the condition of coil springs too. Remember, even the newest R129 is almost twenty years old, so the idea components on an unrestored car will be factory fresh is wide of the mark. Fortunately, due to the R129's immense popularity, parts are readily available from a variety of suppliers, including aftermarket manufacturers. Bilstein's B12 Pro-Kit (comprising B8 shocks and Eibach springs) is a respected upgrade.



## WHEELS & TYRES

Kerbed wheels and worn tyres are a concern when it comes to any vehicle of the R129's age. Fortunately help is at hand from professional wheel restoration companies, but don't be tempted by mobile alloy repair units offering budget restorations at £20 a corner. Seek a specialist who can provide wheel straightening, acid dipping, media blasting, powdercoating and painting.

As for black circles, a wide range of tyres to suit all budgets and driving environments is available from Falken, Nankang, Yokohama and Toyo. This isn't an area where you should be scrimping. Tyres are the only part of your R129 in contact with the road. Don't take risks by fitting inferior rubber. Your car won't thank you for it!





## IDENTITY

Make sure you paw through all documentation supporting claims of servicing and maintenance in accordance with the manufacturer's recommended intervals. Demand to see paperwork proving the seller's suggestion of repair work and replacement parts. Be wary of any unexplained periods of the vehicle being off the road. If in doubt, have a full inspection carried out by a marque specialist. If you're in an owners club, check whether this is a service you can take advantage of as a benefit of membership.

Enter the R129 in question's details into the DVLA's online vehicle enquiry service (visit [bit.ly/dvlaenquiry](http://bit.ly/dvlaenquiry)). It's free to use and will give you key information about the SL you're looking at.

Additionally, take a few minutes to view information held on the DVLA's MOT history database (point your browser at [bit.ly/dvlamot](http://bit.ly/dvlamot)). Another free service, it'll provide you with details of all passes,

fails and advisories associated with the Mercedes you're thinking about buying. You'll also be able to check registered mileage at the point of each test. Check to make sure all details tally up with the paperwork you're presented with by the car's seller.

Invest a couple of quid in an online history check from the chaps and chapettes at [mycarcheck.com](http://mycarcheck.com). You'll get instant confirmation of any outstanding finance, accident history, changes of registration and the number of previous keepers. You'll also be able to tell if the R129 taking your fancy has ever been stolen or had a colour change.

But what of Japanese imports? How are you supposed to decipher twenty-odd years of Asian script? "We've already taken care of that," smiles James. "SLs brought to the UK from Japan and subsequently offered by 4 Star Classics are accompanied by a specially prepared folder featuring original service history and the same documents translated from Japanese to English!"







## EXTERIOR

All credit to Mercedes production processes at the time of the R129's turn on the Bremen assembly line; seeing a fourth-gen SL with bodywork in a state of disrepair is a rare thing, although don't be complacent when it comes to examining the body of your prospective purchase. Consider the possibility the car you're looking at might have been involved in a shunt. The previously mentioned online checks will inform you of any prior insurance claim, but be sure to

examine panel gaps and variations in colour between sections of bodywork. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

Gas rams for the electric roof are known to fail over time. Replacement parts are readily available. The areas surrounding the boot lid lock and driver's door handle may show signs of scuffing where hamfisted previous owners have brushed bunches of keys across paintwork. Light scratches and scuffs will polish out, although deep marks and front end stonechips may require fresh a lick of fresh paint.



## INTERIOR

Hard-wearing upholstery features throughout the range, but higher mileage R129s may exhibit bolster wear or nicks in hide. Automotive upholstery repair and restoration specialist, Awesome (point your browser at [awesome.eu.com](http://awesome.eu.com)), is well-versed in correcting the condition of tired leather and fabrics in luxury sports cars, so don't be dissuaded from the purchase of an otherwise fresh R129. Instead, use the presence of worn cabin furniture as a money-saving bargaining chip.

Later R129s were trimmed in Nappa leather, which wears better than the hide used in earlier cars. "Many fourth-gen SLs were used as runarounds when prices were at rock bottom, meaning some have been kept outside, where the effects of prolonged exposure to sunlight can fade light-coloured interiors," explains

James. "For this reason, I'd always recommend a black interior over cream, although recolouring and restoration is possible no matter the shade of SL cockpit. Factor the cost of remedial work into the price you're prepared to pay for the car you're looking at."

Exposure to heat also causes other problems in an R129's cabin, from cracked wooden dash trim to, er, cracked plastics. "The spectacle holder on the dashboard is notorious for not working particularly well, where a push button is supposed to activate a pop-open panel. Similarly, the centre console armrest features an adjuster handle. This almost always breaks off, requiring a fix," laughs James.

Late R129s can be easily identified by the introduction of chrome rings around dash clocks and a four-spoke steering wheel with a shiny three-pointed star embedded in the airbag.





## PRICE

The R129 has represented something of a bargain in recent years, but times are changing, and a new generation of owners are looking to this sleeky SL as the object of their desire following exposure to the model when it was in production. Remember, low mileage doesn't necessarily mean the best condition, so do your homework, shop around and pick a car accompanied by a stack of paperwork. Here's a selection of the minters currently being offered by 4 Star Classics:

### 1999 SL 320

Brilliant Silver Metallic paintwork, 25,232 miles from new, full black Nappa leather, unmarked soft top, pristine hard top  
**£17,495**

### 1995 SL 500

Japanese import, Green Black Metallic paintwork, 24,730 miles from new, full black leather, completely free of corrosion  
**£20,995**





## KROWN SHAMPOO

Give your R129 an eco-friendly, high-foam clean with Krown's Premium Wash concentrated shampoo. Simply dilute a fifth of a cup of concentrate in five-litres of water, then mix, foam and wash. It's that simple! Easy to apply and equally straightforward to rinse off, the contents of each 500ml bottle last for up to thirty washes. The product is easy to get hold of too, with every branch of Halfords stocking it. Off to the shops with you!

**Price: £8.99** [bit.ly/krownwash](http://bit.ly/krownwash)



## MOTAMEC CORDLESS WRENCH

Packing a hefty 430lb-ft torque, Motamec's cordless impact wrench (half-inch drive) is powered by a lithium battery which retains its charge for long periods of time. Forward and reverse controls with an 'instant stop' brake are integrated into a sturdy housing, making this an ideal tool for the DIYer at home or those working while on the move. Supplied with a mains charger and carry case, this variable speed wrench also features a battery condition LED indicator.

**Price: £195** [bit.ly/motamecwrench](http://bit.ly/motamecwrench)

# R129 Essentials

A selection of cool kit to help you get the very best out of your SL without breaking the bank...

## NICOMAN 'SPAGHETTI' CUSTOM FLOOR MATS

These incredibly durable custom-fit 'Spaghetti' floor mats from Nicoman feature a 12mm thick intricate weave that traps dirt, debris and moisture, keeping muck away from your R129's valuable carpets. Made to order for any make or model (or available in universal fitment), each mat can be cleaned by jet wash or hose. Fire retardant, sound-deadening, UV-proof, non-slip, stiletto-friendly, super-comfortable and featuring a patented, carpet-protecting GECKO backing, each set of mats comes with an impressive two-year warranty and is available to order in a choice of eight different colours to suit a variety of classic Mercedes interiors. Nicoman pitches the product as the most luxurious, practical and protective car mat available. Find out for yourself by visiting the firm's website.

**Price: From £19.99**

[nicoman.co.uk](http://nicoman.co.uk) or call 0121 328 5582



## EBC BRAKES PERFORMANCE DISC AND PAD KITS



Premium quality brake discs and pads in a variety of compounds to suit varying driving styles and environments are available from UK manufacturer, EBC, with ATE and Brembo-caliper R129s (model year 1994 onwards) catered for. Whether you're in charge of an SL 280 or an SL 73 AMG, EBC has you covered, with options of flat-faced or slotted and dimpled discs, offering big savings over OEM parts, optimised braking performance and 250ml of BF004 brake fluid shipped with every kit. Visit the EBC website for further information and to view the company's full range of discs, pads, handbrake shoes and hoses.

**Price: Front brake kit from £132.04**

[ebcbrakesdirect.com](http://ebcbrakesdirect.com)  
or call 01604 286028

## YUASA YBX5000 BATTERY RANGE

Yuasa has launched a range of premium quality batteries suited to standard or modified vehicles with factory ignition systems. Featuring up to 35% increase in cranking power and a handy state-of-charge indicator, each unit in the YBX5000 range is VDA rollover test compliant and ensures easy installation thanks to an integrated handle. A sealed tip/tilt double lid and calcium plates add to OE quality with enhanced performance and specification. A wide range of cars are catered for, including R129 SLs, so hop online, visit [yuasa.co.uk](http://yuasa.co.uk) and punch in your vehicle's registration number to find out which battery and upgrade options are available for you to take advantage of.

**Price: From £81.95** [yuasa.co.uk](http://yuasa.co.uk) or call 01793 833555





## DEI SHRINK TUBES

DEI Heat Shrink Tubes are professional grade flexible polyolefin tubing, providing protection from dirt, dust, solvents, and foreign materials, as well as delivering excellent electrical insulation and strain relief. The over-expanded tubing easily fits over the ends of wires and connectors before shrinking down to 33% of its original diameter to create a snug, water-tight protective seal.

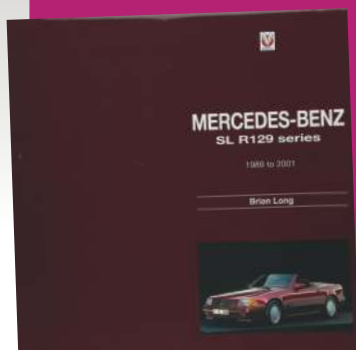
**Price: From \$12.16** [designengineering.com](http://designengineering.com)



## PIONEER AVH-Z7000DAB

Pioneer has launched a feature-packed single-DIN head unit offering owners of older cars the same tech available with double-DINs. Take a bow, the unparalleled AVH-Z7000DAB. Complete with a fully motorised, pin-sharp, fold-out seven-inch touchscreen, this Apple/Android-enabled Bluetooth unit features thirteen-band EQ, MOSFET 50W x4 output power, Auto Equaliser and Auto Time Alignment.

**Price: £629** [pioneer-car.eu/uk](http://pioneer-car.eu/uk)



## RECOMMENDED READ MERCEDES SL: R129 SERIES

Such is the R129's fantastic styling, it's hard to believe the model was launched thirty years ago, but here we are celebrating three decades of the sensational SL, a modern classic with looks still considered fresh and attractive. Covering the '90s SL's ever-changing specification is a tough task, especially when you want to examine the R129's presence in all the world's major markets, but all the information is here in detail, bolstered by stunning contemporary photography in a volume ready to join your reference library.

Presented in hardback with 208 pages featuring

350 images, this exhaustive look at the R129 includes everything from road test results and production numbers to detailed vehicle profiles and year-by-year analysis of factory output, spanning the R129's entire lifespan. A must-have tome for any enthusiast interested in the historical significance of this increasingly popular SL.

**Price: £40** [veloce.co.uk](http://veloce.co.uk) or call 01305 260068



## RENOVO BLACK CARPET REVIVER

Discoloured, matted-down and dirty carpets can make your treasured R129 look tired and neglected. Fortunately, car care product manufacturer, Renovo, has developed a carpet reviver designed to make even the greyest of blacks look as good as new. The famous firm's unique formulation not only cleans and re-colours black carpet, but it also protects treated material with a UV inhibitor and an advanced anti-bacterial guard effective against superbugs. Simple to apply and capable of delivering outstanding results, Renovo carpet reviver is sold in 400ml spray bottles for a shade under fifteen quid.

**Price: £14.95**  
[bit.ly/renovocarpet](http://bit.ly/renovocarpet)  
or call the team on  
01444 443277



## AUTOBRITE DIRECT THREE-STAGE PAINTWORK CORRECTION KIT

This all-in-one paint correction package from Staffordshire-based detailing specialist, Autobrite Direct, includes a DA-21 (or optional DA12) dual action polisher, five-inch and six-inch microfibre cutting discs, five-inch and six-inch microfibre finishing discs, a Mini Reaper 1,000gsm buffing towel, 125mm and 150mm DA-21 backing plates, a microfibre applicator, a detailing pad brush, plus bottles of Restore cutting compound, Enrich polishing compound and Final Finish glaze (each in 250ml quantities). The celebrated DA-21 has a powerful 880W motor with a six-speed setting delivering masses of torque and quiet operation. A three-metre power cable gives you plenty of room to manoeuvre around your car, and the entire package is presented in a heavy duty DB2 carrying bag. Aimed at professional detailers and enthusiasts alike, this is a comprehensive paintwork correction kit supplied with easy-to-understand instructions and is suitable for owners of classic or new cars.

**Price: £235** [autobritedirect.co.uk](http://autobritedirect.co.uk) or call 01782 315632







# On the **air**

The most commonly purchased aftermarket air filter designs and how effective they are at balancing the rate of filtration with derestricted airflow

**A**n air filter is always the first upgrade made when enthusiasts look to improve their car's performance, but this key alteration is quickly overshadowed by more exotic modifications. This is unfair – the humble air filter is a crucial component in the quest for increased horsepower. Moreover, an engine without an air filter in place will most likely destroy itself through the inhalation of dirt and debris. In the worst-case scenario, your Mercedes' beating heart would shotblast itself to death from the inside out! By its nature, a filter introduces a restriction of

some kind or another, meaning choosing the right air filter can be tricky. The key behind delivering uninhibited airflow suited to a specific application is to reach the perfect compromise between levels of filtration, airflow and intake air temperature. Additionally, the resulting air filter needs to fit in whatever space is available in a car's engine bay.

As a rule of thumb, a filter with higher filtration properties will flow less air. In other words, you'll need a larger filter to flow the same volume of air as one with lower filtration properties. The temperature of the intake air is just as important; hot air is less dense than cold air, meaning there's more oxygen available for



combustion in cold air. This is why temperature plays such an important role when it comes to induction and achieving big bhp, and why a rolling road operator has to make calculations which consider the effects of volatile ambient temperature before he or she is able to provide you with an accurate power figure after your Mercedes has enjoyed a session on the dyno.

There are many types of aftermarket air filter available for you to choose from. A variety of different materials can be used depending on the desired filtration rate and intended application. In this article, we take a closer look at the most popular designs, examining how each of them works.



## FILTRATION vs FLOW

With any air filter, there's a trade-off between levels of filtration and the volume of airflow. Put it this way, if you simply blanked off your car's intake hose, you'd stop all dirt and debris from entering the engine, but you'd also stop air from being sucked in, meaning the engine wouldn't run!

At the other end of the spectrum, an open intake with no filter whatsoever would pose zero restriction to the amount of air which could enter your Mercedes' powerplant, but all dirt and debris in its path would be sucked in, causing serious damage. Not good.

Clearly, we need a compromise between these two extremes. Most standard air filters tend to fall nearer the 'closed' example we've just outlined, ensuring high levels of filtration for

maximum engine protection and increased service life. All of this sounds great, but it comes at the expense of airflow, and as we already know, much more air means much more power.

Thankfully, aftermarket performance air filters allow you to shift the rate air can enter your car's engine, leaning towards the 'open' example we've just highlighted. The increased flow rate allows you to unlock more of your Mercedes' true performance potential. In theory, this should come at the expense of filtration, but by deploying clever tricks of the trade (uprated materials, custom filter shapes and a choice of sizes), huge improvements in airflow can be achieved whilst maintaining excellent levels of filtration.





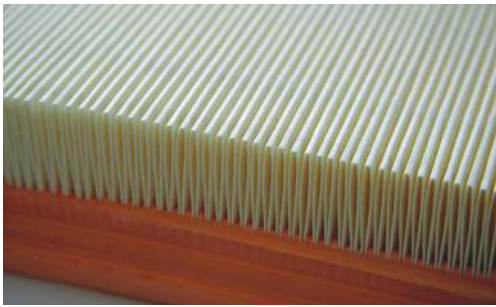
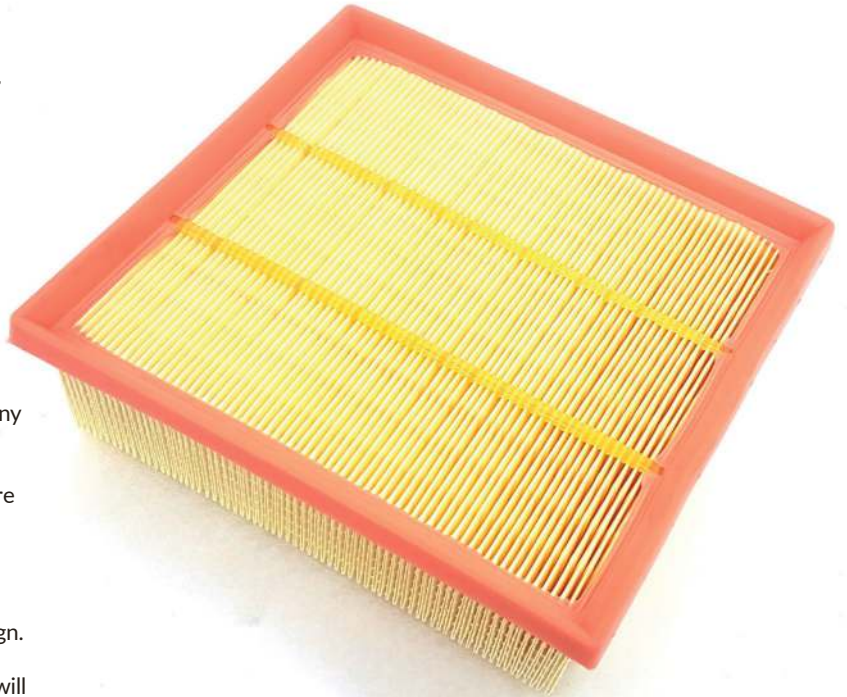
## MATERIALS

There are many materials which can be used to create a performance air filter, but the four most commonly used properties are paper, cotton gauze, foam and mesh. Let's look at each of them in detail.

### Paper

Most standard air filters are made from paper. Paper is very good at filtering dirt and debris, but as the filter does its job, it becomes dirty and blocks airflow. Imagine looking at a paper element under a microscope. You'd see lots of tiny holes allowing air to pass, but these same holes get blocked quickly, preventing anything – even air – from passing. This is why paper air filters are disposable and have a short service life.

As you'd expect, a paper filter's performance decreases with age. To increase service life, manufacturers give paper filters a large surface area, which explains their distinctive fin-like design. Paper isn't as good at allowing air to pass as the other materials we've talked about, though, and will pose a problem when it comes to engine tuning.



**To increase service life, manufacturers give paper air filters a large surface area, which explains their distinctive fin-like design**

### Cotton gauze

Cotton gauze allows far higher airflow than paper. Typically, a cotton gauze air filter will make use of four-ply gauze with a specially designed aluminium screen. The aluminium offers support to the cotton gauze and allows the filter to be corrugated across its surface area. A large surface area has many benefits over a smaller one, but one of the main advantages is the marked increase in the filter's lifespan.

Air filters made from cotton gauze use a specially formulated oil to assist with filtration. When contaminated air passes through the filter, any dirt present gets trapped in the oil. This vastly increases the air filter's ability to stop unwanted particles entering your car's engine without reducing

the volume of air being sucked in. Consequently, cotton gauze filters can limit the movement of particles as small as five microns. Anything smaller is unlikely to cause harm unless being drawn into the engine in large quantities. To put this into perspective, most standard paper air filters are unable to filter particles smaller than twenty microns!

Cotton gauze filters are designed to be cleaned and reused. Simply ridding the filter of trapped dirt will restore the part's performance back to its as-new state. Indeed, the guys at K&N Filters are so confident in the quality and durability of the company's cotton gauze filters, they offer a million-mile warranty with each one sold!



## Foam

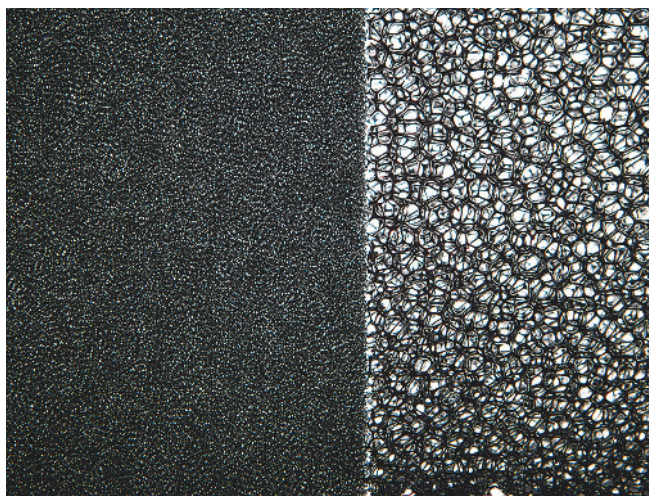
Foam air filters are used in a wide range of applications, including top tier motorsport such as the British Touring Car Championship, World Rally Championship and Formula One. Foam filters differ from cotton gauze and paper filters due to their nature as a 'surface' medium. In other words, they block dirt and debris on the filter surface before allowing air to pass.

Foam filters are said to offer a high rate of filtration due to their thickness. Dirt and debris gets caught in the filter, but there's always an alternative route for air to flow freely. The labyrinth-like fashion of foam air filters is why they tend to have a lengthy service life and maintain their performance far longer than other surface media filters.

Another advantage is the ability to laminate different grades of foam to produce a filter with unique characteristics. For example, take a layer of coarse foam and put it atop a layer of finer foam. Before you know it, you've produced an air filter with very little restriction through the first layer, although larger particles will be trapped. Then, as the air flows through the second layer, an increased volume of dirt is blocked from entering the engine, although the air will be more restricted than when it made its way through the first layer. You could add a third layer that's finer still, which would trap the smallest of particles, albeit at the expense of unrestricted airflow.

As you can see, laminating filter foam like this allows almost infinite scope for adjustability, enabling a bespoke filter to be produced for a specific application. As if to prove the point, WRC chariots use different foam air filters on each rally stage, primarily because the dramatically different weather and surface environments competing cars are subjected to demand ever-changing air filter properties.

Foam air filters use a specially designed oil to help trap dirt and debris, blocking particles as small as four microns! Like cotton gauze filters, foam air filters can be cleaned, re-oiled and reused, with filter manufacturers offering the necessary cleaning materials at extra cost. Some manufacturers even offer foam filters mated to carbon-fibre intake pipework!



## Mesh

Mesh filters aren't all that popular on the Mercedes scene, but they are often seen strapped to the powerplants of Japanese joy toys. The principle behind how they work is the same as paper and cotton gauze filters: the layers of fine stainless steel mesh act as a filter which helps to prevent dirt and debris from entering the engine. The consensus among modifiers, however, is that because of the way stainless mesh is constructed, this type of air filter fails to offer the same rate of filtration as paper,

cotton gauze or foam. The holes within the mesh allow vastly improved airflow over the host vehicle's standard paper air filter, which is why you should expect to see good power gains with a mesh filter in place, but don't expect the same level of filtration as you'd enjoy after investing in an air filter made from any of the other materials we've talked about in this article. If outright power (at the risk of engine durability) is your thing, then perhaps a mesh filter makes sense to you. If not, consider a safer form of filtration.







## SIZE MATTERS

When it comes to the wonderful world of air filters, bigger is better. That said, you shouldn't make the mistake of thinking a bigger filter will automatically deliver enhanced performance. Each application has its own optimum filter size. Exceeding it won't make any difference to the power your car's engine is able to produce. Then again, most people fit the largest air filter they can squeeze into the available space beneath the bonnet of their car to ensure they aren't restricting airflow. Also, a larger air filter features a larger surface area, which means it should have a longer service life before cleaning is required.

In theory, fitting a filter larger than what's necessary won't

cause any harm, but there is increased danger of the filter's larger dimensions causing the part to edge closer to heat generating componentry, and the last thing we want is for hot air to be sucked into the engine. Our advice is to fit an air filter designed for your intended application, or to take measures to prevent a larger filter from being unduly exposed to heat (see separate boxout).

Fitting an air filter that's too small will cause problems. Essentially, the filter becomes a restriction, even if made from high-flowing performance materials. The engine will be choked of air, robbed of performance and may suffer damage as a consequence of being subjected to prolonged periods of 'breathing difficulties'.



## Panel filters

Replacement panel air filters are usually seen as the first stage of upgrade in the world of tuning. Replacing your car's standard paper air filter with a freer-flowing panel filter made from cotton gauze or foam allows more air to reach the engine. This means it can put less effort into pulling air through the filter and can suck more air in, behaviour resulting in more power.

A performance panel filter has many advantages over the part it replaces. As we've already highlighted, a panel filter will allow more air to travel through it at a quicker rate; typically, a performance panel filter will flow forty percent more air. Also, these parts benefit from being a direct replacement for the standard item, meaning quick and easy installation taking no longer than you'd spend fitting a factory-spec filter. The performance part has a much longer service life too.

Don't be fooled into thinking an aftermarket performance panel filter will always increase performance. Much depends on the size of the standard air box in which the air filter is housed; if the air filter is capable of flowing more air than the airbox design will allow, it doesn't matter how good the flow rate of your new air filter is, there will always be a limit to its ability to release trapped ponies. Under these circumstances, you'll need to look at replacing the stock air box with an aftermarket item or induction kit.

## Cone/Cylinder filters

One of the most popular choices for an aftermarket performance air filter is a cone or cylinder filter. The benefit of a cone over a flat panel is simply that a cone offers a greater surface area whilst still fitting within a small physical space, often narrower than that occupied by the panel filter. Think of it like this: rolling a panel filter into a cone doesn't change the panel's surface area, but it does allow the part to squeeze into a small space.

Installing a cone or cylinder filter often requires the removal of the car's original air box. The new filter is then installed directly onto the end of the intake trunking. Alternatively, it can sit within a bespoke air box or behind a custom heatshield. This setup is usually what people refer to as an induction kit. It eliminates the standard air box's restrictions by drawing air in from all directions instead of relying on air being fed inward via a specific route dictated by uncompromising air box ducting.

The downside to all of this is that controlling where intake air is drawn from can prove to be a challenge, with some poorly designed filters pulling in hot air from around the engine bay. This is what's referred to as 'heat soak' and is massively detrimental to performance. If you're really unlucky, your car might be producing far less power than it was with its stock air filter in place!

Open air filters work well on naturally aspirated engines where improvements in airflow feel more pronounced than when playing with air filters linked to forced induction equipment (such as a turbocharger or supercharger). Moreover, tuned naturally aspirated engines need large volumes of air to be drawn from the atmosphere, but often feature air boxes which won't allow air to flow beyond the manufacturer's standard specification.

Cone filters used in forced induction applications tend to be much larger than those fitted to naturally aspirated engines. This is simply because forced induction applications usually produce more power than those free of a 'charger, dictating the need for more intake air.



## THROTTLE BODIES

When making use of throttle bodies, you've got two main filter choices: smaller individual air filters (one for each throttle body) or a giant filter which covers all the inlet trumpets at once! Which you choose depends on the application and its requirements. For example, the amount of space you have to play with might prove to be a key concern preventing you from fitting a large single air filter with a superior flow rate.







## COLD AIR INTAKE SYSTEMS

As we've already mentioned, hot air isn't as useful to an engine as cold air. Shielding the incoming air from sources of heat (turbochargers, exhausts etc.) will always result in better performance. One way of avoiding the dreaded 'heat soak' whilst maintaining a cone filter's rate of airflow is to enclose the filter in a specially designed casing that can only receive air from a dedicated cold air feed. Yes, we appreciate that sounds like we're describing the standard manufacturer airbox setup, but we're talking about a completely derestricted air filter housing suited to your car and the power you hope it will achieve.

It's true to say many modern sports cars feature well-designed air boxes with multiple inlets and excellent heat shielding, but even good OEM designs can be improved upon. Besides, most older Mercedes – be they performance or pedestrian models – are fitted with terribly designed air boxes which massively restrict engine performance.

One of the simplest ways to combat 'heat soak' is to take a cone air filter and fit it inside a carbon-fibre or aluminium air box. You can then direct cold air through ducting starting at the front of the car (consider losing a fog lamp to make way for the intake opening). It's a method which yields good results, but unless you're building a bespoke air box, don't expect an off-the-shelf aftermarket air box to fit without fettling. They can be cumbersome and awkward to install!

Fortunately, many tuners will be able to recommend performance air boxes with optimised pipework design, as well as being able to advise on the best choice of air filter for your car. Naturally, bespoke solutions attract a premium price tag often dictated by the choice of materials and complexity of design deployed. Rest assured, if you are shelling out for a custom design, you'll almost certainly be investing in the best airflow solution available for your Mercedes.



**Bespoke solutions often attract a premium price tag dictated by the choice of materials**

### CONTACTS

**Ramair** [ramair-filters.co.uk](http://ramair-filters.co.uk) 01672 564595  
**K&N Filters** [knfilters.co.uk](http://knfilters.co.uk) 01925 636950  
**AEM** [aemintakes.com](http://aemintakes.com) 01692 404313

**Mishimoto** [mishimoto.co.uk](http://mishimoto.co.uk) 01384 897476  
**ITG** [itgairfilters.com](http://itgairfilters.com) 02476 305386  
**BMC** [bmcairfilters.co.uk](http://bmcairfilters.co.uk) 01731 111207



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**M E R C E D E S - B E N Z**



# JAPANESE DREAM

9,000 miles from new and 6,000 miles from home, Bim Mountain's W126 420 SEL takes us to another time and place

WORDS **Emma Woodcock** PHOTOGRAPHY **Matt Woods**













It's 1989 and the streets of Tokyo, Osaka and Yokohama throb with corporate life. On every side, the buildings thrust high, strafing each road and walkway with blue-grey sheets of tempered glass. The ground chokes under the same 'twice a day, every day' rush you'd see in any major city.

Salarymen and salarywomen cloaked in sober cuts of black and grey fill the pavements and pool around the crossings, waiting for traffic to pause just long enough to allow safe passage.

Don't let appearances deceive you. This was Bubble Era Japan and the year the local stock index hit its all-time peak. There was money around and more desire than ever to spend it. Just take a look at the roads; domestic manufacturers took the economic boom to heart, hurling cash into ever more complex halo models in the quest for ultimate prestige. Honda developed a supercar, Subaru unveiled a futurist coupe with a flat-six and huge glasshouse, Mazda launched a mid-engined economy car with gullwing doors! Away from the avant-garde, the end of the 1980s also birthed enduring icons like the Nissan R32 Skyline GT-R, the Lexus LS400 and the stupendously successful Mazda MX-5.

Despite their enthusiasm and ever ballooning budgets, there was one thing Japanese manufacturers couldn't provide the local market: exoticism. From fashions to food, newly affluent investors wanted their luxuries European. When it came to cars, that meant Mercedes. Which brings us back to the urban sprawl and the automobiles within it. Somewhere in the crowds, there was a band new, long-wheelbase W126 S-Class. Breezing through the streets in all-leather, air-conditioned luxury, floating to an eight-cylinder, 4,196cc tune, it was two-tone proof of an economic miracle.

Almost six thousand miles and three decades away,

Bim Mountain was getting ready to wrap up a day's bidding at a classic car auction. That's when he saw it: five metres of square-edged, royal blue opulence with a three-pointed star on the grille. A paper sign peering out of the window told Bim what he wanted to know; right-hand drive and well presented, this 1989 300 SE was up for sale. "What a beautiful car!" he remembers. A Norfolk-based modern classics specialist who trades as Kerbey Motors (visit [kerbeymotors.com](http://kerbeymotors.com)), he knew exactly what he was looking at – and he was impressed.

## LOOKING BACK

If you caught last issue's feature on Bim's stunning R107 300 SL (order a back issue at [bit.ly/issuesmd](http://bit.ly/issuesmd)), you can guess what came next; a perfectionist whose focus is far more than skin deep, Bim got down on his hands and knees to check the car's underside. The news was good: no muck, no yuck and – most importantly – no visible corrosion. Everything he'd seen was clean and Mr Mountain was ready to spend big on the W126 before him.

There was just one obstacle, and it was making its objections known. "There was another dealer present. The guy was shouting his head off, telling all within earshot the car was already sold." The claim wasn't true; keen to make the 300 his own, the angry loudmouth hadn't signed on the dotted line. As any grammarian will tell you, 'buying' is a long way from 'bought'. Bim, undeterred by the competition, made some speedy enquiries.

The voice at the other end of the phone confirmed the SE was yet to find its new owner. Together, potential buyer and seller made another circuit around the 300, assessing its condition before reaching a deal. A recent Japanese import packing a striking combination of wood trim and blue velour, »

## Below and facing page

Every aspect of Bim's W126 420 SEL is utterly immaculate, including the amazingly presented engine bay and lush executive leather interior





the W126 Bim was looking at was a one-way ticket to an age long past. He was enchanted. "I had to buy it. The car had covered just 25,000 miles from new and it really wanted for nothing other than a new owner."

Twelve months whizzed by until the 300's seller dropped Bim a message announcing the availability of another W126. This car, it was claimed, was even better than the last. He needed to know more. "In the end, I couldn't resist going to look at it," he smiles. "The guy was right. The car was absolutely stunning. It looked like it'd just rolled out of the factory." Another import from the Land of the Rising Sun, this 1989 S-Class was a step even closer to perfection. Wearing barely 9,000 miles (displayed in kilometres) and carrying reams of Japanese paperwork, this fantastic 420 SEL could have rolled straight out of its Bubble Era import story.

## FULL TREATMENT

Before the car could head home with Bim at the wheel, it was submitted for a full service and recommissioning with Mercedes expert, Colin Ferns. "He's one of the most knowledgeable guys I know when it comes to working on older Mercs," says Bim. "Colin kept the car for a few days, running through it front to back. I remember him telling me I'd bought a 420 in unbelievable condition," he grins.

## Pacific rims

Bubble era Japan didn't just spawn homebrew oddballs. Working with Mitsubishi, even AMG got in on the action! The two firms collaborated in 1991, producing the Galant AMG. Key changes included a body kit, colour-coded alloys, a Nardi steering wheel and a thoroughly reworked engine. A revised intake, titanium valve springs and high compression pistons all featured, taking power to 170bhp at 8,000rpm. If that sounded a little too sporty, buyers could opt for the Debonair V 3000 Royal AMG. Updates were skin deep, including many, many AMG badges.

With seat time under his belt, Bim couldn't help but share the same opinion. First exposed to the W126's manifold charms when he worked for the owner of a 500 SEL all the way back in 1990, he found several parallels between the 420 and his early experiences. "I drove that 500 from time to time. I appreciate the fact my 420 is powered by a smaller engine, but it doesn't drive too differently. It's like a great, big, effortless limousine." He didn't dare enjoy the drive for too long; from the moment the SEL arrived at the Kerbey Motors base in Pulham Market, the large barge has been doted on in order to protect its low mileage and exceptional ambience.

When the time came to prepare the car for its next home, preservation was the order of the day. A full examination of the underside revealed nothing in the way of corrosion and, once cavity wax was applied as a precautionary measure, the bodywork was otherwise left alone. "There's been far less to do than with any car I've bought to date," he says. "I didn't want to tamper with perfection. It's such a lovely car and extremely original." Look around the fabulous four-door and his reticence is easy to understand. The metallic paintwork is unblemished, the engine bay doesn't exhibit a single ooze or imperfection. Even the tool roll and spare tyre appear original.

Open the doors and the interior is arguably even



## THE LARGE BARGE HAS BEEN DOTTED ON IN ORDER TO PROTECT ITS LOW MILEAGE AND EXCEPTIONAL AMBIENCE



cleaner. The carpets retain their every thread, the seat squabs are taut and the plastics refuse to exhibit a single crack or wrinkle. Behind the B-pillar, the opulence of original owner shimmies down the decades through rear air-conditioning vents and pristine angled foot rests. An inch-thick document bundle details the 420's history from new, suggesting this particular SEL has seen a lifetime of exacting care. Frustratingly, we can't know for sure until someone fluent in Japanese takes a look at the car's paper trail.

### DEEP IMPACT

What we do know is clear to all who see Bim's 420 SEL: this car is a survivor, a passport to the headiest days of boom culture than can never be replicated. "I'm hoping that when I do sell this W126, the new owner realises just how beautiful the Benz they've bought really is," he reflects. "I don't think I'll ever find another one like it. People look at this Mercedes, even people who aren't Benz fans, even those don't really understand cars, and they just get it. There's even the whiff of that 'new car smell' apparent every time you open a door and step inside. It really is a beautiful machine, and one I'll be sad to part with."

From rush hour Japan to sleepy Norfolk, this spotless 420 proves that quality echoes, no matter the time, no matter the place.



DRIVER

Q&A



**BIM MOUNTAIN**

**First Mercedes**  
CL55 AMG

**Favourite Mercedes**  
1954 Gullwing

**Best thing about your W126 420 SEL**  
Its stunning original condition

**Worst thing about your W126 420 SEL**  
I'm unlikely to find another one like it



# HARD TIMES

Uncertain ownership and a decade wedged in the worst of the Scottish weather didn't prevent Robin Thomson from saving this stunning W111 220

WORDS **Emma Woodcock** PHOTOGRAPHY **Adrian Brannan**









When the chips are down. When the next step ain't too certain. When the sky is lousy with the rolling clouds of pathetic fallacy. Those are the moments that make character, the days that decide whether we'll walk away with whatever little we've still got or keep going, pushing for the more and for the better. For the vintage vehicle restorer, it's a moment that comes time and time again. A drawn-out decision flows from the point of purchase and trickles through every rotten panel or impossibly scarce trim piece. The man or woman with the toolbox just has to persevere, safe in the knowledge a pristine classic Mercedes will be the ultimate reward. It's a fumbling, tumbling tale and one played out in a million little choices. It's one Benz addict, Robin Thomson, has made his own.

The knowledgeable Scot started on cars in his early days, working through a youth of self-described wheeling and dealing to learn the basics of automotive amelioration. "It was a hobby," he recalls. "When I look back, I recognise that I was simply tarting up cars before moving them on in the hope of securing a decent profit."

His predilections led to a first introduction to the Mercedes-Benz marque by way of a local auction in the 1990s. A W126 S-Class was shuffling over the block, pushed along by a less than original diesel motor. The limo's luxe, black look set a spark in Robin's heart. "I didn't know the engine was an aftermarket swap until I'd bought the car!" he groans. "Among other issues, it was leaking oil at an alarming rate, but it went through the auction at a low purchase price and looked stunning. My friends thought I'd won the lottery!"

As the months and miles passed by, the W126 wormed even further into Robin's heart, igniting a search for more Mercls, resulting in additional W126s and a selection of W123s landing on his driveway. His first S-Class, however, stayed put. "It was a fabulous car. I held onto it when I was working my way through the others simply because it was so much fun to drive." Mounting repair requirements, not to mention an absolute absence of financial viability, eventually sent the saloon to the great scrapyards in the sky. Even so, our man's enthusiasm for the brand kept on growing.

## LOCKED DOWN

Catch up with Robin today and he'll gladly explain; the Stirling & District Classic Car Club devotee's collection now runs to fourteen Benz-badged belters, all of them stored in a sizeable yard and garage complex. Were that not enough, he and his wife, Carol Ann, are also long-serving regional officers for the Scotland Central region of the Mercedes-Benz Club. From a stunning teal C140 coupe to earlier W108s, Robin's fleet is also abreast of the marque's lengthy history, bringing us neatly to the 1964 *Heckflosse* in our photos. Freshly resplendent in its original *Dunkelblau* – that's Dark Blue for those of us without Teutonic tongues – it's a sparkling example of Robin's restoration skills.



## Many Mercls

We've already touched on Robin's remarkable collection, but there's no harm in taking a closer look. "There won't be any more!" he laughs. "If anything, I'm looking to downsize. Right now, I'm mostly working on a W123 230E and another diesel-converted W126. These projects were on the backburner while I finished the Fintail. I've also got a W124 300 diesel as daily. It's a fabulous car. My hooligan Merc for the summer is an SLK 320. One of the rarest Mercls I own is a C140 500 SEC. It's a beautiful old thing and a very early example from before the W140 line-up was renamed."

"I knew about this W111 for a long, long time before my name appeared on its logbook," he explains. "The car was sitting in the yard of a Mercedes dealer local to where I live. It was there in all weather for close to nine years!" Well known in Scotland's classic car enthusiast circles, the dilapidated Fintail had been the subject of several rescue attempts. All had been rebuffed. Unclaimed and seemingly unloved for almost a decade, the car eventually disappeared.

Two years later, Robin was surfing everybody's favourite internet auction site for a new project. A familiar shape caught his eye. It was a partially dismantled W111 220. What's more, it looked to be the very same car spotted spending all those years sitting out in the harsh Scottish weather. Intrigued, the serial Mercedes purchaser placed a bid. The clock ticked down, no more offers were placed, the auction was won.

The trail now led to an accident repair workshop in Perth, where the battle-scarred classic had benefitted from the first murmurings of a restoration. The bodywork had been stripped back, the springs, shocks and bushes had been renewed and the braking system had been treated to new discs, calipers and rear drums. Looking at his purchase, Robin was pleased to learn the driveline





was in reasonable condition and the all-original interior had remained untouched. The odometer read a scant 28,000 miles.

### TIME TRAVELLER

Ownership also allowed Robin to uncover the Fintail's early history. "I discovered the car originally belonged to a friend of the guy in charge of the dealership where I first laid encountered the classic Mercedes," he explains. "I'm told the owner only used the car on Sundays, often doing nothing more than polishing his pride and joy. It was last on the road in 1992 and had been sent to the dealer for servicing work." Sadly, the owner then passed away, leading the firm to keep custody of the car until it was decided to rehome it many years later.

Eventually repatriated to Robin's nest, the part-completed project needed bodywork and needed it bad. The restoration would take five years. "The more I think about it, the more rust I remember!" he laughs. "The rear of the car was especially poor. The boot floor was a mess and I found severe corrosion around the sills, the door bottoms and the inner wings. There was no getting away from the stark fact the whole of the body was in need of urgent care." Amazingly, not a single panel has been replaced, Robin

**Above** Robin's restored W111 220 looks beautiful in deep blue and features sharp angles in all the right places

**Right** Thanks to lots of spanner work, not to mention a fair amount of spit and polish, the engine bay looks factory fresh









instead drawing on his experience to cut away any corrosion and fabricate the substitute shapes. The rear subframe mounts proved especially challenging, requiring a patient, dextrous hand to effect an invisible repair.

As the process progressed, Robin also worked to repaint the car. "Whenever I finished a panel, I'd paint it inside and out before reassembly. Then, when the car was back together, it got a final paint over." Keen to replicate the factory's original treatment, even the underside of this tidy 220 wears a coat of dark blue over its stonechip base. Just as smart inside as it is out, the W111's MB-Tex upholstery also benefitted from Robin's attention; warped door cards were dampened, slid under a stack of weight and squeezed for a full year to regain their original shape.

## LUCKY FIND

Regrettably, not every original component could be salvaged. Nowhere was this more apparent than the rear bumper. Split into two parts, the right side of the chrome strut had almost disintegrated, a common Fintail fault. "I looked for a replacement

from the moment I started the restoration," says Robin. "I tried Essen, I tried Stuttgart, but dealers told me it was an impossible task. Truth be told, I'd almost given up." Then, one night before a trip to Germany, the internet provided. "To my amazement, I found a bumper listed on eBay by a seller located twenty-five miles away from my home. I placed a bid and won!" Offered on behalf of an elderly former Mercedes owner, a shrewd Samaritan had prevented the piece from hitting the skip, much to Robin's delight.

With the addition of new hoses, fresh fluids and a stainless steel exhaust, his terrific 220 was finally complete. "It was a fabulous first drive," he smiles, proud of a job well done. "There was nothing untoward and the ride was exactly as it should be." Now in the model's sixtieth year, this W111 will celebrate its renaissance with a flurry of trips to local car shows and a long run to this summer's Silverstone Classic. From chrome tip to flicked tail, this mega Mercedes is a shining testament to its owner's skill and perseverance, plus it serves as proof that no matter how wrecked a car might look, there's always a brighter tomorrow.

## DRIVER

## Q&A



### ROBIN THOMSON

#### First Mercedes

A diesel-powered W126

#### Favourite Mercedes

I like them all!

#### Best thing about your W111 220

The styling is fabulous

#### Worst thing about your W111 220

Nothing. I love it!







## UNDER THE HAMMER

# HAMMER TIME!

A bumper few weeks of auction room activity saw Mercedes metal head home with visitors to the National Exhibition Centre and Stoneleigh Park...

WORDS **Dan Furr** PHOTOGRAPHY **Horace G Skiing**

SOLD FOR  
**£45,732**



## 1965 W113 230 SL

Once owned by popular Greek MEP, Emmanouil Kefalogiannis, this smartly presented and totally useable W113 230 SL was imported from Crete on a NOVA (that's a Notification of Vehicle Arrivals service, not an unusually strong Vauxhall). Unfortunately, disaster struck when the complete contents of the history file were mysteriously lost after the car waved goodbye to the birthplace of Zeus. Yikes! On the plus side, the original registration document was kept with the pretty Pagoda, and the seller was able to provide evidence of major engine and transmission work



recently carried out. Regarding the latter, this silver SL is kitted-out with a rare four-speed manual gearbox. Another plus point is the stack of Greek music cassettes in the glove box, which is every Mercedes buyer's dream, right?! If bopping to Byzantine isn't your thing, however, then perhaps achingly seductive styling, a factory hard-top and a reconditioned soft-top will get you moving. It certainly worked for the lucky buyer, who walked away from the Classic Car Auctions (CCA) NEC Restoration Show as the proud owner of a globetrotting, feet shimmying SL.

## 1976 W116 450 SEL

As far as large executive '70s saloons go, the W116 takes some beating, and this long-wheel base 450 automatic is a great example of why abundant power, ample cabin space and period-perfect creature comforts proved so popular with those who had money to spend forty-odd years ago. With current mileage at less than 93k, silver paintwork, good panel gaps, tidy brightwork, blue velour seating and colour-coded plastics in excellent condition, our only complaint was the addition of a tow bar. At least the low sale price more than compensated for this lavish load lugger's unsightly towing tail!



## 1983 W123 200



Sometimes, less is more, as proved by this two-litre W123 saloon, a simple classic remaining unadorned, unmolested and proudly standard. Wearing a coat of Ascot Grey (the kind of hue Lamborghini and Audi would have you believe they made fashionable in recent times), this well-looked after example has been with the seller for over nine years. During this time, all servicing and maintenance has been carried out according to manufacturer instruction, with the owner keen not to let age-related wear and tear get the better of his bulletproof Benz, a four-door with blue velour cabin furniture showing none of the imperfections one might expect from a car with 120k miles on the clock.



## 1990 C126 420 SEC

This UK-supplied, right-hand drive 420 SEC is another Mercedes on these pages boasting only four owners from new. A handsome pillarless coupe, it's a rare sight on UK roads, with only 3,680 420s reportedly built for worldwide distribution. The 4.2-litre V8 is hidden inside a gorgeously-kept body decorated in

Graphite paintwork matched to grey leather in superb condition, a feature undoubtedly encouraged by distance covered of only 64k miles from new. A full MOT and a decent history file complete the package, which didn't struggle to attract interested parties at the NEC Classic Car & Restoration Show auction when it took place in March.



SOLD FOR  
**£4,662**





## UNDER THE HAMMER

### 2002 W210 E55 AMG

It might not be loaded with snail-shaped bhp boosters, but the W210 E55 AMG and its near-350bhp 5.5-litre V8 still command an army of loyal admirers many years after the model was first introduced. This 2002 example is equipped with an automatic transmission and the classic twin-tone leather design you either love or hate. Meticulously maintained with a full service history proving caring ownership from just two owners, 79k miles from new and a fresh service from Mercedes-Benz of Solihull, the fast four-door shifted for less than nine grand at the Classic Car Auctions NEC sale.



### 1983 R107 280 SL



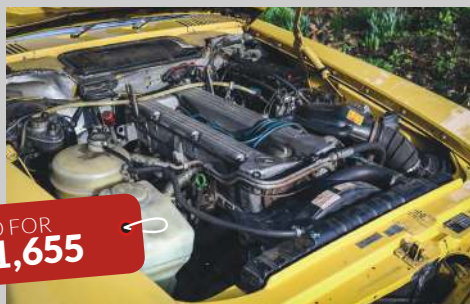
In the early 1980s, it took a brave buyer to order their new 280 SL in a shade not too dissimilar from the custard-coloured paint covering British Telecom panel vans. Nevertheless, this *Saharagelb* 673 R107 served its first owner well before being sold to its last custodian, who hung on to the wide-rimmed roadster for twenty-nine years before presenting the car for sale at the NEC in March. 97k miles, a good history file, an MOT with no advisories and a spare set of rims, not to mention a colour-coded hard top in excellent order, meant this striking drop-top didn't hang around the auction room for long, although bodywork in need of attention may have influenced the low final sale price.



### 2013 SLS AMG GT

First registered on 18th April 2013 and thought to be one of only nine UK-registered examples, this awesome *Sport Licht Super* AMG GT is dressed in Sepang Brown with an Artico Black leather interior. The car was purchased by the vendor in summer 2017, when he became the fourth owner and enjoyed the Affalterbach-badged 'Gullwing' until

it reached the 17k-mile mark, at which point he decided to sell. Unfortunately, not even maintenance without care for cost, a comprehensive main dealer service history and sheer depth of talent capable of leaving a long-lasting impression were enough to secure a winning bid at the Race Retro Classic Car Sale at Stoneleigh Park in Warwickshire a few weeks ago.





**BIG  
SPENDER**

SOLD FOR  
**£53,280**

## 1967 W113 250 SL

Another Pagoda offered for sale at the CCA NEC Restoration Show auction was this 1967 Cherry Red 250 SL, complete with cream MB-Tex, matching hard-top and a new tan soft-top. Imported to the UK from America in 2015, the car is accompanied by a full documented history after import, but nothing prior to that date (there's a theme developing here!). Ready to roll straight out of Brum after time spent inhabiting the trendy West End of London, this 'matching numbers' *Sport Leicht* generated a lot of interest in the room, although hit a sale price many thought would be much higher.



## 2003 W463 270 CDI



As readers of our last issue (order a copy at [bit.ly/issuesmd](http://bit.ly/issuesmd)) will know, 2019 marks forty years of G-Wagen. Nothing renews interest in a model quite like an anniversary year, which is why we weren't surprised to see bidders get busy when it came to the Classic Car Auctions team passing this W463 270 CDI across the block. A German market car imported to the United Kingdom in 2012, the Triple Black right-hooker has covered a lofty 240k miles, but has been maintained to an incredibly high standard, with a mainly main dealer service history, a reconditioned engine fitted less than 20k miles ago and a new gearbox installed back in 2015. A 240k-mile G-Wagen which drives like a 50-miler and costs less than fifteen grand. What's not to like about that?!



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### 420 SEL



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### 380 SL



**1984, £38,900.** Hard and soft top, un-restored and totally original and in beautiful condition throughout. Been in storage since 2006. Please call 07831 884045, Gloucestershire.  
6022

## 450 SL



**1973, 88,000 miles, £9,950.** LHD Californian import with all duties paid. The car is rust free and comes with soft and hard top. Please call 01460 77760, Devon.  
6674

## 500 SL



**2002, POA.** Silver exterior with grey interior. Excellent condition with service history books and every conceivable extra plus a full MoT and a personalised registration. Please call 07737 174200, West Midlands.  
6988

## 500 SL



**2002, £5,250.** Personalised reg, silver, full MoT, all books, papers, full extras package AMG wheels, 2 keys recent discs and pads. Please call 07477 414999.  
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**1983, 106,000 miles, £14,500.** Petrol, convertible, new soft top and a good hardtop. New tyres which are good all round and original took kit. Please call 01424 213473, East Sussex.  
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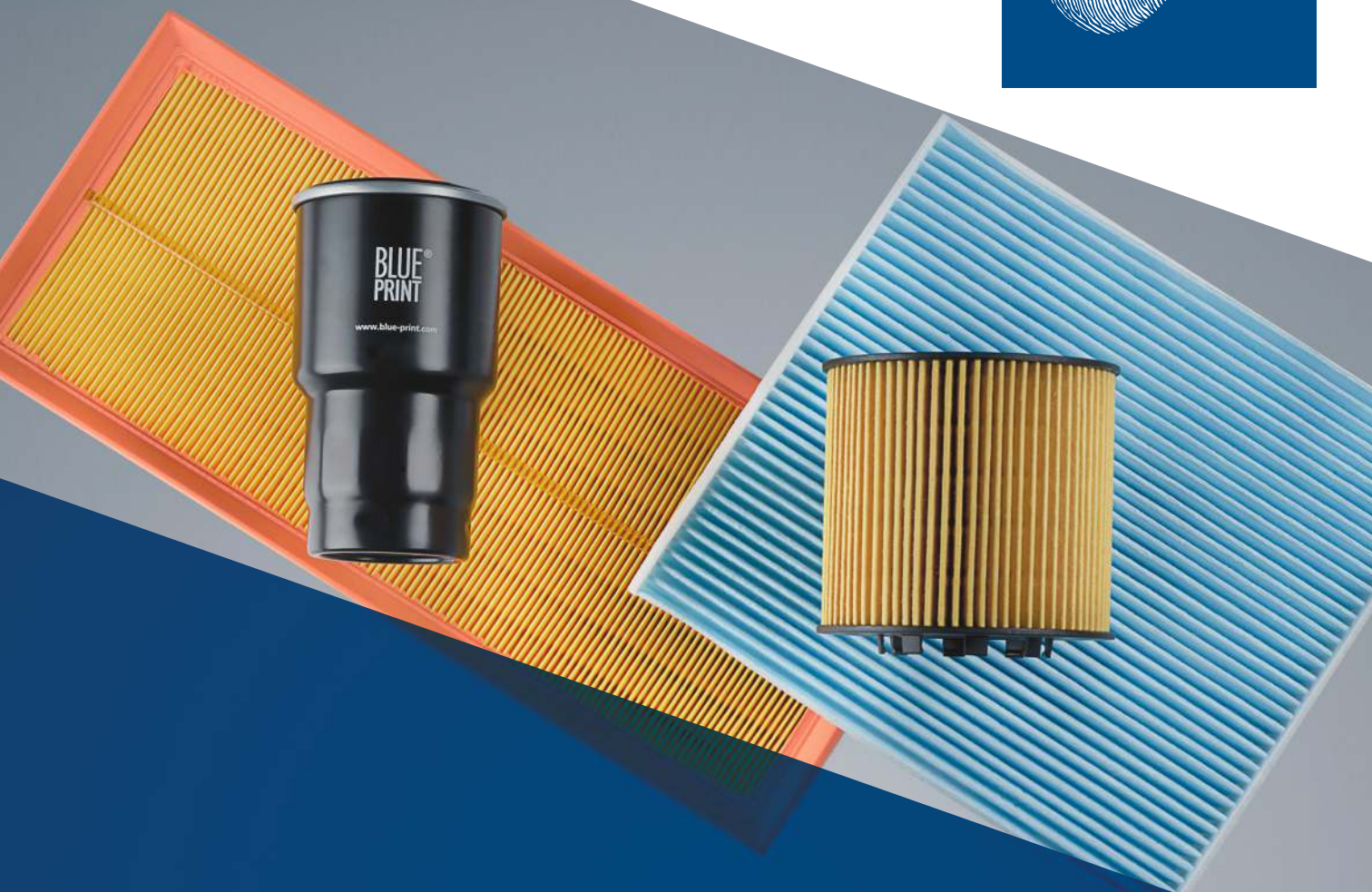


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