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DRIVE!**

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Issue 160  
February 2015

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“What was the point of this exodus? Simply to get out in ‘our’ Mercedes and find some interesting roads”

**T**RUTH BE TOLD, WE WEREN'T THE ONLY ONES ENJOYING THE DRIVE THAT you can read about from page 42. Of course, the 450SEL 6.9 held centre stage (I lost count of the people who appeared to wonder if, and then realise it really was a 6.9), but it did not claim that position without a fight. With its gorgeously wide arches, the supercharged W124 E500 (see the photograph below) was a big rival in the eye candy stakes, not to mention in performance terms, and provided a link from classic to modern classic in our group. Then there was the extensively overhauled G400 CDI, battling over the terrain with a four-litre V8 diesel and rolling with the looks of an AMG model, its five-speed auto making full use of the muscular torque. Amongst snowy scenery, it stood prouder than a loyal gun dog. Look out for this car in a future issue of Mercedes Enthusiast - and the same goes for the new W205 C180, which flew the flag for modern Mercedes during our roadtrip.

What was the point of this exodus? Simply to get out in ‘our’ Mercedes and find some interesting roads. If you ever find yourself in Norway with interesting machinery at your disposal, the route described in the Youngtimer Special feature is well worth seeking. It's so good, in fact, you would still enjoy it while driving something with no sporting pedigree whatsoever. That said, it appeared particularly suited to Mercedes cars of yesteryear, with



long and flowing curves and the kind of scenery you will find in the background of 1970s and 1980s press pictures. It was a great privilege to be in such company and to drive such a special route. The fact our steed was a 450SEL 6.9 made it a once in a lifetime event.

Kyle Molyneux  
Editor

Who's been doing what in this month's Mercedes Enthusiast...



## Guy Baker

“Surely there was a mistake? It's not unusual for one-owner SLKs to have covered a low annual mileage, but a seven-year old, mint example with just 2,108

miles on the clock? We simply had to take a closer look,” reports Guy Baker. The pristine condition, R171 SLK200 Kompressor that greeted him at Mercedes specialist Simon Light looked like it had just driven out of the factory gates. Read all about it from page 56, but be warned: this feature may inspire you to seek your own low mile gem.



## Matt Zollo

“Due to its timeless, barely altered beauty, it is easy to assume all R107 SLs drive alike, engine power and vocals notwithstanding. But because of this SL's

near 20-year production, the experiences from behind the wheel can be very disparate indeed,” explains Matt Zollo, charged with assessing a pair of V8 models for a Take Two feature (see page 70). “As these German stunners demonstrate, however, there is no such thing as better or worse with this modern classic SL, only different.”



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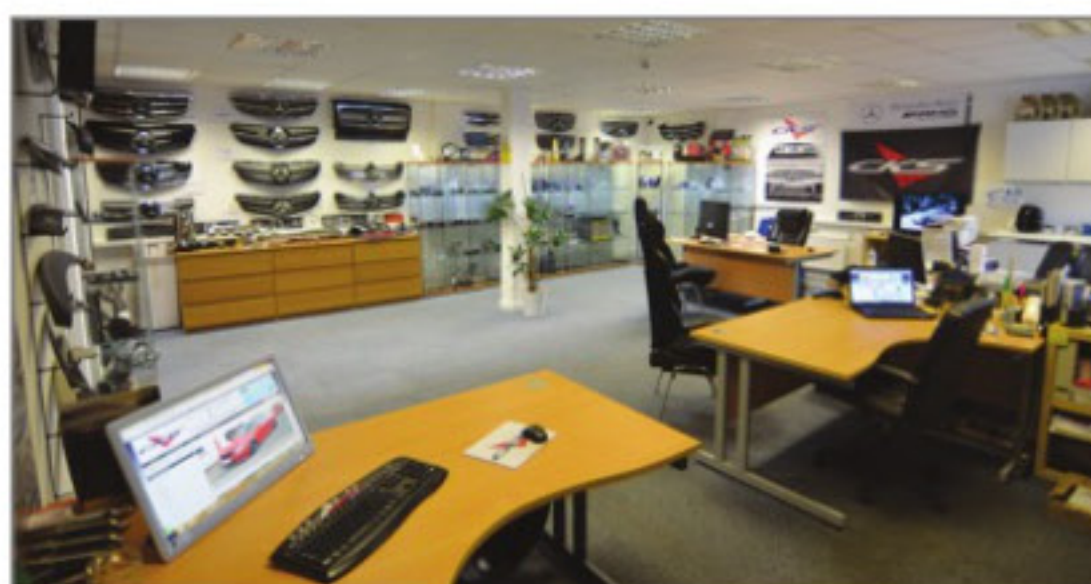
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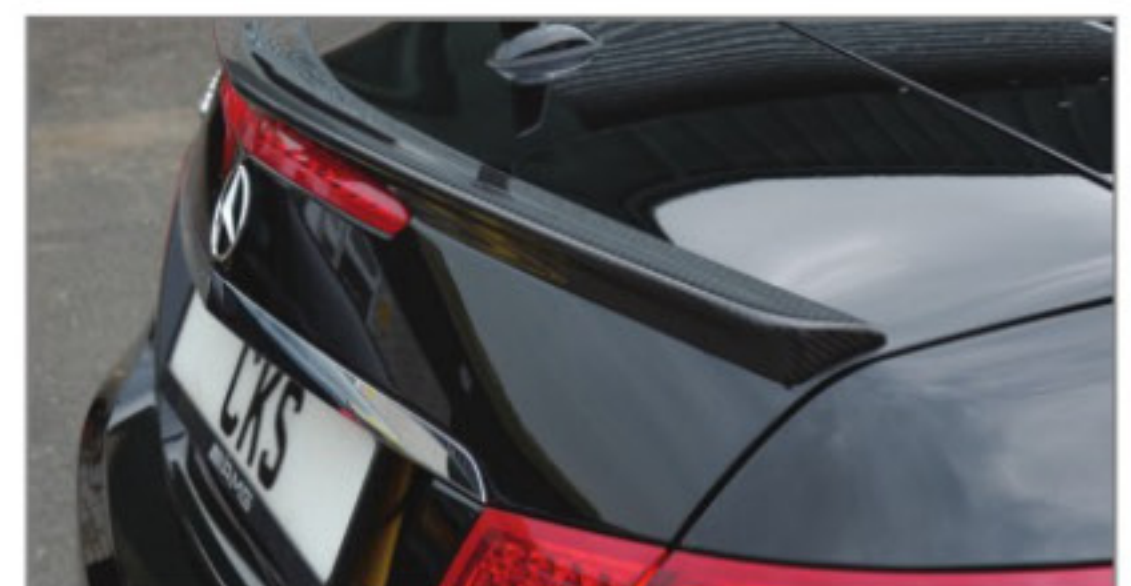
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The latest Mercedes launches, news and motorsport

## NEWS



## NEW GLE COUPE

Mercedes targets the US and China with its fast backed SUV, also set to go on sale in the UK this year

**C**OMBINING THE HIGH driving position and off-road capabilities of an SUV with the sweeping tail of a coupe and the nimble handling of a sporting machine, the new GLE coupe is not exactly conventional.

Based on the 166-series ML (now called the GLE), the four-door GLE coupe carves a new niche in the Mercedes-Benz range while carrying many recognisable features, such as a sports grille with large star badge, power domes on the bonnet, flanks with two prominent creases from nose to tail, a curving top edge for the rear window, and slim LED clusters below, complete with chrome brow.

With wheels measuring up to 22 inches in diameter, you couldn't say the GLE coupe lacks presence. Nor could you accuse it of having old, hand-me-down technology from elsewhere in Mercedes' range. In fact, the GLE coupe has a few aces up its sleeve, such as a 362bhp/383lb ft torque V6 biturbo petrol engine in the GLE450 AMG 4Matic – the first

car from the new AMG Sport range. A full fat AMG is also expected with a biturbo V8.

While the GLE350 d 4Matic (V6 turbodiesel – 254bhp/457lb ft) and GLE400 4Matic (V6 petrol – 328bhp/354lb ft) feature 50/50 torque distribution front and rear, the GLE450 splits its grunt 40/60, reaffirming its sporting intent.

All GLE coupes come with Mercedes' latest 9G-Tronic automatic, but the GLE450 AMG also features a double-declutch function for downshifts, plus a sports direct steer system (with a quick 17.4:1 ratio), as well as the body

roll reducing Active Curve System for the Airmatic suspension, and Dynamic Select which allows the driver to alter the behaviour of the suspension, steering and powertrain with modes ranging from Comfort to Sport+.

To make this possible, Dynamic Select is linked to the car's ASR (anti slip regulation), ESP with Curve Dynamic Assist, the four-wheel drive specific traction control, and the Adaptive Brake system. Air suspension – now with ADS Plus continuously variable damping – is available as an option on the GLE350 d and GLE400, replacing steel sprung suspension.

The GLE coupe shares its 2,915mm wheelbase with the regular ML/GLE, but at 4,900mm long, 2,003mm wide and 1,731mm tall, it is almost 100mm longer, over 80mm wider and over 60mm lower overall. Boot space measures 1,650 litres, which is 360 litres down on its straight-backed counterpart.

UK pricing and specifications were not confirmed at the time of writing, but the GLE coupe is expected to go on sale this summer.



△ Large dash display, nine-speed 9G-Tronic auto standard.

**“The GLE coupe carves a whole new niche in the Mercedes-Benz range”**



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△ A government grant chops £5,000 off the B-Class Electric Drive's price.

△ Full recharge using a wallbox takes up to four hours.

## B-CLASS ELECTRIC DRIVE

The B-Class Electric Drive is now available to order in the UK. Prices start from £31,950, which with a grant from the government drops to £26,950. Producing zero emissions and with a range of up to 142 miles on a single charge, this 178bhp/251lb ft torque B-Class hits 62mph in 7.9 seconds and its boot is capable of holding 1,456 litres with the rear seats folded down.

Two trim lines will be offered. The £31,950 Sport model features 17-inch alloys, LED daytime running lights, a seven-inch display on the dash, Artico seat trim, a reversing camera and cruise control, plus the option of eight paint colours.



△ This 178bhp B-Class goes from 0-62mph in 7.9 seconds.

The £295 more expensive Electric Art model comes in Cirrus White or South Seas Blue, and features a contrasting radiator grille and mirrors, plus 18-inch two-tone alloys, blue stitching for the seats and aluminium trim. An optional Energy Assist Package (£945) brings adaptive energy recuperation systems to boost efficiency and thus the car's range, plus privacy glass, a heated windscreen, extra insulation for the doors and windows, and a 'Range Plus' button in the cabin.

Over its entire life cycle, the B-Class ED produces up to 64 per cent less CO<sub>2</sub> than a B180 petrol model.

## DARTH VADER'S WEEKEND TOY

Mansory's take on the latest S63 AMG is one of the high end German modifier's more restrained efforts - relatively speaking, of course.

There's a new front spoiler with LEDs, a new bonnet cover, wider front wings, deeper side skirts, and roof

and bootlid spoilers - all of which are made from carbon fibre. Four 22-inch alloy wheels complete the picture.

Mansory has also added a sports exhaust system to beef up the sound of the reworked V8 biturbo engine. And when we say 'reworked', we

really mean it: the M800 engine package produces 789bhp (or 800ps) with 885lb ft torque, while the M1000 kit achieves - you've guessed it - 1,000ps or 986bhp, with 1,032lb ft of twisting force. These are up from the standard 577bhp and 664lb ft torque.



MANSORY

## 123-SERIES BOOK

Mercedes Enthusiast's Martin Buckley has published a new book called *Mercedes-Benz W123 The finest saloon car of the 20th Century?* Taking five years to make, it is co written by 123 specialist Mark Cosovich.

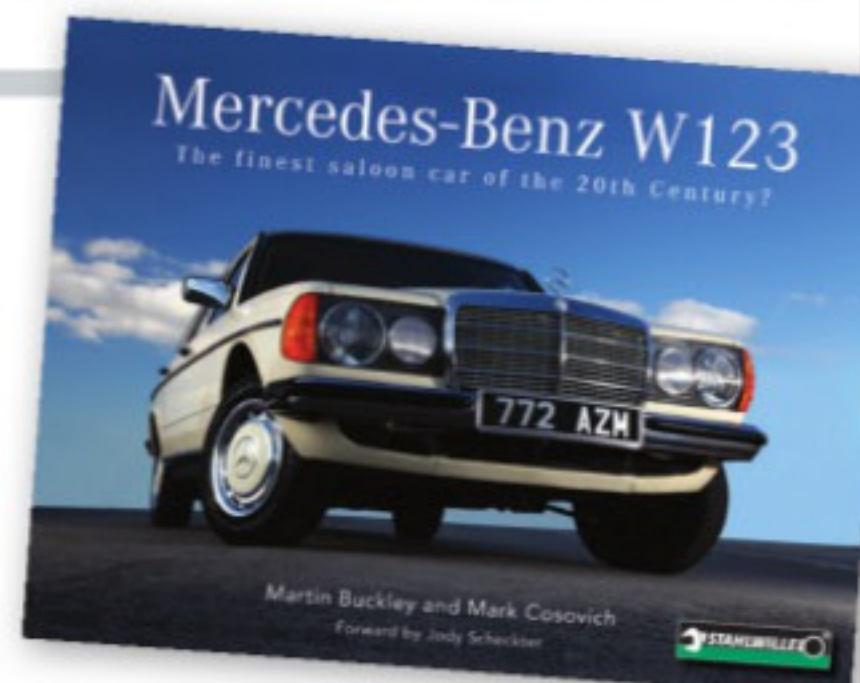
"I wrote the basic history of the model, putting it into context as a product that perhaps represents Mercedes-Benz's ultimate achievement as a maker of durable, pre electronic era vehicles," Martin explained. "But it was Mark Cosovich who put in the hard slog, finding information about obscure South African specifications and the general fortunes of this famously tough model around the world."

"Chapters are split into saloons, coupes and estates, and there is supplementary information

regarding paint, trim and chassis codes before Mark gets stuck into rust and

technical problems in his inimitable style," Martin continued. "After visiting the Stuttgart archive, Mark was able to furnish this labour of love with fascinating facts: if you want to know which years Milan Brown paint was offered, or what the VIN codes mean, then this book is for you."

Designed by fellow enthusiast John Summers of Ad Lib Design and priced at £35 (not including P&P), this W123 bible can be ordered from [w123book.com](http://w123book.com).



### △ LITHIUM-ION TECH

Daimler AG has invested €100m (£79m) in its pioneering Deutsche ACCUmotive subsidiary, to increase production of lithium-ion batteries. The new building in Kamenz in eastern Germany will be completed by the middle of 2015, and roll out batteries for the upcoming smart fortwo and forfour from 2016, as well as for future hybrid Mercedes.

### □ OLA KÄLLENIUS

The Supervisory Board of Daimler AG has appointed Ola Källenius as a member of the company's Board of Management with effect from January 1 2015 until December 31 2017. Despite this promotion, he will continue to be responsible for worldwide car marketing and sales for Mercedes-Benz. Källenius is well liked within the company and some are touting him as a replacement for Dr Dieter Zetsche, who also came from a position within the sales division.

### ▽ CHINA MILESTONE

At the beginning of December, the 500,000th car rolled off the production line at Mercedes' factory in Beijing. Appropriately, it was a China only, long-wheelbase C-Class (see below). In early 2015, the GLA will become the fourth Mercedes car to be built in Beijing, and more will follow.



### ▽ KW SUSPENSION

Suspension specialist KW has released a 'DDC ECU coil-over kit' for the C63 AMG Black Series. Damping can be altered with a free app for Android and iOS compatible smartphones. Alternatively, Comfort, Sport and Sport+ modes can be selected in the cabin. See [kwautomotive.de](http://kwautomotive.de) for more details about this new system.



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# MOTORSPORT NEWS

A successful F1 partnership comes to an end, while the SLS AMG GT3 scores a podium in Abu Dhabi

McLaren has confirmed it will retain Jenson Button to race alongside Fernando Alonso in 2015, demoting Kevin Magnussen to a reserve and test driver role. Sadly, the British team ended its engine deal with Mercedes-Benz at the end of the 2014 season, following a 19-year partnership that began in 1995 with the MP4/10 (main image) and yielded 78 wins, three drivers' titles and one constructors' title. The Mercedes works team, plus Williams, Force India and Lotus will boast Benz power this year.

In other news, Mercedes AMG's Lewis Hamilton (near right) won BBC Sports Personality of the Year 2014, taking 34 per cent of the public's votes. And HRH The Duke of Kent (far right) recently paid a visit to the Mercedes AMG High Performance Powertrains division in Brixworth, to highlight the site's commitment to graduate and apprentice schemes.

Over 10 per cent of current employees were sourced through such routes, and 39 graduates, apprentices and interns joined in 2014 alone. Towards the end of 2014, Mercedes AMG HPP was awarded the coveted Dewar Trophy - renowned as the most prestigious award in British automotive engineering - for its PU106A Hybrid Formula 1 Power Unit.

## FORMULA 1



## SLS AMG GT3



An SLS AMG GT3 run by the Abu Dhabi Racing Black Falcon team finished second in December's Gulf 12 Hours event. Driven by Bernd Schneider, Jeroen Bleekemolen and Khaled Al Qubaisi, the Mercedes finished just three seconds behind the lead Ferrari 458 after 315 laps of the Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi. It was a strong race overall for AMG customers, with three SLS GT3s finishing inside the top 10.



## DTM



In the middle of December, Mercedes-Benz gave drivers Felix Rosenqvist (F3), Esteban Ocon (F3 - left), Lucas Auer (F3), Maximilian Götz (GT3 - right) and Charles Pic (F1 test driver) the chance to pilot its DTM spec C-Class coupe as reward for their driving achievements in 2014.

The car maker may have been assessing the drivers for a future role in one of its DTM cars, in order to boost its competitiveness in 2015 following a tough season last year, during which it won three races out of 10.





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Set to build on the success of the 222-series S-Class, the flagship Maybach model has Rolls-Royce in its sights

# GOING TO ANOTHER LEVEL

WORDS SUSANNE ROEDER  
IMAGES DAIMLER AG

Mercedes' revival of the Maybach brand will succeed where its previous attempt faltered – for that, thank the latest S-Class, on which the new limousine is based

**L**EAVE THE EARTH WITHOUT abandoning it" was the slogan back in the late 1990s, to announce the then new CL coupe. With the relaunch of the Maybach, Mercedes is now reaching out towards the stars.

No longer a stand-alone name, Maybach now represents the most individual, most prestigious and most exclusive sub brand of the Mercedes model range. Mercedes-Maybach debuts as the luxury counterpart of the successful high performance AMG models. Thus, the Mercedes-Maybach S600 is now on a par with the S65 AMG, representing the most luxurious and the most sporting versions of the Mercedes flagship limousine respectively.

Carl Benz, Gottlieb Daimler, and Wilhelm Maybach are inextricably linked with the development of the internal combustion engine for land, water and air use, symbolically represented by the three-pointed star on the bonnet of Mercedes-Benz cars.

However, while Daimler and Benz were immortalised as the pair who invented the automobile, Maybach was to disappear twice – once in 1940, and again in 2012. Having been revived in 2002, the company distinguished by the golden double M logo sold just 3,000 examples of the Maybach 57 and 62 before it ran out of customers.

Now Maybach is back with a vengeance – following the three-pointed star on its bonnet and with the intertwined MM in silver on both C-pillars, plus the Maybach name on the bootlid as an option. These symbols distinguish the new flagship S-Class as a Mercedes in the

first instance, and secondly as a Maybach to endorse its uber-luxury credentials.

"Mercedes is doing very well," proclaimed Ola Källenius at a sneak preview in Sindelfingen of the new Mercedes-Maybach flagship, prior to its world premieres at the Guangzhou (China) and LA (USA) shows in November. Sindelfingen is also where the Maybach will be produced alongside the regular S-Class.

## OVER 5.4 METRES OF LUXURY

"We have just had the best October in the history of our company, with more than 12 per cent growth [from January 1] to October 31," Källenius said. He then went on to announce, "We will now add to this growth by offering a car for the Mercedes customers who want even more exclusiveness."

Having been at the helm of AMG for three years prior to taking over the responsibility for sales and marketing of Mercedes-Benz



△ Ola Källenius is Merc's head of sales and marketing.

▷ In Germany, the S500 costs €134K, the S600 €188K.



△ The M275 V12 biturbo produces 523bhp/612lb ft torque.

passenger cars, the Swede is well versed in exclusive brands. "Mercedes is a very dynamic company, where things are happening," he said. "We are on the throttle, enlarging our portfolio from the bottom up. Our brand is growing."

Like all premium car manufacturers, Mercedes-Benz considers China to be the most important market. It therefore seemed logical that Maybach should celebrate its comeback in a modified, more intelligent guise, and with a firm eye on wealthy Chinese customers. "The Mercedes-Maybach will be the best car in the





**Mercedes-Benz is doing very well - we are on the throttle, enlarging our portfolio from the bottom up**



◀ Burmester speakers in the A-pillars.

◀◀ Bespoke interior key to car's success.




◀ Both rear seats recline by 43.5 degrees.

world, only more exclusive," Källenius promised. This means that, apart from having the best of Mercedes' bespoke range of personalised options, a Maybach will also showcase the latest technology.

For starters, there will be three Maybach-Mercedes versions, one of which, the V6 powered S400 4Matic, is specifically aimed at affluent Chinese customers. The others are a 449bhp V8 biturbo version and the 523bhp V12 biturbo engined Maybach-Mercedes S600.

### TAKING ON THE BIG GUNS

It is premature to say whether the Mercedes-Maybach will overtake well established rivals like Bentley or Rolls-Royce. But it doesn't take rocket science to forecast that this car will be more successful than its immediate predecessor.

Although Källenius would not be drawn to comment, it seems logical that once the Mercedes-Maybach sub brand has become established as the ultra luxury counterpart to AMG, we will see the name used on other models in the Mercedes-Benz range. The comment, "It is a sub brand that will deliver Mercedes-Benz cars in an even more exclusive form," is surely a strong hint of the future. 



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Our man in the know tackles everything Mercedes-Benz – this month...

# ARMCHAIR BUYER



It is now far easier to decide on your next Mercedes thanks to the wealth of information offered up front, handing **David Sutherland** food for thought...

**O**ne of the earliest pieces of used car buying advice I can remember being given, probably in about 1973, was “Never buy the first car you see”. The concept seemed to make so much sense, especially in those days when so many used car advertisements concluded with, “First to see will buy!”

The logic is surely indisputable. You look at various cars, building up your knowledge of the model with each visit, and getting an accurate feel for what you will have to pay. Armed with this information, when you finally decide on one it will be the right car – or at least the best one within the given budget – for you.

**But I wonder if that rule is now so golden,** or unbreakable. I can still feel the pangs of regret when I think about the 1963 MGB Roadster I didn't buy in 1975 because it was actually the first I'd looked at – I didn't realise until car number three that it was the best one and underpriced too. Needless to say it was sold by the time I called back, and much the same happened when I found possibly the only rust free Renault 4 in the UK a year or two after that.

The reason I'm changing my mind is that there is now so much information available on individual cars for sale that you simply couldn't get hold of in previous times, when the typical classified advert was four lines of printed text, which didn't leave a lot of space for a description once the car name and the phone number were included. In fact, in the 1970s a lot of people

selling cheap cars didn't have a phone, so with a long lead time before the advert appeared, it wasn't uncommon to undertake a lengthy journey only to find the car already sold.

**The beauty of the internet is that it enables you to pinpoint exactly what you want,** provided of course you know that yourself. Let's say I plan to buy a four- or five-year old, four-cylinder SLK, perhaps hoping for a mid winter bargain on the Mercedes roadster. My first click on my laptop is the Mercedes-Benz

**I haven't even got out of my chair and I've made a shortlist of SLKs that might be suitable**



Approved Used site, to learn what the highest prices for these cars are going to be, which I discovered is £12,000 to £17,000.

**Following a flick through the Mercedes Enthusiast classifieds,** I then visit the Auto Trader website to find out what independent dealers and private sellers want for their cars. This site gives me over a dozen search options, even down to the amount of yearly road tax I'm prepared to pay. I specify engine size, a £10,000 to £15,000 price and five-year age limit (which produces a list of 114 cars), then opt for a manual gearbox (which drops the selection to 13), and finally cap the mileage at 50,000 (leaving nine cars).

From there, some elementary detective work follows, the wide array of photos most adverts include providing plenty of scope for that. Photo resolution is often so good I can tell if the bodywork is ding free, the wheels are scuffed and the seat trim or leather is worn. If I'm serious about a particular car, I can ask the seller to step outside and take a photo of a particular aspect of it and then email it to me straightaway – in the old days few ads even had photos in the first place.

**The background can tell me a lot too.** Maybe the car is on a posh driveway with a bigger Merc in view, suggesting the SLK is a cosseted second car. Or maybe it's parked on the pavement and looking too neglected to be a good buy. The next stage is to purchase a vehicle status check with an organisation such as HPI Check, for £20 finding out more or less instantly if there's outstanding finance or if it's stolen, written off or clocked. The DVLA website will tell me how long the MOT certificate is valid. Two more things you couldn't do in the old days.

I haven't even got out of my armchair and already I've made a shortlist of SLKs that might be suitable, and while I haven't touched them in the metal, I know almost everything there is to know about them. With such resources, and a strict application of common sense, I even feel you can safely buy a car without seeing it, let alone it being the first one you look at. After all, motor traders buy cars unseen all the time, as they know exactly what they are looking for.





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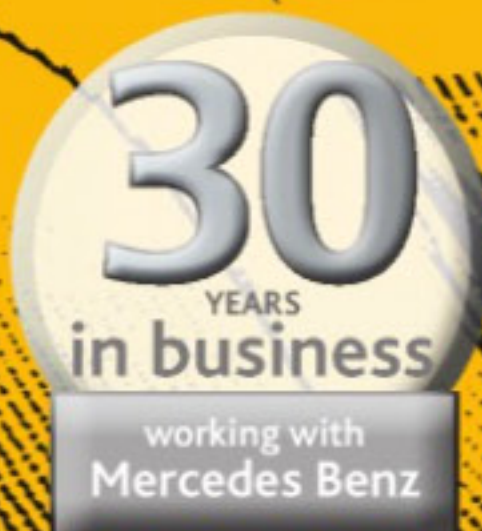
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The spotlight on Mercedes from within the motoring industry - this month...

# DESIGN BY NUMBERS



Mercedes should have tried harder to distinguish its new GLE coupe from its rival, argues our controversial insider, but the 'SUC' will be a success anyway

**I've been away for a week, and arrive back at my desk to find Mercedes-Benz has revealed yet another new niche model.** The GLE coupe, in this case.

Mercedes-Benz has long been determined to fill every niche imaginable, but in this case it's playing catch up. That's unusual, the three-pointed star usually leading with great success (if you quietly set aside the R-Class), the GLE coupe slotting into the same niche that BMW's X6 created back in 2007.

The thing is, the GLE not only fits into the BMW's slot, but appears to have been pulled from the same mould as the X6. It's inevitable that a pair of four-door SUV coupes might share something of a similar shape, but I think the GLE coupe and X6 really could have been separated at birth. There are some design identifiers for each brand – headlamps, grilles and tail lights – but take those away and you could possibly get away with swapping badges.

**It's not just the GLE coupe and X6 either;** squint at the C-Class and 3-Series and I think there are striking similarities, proportionally and in their details and finish. Indeed, start really lining up respective ranges and there's a lot of commonality in design, despite each claiming to have

**Design is no longer merely an art, it's a science**

their own visual brand identity. That's perhaps unfair, as yes there are distinctions, but to many they might just not be distinctive enough to mark them out as individual.


Who to blame then? The designers? Surely it's down to them, but the real reason behind visual convergence – not just between Mercedes-Benz and BMW, I might add – is efficiency. The ever increasing demand to eke out as much fuel as possible from a car means their shapes are dictated by the flow of air in a wind tunnel, as much as they are by the stylist's pen. Design is no longer merely an art, it's a science that's as much about creating as little drag as possible, while still looking good.

It's perhaps easier to retain some

distinction when coming from a previous model and instilling some common features to underline the new car's heritage. But with a new model and a new niche, it's pretty much inevitable that two different design teams produce similar results.

**That creates a problem,** as demands on economy will only become greater, which will only exacerbate the problem further. There will, of course, always be ways around this. As demanding as the need is for efficient air flow, the designer will always find a way to add some flair. Innovation helps too – active aerodynamics allow a car to change its shape at differing speeds, granting compromises that wouldn't be possible if the shape was fixed.

New lighting technology also helps, LEDs allowing designers to build a visual identity with light and the shape of the light housings. There's material surfacing too, highlighting some body panels in different materials, be it glass, carbon fibre, plastic or any other for that matter. Then there's paint and livery choices – the ability to personalise via decal packs and contrasting colour choices offering not just visual distinction, but allowing owners some degree of personalisation, too.

**It's already happening** – the A-Class can be had with sticker packs to change its appearance. And the base model is a blank canvas for customers to choose their style, trim levels no longer merely a badge, but bringing reprofiled bumpers, different wheels and alternative cabin detailing. That allows the A-Class to stand out among all the other two-box hatchbacks on the market. The GLE coupe is another story, however. To my eyes, it simply doesn't look different enough – niche or not. 

► *Our insider is a globe-trotting roadtester driving the latest cars from Mercedes-Benz and its rivals*





Got something to say about motoring, your Mercedes or *Mercedes Enthusiast* magazine? Here's your chance...



# LETTERS

STAR  
LETTER

## A GOOD HOME INDEED

I am the proud new owner of the Diamond Blue 230E you reviewed in *Mercedes Enthusiast* December 2014, and I thought I would share an update on the vehicle.

Upon purchase, the car went straight to John Haynes Auto Technics in West Sussex for a full mechanical report, and I have now entered into two phases of work – one mechanical already completed, and one concerning preservation starting in January.

Phase one saw the car receive genuine Mercedes-Benz parts, including a new manifold, a full exhaust system (as the stainless steel one fitted did not do the

car justice), plus new brake discs, pads and hoses, Michelin XVS classic tyres to preserve the originals, new engine mounts, a sump pan and oil seals, new plugs and leads, and lots more. It was very interesting to see the near



30-year old engine produce factory figures when compression tested.

The two years spent in Scotland had not let the car off scot-free, and although not in terrible condition the underside showed surface rust, and more red stuff on the chassis legs. Phase two involves dropping the suspension to treat and underseal the car, with the suspension enjoying new components and powder coated axles and so on, to bring the underside to the same standard as the rest of the car.

I thought I would attach a few pictures of the car's engine bay which, after just a steam clean and some TLC, looks great with the new manifold.

**Trevor Williamson, East Sussex**

## STARS IN WAITING

I recently moved to Qatar from the UK because of my work, and decided to buy a new Mercedes SUV. In Qatar, most people drive around in huge American or Japanese SUVs, so from a safety point of view, and also to fit in with the Qatari crowd, but in style, I settled on a Mercedes SUV.

I had a mind-blowing experience when I was taken to the Mercedes-Benz depot in Doha where brand new Mercedes are kept before they are taken to the showrooms. I have been to

Mercedes-Benz World in Surrey several times, but I had never seen anything like this before.

This was an 'Aladdin's cave' filled with every new Mercedes that you could imagine. The SLS AMG, G65 AMG, GL, GLK, ML, SLK, new C-Class and A45 AMG were all represented – just a little dusty from the desert sand but nonetheless all brand new.

I felt like a four-year old in a sweet shop – I just wish the picture I took (below) could do this incredible place justice.

**Vincent Boama, Qatar**



## THE LADDER ENDS HERE

My lifetime dream has come true! I'm almost 73 years old and have enjoyed a happy motoring life being a Mercedes-Benz lover, owning several cars over many years, from an E-Class to an SLK. But now I own my true dream car.

It is not brand new, rather it's three years old. But it is the most beautiful looking, the most beautifully built and the most gorgeous creature to drive. It is, of course, the W221 S-Class!

I often leave it outside my house so I can gaze at it through my

bedroom window. I am totally in love with it, and at my age! It has covered only 14,000 miles, comes fully loaded, and has a beautiful grey leather interior.

I think it's lovely to know that I have achieved my motoring goal with the last car I might ever own. The S-Class's silence, smoothness, economy, comfort and that positively distracting three-pointed star on the end of the bonnet are true pleasures.

Am I the luckiest and happiest bunny in the world? You bet!

**Ian Kennedy, Berkshire**

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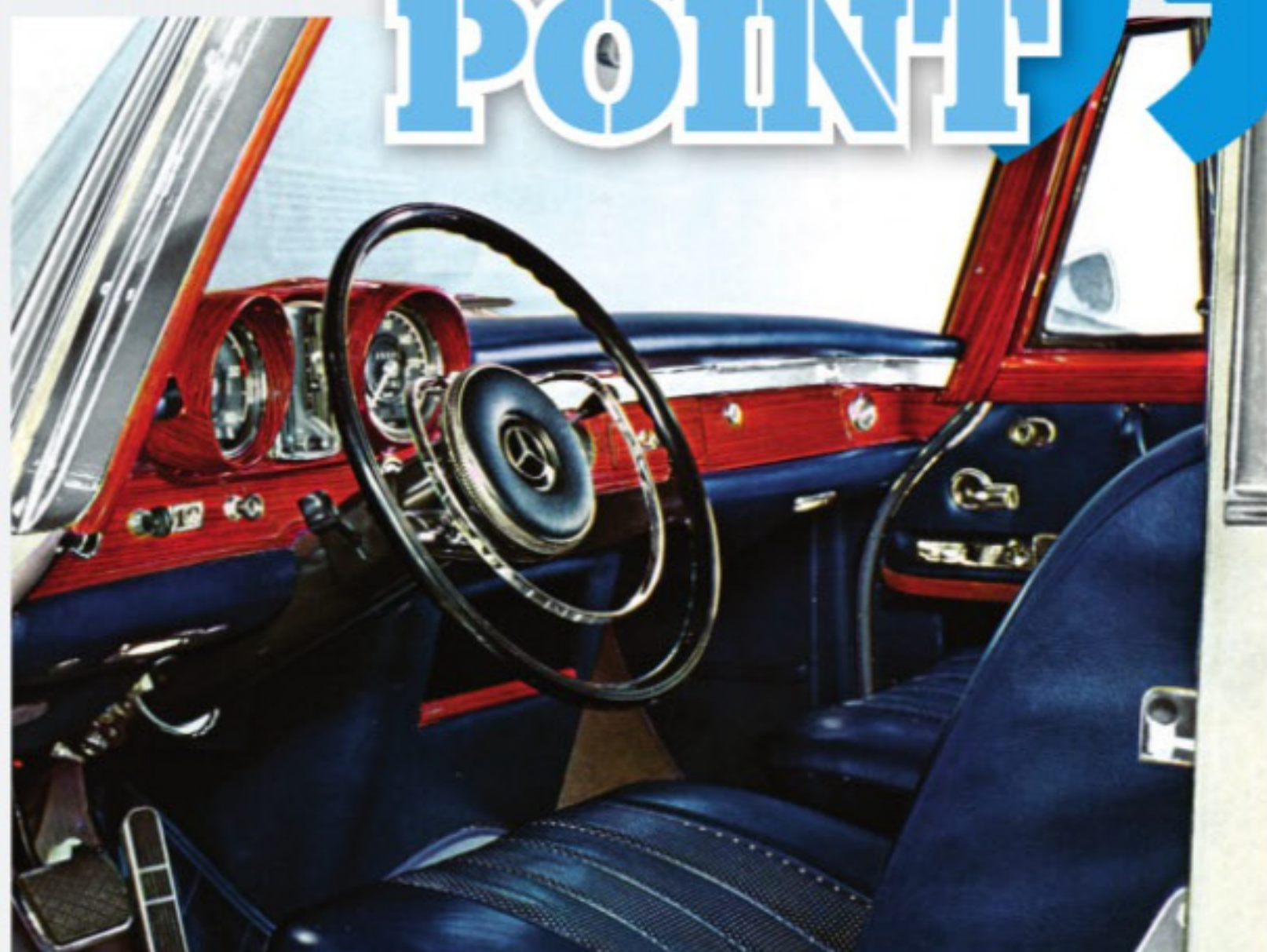




**f** "Michael Fink's masterpiece."  
Arya Kani  
- The original CLS can still work the  
high street catwalk, owing much of its  
style to US designer Michael Fink

**f** "My C250's traction control system  
- perfect for tackling the snow."  
Matthew Kean  
- We asked what aspect of your Benz do  
you enjoy most during winter months

# TALKING POINT



## This month's Talking Point... What is your favourite Mercedes-Benz car interior of all time?

"The R129 SL's - simple yet very classy, and with quality  
second to none." **Robert Vint**

"W100 600's without a doubt!" **Michael Lawrence**

"Nothing exudes class like a W111 dash." **Azmi Afyouni**

"The C219 CLS has the best interior. The dashboard's curvaceous  
theme flows to the door panels. Truly a classic!" **Ye Min Than**

"A W123 with MB-Tex upholstery." **Errol Mourad**

"The W100's cabin - breath-taking!" **Mark Avedisian**

Take part in **Talking Point** every month on Facebook and Twitter.  
See the bottom of page 18 for our respective websites!

# MERCSPOTTER



"I saw this 300CD Turbodiesel in a hotel car park in Dundalk,  
Ireland," says Jamie Coyle. "It was very coincidental that you ran an  
article on this model in the December 2014 issue and then I spotted  
this car a few days later in my home town! It is spotless, with tan  
leather and 100,000 miles. I couldn't believe the space inside!"

Seen an interesting Mercedes or caught one in an unusual situation? Send a  
picture to [info@mercedesenthusiast.co.uk](mailto:info@mercedesenthusiast.co.uk) (subject 'Merc Spotter') or by post  
to Mercedes Enthusiast, 17 Wickham Road, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 5JS.



## Martyn's Car Sales

*A selection of some of our classic Mercedes*



**SL320 Auto**, 98/S, special edition '40th  
anniversary' Alenite Blue with Grey leather,  
hard top, rear seat, rare, genuine 73k, FSH,  
excellent condition, a special SL . . . **£11,950**



**E220 Auto Cabriolet**, 97/P, 74k, metallic  
Black with Grey leather, heated seats, air con,  
last year of '124' rarer 220 model, FSH, really  
nice condition, drives superbly . . . **£9,950**



**230E Auto**, 90/G, Diamond Blue with Grey  
cloth, 1 private owner, 28 Mercedes main  
dealer services, genuine 28,000 miles, drives  
tight like a new car, beautiful example **£8,950**



**300SL Auto**, 86/C, Thistle with factory cloth,  
Facelift model, recent restoration, new hood,  
paint etc, drives beautifully, lovely condition,  
Cat D . . . **£7,490**



**420SE Auto**, 89/G, Diamond Blue with Beige  
leather, front and rear heated seats, 70k, FSH,  
very rare V8 with this mileage, drives as it  
should, superb . . . **£6,950**



**SL320 Auto**, 99/S, 78k, 'Azurite', matching  
leather, special factory maple wood, rear  
seat, hard top, 2 private owners, FMBSH,  
superb . . . **£6,950**



**SL280 Auto**, 95/M, 72k, Arctic Silver, rare  
factory Black cloth, hard top, 8-hole alloys,  
private plate, 2 owners, FSH, lovely drive and  
condition . . . **£6,450**



**300SE Auto**, 89/G, 100k, Almandine, Beige  
leather, FSH, excellent example . . . **£4,500**

### Other cars available

<b>E220 Auto Cabriolet</b> , 110k, 97/P . . . <b>£8,950</b>	<b>190E 2.6 Auto</b> , 92/K, 78k, leather . . . <b>£3,950</b>
<b>560 SEC</b> , 110k, 1990 . . . <b>£7,500</b>	<b>SLK 200K</b> , 00/X, 62k, manual, Silver . <b>£3,650</b>
<b>280CE Auto</b> , 85/C, 100k, leather . . . <b>£6,500</b>	<b>420 SEC</b> , 87/E, Silver, 172k . . . <b>£3,000</b>
<b>E220 W124</b> , 98/R, 44k, manual, air . . . <b>£5,000</b>	<b>E220 W124</b> , 01/51, 85k, manual, air . . <b>£2,990</b>

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A look back at Mercedes that deserved more recognition for their sometimes hidden qualities - this month...

# WHY I LOVE THE... W112 300SE

This much style didn't come cheap in the early 1960s, the 300SE the ultimate Fintail and a favourite of one *Mercedes Enthusiast* contributor

WORDS MIKE RENAUT IMAGES DAIMLER AG

**S**PORTS CARS HAVE never really appealed to me. I can't deny the prettiness of the Pagoda SLs, but I have always preferred room to stretch out and the space for suitcases or shopping.

That's not to say I don't appreciate performance and handling, though – I like a fast car as much as the next man or woman, and if it goes round bends without a fight so much the better.

But style is equally important. I admire discretion in a car, yet I'll admit a weakness for the American excesses of the late 1950s – whitewall tyres, an abundance of chrome, and tailfins that made a car appear capable of space travel.

Convey these requirements to a late 1950s Mercedes-Benz engineer and the only result can be the Mercedes-Benz Fintail, and more specifically the W112 300SE. In taxi cab W110 190D form, the Fintail looked elegant, perhaps even (dare I say it) cute, but mix in an extra dose of style, luxury and power, and I don't believe Mercedes made a better looking car than the 300SE saloon.

Growing affluence on both sides of the Atlantic meant Mercedes' timing seemed just right. Launched at the 1959 Frankfurt motor show following over two million miles of prototype testing, the initial cars were the 111-series 220 Mercedes. The car maker's innovative unitary construction included a passenger safety cell and crumple zones. In 1961, the range grew with

four-cylinder (W110) base models and a flagship – the W112 300SE. Faced with the opportunity to sell luxury cars to the burgeoning American market, some manufacturers went entirely too far – witness Jaguar's gigantic Mk 10 – while Mercedes-Benz simply went as far as it dared.

## EXCLUSIVE LUXURY

Hugely expensive at twice the price of a 220 model, the 300SE saloon stood out with extra chrome along its waist and around the C-pillars. An automatic transmission, servo-assisted steering, air suspension and a Bosch fuel injected, three-litre alloy engine made for an impressive specification on paper.

Although whitewall tyres were an optional extra, you'll rarely find a period image of a 300SE that isn't wearing a set, while discs on all four wheels with separate circuits for front and rear meant the braking was fail-safe. The air suspension used pressurised rubber bags in conjunction with hydro-pneumatic shock absorbers, allowing the car to self level. Large rubber bump stops ensured the 300SE could still be driven should the system fail.

The W112 was deliberately kept apart from the lesser Fintails, even to the extent of having dealers put the cars in separate showrooms. It wasn't until 1962 that 111-series coupes and cabriolets were introduced, yet these would still outsell the 300SE by 24 to 1.



△ Vertical speedo later dropped by Mercedes-Benz.

▷ With this much legroom, who needed a LWB?

▽ Mechanical injection for two-valve M189 unit.

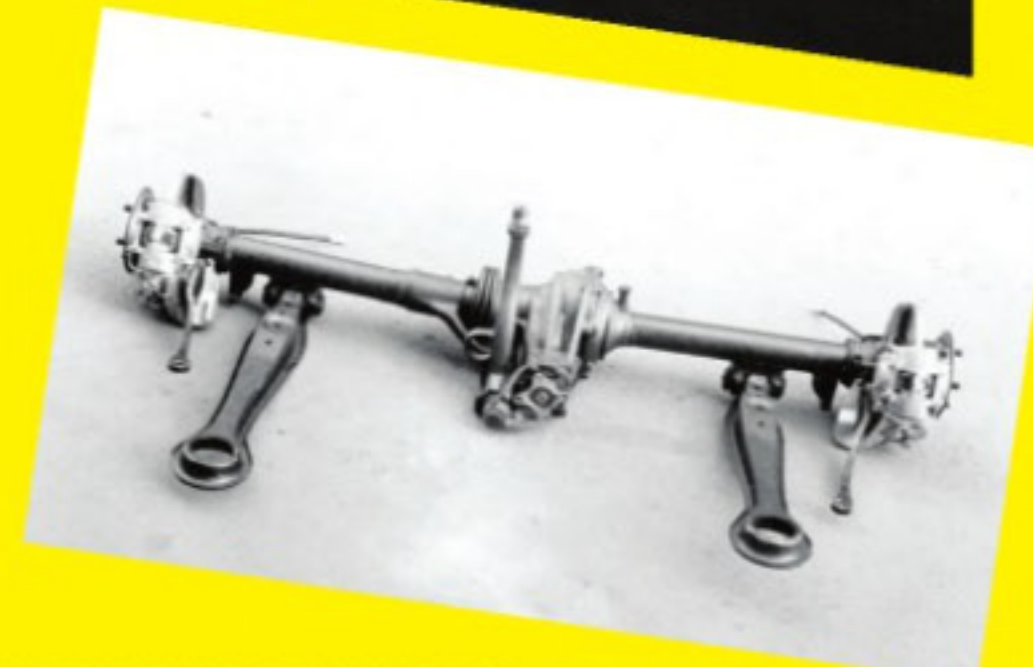
▽▷ Chromework suited the North American buyers.



**I don't believe Mercedes made a better looking car than the 300SE**

▽ The perfect grand touring Benz saloon.

▷ Rear swing-axle with air spring set up.





## Mercedes-Benz 300SE Fintail (W112)

ENGINE M189 2,996cc 6-cyl

POWER 168bhp@5,400rpm

TORQUE 184lb ft@4,000rpm

TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD

WEIGHT 1,565kg

0-62MPH 10.7sec

TOP SPEED 115mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 20.6mpg

YEARS PRODUCED 1961-1965

Figures for a 1964-on car - 300SEs built before then had 158bhp/185lb ft torque; fuel consumption determined at 3/4 of top speed (110km/h, 68mph) plus 10 per cent



The four-door saloon kept its fins, which even by 1959 were becoming passé, but the coupe and cabriolet models had theirs shaved, radically altering their appearance to complement clean lines that still look fresh to this day.

We say 'fins', but Mercedes called them '*peilstege*' – sight lines to aid parking. Mercedes chief designer Karl Wilfert conceded that they were, "*In Rufweite der Mode*," – within earshot of fashion. Mercedes had clearly attempted to Americanise the car, and Americans seemed touched by the gesture, but not enough to buy Fintails in significant numbers.

A four-speed automatic transmission was standard on the

300SE, but Mercedes would fit a four-speed manual gearbox if the customer insisted; in March 1963 the manual gearbox officially became an option, and a long-wheelbase version of the range topping Fintail debuted.

A 1964 *Autocar* roadtest described the 300SE as "neither beautiful nor dainty," but it had a "massive and solid appearance." Testers drove it the length of the M1 motorway at 100mph (most UK motorways were less busy then, with no speed limit) and concluded after 1,465 miles of testing that "the comfort and size are well up to the Mercedes image."

The 300SE is hardly flawless. The saloon drew criticism over its

Americanised speedometer design and those tailfins, which so rapidly dated its appearance. A prodigious thirst meant Mercedes was forced to fit a larger fuel tank to models made after 1963, the increase from 65 to 82 litres offering just 50 miles more range. The air suspension suffers from water leaking past the seals – especially if the car isn't used regularly – and, with all that shiny chromework, they are prone to rust.

### NO COMPROMISE

The 300SE was – and still is – complicated, and expensive to buy, maintain or repair. The 5,202 examples built were bought by rich enthusiasts who refused to

settle for a lesser Mercedes which, in many ways, were just as good. They wanted luxury and obvious prestige, regardless of the cost.

But fashions had already begun to change, and when the six-cylinder Fintail's replacement arrived in 1965, it was clear Stuttgart had played the W108's design very safe. Mercedes claimed the W112's indirect successor – the range topping W100 600 – was designed to be the best car in the world. That's how good it had to be to follow the 300SE.

The Fintail saloons certainly would not be the last vehicles Mercedes-Benz built for the American market, but they were the last to be styled for it. ■



At just over £70,000, the V6 biturbo powered SL has serious competition in the market

# BASEPLAYER

The magic of turbochargers means the three-litre V6 powered SL400 is faster than the 3.5-litre, naturally aspirated SL350 it replaces, and forces you to rethink your idea of an entry level roadster

WORDS KYLE MOLYNEUX IMAGES TERRY OBORNE



**DON'T THINK I WAS** the only one who mourned the passing of the SL350, replaced in the second quarter of 2014 by this SL400. The old car's naturally aspirated V6 whooped and snarled like a demon football fan, completely overshadowing the SL500's V8 biturbo for sheer theatre. AMGs aside, the V6 was my pick of the R231 range, even before the £10,000 saving over the not-much-faster V8 model was taken into account.

The SL400 retains the 350's M276 V6, but the capacity has shrunk from 3.5 litres to 3.0 litres. Those thinking Mercedes has suddenly gone soft will be relieved to hear the V6 in the SL400 also has two IHI turbochargers, rectifying any loss of performance brought about by that engine capacity decrease. Thus equipped, power is raised from 302bhp to

328bhp, and torque from 273lb ft to 354lb ft – the latter jump an increase of 30 per cent and cutting the 0-62mph time by a noteworthy *seven tenths* to 5.2 seconds.

## MORE FROM LESS

Unsurprisingly, the slight fall in fuel economy, from 39.2mpg to 36.7mpg (NEDC combined), and increase in CO2 emissions, from 169g/km to 178g/km, go without mention in the press release, but the SL400 remains a sports car with a conscience. Officially, it is capable of 27.7mpg around town and 45.6mpg on faster roads, not bad for a two-seat roadster weighing 1,730kg and packing a 364- to 504-litre boot cavity within its ample rump.

As with the SL350, the SL400 is only available in AMG Sport spec

and it comes with a sticker price of £72,500 OTR, around £2,500 more than what Mercedes-Benz UK charged for the SL350 in April 2014 shortly before it was shown the door. For that outlay you get AMG body styling, 19-inch AMG wheels with 255/35 front and 285/30 rear tyres, plus lowered sports suspension with stiffened dampers, sports seats with perforated leather, a panoramic

glass insert for the vario-roof, and parking sensors.

As standard, the SL400 also

boasts designo Platinum White Pearl piping on the door armrests, centre console, seat side bolsters and headrests. Not forgetting Comand Online with Bluetooth connectivity, Mercedes' Intelligent Light System with bi-xenon headlamps, metallic paint, and a

plethora of airbags and safety systems designed to keep you alive in the event of a crash.

Excepting the brilliant Airscarf (£575), that amount of equipment would do many buyers just fine, but this test car's total price amounts to £89,125 thanks to extras such as the two-tone 19-inch wheels (£510), Active Body Control suspension (£3,080) with Comfort and Sport modes, the Driving Assistance Package (£2,350), a reversing camera (£265), Magic Sky Control for the glass roof (£1,875), a Harmon Kardon surround sound system (£1,150), and Porcelain nappa leather upholstery (£710). Yikes!

Expensive it may be, but this Obsidian Black roadster has the sculpted, aggressive looks and badge appeal to back it up. And as you fire the V6 biturbo from cold, the gargling rip-roar spewed from the twin exhausts instantly purse

**I didn't expect such tingling vocals from a turbocharged six**



## JUST THE FACTS

### Mercedes-Benz SL400 (R231)

**ENGINE** M276 2,996cc V6 biturbo

**POWER** 328bhp@5,250-6,000rpm

**TORQUE** 354lb ft@3,500-5,250rpm

**TRANSMISSION** 7-speed auto, RWD

**WEIGHT** 1,730kg

**0-62MPH** 5.2sec

**TOP SPEED** 155mph

**FUEL CONSUMPTION** 36.7mpg

**CO2 EMISSIONS** 178g/km

**YEARS PRODUCED** 2014-on

*Figures for car as pictured; fuel consumption according to NEDC combined; top speed electronically limited*



△ The SL's 364- to 504-litre boot ideal for weekend bags.

△△ Wide stance translates into a very planted feel.

△▷ Bootlid spoiler and 19-inch alloy wheels standard.

◁ Superb cabin design drips with high tech luxury.

▷ SL400 is a 3.0 but the E400 has a 3.5-litre V6.



the lips of all those within ear shot. I didn't expect such tingling vocals from a turbocharged six, and suddenly the passing of the SL350 doesn't seem so bad after all.

### WHO NEEDS A V8?

On the road, the SL400 continues to do good things for one's recovery, the ABC suspension

firm yet forgiving like memory foam, and that V6 under the aluminium bonnet sounding like a flute playing Wookiee, the soothing, low down warbling giving way to a sharp edged and complex six-cylinder symphony by 4,000rpm, mid way through the maximum torque curve and on the brink of full power deployment.

The SL500 delivers a kidney bursting punch from almost no revs, but refuses to let a roar escape from its jaws. The SL400 feels less kamikaze once fully lit, yet its lesser urge allows greater appreciation of the speed that is building, particularly with such an invigorating noise emanating from behind your head. A throttle blip

function for the 7G-Tronic Plus automatic is the only thing missing in this otherwise satisfyingly engaging roadster.

Highly comfortable with the roof up or down, and quick footed despite its considerable size, the V6 biturbo powered SL400 makes the entry point to the R231 SL range even more appealing.

The fantastic vario-roof can be opened or closed in less than 20 seconds, says Benz.



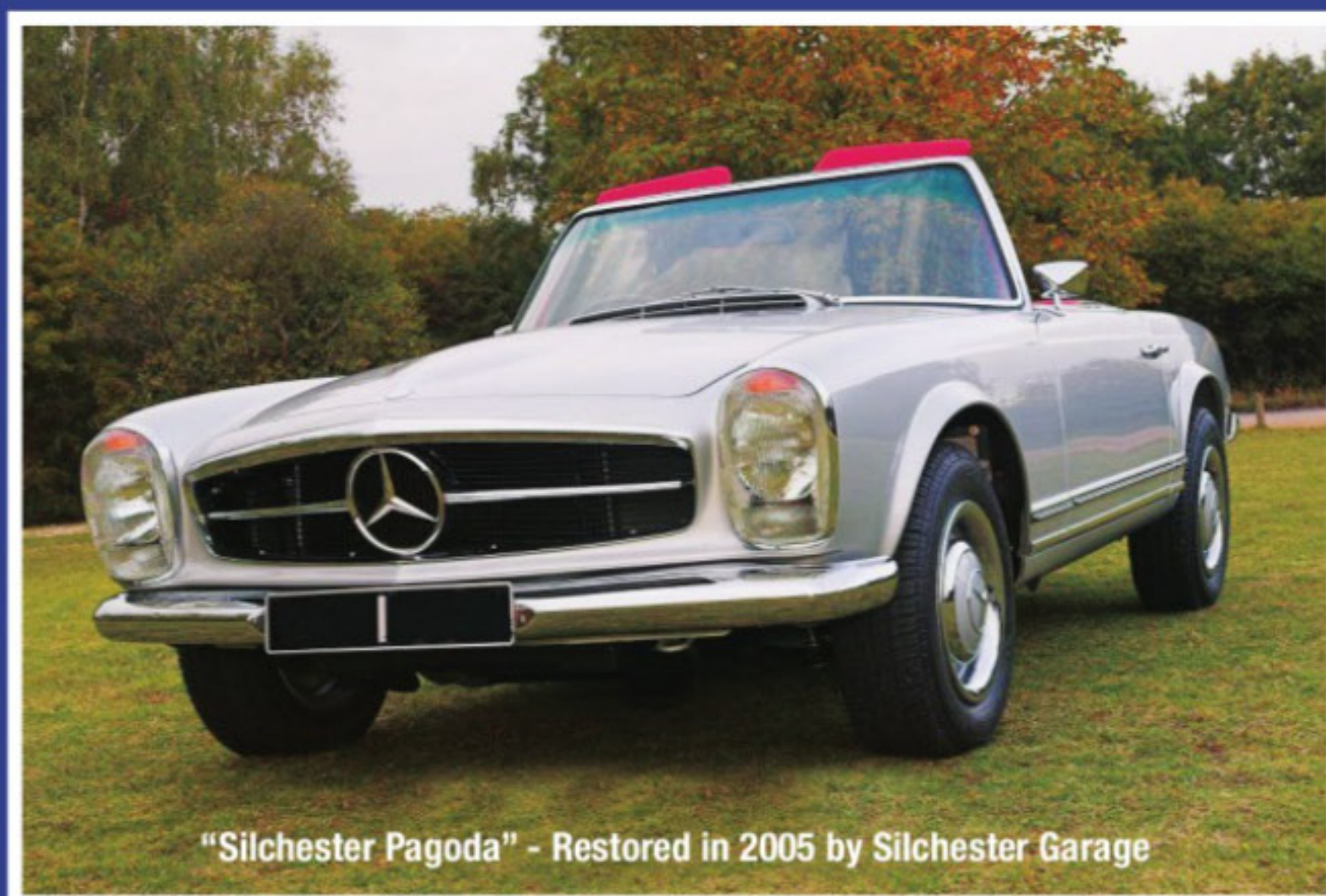


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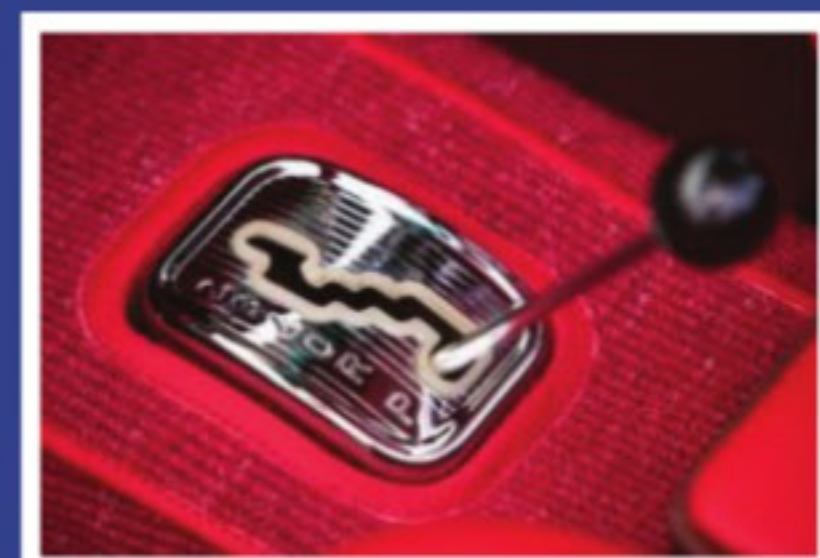
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**£25,750 1986 Mercedes 300GD**

9-seater auto diesel, restored to a high standard, gearbox rebuilt and too many other things to list.



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# THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH

A POWERFUL AND COMFORTABLE CAR IN ITS DAY, THIS W111 280SE 3.5 COUPE BOASTS NEW FOUND ACCELERATION AND REFINEMENT THANKS TO A MODERN V8 AND AIR SUSPENSION FROM A W220 S-CLASS

WORDS AND IMAGES IAN KUAH





**“  
The W111 coupe is one of  
the most highly regarded  
and desirable Mercedes  
of all time  
”**



△ Carsten Ohlinger of Restoration, Prestige Cars and Racing.







△ Driveshaft from 220 S-Class needed to be shortened.



△ Rear S-Class air suspension and Koni dampers all round.



△ Front axle given Firestone's air ride suspension system.

**“  
The conversion  
makes it suitable  
for everyday use  
in modern traffic  
conditions and  
improves its  
all round  
performance  
”**







**T**HE LATE 1950S TO EARLY 70S were a golden age of car design. This era – before the most onerous safety and emissions laws put their stranglehold on the industry and began to compromise creative styling – gave birth to some of the most beautiful cars ever designed. In sports car terms this meant Alfa Romeo, Aston Martin, Ferrari, Fiat, Lamborghini and of

course, Mercedes-Benz. And during this period this last marque also produced some of the most elegant saloons and coupes in car history.

The W111 coupe, particularly the V8 powered 280SE 3.5 and its cabriolet sister, are two of the most highly regarded and desirable Mercedes models of all time, and their steadily increasing values bear testimony to this fact. The W111 range in general is also significant for being the first Mercedes line up to feature the passive safety cell developed by Daimler-Benz safety supremo, Béla Barényi.

However, like all cars of this era, these three-pointed stars require more servicing and fettling than modern machinery, and were never designed to run reliably and stay cool in the kind of stop-start traffic conditions we face today. Features that we take for granted like air conditioning were options back then, and were not particularly efficient by modern standards. Air suspension was also in its infancy at the time, and the early technology was expensive and not as reliable as Mercedes-Benz would have liked.

While this cocktail of innovation was a serious draw for wealthy buyers, it was also a ticking time bomb for subsequent, less well heeled owners, and a veritable nightmare for those enthusiasts wishing to restore and drive these cars several decades down the road. As always though, where there is a will, there is a way. Over the years, a few canny specialists have come up with solutions to mitigate the impact of some of these sophisticated features going wrong. Common upgrades involve replacing the distributor points with electronic ignition and improving other electronic and electrical components, usually in a way that preserves the original look.

### CLASSIC MADE MODERN

However, the drawbacks of these cars from an engineering point of view are the sheer weight of the 3.5-litre, iron block V8, a four-speed automatic transmission that is, by modern standards, slow witted and clunky when not properly adjusted, and optional air suspension that can be troublesome and is rather expensive to fix when it does go wrong.

Carsten Ohlinger started RPR (which stands for Restoration, Prestige Cars and Racing) in 2012, setting up shop in Tamm near Ludwigsburg in Germany. RPR specialises in the restoration, service, sales and motorsport preparation of Mercedes and Porsche cars, and Carsten is very clear about his objectives. “Although ‘Restoration’ is the first word in our name, I decided to handle these jobs sparingly, and only for good friends,” he explained. “As much as I love restoring old Mercedes, the number of hours you invest in a car makes it a marginal business even when you charge the not insignificant amounts of money that the top players do.

“I am a mechanic by trade, and it is the technical part of the job and racing that interests me most,” he continued. “I am ▶



**CLASSIC CHOICE**  
**RPR W111 coupe**



▷ Front and rear  
air suspension  
transforms ride.

**“**  
**The 302bhp,**  
**24-valve V8**  
**motor fires up at**  
**the first turn of**  
**the key**  
**”**







◁ Five-speed auto also from a W220 S-Class.

▽ Tan leather for this pillarless classic coupe.

△ An increase of 105bhp for a total of 302bhp.



▷ always thinking of ways to improve cars, and I have evolved my own ideas for curing the issues that often let down owners of classic Mercedes-Benz vehicles.”

The W111 coupe I have come to drive today is a prime example of the kind of transformation RPR is able to perform for an enlightened client who wishes to treat his classic as far more than just a hobby car for high days and holidays. The conversion makes it suitable for everyday use in modern traffic conditions and improves its all round performance.

Putting the coupe on the lift in RPR's workshop is most revealing, and it is immediately obvious that the car never left the factory with these underpinnings. The front subframe has been modified to take the smaller, lighter and much more powerful, five-litre M113 V8 and its matching gearbox. The air suspension units up front are aftermarket units, with airbags made by Firestone, working in conjunction with bespoke Koni dampers. The electronic control calibration is done by RPR.

Even more noticeable is the all new rear axle, which is from a 220-series S-Class, replete with its Airmatic air suspension units. Needless to say, new attachment points had to be created for the

W111 and welded to the body shell, along with the requisite stiffening plates, but the finished result has the same clean and polished look as a factory solution. As the S-Class's driveshaft is longer than the W111's, it had to be shortened to fit.

## AIR SUSPENSION

A substantial amount of planning, measuring and modifying of the sheet metalwork had to be done to get the new components to fit exactly where they should, but the end result looks factory standard. With the car back on terra firma, the only external giveaways are the 8.5Jx17 AMG wheels wrapped in modern 215/45ZR17 rubber, and the 40mm lower ride height. Other than that, the car looks as it did when it left the factory in 1972.

An original, 197bhp 280SE 3.5 motor cranks over a few times before it bursts into life with a stutter from its 1960s injection, and settles down into the slow, consistent idle of a Mercedes engine from this era. In contrast, the electronically controlled, 302bhp, 24-valve V8 fires up with the first turn of the key, with the signature sound just as you would hear in a modern Mercedes with this engine, and it instantly steadies to a rock solid idle while emitting a barely discernible purr.

On the fly, the V8 growl is subdued most of the time, thanks to the 'waft-ability' factor engendered by the car's relatively low kerb weight compared to the S500, which donated its engine. With 50 per cent more power on tap than the original V8, this car has gone from sedate to rapid in one fell swoop.

Snappy throttle response with good low end torque, and a responsive gearbox allow you to move quickly on minimal revs. The original V8 feels stolid and leaden by comparison and that ▷



“  
The RPR W111 feels  
thoroughly modern,  
yet retains a compelling  
classic twist  
”



▷ This 3.5 coupe proudly wears the RPR logo.

▷▷ M113 V8 had 339lb ft torque in the 220 S500.



▷ is not just because it has only two-thirds the power of its modern counterpart. Older Mercedes engines simply did not rev as freely or as high as they do now, so it is no surprise that the modern drivetrain changes the character of the W111 quite considerably, turning it into far more of a driver's car than its designers ever intended it to be.

### A BEAUTY AND A BEAST

While the bespoke stainless steel exhaust sounds civilised, it does not hide the V8's character under full throttle. So when you find yourself approaching a tunnel it is hard to resist dropping a gear or two along with the side windows of this elegant pillarless coupe, and making the most of the resident V8's throaty singing voice. Given his penchant for transplanting the biggest possible motors in the Mercedes catalogue into unsuspecting models lower down in the range, Mercedes' legendary development chief Erich Waxenberger may have approved of this car.

The rest of the time, the RPR W111 coupe is a smoother, more effortless and better behaved version of itself. There is no

question that the new powerplant is far more refined and less gritty, and the modern five-speed gearbox is seamless compared to the original and delivers quieter cruising and far better fuel economy too. The more modern air suspension, and adjustable hydraulic dampers controlling bounce and rebound, provide the coupe with better body control and a silkier ride than the original suspension system. With electronic calibration controlling the ride quality, it is a fairly straightforward matter to fine tune the ride quality to individual owner requirements.

While Mercedes-Benz purists will no doubt throw up their hands in horror at this extensive conversion, one must remember that the objective is to produce a car with the characterful look of the original, but the sheer usability, dependability and performance of a far younger Mercedes-Benz. Apart from its characteristically vague recirculating ball steering, the RPR W111 coupe feels thoroughly modern, yet retains a compelling classic twist. I absolutely loved this car, both in terms of its looks, and how it drove. For my money, this W111 coupe epitomises the best of both worlds.





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# A star for life

WORDS DAVID SUTHERLAND  
IMAGES TERRY OBORNE

After recently experiencing a low mileage W123 230E in the December 2014 issue, the opportunity to drive a W124 version provided a rare comparison test











QUALITY IS QUALITY, NO matter how unadorned the product might appear to be, and no car surely highlights that better than a Mercedes-Benz of the 1980s, a prime example being the W124 230E seen here. Long before the term ‘poverty

△ Multi link rear provides secure, nimble handling.

△△ Grey cloth with wood trim a very smart look.

spec’ was invented, Mercedes-Benz offered cars that looked basically furnished, came with hardly any equipment as standard, and which hardly impressed in the performance stakes. They were also significantly more expensive than all comparable rivals, if indeed anything other than a BMW or Audi could be truly thought of as a rival to the three-pointed star.

The buying public loved them. In 1989, the year before this 230E was registered, and the peak year in that era for new car sales in the UK, Mercedes sold just over 13,000 124-series cars (still then known, rather awkwardly, as the ‘200-300’ range). That exceeded the 190E total by some 2,000 units, and was more than, for example, the total number of VW Passats registered.

Those brought up on modern cars loaded with kit and with plentiful power outputs might struggle to understand how Mercedes got away with it. But demand was so strong that customers waited months for delivery, and after a few years could sell the car on for a healthy proportion of its list price – which had not been discounted by one penny.

Let’s look at the February 1990 price list, current when this 230E was delivered to its first and only owner. The cheapest 124



was the 200E, with its two-litre fuel injected engine, priced at £19,020. As standard, it had a five-speed manual gearbox, anti lock brakes, central locking and an electrically operated passenger door mirror (the driver’s was manual).

### CHOOSERS CAN BE BEGGARS

But during your visit to a Mercedes-Benz dealership to place an order, the salesman would have slid a blue booklet across the desk, showing the 38 factory extras that could be added, ranging from twin illuminated vanity mirrors at £68, to air conditioning at £2,092, and including one or two specialist items such as a tow bar and an engine sump guard.

You could, provided you were prepared to wait for the factory to build it, order a 200E with every factory option available which, taking account of duplications, totalled 32, generating an extra £16,076 on the invoice – but that still wouldn’t get you a radio. Maybe a few customers did this, but in the UK it was



“The Diamond Blue paintwork retains its lustre, and inside this saloon still looks like new”



common to see the exact opposite, a 200E with absolutely no extras, and the reason was simple. A key threshold in the company car tax regime of the day was a list price of £19,251, and the basic 200E nestled neatly under that – hence its lucky ‘user chooser’ driver paid no more benefit in kind tax than on a humble, 1.6-litre Ford Escort.

Over the 200E, the 230E came with an electric tilting sunroof and front/rear electric windows. The owner of this car – or perhaps it was the supplying dealer – proceeded beyond the basic specification, but when ticking the options boxes was clearly budget conscious, choosing the four-speed automatic transmission, metallic paint, a leather steering wheel and gearknob, and a wooden



▽ One previous owner since 1990 and just 28K miles.

▽◁ Blaupunkt radio and cassette player for this youngtimer.



## JUST THE FACTS



### Mercedes-Benz 230E (W124)

ENGINE M102 2,298cc 4-cyl

POWER 130bhp@5,100rpm

TORQUE 146lb ft@3,500rpm

TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD

WEIGHT 1,360kg

0-62MPH 11.2sec

TOP SPEED 121mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 24.8mpg

YEARS PRODUCED 1985-1992

*Figures for a 1990 car as pictured; fuel consumption according to EEC urban*





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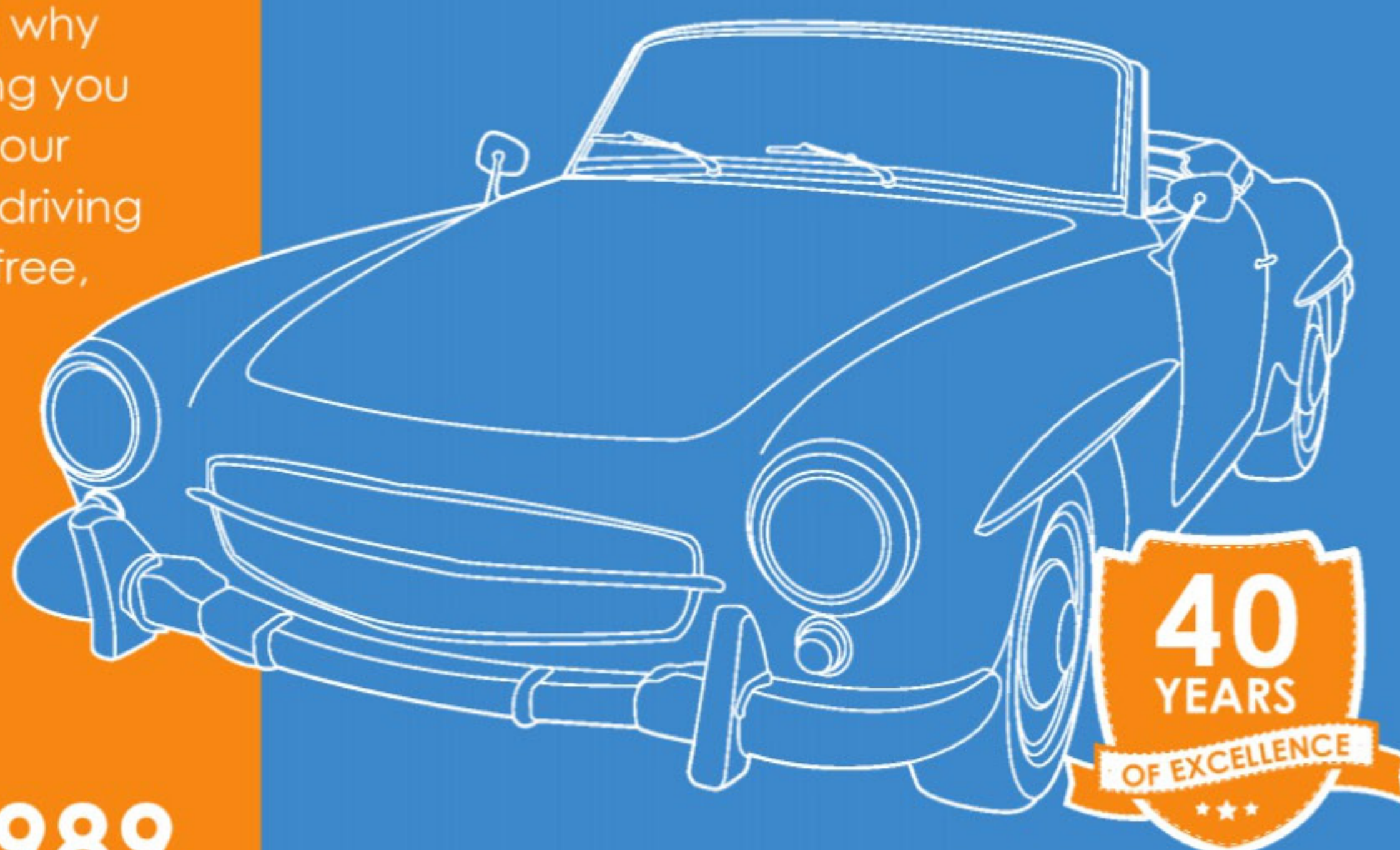
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▷ console box for cassettes, all of which added just under £1,900. The 'delivery charge' of £190 plus VAT brought the price to £23,536, although the dealer supplied Blaupunkt Cambridge SQM39 radio and electric aerial would have upped that further.

The first owner (a retired airline pilot) recently gave up driving, at which point the 230E passed into the hands of Martyn's Car Sales in Chertsey, Surrey, where we understand proprietor Martyn Neville is prone to buying in 1970s to 90s Mercedes for resale, but then diverting them to his now considerably sized personal 'young classic' collection. However, the 230E – having covered a mere 28,000 miles from new – did appear to be one you could buy, priced at £7,990.

### FLYING HIGH

It was one of three 124s for sale here, but stood out due to its notably well preserved condition, only a small patch of rust on the front wing preventing the description of 'pristine' applying. The Diamond Blue paintwork retains its lustre, and inside, the Mercedes still looks like new.

The 124-series was launched in early 1985 and stayed in production in Germany until 1995, after which it was supplied in CKD ('Completely Knocked Down') kit form for export for a short period. Saloon production totalled just over 2.2m, long wheelbase saloons and special chassis conversions, estates, coupes and cabriolets swelling this by an additional 524,700.

Its decade long life saw two facelifts, and this 230E is middle period, from after the barely detectable 1989 update, which introduced lightly revised exterior and interior trim, and before the staged 1992/1993 revisions when engines were changed, the star was moved from the grille to the bonnet, and the bumpers colour coded. Its engine is the 124's original 2.3-litre four-cylinder, producing 130bhp and 146lb ft torque (1989-on 200E running tax minimisers made do with a not significantly less 116bhp and 127lb ft).

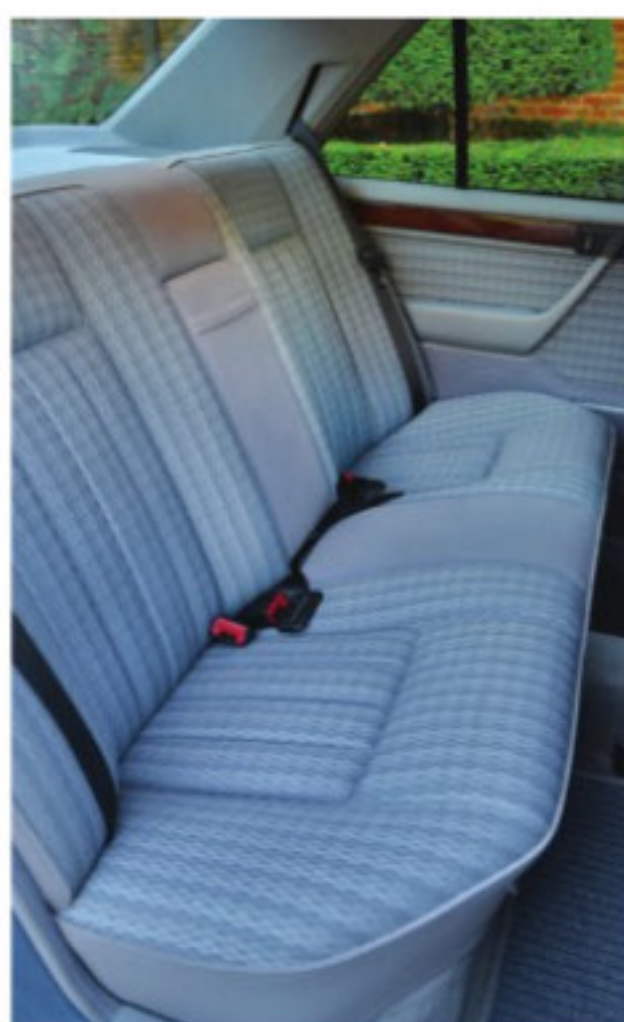


### THE MORE POTENT FOUR-CYLINDER

Settling into the 230E's still fresh cloth seats and absorbing the shiny Zebrano wood veneer instantly takes me back to the last time I drove a 124 that felt as youthful as this, in 1988 and the six-cylinder 260E. This involved an excursion onto Pendine Sands in Wales (as recalled in *Mercedes Enthusiast* April 2006), during which the virtually brand new Mercedes press car was nearly lost to the Atlantic. But Martyn Neville didn't have to worry today because our plan was less ambitious, merely a relaxing drive to remember the way Mercedes used to do things.

The four-cylinder M102 engine, which made its debut in 1980 in the 123-series 230E, does not truly inspire, as it never emits anything other than a gentle thrum, and does not really like to rev hard. But it is smooth enough, and from within the cabin it is very quiet – which of course is what counted most for Mercedes customers. Neither does it deliver sparkling performance, but, again, the 230E was obviously quick enough for owners who, if they had been worried about pace, would have bought a BMW 320i or a VW Golf GTi.

Notwithstanding the probable expectations of today's drivers, the 230E has sufficient usable performance, even if you must avidly ▷



**The 230E was obviously quick enough for owners**



◁△ Seat belts for all three rear occupants.

◁△ Anti lock brakes standard from 09/1988.

◁ The M102 unit was carried over from the W123.





▷ flex the right ankle on a long travel accelerator to extract what's there. With either the manual or automatic transmission, the saloon achieves 62mph from a standstill in just over 11 seconds but, probably more importantly, the engine with its high-ish torque peak is suited to relaxed cruising.

### HANDLING WITH CARE

No aspect of the 230E's handling is tactile. The recirculating ball steering messages little back to the fingertips, and the comms blackout continues into fast corners, during which the car's natural responses are damped into submission. But yet again it is what Mercedes, no doubt correctly, reasoned customers wanted, and the W124 – which adopted the excellent multi link rear suspension of the W201 190/190E range – wants for nothing in terms of road holding and braking. It could also, with its mere 15-inch wheels and 65-series tyres, teach many tautly sprung and generously tyred current cars a thing or two about comfort.

Another hallmark of this period of Mercedes is the cabin, so austere and plain – and for another £150 you could order the MB-Tex vinyl and make it even more so. And yet so appealing, thanks to the simple,

▷ Paperwork reveals no major jobs undertaken.

▷ A warning triangle in the super clean boot.



**“The paperwork is as complete as I have seen on any older Mercedes”**

restrained design. The springy seats, shared with other Mercedes of the era, are certainly an acquired taste, but even without the costly electric seat and steering column adjustment you can fashion the perfect driving position, thanks to separate manual height and angle adjustment controls on the side of the seat.

### SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

The paperwork on this car is as complete as I have seen on any older Mercedes, with every receipt, MOT certificate and even tax disc present. And it proves that an executive sized saloon is not necessarily an expensive car to run; there have been no major repairs in this car's life, and most of the services have been £300 or less, despite an official Mercedes dealer performing every one.

The 124-series, particularly the saloon, it seems, is the latest once plentiful Mercedes to become scarce as, 18 years after its production ended, many survivors are deemed no longer useful. As one who recalls seeing it as the newcomer on motor show stands, and having enjoyed so many great moments in a 124 of one kind or another, it makes me sad. Fortunately, at least, this particular 230E, thanks to its top condition, is likely to have a life ahead of it at least as long as that which has so far elapsed. 🚗

▶ Thanks to **Martyn's Car Sales** for the loan of the 230E [Web www.martynscarsales.co.uk](http://www.martynscarsales.co.uk) **Tel** 07768 017781, and to **Great Fosters** for the location [Web www.greatfosters.co.uk](http://www.greatfosters.co.uk) **Tel** 01784 433822

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# The great escape

Taking to Norway's beautiful and often challenging roads in the iconic 450SEL 6.9 was one opportunity not to be missed

WORDS **KYLE MOLYNEUX**  
IMAGES **CRAIG PUSEY**







COVER  
STORY



IT WOULD BE VERY EASY TO dramatise feelings of worry as I slipped into the Bamboo leather seat of this 37-year old, long-wheelbase saloon. But the fact is, although I did not know the total distance of our roadtrip before it began, I was utterly convinced that this Mercedes-Benz 450SEL 6.9 would complete it. Extremely healthy bodywork and a quick starting M100 V8 can do that for a modern classic driver's confidence.

This 6.9's well documented history also helped the positive feelings to grow. Delivered to Beverly Hills in

California on June 27 1977, the S-Class moved 800 miles north to Oregon 23 years later, and received a transmission rebuild complete with a new torque converter. The air conditioning compressor was replaced and the system updated to R134a gas, too.

#### **SOLID METAL**

Falling into the hands of another Oregon based keeper in 2003, the 6.9 enjoyed new parts for its hydro-pneumatic front and rear suspension (standard on this flagship S-Class), new brake discs and pads, new front wheel bearings, new fuel injectors on four of the cylinders, a rebuilt starter motor, and a



new water pump and radiator. In 2007, the bodywork was repainted using the original and oh-so-cool, DB404 Milan Brown metallic colour, and during that work the rubber seals

*“Unexpectedly, out here in this wilderness the 6.9 looks at home”*



around the windscreen and rear window were replaced. Thanks to living in such a dry climate from 1977 to 2000, the bodywork remains rust free while the chrome reflects mirror perfect images of the world around it.

This 6,834cc V8 saloon began the next chapter of its life when it was bought on eBay in September 2008 by its current keeper Per Rustberggard, and promptly shipped to Norway (that first Scandinavian winter must have come as a shock to this old Mercedes!). Since then, the 6.9 has required only servicing and a new mount to secure its cast iron block V8. ▷

◁ Long downhill stretches tested the disc brakes.

▽ One of the steepest roads in northern Europe.

## JUST THE FACTS

### MERCEDES-BENZ 450SEL 6.9 (V116)

ENGINE	M100 6,834cc V8
POWER	250bhp@4,000rpm
TORQUE	360lb ft@2,500rpm
TRANSMISSION	3-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT	1,990kg
0-62MPH	8.9sec
TOP SPEED	134mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION	15mpg
YEARS PRODUCED	1975-1980

*Figures for a US spec car as pictured, built from 1977 to 1979; fuel consumption determined at 3/4 of top speed (not more than 110km/h, 68mph) plus 10 per cent*





△ A shade under 118,000 miles and none the worse for it - what a machine!

△△ Many settings for this California car's climate control system.

▷ Bamboo leather looks tremendous with the Milan Brown paintwork.

▷▷ The light at the end of the many tunnels was a most welcome sight.



*“The craggy, knee high walls separating us from certain death do little to calm my nerves”*

▷ One of the few times Editor Molyneux wasn't smiling while driving.

▽ Hydro-pneumatic level control at rear ensures little fighting in corners.

transmission relying on second gear to do most of the leg work before carefully smudging the change to third gear – the highest available. At 50mph, the two-valve engine is barely past 2,000rpm, and reminds the car's occupants of its presence with a rhythmic and ever so gently reverberating melody that calls for the Becker radio to remain silent, and conversation between myself and photographer Craig Pusey to be sociably fleeting.



▷ Per saw fit to replace the extended North American bumpers with Euro spec items, but as these are more expensive to buy new than what he paid for the entire car, he sourced the bumpers from a somewhat cheaper 1976 280S.

Back in the present, the object of today's drive is simple: to enjoy the experience. We have long championed proper use of classic and modern classic Mercedes-Benz cars, and owners of this 6.9 have certainly lived up to expectation, racking up over 117,000 miles by the time my fingers acquaint themselves with the steering wheel's rubber rim, the crinkled surface unusual to hands more often applied to perfectly smooth modern finishes.

### NOW OR NEVER

Freyr, the Norse god of many things including sunshine, clearly approves of our intent, blitzing early morning clouds and leaving a near flawless blue ocean above, the 6.9's shade merging with roadside flora as we begin our journey south west, leaving the town of Gol along road 7 and aiming for Hol, 36 miles away.

With tighter curves few and far between, the flagship 116-series S-Class is allowed to stretch its legs on a hard surface well accustomed to sub zero temperatures, the 6.9's automatic

Soon we are on the outskirts of Hol before rolling north west along road 50. As we begin to climb, greater use of the 6.9's recirculating ball steering is required, and it is along here that we get our first sight of snow. Almost 1,000 metres above sea level, the Strandavatnet lake literally stops us in our tracks, reflecting the snow covered hills and blue sky above in its impossibly tranquil surface. Unexpectedly, out here in this wilderness the 450SEL 6.9 looks completely at home, its slightest of curves and coppery hue becoming part of the landscape rather than distracting from it.

Eager to make tracks with the promise of even more spectacular scenery, the full 250bhp and 360lb ft torque of this US spec 6.9 (Euro cars had 282bhp/405lb ft, in part thanks to a 0.7 higher compression ratio of 8.8) are deployed as we leave the layby and rejoin the carriageway. The V8's ascent through its rev range is relatively steady but it packs the force of a freight train, the final 1,000rpm before the redline at 5,000 the most energetic as the engine emits a deep and brutal snarl hardly in keeping with the bodywork surrounding it. The quoted 134mph maximum (140mph for Euro cars) certainly feels possible with more provocation of that floor hinged throttle pedal.

With the morning rapidly eroding, we continue our march along road 50, now heading north west towards Aurland. However, to get there we must pass through several tunnels including the Nesbøtunnelen (1.6 miles long), Berdaltunnelen (2.6 miles) and Stondaltunnelen (1.4 miles), each black hole through the mountainside testing a driver's nerve and spatial awareness, and of course, their car's headlamps, which in this case are somewhat lacking in their lighting ability!

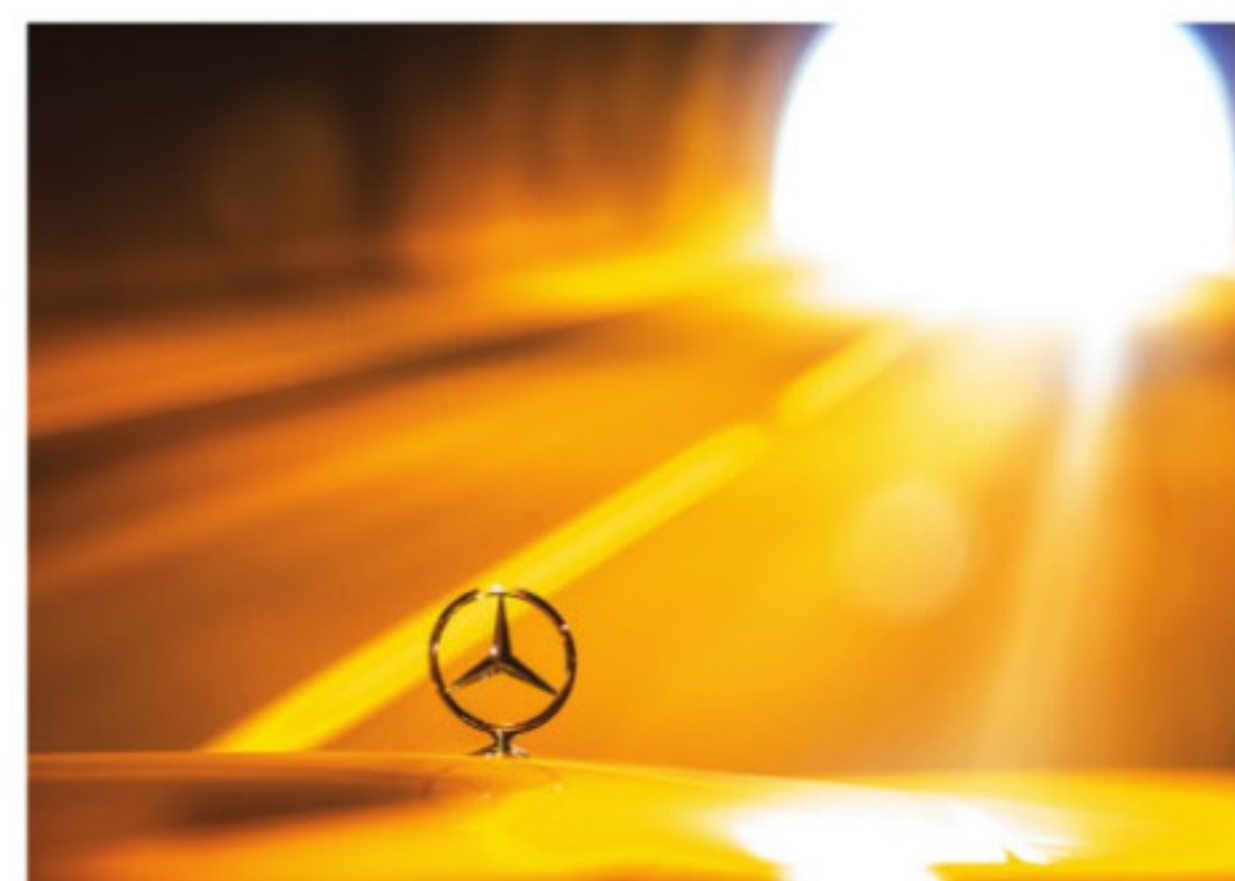
The tunnel roads may be dead straight, but they are littered with bumps and covered in dust. And the fact they are only just wide enough to take two cars abreast does not make meeting oncoming vehicles any easier, or less stressful. For those drivers who have navigated the Blackwall Tunnel in London, that mildly twisting route under the River Thames is a walk in the park compared to what greets us in the next few dozen minutes.

### EMERGING FROM THE BLACKNESS

Still around 12 miles from Aurland, and after carefully aiming the 6.9 downhill through yet more tunnels Gollum from *The Lord of the Rings* would be happy to call home, a puff of smoke rises from the front left wheel and wafts across the bonnet as we come to a halt at a red traffic light. The disc brakes of this two-tonne Benz are crying time, so under the advice of their owner I manually choose a low gear and stay off the stoppers whenever possible.

It takes all of lunch in Gudvangen, another 12 miles west of Aurland, to regain my confidence in the 6.9's vacuum boosted brake system, which has sufficiently cooled before the next challenge presents itself – one of the steepest roads in northern Europe. Right!

We could simply retrace our tracks along the E16 back to Aurland, but with a 6.8-litre super saloon to hand and a longing for a deeper sense of adventure, the Stalheimskleiva it is. Beginning at the rear of the Stalheim Hotel, which overlooks the Nærøy Valley, this 13-hairpin road, complete with two adjacent waterfalls, puts renewed strain on the 6.9's brakes, the old saloon suddenly feeling incredibly wide and longer than ever as we tiptoe down the mountainside, the craggy, knee high walls separating us from certain death doing little to calm my nerves. Somehow, we make it to the bottom of the valley without a ▷





▷ wisp of brake smoke to speak of, and the 6.9 is duly rewarded for its steadfast performance with a full tank of fuel.

Continuing back to Aurland before attempting to absorb the majesty of its vast fjord, we once again choose the scenic route as we begin the return leg of this dizzying journey. The next destination is Lærdal, and most drivers head to and from it via the Lærdalstunnelen, a monster, 15.2-mile cavity bored out of the mountains. We, however, set the 6.9's 14-inch wheels on the 'Fv243', a road seemingly scribbled onto the map by a child and which zig-zags across huge areas of countryside almost always covered with snow. Lots of snow – banks so high they loom over this 1,410mm tall Benz.

Despite the snowfall in these parts, the roads are sun kissed today and perfectly formed, inviting the 6.9's double-wishbone front end to hunt apex after apex along this twisting back route. There is just enough



The M100 V8 needs no introduction, Aurland's fjord equally mesmerising.

room for two cars to pass each other along here, but this otherwise grand Mercedes starts to shrink around me and gamely chirrup its inside rear wheel on the exit of one 90-degree left hander. Sadly, nobody else is around to see and hear the long-wheelbase S-Class fire down the road at a rate of knots that must have seemed completely absurd in the 1970s.

### BACK WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

Our isolation brings renewed focus on the car, which feels more responsive and wieldy than ever as we join the E16 in the heart of Lærdal, before heading south east towards Hemsedal. Norway gives us one last, emphatic memory during the final 60 miles, road 52 offering up more for the driver to savour than most of the





A-roads in the UK combined. Again, the long-wheelbase 6.9 comes alive, the extra legroom in the rear seemingly of no concern to the 116-series chassis, with composure only ever rocked by poorly judged entry speeds into corners, or overly keen inputs through the helm. Of course, there is body roll (not even the rear level control system can fix that), but it is not the door handle scraping sort that came with any hydro-pneumatically suspended Citroën of the day.

I imagine Norway's main routes are welcomed by this S-Class, brought up on arrow straight American highways. Fast and flowing, they allow the M100 to sing, and with half-turn curves they keep those old joints supple. It is a dream environment for this once most powerful Mercedes-Benz to flourish, and as we arrive in Gol, around 10 hours after we left, I swear I see a flash of new life in the 6.9's headlamps as we part ways – painfully for me.

With another 232 miles under its wheels, this 6.9 has proven that older Mercedes really can be taken on new adventures in the second decade of the 21st century. All it takes is a sense of responsibility for maintaining that which would otherwise be lost in time. Given the potential rewards, I think it's the least we can do...

► Thank you to **Per Rustberggard** of **Pers Hotell** for the loan of the **450SEL 6.9**  
**Tel +47 32 02 30 00 Web pers.no**

*"I imagine Norway's main routes are welcomed by this S-Class, brought up on arrow straight American highways"*





# *A new kind of*

Synonymous with expertly crafted, elongated Mercedes-Benz cars, coachbuilder Binz has now branched out into the tuning world with exciting results – we drive the Xtend model and more!

WORDS & IMAGES IAN KUAH



“The extra interior length purely benefits the cargo bay behind the rear seats”



◁ Sky lighting for the larger luggage space.



◁ Surprisingly, rear legroom is unchanged.



◁ Binz centre caps for the Mercedes alloys.



**Binz**

▷ An additional 851mm in length makes 5,756mm!





**‘Binzsport’ is the tuning division of Binz, started in 2010 to give the company a more youthful image**

**I**F YOU SEE A Mercedes ambulance, hearse or E-Class stretched limousine in Europe, chances are that it was built by Binz, the independent coachbuilding firm that has specialised in the design and manufacture of unique Mercedes vehicles since 1936.

Its ties with Mercedes run very deep. In fact, Binz is seen as an official partner company, and for the 212 E-Class Mercedes even supplies it with specially equipped or configured cars to use as the base vehicles (for more about the history of this company, and its inner workings, see *Mercedes Enthusiast* September 2014).

Normally, the extra length in a stretched limousine is added within the wheelbase, and Binz certainly does this with its stretched E-Class saloon, versions of which it has been manufacturing for the last four generations of this mid range Mercedes-Benz model. However, the Binz Xtend – the latest E-Class variant I have come to see today – is based on the E-Class estate, and the extra interior length purely benefits the cargo bay behind the three-seat rear bench.

### SLEEPS TWO...

Naturally, Binz uses the same suppliers as Mercedes-Benz, so the extra metal sections for the extended floorpan and the new sills come from the OE manufacturer, while the roof panel and glass are made by Binz. The wheelbase is extended by 861mm, from 2,874mm to 3,735mm. Meanwhile, the overall

length goes up from 4,905mm to 5,756mm – making it just over 300mm longer than the new Mercedes-Maybach!

The standard floorpan is precision cut by hand aft of the front seat using special tools and jigs. Then jigs are used to hold the sectioned shell in perfect position while a brand new floor pressing, door posts, roof cant rail sections, and a bespoke longer roof panel are welded and glued in place. Extra reinforcing plates are also used to ensure that the stretched shell has a very high standard of torsional stiffness and side impact crash protection.

A lengthened, dynamically balanced three-section driveshaft made by the Mercedes OE supplier is used to bridge the difference between the standard and lengthened chassis, and heavy duty versions of the normal road wheels and tyres are fitted at each corner.

Binz goes to a lot of trouble to ensure its cars look ‘factory’, and this means designing all the extended parts and new panels to visually integrate with existing features. If something cannot be modified, then a complete new panel is pressed or moulded.

This costs money, but the results speak for themselves. Boded window frames and shut lines are not an option here! The E-Class estate is the most capacious car in its class, able to swallow up to 1,950 litres of cargo with its rear seats folded. The load area of the Xtend is 1,390 litres, transformable into a massive 2,645-litre space with the rear seats folded flat.

Three power units are available for the Xtend, ranging from the E250 CGI through to

the E250 CDI and V6 powered E350, the latter the only version with a 4Matic option. While the E500 V8 was available in Binz’s two stretched limousines, and was an option on the Xtend when it debuted in 2011, the V8 is no longer available for the current model year.

Every bespoke interior trim part made to fit the different shapes and dimensions of the new Binz panels, is manufactured from OE materials, resulting in the contiguous Mercedes-Benz look and feel that Binz vehicles are renowned for. The bespoke loading bay options in the Xtend include extra mounting rails, a retractable platform to help with the loading of heavy objects, and fixed boxes for the transport of animals.

Far from being just a utilitarian vehicle, the Xtend can also be configured for a luxury or sport experience up front with seat options ranging from standard, to comfort to lightweight sports seats, with a choice of leather or Alcantara trim. Multi zone climate control takes care of occupant well being no matter what the weather outside is doing. The test car was also equipped with the optional LED sky lighting package, which features individual lights in the headlining and sides of the loading bay as well as the tailgate. This car also had purple LED lights in the C-pillars.

### PERSONAL TOUCHES

You might be surprised to learn that the rear body panels of all Binz creations are made from glass reinforced plastic (GRP) rather than steel. While it is true that pressing these panels from steel would be prohibitively expensive in such low volumes, as well as heavier, there is apparently no advantage in crash safety terms, as the structural strength is derived from the steel frame inside.

Taking the E250 CDI version as a benchmark, the kerb weight of the Xtend version is 2,040kg, so the extra materials in the conversion, including the longer driveshaft, add a total of 195kg to the the base E250 CDI Estate. The car sits on Avantgarde alloy wheels shod with 255/40ZR18 tyres, with an AMG brake system taking care of the extra weight.

Airmatic suspension with self levelling is standard on the rear axles of all 212-series estates. On the large hearses, which carry extra heavy loads, Binz fits additional helper spring and damper units to the rear axle. Roughly equivalent to the weight of two passengers, the extra mass naturally blunts the car’s performance. In the case of the E250 CDI, the 0-62mph sprint goes up from 7.8 seconds to 8.5







◀ Wider arches and four silver exhaust pipes.

▶ Cabin trim and sound upgrades also offered.

◀ Corniche Challenge rims look the part.



seconds, while the top speed falls from 144mph to 130mph thanks to an electronic limiter found on all Xtend cars.

Even so, the 369lb ft of torque ensures the E250 CDI powered Xtend still feels spritely, although a load carrier like this is not the sort of vehicle you would use to eat up winding country roads at a great rate of knots. If anything, the Binz Xtend feels quite majestic, with a long, loping deportment conferred by that longer wheelbase. I also did a stint in the rear seat, where it feels like you are riding in a limousine with, ironically, no extra rear legroom to speak of.

### SPORT BY BINZ

My first visit to Binz was in 2005. Back then, the coachbuilder was totally focused on its ambulance, hearse and stretched limousine

business, and did not normally do motor shows, apart from specialist trade shows for hearses and ambulances. Thus it came as a big surprise to find a Binz stand at 2014's Geneva Auto Salon. More so when I saw that some of the cars on the stand were quite visibly tuned, and wild looking with it. This was the last thing I expected from a company with such a sober and conservative image.

'Binzsport' is the tuning division of Binz, started in 2010 to give the company a more youthful image. If the Xtend is the traditional face of Binz, then the wide bodied Emperador, also based on an E-Class estate, is its evil twin. It would be a big investment for Binz to design and make moulds for a line of body styling kits for what will ultimately be a small volume operation. So Binz formed a partnership with

Inden Design, a Mercedes-Benz and Ferrari modifier located near Frankfurt in Germany. The Binz/Inden Design conversions on the Binz stand were the E-Class estate, C63 and the SLS AMG Roadster, but I have also seen a mean looking C63 AMG Estate.

Known as the Emperador, this grey car is based on an E350 4Matic Estate and features a new front bumper/spoiler, as well as new front wings, side skirts, rear door panels, rear wing extensions and a new rear bumper/valance. The latter has cut outs for the four-pipe, stainless steel sports exhaust system, which features a cross pipe to balance the gas flow between the engine's cylinder banks.

A standard E-Class visually suits either 19- or 20-inch diameter alloy wheels. But 20s are a must with the Binz widebody conversion, and the coachbuilder uses Corniche Challenge wheels – 10.0Jx20 front and 12.0Jx20 rear – ▶



▷ shod with 255/30ZR20 and 305/25ZR20 Dunlop Sport Maxx tyres respectively.

A wide bodied Mercedes-Benz with big boots looks downright gawky at the standard ride height of the Airmatic air suspension. This issue is taken care of by an electronic lowering unit that drops the static ride height by 25mm at the push of a button, so the car looks the part at rest. The suspension recovers its normal ride height on the move to avoid contretemps with speed bumps and car park ramps.

If the Emperor caught me off guard in Geneva, I was not at all surprised by the look of the Binz/Inden Design A-Class that Binz Brand Manager, David Wiegels, showed me during the factory tour. Where the Emperor's styling is clearly designed to be extrovert in a very 1980s way when widebody

**Binz recommends a ride height drop of about 25 to 30mm from standard, but someone took things to the extreme here**

styling was all the rage, the carbon fibre additions for the factory Sport styling package on the A-Class are relatively subtle, integrating very well with the inherently dynamic look of the Mercedes-Benz hatchback.

### ALL THINGS GREAT AND SMALL

In fact, if you said that they were a factory option, I am sure that, apart from the clearly aftermarket alloy wheels, most people would believe you. New components are the front spoiler lip, upper frames for the front air intakes, side skirt inserts and rear diffuser insert, and the finishing touch is the AMG Black Series style exhaust tips. The alloy wheels are the BBS CH-R design in 8.5Jx19 front and 9.5Jx19 rear sizes, shod with 225/35ZR19 and 255/30ZR19 rubber respectively. They fill the

wheelarches to the brim and this particular A-Class has also been lowered with an adjustable coil-over suspension system.

Binz recommends a ride height drop of about 25 to 30mm from standard, but someone took things to the extreme here. When you see the tops of the front tyres disappearing into the arches like a BTCC race car, you know it is too low for the road, and this was borne out by the stiff ride and distinct lack of wheel travel over bumps. It looks good in photographs, though.

Originally founded in 1936 by Michael Binz, the Binz company began its association with Mercedes-Benz and has never looked back. Current Binz CEO, Lorenz Dietsche, told me that the company has just passed the stringent US Type Approval process and will soon begin selling cars in America. This transatlantic venture opens a whole new chapter in the story of this 78-year old coachbuilder.



◁ CH-R rims by BBS, carbon addenda by Binz.

▷ Coil-over kit and Black Series style exhausts.







**BINZ**

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**“It was a one-owner car and  
had been kept in a heated  
garage from day one!”**





WORDS **GUY BAKER**  
IMAGES **TERRY OBORNE**

# Good as new

Seductive styling, an affordable price tag and a rewarding driving experience make early R171 SLK200 Kompressors among the finest used Mercedes buys - and this manual example has just 2,100 miles on the clock!



## JUST THE FACTS



### **Mercedes-Benz SLK200 Kompressor (R171)**

**ENGINE** M271 1,796cc 4-cyl supercharged

**POWER** 161bhp@5,500rpm

**TORQUE** 177lb ft@3,000rpm

**TRANSMISSION** 6-speed manual, RWD

**WEIGHT** 1,390kg

**0-62MPH** 7.9sec

**TOP SPEED** 143mph

**FUEL CONSUMPTION** 32.5mpg

**CO2 EMISSIONS** 209g/km

**YEARS PRODUCED** 2004-2008

*Figures for a 2007 car as pictured; fuel consumption according to NEDC combined*



**A car like this would  
have set its first owner  
back in the region of  
£31,000 in 2007**





W

HEN IT COMES TO buying used Mercedes-Benzes, the holy grail is a mint condition, one-owner, low mileage example.

And if you search through the classifieds hard enough, you will unearth quite a few, especially if you are looking at sporting models such as Mercedes' SL and SLK roadsters. But we did a double take when we saw this Iridium Silver R171 SLK200 Kompressor advertised for sale at Simon Light in Hertfordshire.

Surely the mileage – a mere 2,109 when tested – had to be a mistake? We were straight on the telephone to salesman Scott Chappell, who was delighted to confirm that the roadster in question had indeed covered such a small number of miles. Not only that, but it was also a one-owner car and had been kept in a heated garage from day one! We simply had to see this car...

Standing on the Mercedes specialist's forecourt, it took just a few seconds to realise that this was a truly special SLK. The bodywork wasn't just flawless, it was in concours condition. Everything about the car was factory fresh, from the squeaky clean door shuts and shiny brake calipers, to the virginal engine bay that was as new. Almost certainly never driven in wet weather, the car's owner had clearly been fastidious – possibly to the point of obsession. It was as if the car had recently been transported through time from 2007 to 2015.

With such an incredibly low mileage, this SLK had undergone relatively little servicing, with just two visits to the dealership – one in 2008 at 1,259 miles and another in June 2014 at 2,108 miles. The tyres and brake pads appeared to have been barely called upon, whilst the interior was absolutely faultless. And the specification incorporated all the key SLK200 Kompressor ingredients, including five-spoke alloy wheels, ASR with ESP, air conditioning, automatic headlights, a CD player, Speedtronic cruise control, heated electric folding mirrors, front foglamps, a heated rear window, a high level brake light, a wind deflector and tinted glass.

An SLK like this would have set its owner back in the region of £31,000 in 2007, and given the as new condition of the car, Simon Light's £14,995 asking price seemed entirely reasonable (the car is now sold). Yes, a more

typical, 65,000-mile, pre facelift example from 2007 might set you back around £10,500, but with the mileage correction on this car and its unique condition, there's every chance the new owner paid the full asking price for this car.

### A MORE SERIOUS PROPOSITION

Introduced in March 2004, the R171 SLK cut a dash. With its Formula 1 inspired styling, it built upon the desirability of its R170 predecessor, and some would say it's sexier than the current R172 model too. A very respectable standard spec included items like ABS, an alarm, 16-inch alloys, climate control, body coloured bumpers, a CD player, electric heated mirrors, cruise control, sports seats, ▷

◁ Four-valve technology and variable cams.

◁◁ The 16-inch rims blend style and comfort.

◁◁ Twinpulse tech aided fuel economy, power.







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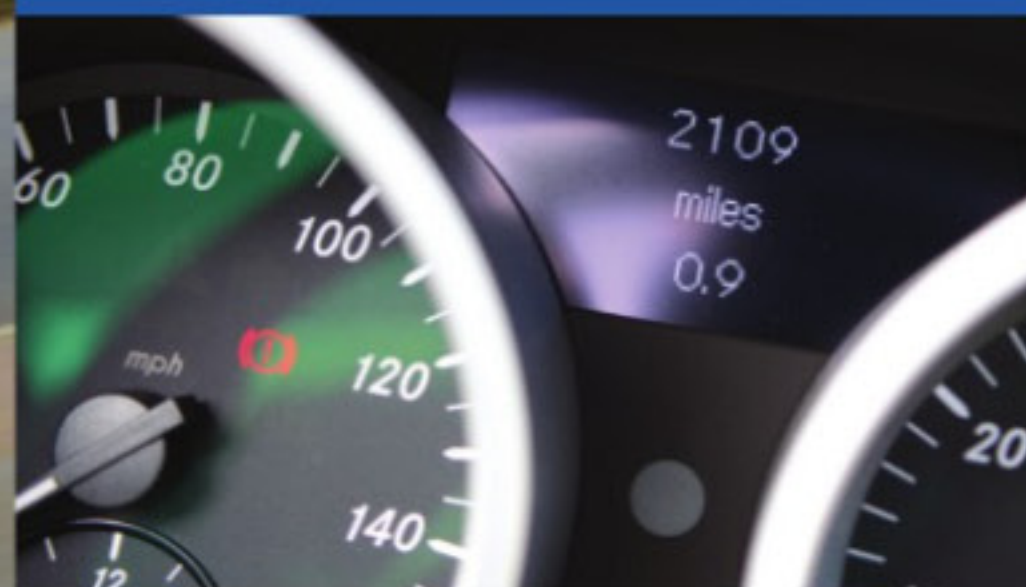


△ R171 brought rack and pinion steering to the SLK formula.

▷ We'd pick the six-speed manual over the five-speed auto.

◁ Few owners have had problems with the superb vario-roof.

▽ Manufactured in 2007, this SLK200 K has done 2,109 miles.



▷ ESP with traction control, and polished oval exhaust pipes. And for those with a bit more cash, an extensive factory options list offered all manner of extras like 17- or 18-inch alloys, Airscarf, AMG body styling, leather upholstery, Comand with satellite navigation, auto leveling bi-xenon headlights with headlight washers, a six-disc CD changer, an interior lighting package, Parktronic, rain sensing wipers, heated seats, a sports suspension pack, a Harman Kardon Logic 7 surround sound system, a hands free phone kit and iPod integration.

### THE TRANSMISSION OF CHOICE

Available with a six-speed manual or a five-speed auto (only the six- and eight-cylinder models got a seven-speed automatic), the SLK200 K's 161bhp M271 engine employed a cast aluminium block and aluminium cylinder heads, with four valves per cylinder and variable valve timing. Supercharged and intercooled, it also boasted forged steel con rods for added reliability. A pretty high tech engine then for the entry level SLK, and one which – thanks to a decent wallop of torque –

**The throttle response is silky smooth yet punchy with instant delivery**

imbued the compact roadster with hot hatch levels of acceleration and a 143mph top speed.

The 2008-on, facelifted SLK200 Ks claimed a tad more power and slightly improved fuel economy, plus a revised front bumper and a more pronounced arrow shape. The rear end and interior were tweaked too, but these differences appeared minimal.

As I nestle down into the cabin, I'm immediately struck by the spotless condition of the controls and trim. I'm relieved it's a dry sunny day, as my shoes won't leave any stains on the pristine carpets or gleaming pedals. The car springs into life first time (it did this all day) and the engine purrs invitingly.

As we leave the confines of Ware's residential streets and head out into the verdant Hertfordshire countryside, the unsullied feel of this example is in evidence everywhere. The throttle response is silky smooth yet punchy with instant delivery. There's no hint of hesitation or lumpiness anywhere in the rev range, and that manual gear change feels as tight and accurate as it did the day it left the factory. In truth, this is the best transmission for the SLK200 K – nearly 40 per cent of examples for sale have it – and it suits the car's character better than the ▷



▷ automatic, which feels quite slow to respond. The black cloth sports seats are reassuringly supportive and wide enough for contemporary sized drivers, whilst the exhaust emits a raspy, throaty bark belying its humble four-pot origin.

Steering feel and response really impress too, providing this SLK with a satisfying eagerness to change direction. The chassis feels youthfully taut and allows you to press on confidently through the bends, as the suspension soaks up any undulations with ease. The standard 16-inch alloys (shod with 255/55 rubber) certainly help the ride quality without detracting from the car's cornering capability. Examples with larger alloys and the optional sports suspension are far less forgiving.

This car's brakes are spot on too, whilst the steering – although light around town – feels pleasingly direct at higher speeds. Throw in a near perfect driving position, first class

visibility and a decent sized boot (208 to 300 litres) and this SLK is irresistible. No wonder the R171 proved more popular than the R170 in the UK: Mercedes-Benz sold 19,838 pre facelift R171s alone, with this version – the SLK200 K – the biggest seller.

◁ Leather and Aircarft extras not fitted here.


▽ M271 unit replaced the M111 red top.

So a low mileage R171 SLK200 K is still a great drive in 2015, but how does it stack up as a buying and ownership proposition? There are plenty of 2004 to 2007, pre facelift cars for sale, with the leggiest 90,000 milers selling for just under seven grand. A more typical, 65,000-mile example is £8,000, whilst the very last, low mileage, pre facelift cars are £12,000. Plenty of supply then, with affordable prices that are usually negotiable.

### ACT FAST

Keeping your R171 SLK in good condition shouldn't prove too costly either, especially if you find a reputable Mercedes specialist for all the routine fettling. Simon Light, for instance, would charge £198 all in for an A service on a car like this, and £287 for a B service. A routine brake fluid change is just £49.50, whilst parts prices are extremely sensible: a new air filter is £68, and a set of replacement front brake pads for the SLK200 K will set you back just £166, including VAT and labour.

Better still, the reliability record for this model is impressive, with few cars suffering major issues. A handful of owners with red cars feel that their paint has chipped too easily, and look out for water leaks through the roof or bootlid seals, but that's it.

In fact, the only fly in the ointment with a super low mileage SLK200 K is likely to be the price. But with such a ready supply of well maintained, average mileage examples out there, both salesmen and private sellers will realise that some degree of flexibility is needed to agree any deal. As Scott Chapell at Simon Light succinctly puts it, "Let's just say, we are always willing to negotiate with any interested party." And if you do stumble across another SLK200 K in anything like this kind of condition, don't hang around – they are usually snapped up in days! 

► Thank you to **Simon Light** for the loan of the car **Tel** 01920 423342 **Web** [www.simonlight.co.uk](http://www.simonlight.co.uk) and to **Ware Rover** for the location **Tel** 01920 465431 **Web** [www.wareroverttech.co.uk](http://www.wareroverttech.co.uk)

“Keeping an R171 SLK in good condition shouldn't prove too costly”



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# WHITE KNIGHT

**WITH MEC DESIGN'S AXIOM ONE WIDEBODY KIT PLUS NEW ALLOY WHEELS AND A HOST OF PERFORMANCE UPGRADES, VOGUE AUTO DESIGN HAS TURNED THIS SL55 AMG INTO A MEAN WIDE BOY ROADSTER**

WORDS AND IMAGES TONY MATTHEWS





**“This piece of  
German engineering  
mastery was destined  
for something more  
profound”**







△ 20-inch VF1 forged wheels by Vogue Auto Design.

▽ SL's signature side vents much deeper here.

**“It took the people at VAD a few weeks to transform the Merc from stock roller, to street warrior”**



▽ Silver mesh much needed for the SL55's gaping front intakes.

▽ Wide bore exhaust pipes sit within an aggressive diffuser.



**W**HEN I WAS A YOUNG boy, I read many amazing stories about knights in shining armour. Stories of great battles from times gone by, featuring brave warriors fighting for their right to be free and live in peace. Each story had a main character with a great destiny to fulfil, involving a journey to an unknown land where no other had dared to go before. These individuals are the stuff of legends.

The hero of this story comes in the form of an R230 SL, which was originally a stock SL55 AMG with black armour. Black SL55s are rare

to come by, but in the eyes of its owner Christopher Mellor, it wasn't quite special enough. Whether you agree or not with the car's transformation, you must reserve judgement until the full details are revealed.

Christopher has a taste for all types of rare and legendary cars, and over the years he has acquired a Porsche Boxster done up for the track, plus a Toyota Supra, Caterham Seven, Aston Martin DB7, Mitsubishi 3000GT, one of only four Lynx Jaguars ever built, and now this SL55 AMG upgraded to 500bhp. His passion is so deep that he will find the rarest examples of cars to add to his collection. "I was going to

simply buy a second car, but while searching online I came across VAD [Vogue Auto Design]. I spoke to the company and took references on the quality of its work," Christopher recalls. He was so impressed with what he learned, and after seeing a MEC Design bodykit for an SL55 on VAD's website ([www.vogueautodesign.com](http://www.vogueautodesign.com)), he just had to find a stock model and make his own mark.

#### **FROM DARK TO LIGHT**

He knew the SL55 was a rare car, and normally he would keep it standard, but after laying eyes on the MEC bodykit, this piece of German





engineering mastery was destined for something more profound in his hands. "The MEC bodykit required a base SL55, so I bought a 10-year old one, unseen in Yorkshire, with a high specification and low mileage, always knowing that it would be overhauled and upgraded," Christopher remembers. The major factor in the journey that the SL55 would take was its colour change from black to white – a white knight amongst darker coloured counterparts located around the world.

The kit you see on this mighty Merc is MEC Design's Axiom One upgrade, which consists of a custom bonnet, new bumpers front and

rear (the latter with a diffuser), side skirts, wheelarch extensions for added visual impact, and a rear spoiler. It took the people at VAD a few weeks to transform the Merc from stock roller to street warrior, including applying the now signature white armour paint.

Vogue Auto Design carried out a lot of research in the industry when it came to supplying the best bodykits on the market, and after seeing the quality of MEC Design's work, it made sense to become a UK importer.

For those of you who are not familiar with MEC Design, it is one of Europe's leading Mercedes-Benz tuning companies that

specialises in not just bodykits, but also alloy wheels, lowering kits, engine performance enhancements and interior upgrades. It was founded way back in 1999 and created its first widebody kit for an R129 SL in 2001. Since then, MEC Design has grown from strength to strength. You can find out more about the company by visiting [www.mecdesign.de](http://www.mecdesign.de).

#### REAR OF THE YEAR

I can see why Christopher opted to have the kit instead of keeping the SL55 stock, as boy does it bring out the beast in this Mercedes-Benz! Take a moment to absorb just how wide and ➤





**“Last on the list was a Quaife limited-slip differential”**

- △ The red interior provides a great contrast to the exterior.
- ▷ ECU remap and supercharger pulley upgrade give 500bhp.
- ▷△ Facelifted looks for this earlier R230 thanks to MEC.
- ▷△△ Thickly bolstered seats with a pulse massage function.
- ◁ Soft, perforated leather for the SL's sumptuous chairs.

▷ aggressive this car now looks, complete with its facelifted R230 appearance. A set of VAD's VF1 forged wheels were bolted on and, at 10 inches wide at the front and 13 inches wide at the rear, they reinforce the incredible stance.

#### KLEEMANN ADDITIONS

Not only does the exterior look super aggressive, but the heart of the beast has also gone through a transformation to give it more grunt. VAD entrusted SKG Performance to

give the V8 a Kleemann boost kit. This consists of a smaller pulley and ECU remap, including the removal of the speed limiter and an additional programme for the tubular headers – these also made by Kleemann and complemented by new downpipes to help remove exhaust back pressure, allowing the engine to breathe more freely and produce more power. Last on SKG's list was a Quaife limited-slip differential to aid traction, handling and braking. Vogue Auto Design then fitted its

own stainless steel back box and a Kleemann intercooler pump to help reduce intercooler heat soak and improve recovery time.

Having grown his business over the years before selling it, Christopher has gifted himself the financial freedom to explore his passion for cars. In the case of this SL55 AMG, he wanted to do something different and take the car to another level in the aesthetic and performance departments. It is safe to say he has achieved his goals, and then some.





If beauty is only skin deep...



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search: "Brutal SKG C63 AMG"

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# Differences



*“Why would anyone feel  
the need to own two  
R107 SLs?”*



From both ends of R107 V8 production, the defining features of this 350SL and 500SL make them surprisingly different propositions

# in the DETAILS

WORDS MATT ZOLLO IMAGES IGOR VUCINIC

BUILT FROM APRIL 1971 TO AUGUST 1989, the R107 SL was in full scale production for 18 years and four months – over which time 237,287 were made – before Mercedes-Benz deemed it ready to be replaced and let it slip gracefully into retirement, assured of classic status in the not too distant future.

The model's trumpet has been parped for this very reason many times before, and that is because such a long and unspoiled lifespan really is quite an achievement in the automotive world. How many other series production models can you think of that lasted so long and yet changed so little over the course of their lives? Talking Mercedes models, only the G-Class trumps it.

This should undoubtedly be seen as a good thing, for many reasons. But it does lead to a most pertinent question regarding these two particular SLs, both owned by Municher Marcus Diamand. That is, why would anyone feel the need to own two of them? OK, there is the obvious answer: because they are brilliant cars, and two of any brilliant car is better than one of any brilliant car. But what is in it for the owner other than a bit ▶





The first round  
goes to the  
early car



△ Retro Becker unit with radio and sat nav.

◁ D-Jetronic fuel injection by Bosch for M116.



△ Early style light alloys in size 14 inches.

▷ Dark green a less often seen cabin colour.



▷ of car based gluttony of the best kind? Surely, even though they were built at the opposite ends of the R107's life cycle, they provide such similar driving and ownership experiences that owning just one of them would suffice?

### LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

The answer to that will come shortly, but first a bit of history on the two cars and their one lucky owner. Or maybe it is better to start with their owner's father, as he is the person responsible for his son's love of all (or almost all, Marcus would probably like us to point out) things Mercedes, having owned various Benzes, from a W100 600, through to a W111 280SE Coupe and W116 450SE (the first one in Munich, incidentally).

Having duly acquired a taste for Mercedes himself, Marcus owned a few W123s before buying, in 1985, a 1972 350SL, a lovely one-owner, low mileage car in beautiful condition. And

that, 28 years on, is the Blue-Black metallic one that you see here. As you might imagine, it is still in fantastic condition, having been owned by just one devoted keeper all those years – but it has not had a totally easy time of it.

"I ran it for seven or eight years as a daily driver, and did some long summer trips in it too. And then I put it away for 10 years because I moved to the United States," Marcus recalls. "When I returned to Germany, I basically had two choices: completely restore it, or throw it away – it was that bad. Of course, since it had been such a big part of my life and I had such great memories of it, I decided on the restoration."

Dropping the car off at classic Mercedes specialist Fritz Wallner, he parked next to a perfectly restored Pagoda, and the request was made simply to "make it as good as that one". A new interior and hood, complete respray in Blue-Black metallic (a late period SL colour; originally the car was white) and a





△ A slicker feel to the four-speed autobox's shift.

◁ Dark blue top and 15-inch rims for this later SL.

▷△ 1985-on 500 with KE-Jetronic fuel injection.

▷ Two-valve M117 with one cam per bank.



mechanical overhaul with many new parts followed, and a few years later it was finally finished. It has not just been restored but improved as well, benefiting from air conditioning, electric windows and many other retrofitted parts and upgrades.

## ONE BECOMES TWO

Marcus enjoyed the car for six years before deciding he could do with another R107, buying the white 1988 500SL featured here (a Monte Carlo car, no less, with just 40,000 miles on the clock) in spring 2011. But why? "I consider myself an SL guy, especially an R107 one, and since my original SL is one of the first manufactured, I thought it would be nice to have one of the last, with the technical improvements of the facelift, and the bigger engine. And also simply because it's a great car."

But just how different can they feel? And which one is better? In fact, is it even possible to say that one is better than the other?

And are they that different beyond their varying power outputs? And the answers are: surprisingly so; you will find out in a minute; not really; yes they are. I could almost wrap things up here, couldn't I?

It can be difficult comparing old cars, because the way they drive can vary so much from example to example. So it is reassuring to know that Marcus's 350 has benefited from a recent and comprehensive cosmetic and mechanical overhaul, meaning that it should not be hamstrung by its many additional miles and years of service compared to the newer, lower mileage 500.

Indeed, the first round goes to the early car. The interior is simply a nicer, more ▷

## JUST THE FACTS

### Mercedes-Benz 350SL (R107)

ENGINE M116 3,499cc V8

POWER 197bhp@5,800rpm

TORQUE 211lb ft@4,000rpm

TRANSMISSION 3-speed auto, RWD

WEIGHT 1,540kg

0-62MPH 9.5sec

TOP SPEED 127mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 21.7mpg

YEARS PRODUCED 1971-1980

### Mercedes-Benz 500SL (R107)

ENGINE M117 4,973cc V8

POWER 242bhp@4,750rpm

TORQUE 289lb ft@3,750rpm

TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD

WEIGHT 1,610kg

0-62MPH 7.3sec

TOP SPEED 140mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 17.8mpg

YEARS PRODUCED 1980-1989

Figures for a 1972 350SL and a 1988 500SL without a catalyst as pictured - weight figures do not include the 40kg hardtop; fuel consumption for the 350SL determined at 3/4 of top speed (not more than 110km/h, 68mph) plus 10 per cent, and for the 500SL according to EEC urban





◁ Different helm and switchgear in the younger SL.



◁ The 500's blue theme continues to the boot area.

▽ Marcus owns two R107s with good reason.



▷ characterful, more special place to sit. Some of this is personal preference – I love the dark green of the earlier car's insides – but there is no denying that stuff like the vertical slide controls for the heater, the smaller chrome wing mirrors and the elegant, thin rimmed steering wheel are prettier looking things than the 500's plastic, safety approved versions, even if they are not as easy to use, or as forgiving in a crash. Ease of use and practicality is for the daily driver, after all. That said, the seats of the newer car are miles more comfortable and more supportive.

The later car claws it back as soon as you pull away, though. The four-speed automatic of the 500 is far smoother during take off and gear changes than the three-speed auto in the 350. The engine is quieter and more refined, and the car feels more solid and sturdy. It is just generally the better, more competent and composed, and more relaxed car to mooch around in.

But hold on. Is that the point of classic cars like this? Should it be all about competency and good manners? The older car is busier in noise and feel, and more involving and interesting to drive, and that is what people love about classic cars. That

theme continues when you exercise the engines. Sure the newer V8 is quieter, smoother and much more refined.

But is that a positive or a negative in a car like this?

Marcus prefers the sound of the early M116 eight-cylinder, and it is so much louder and more mechanical sounding that it actually seems like the more potent powerplant.

*Me? I would take the 500 – the performance of that big V8 is very appealing*





But it definitely is not. Whereas the 197bhp, 3,499cc V8 provides adequate performance – that is, just enough but nothing more – the performance of the 242bhp 4,973cc V8 is one of the most enjoyable aspects of the way it drives, providing a bigger jump in acceleration and general ability than the extra 45bhp would suggest. Perhaps the additional 78lb ft of torque and closer spaced ratios of the four-speed gearbox are the real reasons behind its extra urge. There is more ‘engine’ than you really need in a car of this type, but who really cares about that?

### GIVE AND TAKE

When you up the pace, more differences make themselves felt. On an open road, the newer car feels better tied down, more stable and more composed. However, thanks to the older car’s smaller 205/70/14 tyres (compared to the 500’s 225/60/15s) it smothers bumps better and actually rides more smoothly (despite the younger car’s lightly revised front and rear suspension set ups) and, combined with the softer, more springy suspension, it actually feels more serene, which suits the SL’s character better. The 350’s steering is nicer, too – not as light and as slick as the 500’s and with an extra third of a turn of lock, but more generous in feedback and involvement.

Despite this, it really is a very close call. Me? I would take the 500 – the performance of that big V8 is very appealing. However, is it not necessarily a better classic car. I can quite understand why anybody would choose the earlier SL as their favourite

R107. Like Marcus, for instance. “Due to the technical changes, the younger 107-series roadster is an improved car. But even with all the improvements, I think the aura and the character of the SL is better demonstrated in the older model. The vertical slide controls for the heater, for example – that is how the car is meant to be. Out of the two, I prefer the black one, besides the fact that I have a long history with it.”

Point well made. A point which, we hope, demonstrates perfectly why Marcus has two R107 Mercedes-Benz SLs, despite them appearing to be so similar at first glance. They really do provide very different driving experiences, feeling almost, but not quite, a generation apart. Besides, they look great parked next to one another, and what more reason does anyone need to own two of them than that?



◀ Space behind the seats ideal for a few bags.







“  
It is precisely such  
details that help a  
premium car stand  
a cut above the rest  
”

▽ Complex trim  
inserts with a  
remarkable fit.

▽ Interior designs  
attempt to continue  
exterior themes.

▽▽ High tech  
systems have a  
traditional vibe.

△ There is more to  
headlamp design  
than meets the eye.





WORDS SUSANNE ROEDER IMAGES DAIMLER AG

A trip to the Mercedes-Benz Technology Center in Sindelfingen revealed the thinking behind the car maker's latest design philosophy

# B E Y O N D L U X U R Y

**B**EAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER. BUT try to please everybody, and you will be everybody's fool. The art of successful design therefore, is to appeal to as many tastes as possible while still being unique. "It is the first time we have created a master plan," Daimler's chief designer Gorden Wagener said of the new styling philosophy, which is all about giving the Mercedes-Benz brand a fresh and, as Wagener claims, "pure" makeover.

One of the first things to catch your attention when you see the front of a car is the headlights. They are an essential part of its 'face', its retinal signature, so to speak. This is why the designers in Sindelfingen look all their cars straight in the eyes, to determine the look that best suits each individual model. It was Peter Pfeiffer, Gorden Wagener's predecessor and champion, who created a separate lighting department within Mercedes-Benz shortly before retiring in 2008, arguing, "We need to study this subject in greater depth."

The outcome is studies of Mercedes-Benz physiognomy determined by headlamp shape. Progressing headlamp design beyond just shape and three-dimensional qualities, the designers also pioneered the use of Swarovski gems in the optional LED headlights of the S-Class coupe, a unique highlight that makes the luxury car's appearance even more striking.

Daimler is the first car manufacturer to use the precision cut glass crystals, which are the doyen of international fashion designers, as a brilliant extra. The LED high performance headlamps feature 47 Swarovski crystals, of which 17 angular crystals form the flare shaped daytime running lamps, and 30 round crystals make up the turn indicator lamps.

## LIFE IN LIGHT

The precedent may well have come from the fashion industry in which Daimler has long taken a vested interest, and where for example, Chanel sent some of its models down the catwalk with gem studded eyebrows. Such detailing is just



△ 'Dynamic' and 'Sovereign' looks for Merc's headlamps.





**With luxury goods, the means and the craftsmanship are often more important than the ends**

△ Wood veneer prior to receiving a glossy, enhancing finish.

▽ An ambitious concept became a production reality.

▽▽ No less than 47 Swarovski crystals offered on S-coupe.



▷ one aspect of the design process that makes a Mercedes-Benz car more dramatic, exciting and passion inspiring.

“Luxury is about individual solutions,” Wagener professed. This can indeed be seen in many interior details, as Daimler expert for colour and materials, Martin Breuer, showed us. Take for instance the seat adjustment controls, which are often positioned on the door panels. “We had to use all our power of persuasion to convince the production engineers that we wanted more than just the run of the mill, black plastic switches, and that they now had to match the colour of the door panel insert,” Breuer revealed. It is precisely such details that help a premium car stand a cut above the rest.

Quality materials have always been a Mercedes-Benz forte. Together with good ergonomic design, they create an upmarket environment that stimulates visual and tactile delight. Apart from traditional materials like leather, wood and chrome, new constituents like carbon fibre were added to heighten refinement and further emphasise the high tech quality and sensual purity of a Mercedes. After all, every Mercedes has to fulfil the demand to deliver “a luxury atmosphere with high class materials and excellent workmanship,” as the designers put it. One new process that underlines this is the unique gloss finish on the door and console trim inserts that gives more visual depth to the veneer.

### EVERY DETAIL COUNTS

The interior designers get a lot of inspiration from shows like the Milan Furniture Fair. Purity and authenticity, in other words – attaining the most authentic look for the materials, has been a big challenge for them, but not the only one. “Our trim inserts have the most complex, curved shapes in the industry,” Breuer pointed out proudly. Holding one of these thin and precisely shaped wood veneer panels in one’s hand makes one wonder why it has not cracked during the manufacturing procedure. Their precise fit in a car where they are supposed to last more or less forever is another trade secret.

New patents continue to lengthen the list of intelligent inventions. One idea was to make the interior architecture more closely reflect the exterior design, turning the car into a homogenous piece of art. Here, some of the interior wood panels are subtly curved to mirror the shape of the car itself, as they do in the S-Class coupe. The dashboards and door panel trim pieces even take cues from the classic Riva yachts, acknowledged for their unparalleled craftsmanship.

▽ New shapes look cut from billet metal.







△◁ C-Class console with touchpad.

◁ S-Class dash trim inspired by Riva yachts.

We were repeatedly told that the new generation of Mercedes-Benz cars will not have superfluous lines, and each exterior and interior line has to serve the god of purity in the make up of the overall design. The harmonious wrap-around effect, with organic flowing lines, curved centre console and free-standing instrument display, underpinned by meticulous quality in every detail, creates what the designers call their 'welcome home' feeling.

## MORE THAN A CAR

The purity theme continues with the instruments and telematics, which follow the simple concept of, 'What you see is what you get'. As Norbert Kurz, in charge of User Experience, told us, "As soon as you change something via the digital setting, it will show on the display." The instruments are classic in form, yet modern too. So while there is an emphasis on high tech, the interface is user friendly and underpins the mantra of sophisticated sensuousness and clarity.

"Every Mercedes, with its high value appeal, hand finished quality and outstanding sense of touch and feel, plays a crucial role in maximising 'tangible contemporary luxury'," said Hartmut Sinkwitz, Head of Interior Design, reinforcing Wagener's overall design message. Thus, the round switch in the middle console that enables you to easily scroll through the menu without visual distraction when driving, delivers pleasantly reassuring tactile feedback.

Typical Mercedes elements, such as the round ventilation nozzles, evoke images of jet engines and aeroplanes. While Mercedes says there is no better way to drive than in its premium cars, the magic carpet ride in an S-Class, with auto piloted driving on the horizon, is a strong allusion to the original romance of air travel. 🚗



## GORDEN WAGENER

### How Mercedes' design boss is preparing the three-pointed star for the future

"A picture speaks a thousand words," is an old adage that most of us learned in school. With a new car, the 'picture' is the first glance that leaves the all important lasting impression. According to Gorden Wagener, Vice President of Design for Daimler AG, this is just one of the reasons why he and his team did so much soul searching in their quest to create a unique and credible design language to embody their forward looking concept of 'modern luxury'.

"Design is the first thing you notice about a car, and so it must be used to reinforce the strength of the brand at an emotional level," Gorden explained. "Think of Luis Vuitton, a long life design paradigm, and you also encounter quality and brand loyalty. Customers stay with Mercedes for some of the same reasons. But unlike a set of luggage, cars are 'living', dynamic machines that need to change with the times. They have to be exciting.

"What a Mercedes must have in common with other high end luxury items is good proportions, simplicity, authenticity, craftsmanship and an alluring tactile feel. With luxury goods, the means and the craftsmanship are often more important than the ends," he said.

The new S-Class is a very clean yet dynamic design that exudes tremendous gravitas in its role as a luxury flagship saloon. At the other end of the scale, the A-Class was a huge shock to its rivals, with styling that radically changed the landscape in the normally staid prestige hatchback class. It will undoubtedly influence the design direction taken by the next generation VW Golf and BMW 1-Series.

Some say that the AMG GT's rear looks like a 911's. "I take that as a compliment, as the 911 has one of the nicest rears of any car," Gorden countered. "The GT has even more taper at the rear than the Porsche, and this adds to its sporty flavour. It is also a simpler and cleaner design than the SLS that speaks its own design language, rather than taking cues from a car that went before, as the SLS did."

The new Mercedes design direction is settling down nicely with cars that exude harmonious proportions and meaningful detailing, and are exciting to look at. Modern luxury is now clearly embodied in the story of passion.

## IAN KUAH







Headrests added to the front seats.



△ It took a week to polish the bodywork.

▷ Rear swing-axle with stabilising spring set up.

◁ M108 had Zenith carbs when new.



◁ Vital gauges arranged in a clever fashion.



◁ Europa TR radio created by Becker.

▽ Classic cabin design with added safety.





# DREAMING IN GREEN

Reacquainted with a customer's 1967 W108 after several years, this mechanic could not resist taking the car under his wing – and hasn't looked back since

WORDS AND IMAGES **ERIC RICHARDSON**

**I**'VE KNOWN the car for around 30 years," explains Tony Croxall, tapping a hand on the roof of the W108 250S that is standing beside us. "I carried out some work on it for the previous owner, but that must have been about 25 years ago. He came and collected it from me, then used it once before he put it in his garage and left it there. "Around 10 years later, I heard that he had passed away and I

ended up buying the car. That was in 2010, and in that time since I worked on the car, it had only covered 27 miles."

## STARTING AFRESH

Sadly, while many believe that not using a car will ensure its longevity, Tony knew only too well that a lack of use can have a detrimental effect on perishable items such as rubber seals and hoses. What's more, the garage itself was far from the ideal environment, as

Tony explains. "Yes, the car had been garaged all those years, but in the garage was a coal bunker which the gent used, as he had coal powered heating in his home. As a result of that, the saloon was absolutely covered in coal dust.

"All the bumpers were black, and I honestly never thought they would shine again. I spent a week with a friend just trying to get the Mercedes back to decent condition. It's obviously better now than what it was, and gets better with each clean and polish, but it was hard work."

Once the car had received the thorough cleaning it deserved, Tony's next task was to try and make the car roadworthy. "Anything rubber on the car had perished," Tony remembers. "Fuel hoses, engine mounts, and suspension bushes and so on, absolutely everything was shot, including the tyres.

"Once I'd seen to all of that, I then had to sort the self levelling suspension unit on the rear axle. That is hydraulic and I guess the seals had perished on that too, as the car's back end was really low. It looked as if 10 tonnes of potatoes were lying inside it!

## MERCEDES DELIVERS

"I tried to get the unit repaired, but no independent would touch it, so I called Mercedes' Classic Centre and was told that a new one was in stock. Now, at that time I had no intention of buying it there and then, but because they only had one available I bit the bullet and bought it. It cost me £900, mind you, but it really transformed the car."

The work was not over, however. "The inside of the car absolutely stank of cigar smoke, and the car itself smoked something terrible too. It turned

out it was the valve guides, all of which had worn out in less than 50,000 miles, so I took the head off and had that refurbished."

Tony then pauses a moment. "The only other problem was the gearbox. It had an oil leak, so I had it overhauled, but it was found to be in really good condition. Then we traced the problem to a seal on the torque convertor, so I had that replaced and everything was good once more." Finally up and running, the hard work was

## JUST THE FACTS

### Mercedes-Benz 250S (W108)

ENGINE M108 2,496cc 6-cyl

POWER 128bhp@5,400rpm

TORQUE 143lb ft@4,000rpm

TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD

WEIGHT 1,440kg

0-62MPH 12.9sec

TOP SPEED 109mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 24.1mpg

YEARS PRODUCED 1965-1969

Figures for car as pictured; fuel consumption determined at ¾ of top speed (not more than 110km/h, 68mph) plus 10 per cent

rewarded when Tony was able to use the car at the wedding of the daughter of its original owner.

To ensure the 250S doesn't suffer the same problems again, Tony tries to take it to car shows on a regular basis, and will have attended both the Goodwood Festival of Speed and Revival by the time you read this, as well as numerous other more local shows.

"A couple of years ago, we went to the Goodwood Revival – my wife, myself, and two friends. We were sitting in a traffic jam near the entrance, and this chap had broken down in his Daimler Dart. He saw us approaching, gave a nod and as we slowly made our way past he said, 'Morning, mafia.' We all roared with laughter. It's just like a mafia car, isn't it? It's so imposing. I just love it."





# PRELOVED PERFECTION

With prices suppressed, the winter months provide the ideal market conditions for used car buyers to bag a Mercedes-Benz bargain

WORDS **GUY BAKER** IMAGES **STEVE HALL/TERRY OBORNE/DAIMLER AG/CHRIS GAGE**



**The introduction of new and innovative models has created a halo effect around just about every used Mercedes**

**U**K BUYERS HAVE shown an almost insatiable appetite for new Mercedes over last few months, but do used Mercedes have quite the same allure? Well, according to Rupert Pontin, Head of Valuations at market analysts Glass's, the answer is a resounding yes!

"Mercedes is performing very well in the used car market as a whole at the moment," he told us. "This year has seen a resurgence of popularity of the brand driven by the marketing campaigns behind the assault on the new car market, as Mercedes-Benz aims for a five per cent market share. This has

raised brand awareness across the board," Rupert continued, "and the introduction of innovative new models has created a halo effect around just about every used Mercedes-Benz."

## **BY POPULAR DEMAND**

This improvement in fortune for used Mercedes-Benz products is highlighted by the fastest and slowest selling models list that Glass's compiles on a monthly basis. "It was only six or so months ago that Mercedes dominated the slowest selling 20 cars," Rupert stresses. "But the latest data shows just two Mercedes in the bottom 50."

These are the CL coupe, in the 9th slowest selling position, and the SL which appears in 22nd place. But both these stars are high value 'Sunday' cars that are generally more popular during the summer months. And of course they also come with high running costs. The only other used Mercedes showing reduced demand are SLK diesels, and SE spec C-Class diesels (buyers tend to prefer the Sport models).

In terms of new Mercedes, franchised dealerships were offering new C-Class saloons from £329 a month, with 4.9 per cent APR finance and sizeable dealer contributions (such as

£2,785 on a C200 Sport), and new CLS models for £499 a month at 5.5 per cent APR with a £4,879 dealer contribution.

## **ONLINE STARS**

Outside the dealer network, [www.broadspeed.com](http://www.broadspeed.com) was offering great discounts on new C-Class estates, such as £4,503 off a C200 Sport auto, £4,879 off the list price of a C250 Bluetec Sport, and £5,299 off a C300 Bluetec Hybrid AMG Line.

But whether you are looking to buy a new or a used Mercedes-Benz this winter, the market is at its lowest ebb, so it really is an excellent time to bag a great deal.

**Our best  
used  
buy this  
month...**

## **CL500 (2007 to 2010)**

At launch, the pre facelifted C216 CL was the most expensive mainstream Mercedes you could buy. And eight years on, it still feels like it. With immense performance and a sumptuous interior, it's capable of carrying four adults despite the two-door layout. Everything is wonderfully refined, whilst the acceleration is breath-taking. Who needs an AMG model when the CL500 can happily blast past 62mph in just 5.4 seconds? Incredibly though, the asking price for a decent example is down to £15,000, and even a mint 2010 model is £25,000.

► *Fancy an affordable Mercedes-Benz coupe but not keen on V8 fuel bills and road tax costs? Then check out our top three £8,000 Mercedes coupe bargains on page 84*





## FORECOURT FIND

## W163 ML500

Back in 2002, a new, V8 powered ML500 might have been hard to justify. But 13 years on – priced at just £3,999 – this immaculate, silver, one-owner example is far harder to resist. Especially when you realise that it has a full Mercedes-Benz dealer service history.

With 72,000 miles on the clock, this 288bhp ML500 has a five-speed auto, a six-disc CD changer, leather trim, a detachable tow bar, family pack rear seats, heated front seats, parking sensors and a three-month warranty. And if you ask nicely you could even lever a small discount on the price. Achieving 19.3mpg on the combined cycle, this four-wheel drive off-roader will crack 62mph in 7.7 seconds.

► Dealer information **M60 Carwarehouse**  
Tel 0161 776 440/07904 372672  
Web [www.m60carwarehouse.com](http://www.m60carwarehouse.com)



◁ Full leather trim and a drop-down screen in the rear.

△ The 288bhp M113 V8 also boasts 324lb ft of torque.

▽ A full size spare wheel and tow bar are part of the deal.



## TOP TIPS

WRITING A  
CLASSIFIED  
CAR  
ADVERT

Keep your description short and sweet, and do not forget to sell yourself as a caring, fastidious owner

⌚ Start with a description of your car, including the make and specific model, its year of registration, colour, gearbox and current mileage.

⌚ Emphasise the car's best selling points – such as a full service history, a long MOT, immaculate bodywork and so on, and if you have owned the car for a good number of years then say so.

⌚ Don't mention why you are selling the car – buyers can ask about this if they wish. And include details of any modifications that have been made to the car.

⌚ Always describe any desirable optional extras such as Parktronic, Comand with satellite navigation, Aircar, and leather upholstery, but avoid abbreviations such as 'ASR' (anti slip regulation), as these can all too easily confuse interested parties.

⌚ Including the asking price is obviously essential, but don't write things such as: "or nearest offer" – the asking price is always negotiable, and you don't want to invite price cuts unnecessarily.

⌚ Make sure you provide as many contact details in your advert as possible, including a mobile number, a landline number and an email address. This tactic will maximise your chances of getting a quick sale, and can often reassure prospective buyers keen to purchase a prestige car.



## AUCTION SPOTLIGHT

A round up of recent prices paid for average condition Mercedes in auctions across the UK

## ● C180 Elegance

1.8L, petrol, auto, 1995/N plate, 109,000 miles, **£300**

## ● C200 Sport

2.0L, petrol, auto, 2000/V plate, 134,000 miles, **£375**

## ● A160 Avantgarde

1.6L, petrol, auto, 1999/V plate, 63,000 miles, **£650**

## ● E320 Elegance

3.2L, petrol, auto, 1998/R plate, 86,000 miles, **£800**

## ● SL300

3.0L, petrol, auto, 1998/R plate, 127,000 miles, **£1,100**

## ● A170 CDI Elegance

1.7L, diesel, auto, 2002/O2 plate, 77,000 miles, **£1,225**

## ● ML430

4.3L, petrol, auto, 2000/X plate, 56,000 miles, **£3,200**

## ● S320 CDI

3.2, diesel, auto, 2004/O4 plate, 76,000 miles, **£5,100**

## ● CLK55 AMG Coupe

5.4L, petrol, auto, 2003/O3 plate, 79,000 miles, **£6,000**

## ● CL600

5.5L, petrol, auto, 2004/O4 plate, 56,000 miles, **£8,900**

## ● ML350 SE

3.5L, petrol, auto, 2006/O6 plate, 68,000 miles, **£9,950**

## ● SLK280

3.0L, petrol, auto, 2006/O6 plate, 24,000 miles, **£10,050**

## ● SL500

5.0L, petrol, auto, 2001/Y plate, 50,000 miles, **£10,100**

## ● CLS63 AMG

6.2L, petrol, auto, 2006/56 plate, 93,000 miles, **£13,100**

## ● SLK55 AMG

5.4L, petrol, auto, 2005/O5 plate, 52,000 miles, **£14,200**

## AND REMEMBER...

Always arrive early at car auctions, pick up the sales catalogue and examine the vehicles in the line up before the bidding starts. Should your bid be successful, you will have to pay a buyer's fee in addition to the hammer price, and you must pay a deposit of around £500 or 20 per cent of the vehicle's value (whichever is greater) immediately – in cash, or by Maestro or Visa Debit card. The balance of the purchase price and the buyer's fee can be paid by banker's draft, cash, cheque, telegraphic transfer, credit or debit card.

Find your nearest auction house at [www.british-car-auctions.co.uk](http://www.british-car-auctions.co.uk)





# TOP 3 £8,000 COUPES

A coupe must possess stylish good looks, strong performance and an upmarket interior for it to be desirable, but it doesn't have to come with a sky high price tag. All three of our contenders below have lower price tags and offer more affordable running costs than a CL500

V8, yet still possess plenty of pizzazz. Each one has its own take on the coupe theme, of course, but Mercedes-Benz has produced a variety of alternatives over the years, ensuring that as little as £8,000 can buy an impressive contemporary car likely to suit your own tastes.



## **C180 KOMPRESSOR SPORTS COUPE (2002-2008)**

Eight grand will buy you a highly specced example, with a typical SE model boasting an automatic gearbox, leather trim, climate control, tasty alloy wheels, cruise control, a CD player, traction control and rear parking sensors. Most have covered 30,000 to 70,000 miles, but supply is limited. With 141bhp, performance is quite punchy, and the combined fuel economy is in the mid 30s.



## **CLK280 COUPE (2005-2009)**

There are still quite a few C209 CLK280 Coupes advertised for sale, mostly in desirable Sport trim line. And despite having 228bhp V6 capable of sending this sleek two-door from 0-62mph in 7.4 seconds, you could see an average of 30mpg. A typical specification includes heated front seats, Comand with sat nav, full leather, Speedtronic cruise control, 18-inch AMG alloys, electric front and rear windows, and climate control.



## **CLC180 KOMPRESSOR (2008-2010)**

With both contemporary styling and the possibility of a reassuringly low mileage, a CLC180 Kompressor makes an excellent used buy. With 141bhp, performance is spritely enough, and you can expect to achieve 40mpg on longer journeys. Sought after Sport models boast 18-inch alloy wheels, Artico leather, Bluetooth with hands free facility, climate control, cruise control, heated mirrors, front foglights and Parktronic.

# PRODUCTS PREPARATION

## **CÖDECLEAN LEATHER CLEANER**

Unlike many other leather cleaners, CödeClean's brand new Leather Cleaner contains no abrasive film removers, so it won't destroy the fibres of your car's leather, dashboard or trim's top coat. The gentle formula is claimed to remove grime and ingrained dirt quickly and effectively - simply wipe on, leave for a minute and then remove with a clean, lint free cloth. Even serious stains are easily removed with just light agitation and a quick buff. Available from popular motor factors or online at [codeclean.co.uk](http://codeclean.co.uk), a 250ml bottle costs £8.40.



## **CAR MATS FOR 2007-ON C-CLASSES BY HALFORDS**

Halfords' 'Advanced Mercedes C-Class automatic car mats' are tailored to fit into your car's foot wells and protect the original carpet. Measuring 12mm thick, with 8mm of luxurious polyamide carpet and nubuck style binding for a superior finish, all the mats have an anti slip backing. Suitable for all automatic Mercedes C-Class models from 2007 onwards, a complete set of four mats is priced at £44.99. Check out your local Halfords store or visit [www.halfords.com](http://www.halfords.com).



## **AUTOGLYM WINTER CARE KIT**

Priced at £15.99, Autoglym's Winter Care kit has all you need for those frosty mornings, including a powerful de-icer effective to -50C, a screenwash which can be mixed to remain unfrozen at -45C, an ice scraper and an interior microfibre cloth to demist windows if the heater doesn't work fast enough. The 500ml de-icer is suitable for defrosting both door locks and glass, whilst the 500ml Ultimate Screenwash is capable of dealing with the lowest UK winter temperatures. See [autoglym.com](http://autoglym.com).







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<b>8 CRN</b>	<b>98 LW</b>	<b>7 SLC</b>
<b>49 CS</b>	<b>9 MC</b>	<b>3 SMA</b>
<b>8 CT</b>	<b>82 ME</b>	<b>9 SMJ</b>
<b>DAI SYO</b>	<b>60 MEL</b>	<b>T 25</b>
<b>DAN IH</b>	<b>88 MH</b>	<b>86 TK</b>
<b>45 DF</b>	<b>MSS 6</b>	<b>TNR I</b>
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<b>75 DJC</b>	<b>6I MW</b>	<b>UUI III</b>
<b>555 DM</b>	<b>99 P</b>	<b>222 V</b>
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"Thank you for dealing with things so efficiently. I will pass your details to anyone I know looking for a personal plate."

Rod Brown





△ The V6 diesel offers the best all round ability.



# TOP OF THE WORLD

Boasting proper Mercedes-Benz luxury, underpinned by considerable off-road ability, early W164 MLs are highly tempting used buys – and even more so at current price levels!

WORDS **DAVID SUTHERLAND** IMAGES **TERRY OBORNE**

**T**HE 163-SERIES M-Class, built from 1997 until 2004 and Mercedes' first modern sports utility vehicle after the traditionally designed G-Wagen, was a worthy vehicle that served the company well, with over 647,700 rolling out of factories in Tuscaloosa in the USA, and Graz in Austria.

But it looked slightly dumpy and was uninspiring to drive, and in these respects was outshone by the BMW X5, which arrived three years into the ML's life and no doubt galvanised Mercedes-Benz

into ensuring that its successor was – in SUV terms, anyway – sleeker and sportier than before.

The W164 ML, also built in the US, was unveiled at the Detroit Auto Show in January 2005, and was a world away from its predecessor. Besides the curvier and less conservative body, it moved from the W163's separate ladder chassis to a monocoque construction for greater torsional stiffness, was available with a much improved diesel engine, and ran with the 7G-Tronic automatic gearbox, linked to a Direct Select gearshift on the steering column.

Four-wheel drive with Downhill Speed Regulation (DSR) was permanent, and all new suspension comprised a front double-wishbone set up and a four-link rear axle. The cabin was a big advance on the sober W163 interior, featuring a curvy dash, stylised, sunken instruments, and unusual grab bars (dropped from the current ML) each side of the transmission tunnel.

A great deal to like then, and nine years later early ones can be purchased for £10,000 to £15,000 (most were over £40,000 new). But there is a lot of sophisticated

kit on board, and early MLs are from a less than distinguished era of Mercedes quality. So, is a W164 right, or downright risky?

## DESIGN, EVOLUTION

The W164 range went on sale in the UK in September 2005, the key model being the ML320 CDI using the then recently introduced OM642 three-litre V6 turbodiesel, in this form rated at 221bhp and 376lb ft torque. Also available were the 3.5-litre petrol ML350, giving 268bhp/258lb ft, and the ML500 with 302bhp/339lb ft.

The ML320 CDI and ML350 V6s were theoretically available in base trim, which included climate control, partially electric front seats and heated/folding door mirrors, but the £2,750 SE upgrade was common, adding metallic paint, leather seats with full electric adjustment, burr walnut interior trim, an interior lighting package, and chrome exterior detailing. The identically priced Sport upgrade brought much the same type of enhancements, except with 19- rather than 18-inch alloy wheels.

The ML500 V8 came with either SE or Sport level trim as standard,



**SPOTTED  
FOR SALE  
PRIVATE SELLER**  
**ML320 CDI SE**  
2006/56, silver,  
black leather, 105,000  
miles, Telford,  
£10,295



**The W164 ML was unveiled at the Detroit Auto Show in January 2005 and was a world away from its predecessor**

except with additional items, for example four-zone climate control, multi contour front seats and rain sensing wipers. Major options included Comand, Airmatic air suspension and the Off-Road Pro package.

The first addition to the UK line-up came in April 2006 with the arrival of the ML280 CDI, effectively a detuned ML320 CDI, with 187bhp/324lb ft torque, but the same fuel consumption and CO2 emissions. A few months later the ML420 CDI followed, its four-litre turbodiesel V8 pumping out 302bhp together with 516lb ft torque, and with equipment equivalent to the ML500.

At the same time, the successor to the ML55 AMG in the W163 range was introduced – the ML63 AMG with a 6.2-litre, normally aspirated M156 producing 503bhp/465lb ft. Priced at £75,700, it was equipped with a seven-speed AMG Speedshift 7G-Tronic transmission, AMG fettled Airmatic suspension, performance brakes, and wore 19-inch AMG wheels on 295/45R19 tyres, with 20-inch and 295/40R20s optional. In 2007, the ML500 switched from the

three-valve M113 V8 to the four-valve, 5.5-litre M273 which produced 383bhp/391lb ft.

The mid term facelift was delivered in March 2008, after 300,000 W164s had been sold, 13,000 of them in the UK. The front grille, and front and rear bumpers were revised, as were other exterior trim items.

A new steering wheel had paddleshifters that replaced shift buttons so well hidden on the original wheel that many owners might not have known of their existence, and Mercedes' man made Artico leather made an appearance in the ML's cabin, where a new generation of telematics improved the various 'infotainment' functions.

The last development before the W164 gave way to the new, but quite similar looking W166 ML, came in May 2009, when all three diesels were refined for improved efficiency, and rebadged. The ML280 CDI became the 201bhp/369lb ft ML300 CDI BlueEfficiency, the ML320 CDI the 228bhp/398lb ft ML350 CDI BlueEfficiency, and the ML420 CDI the ML450 CDI but this model was not sold in the UK.

## WHAT TO PAY

The earliest, 2005 registered cars can be purchased for as low as £8,000, but at this price a mileage way over 100,000 is almost guaranteed – W164s are comfy long distance cars, and are used correspondingly. We suggest £10,000 as a starting point, sufficient for a 2005 or early 2006 ML from an independent dealer.

Diesels are far more sought after than petrol models, this reflected in a big value gap between the two. The 'retail' price of a 2005 ML320 CDI SE is, according to Glass's, around £12,600, but only £9,900 for an ML350 of the same year (and same new price). However this may be irrelevant, because probably less than 10 per cent of W164s in the UK are petrol. Sport specification is also favoured over the SE spec, at this age adding approximately £800 to the value of the car.

The cheapest W164 you will normally see at a Mercedes-Benz Retailer is about £14,000 (in something of a freak sighting, a 2006 ML350 at £9,995 appeared on the car maker's Approved Used site), which would be for a 2005 or 2006 vehicle. The cheapest

## JUST THE FACTS

### Mercedes-Benz ML350 4Matic (W164)

**ENGINE** M272 3,498cc V6  
**POWER** 268bhp@6,000rpm  
**TORQUE** 258lb ft@2,400-5,000rpm  
**TRANSMISSION** 7-speed auto, 4WD  
**WEIGHT** 2135kg  
**0-62MPH** 8.4sec  
**TOP SPEED** 140mph  
**FUEL CONSUMPTION** 241-24.6mpg  
**CO2 EMISSIONS** 275-279g/km  
**YEARS PRODUCED** 2005-2009

### Mercedes-Benz ML500 4Matic (W164)

**ENGINE** M273 5,461cc V8  
**POWER** 383bhp@6,000rpm  
**TORQUE** 391lb ft@2,800-4,800rpm  
**TRANSMISSION** 7-speed auto, 4WD  
**WEIGHT** 2,445kg  
**0-62MPH** 5.8sec  
**TOP SPEED** 149mph  
**FUEL CONSUMPTION** 216-22.1mpg  
**CO2 EMISSIONS** 304-311g/km  
**YEARS PRODUCED** 2005-2009

### Mercedes-Benz ML63 AMG 4Matic (W164)

**ENGINE** M156 6,208cc V8  
**POWER** 503bhp@6,800rpm  
**TORQUE** 465lb ft@5,200rpm  
**TRANSMISSION** 7-speed auto, 4WD  
**WEIGHT** 2,310kg  
**0-62MPH** 5.0sec  
**TOP SPEED** 155mph  
**FUEL CONSUMPTION** 17.1mpg  
**CO2 EMISSIONS** 392g/km  
**YEARS PRODUCED** 2006-2011

### Mercedes-Benz ML280 CDI 4Matic (W164)

**ENGINE** OM642 2,987cc V6 turbocharged  
**POWER** 187bhp@4,000rpm  
**TORQUE** 324lb ft@1,400-2,800rpm  
**TRANSMISSION** 7-speed auto, 4WD  
**WEIGHT** 2185kg  
**0-62MPH** 9.8sec  
**TOP SPEED** 127mph  
**FUEL CONSUMPTION** 29.4-30.1mpg  
**CO2 EMISSIONS** 249-254g/km  
**YEARS PRODUCED** 2006-2009

### Mercedes-Benz ML320 CDI 4Matic (W164)

**ENGINE** OM642 2,987cc V6 turbocharged  
**POWER** 221bhp@3,800rpm  
**TORQUE** 376lb ft@1,600-2,800rpm  
**TRANSMISSION** 7-speed auto, 4WD  
**WEIGHT** 2185kg  
**0-62MPH** 8.6sec  
**TOP SPEED** 134mph  
**FUEL CONSUMPTION** 29.4-30.1mpg  
**CO2 EMISSIONS** 249-254g/km  
**YEARS PRODUCED** 2005-2009

Figures are representative of cars built before the 2008 update, including a 2007-on ML500; fuel consumption according to NEDC combined; top speed of the ML63 AMG electronically limited

2008 facelift model would be an ML300 CDI SE, priced at just under £20,000, with the ML350 CDI SE a significant £2,000 more. The biggest metal for money ML must be an ML63 AMG purchased from an independent dealership, for £16,000 to £20,000. ▶



# W164 MLs **INSIDE AND OUT**

## POWERTRAIN

The only commonly seen engine issue on the W164 ML is seen on the three-litre turbodiesel – a failure of the turbocharger's inlet shut off motor, which is positioned inside the engine's vee and underneath an oil pipe to the turbocharger. As on all other OM642 powered Mercedes, oil can – through a worn out seal – drip from the pipe onto the inlet shut off motor and permeate it, which results in a dashboard warning light coming on and then a lack of power.

Replacement is at least a £500 job, but Steve Shali of independent Mercedes specialist Klasse of Fulham explains that it can be prevented inexpensively. "We replace the red seals when we are doing a major service, so there isn't really any labour charge, and the seals, nuts and bolts are about £15."

The turbocharger itself can fail, the warning sign reduced performance. "The turbo's impellor vanes can clog up with carbon, and the wastegate [the valve which blows off excess boost pressure] overheats," Steve warns. A replacement turbocharger, which has the complex electronic wastegate, will cost over £1,000.

The third potentially big powertrain problem is failure of the conductor plate in the seven-speed automatic transmission. "The vehicle will go into 'emergency mode'," says Steve, "and all of a sudden you will have no gears, no manual function, and no kickdown." The rectification cost will be around £650, but on some of the early, 2005 built W164 M-Classes this is part of a bigger unit, costing around £1,500.



A leaking seal above the V6 diesel turbo's inlet shut off motor can cause a warning message – although a common problem, preventing it is easy and inexpensive, according to our specialist, Klasse of Fulham in London.

## SUSPENSION, STEERING AND BRAKES

There is no particular weakness with the brakes, it's just that it takes about £800 to renew the pads and discs on all four corners of the M-Class. "They're expensive – they're great big discs and pads, but they last a very long time" Steve reports.

Listen out for creaks and clonks from the suspension, which could indicate various joints and bushes needing replacing. The somewhat more complex Airmatic air suspension needs to be in good working order, but it too has no susceptibility to known problems. "It's a straightforward system, with a compressor and four air struts – there are not many around, but it's not a troublesome system at this stage," reckons Steve. The steering should not creak or leak, but don't be surprised at the relative lack of self centring.



From bottom left: The ML is a fantastic long distance cruiser, especially with air suspension fitted; the strong brakes last well, but are expensive when you do finally replace them; the 164-series ML boasts a far more complex chassis than its predecessor, complete with permanent four-wheel drive.



**“All W164s carry a lot of electric and electronic equipment, but do not suffer undue failures in this respect”**



**SPOTTED  
FOR SALE  
INDEPENDENT  
DEALER  
ML63 AMG  
2007/57, black,  
black leather, 104,000  
miles, Leeds,  
£17,990**



Clockwise from top left: The 551- to 2,050-litre boot will leave very few owners hoping for more space; cabins are well built and have incredibly comfy seats; battery access in the rear footwell; gear selector on the steering column; lots of room for those in the rear.

## INTERIOR AND ELECTRICS

All W164s carry a lot of electric and electronic equipment, but do not suffer undue failures in this respect, even though the W164 emerged during a period when Mercedes' cars suffered glitches in their electronic systems. However, one possible problem area is the signal acquisition module (SAM), mounted below the driver's side rear lamp cluster.

The problem occurs when the lamp lens is replaced after it has been broken or cracked, Steve explains. "The new lamp cluster doesn't come with a seal, and if the original seal is not put back on, the SAM fills up with water and you get all sorts of electrical issues. It could be anything - lights, tailgate opening..."

Most W164s came with a half leather interior, but those with full leather upholstery are nicer inside, especially if they have the luxury pack with full electric seat adjustment and a part wooden steering wheel.

Clockwise from left: Mercedes' four-wheel drive traction control system means you won't eat through pricey tyres - but always check the alloy wheels for kerb damage, as these are expensive to replace if badly abused; SE cars like this one go without side running boards, but still have a great utilitarian look - exuding far more style than the main rival from Bavaria.



## BODYWORK AND WHEELS

MLs have, of course, considerable off-road ability - but you don't really want to buy one that has done any serious off-roading. Not many have, but if you see one with the Off-Road Pro package - these have a set of differential controls at the bottom of the centre console - then check the underbody for rock and grounding damage, and the tyres for rips and so on, and to ensure that they are the correct road tyres for the vehicle. Otherwise, check that the wheels, which tend to be 19-inch diameter, are unkerbed and in generally good order, because they are not cheap at over £300 each new.



## W164 MLs INSIDE AND OUT

# VERDICT

The W164 marked a substantial improvement over the original W163 ML, and many of the earlier ones, from 2005 to 2008/2009 are now becoming quite affordable, the V6 turbodiesel engine the default choice, and with good reason.

It makes a great family estate as well as a decent off-roader, should you want or need that capability. But only buy an example with a full service history and which seems to have been treated with care – a W164 M-Class that was properly looked after in its early years is likely to return the favour and look after its owner later on.



# Taxing question

Even the least polluting W164 MLs, the ML300/350 CDI BlueEfficiency cars, exceed the crucial 225g/km threshold at which Vehicle Excise Duty is hiked in the UK, so currently cost £485 per year to tax, while all others exceed 255g/km and cost £500. And these amounts are bound to rise in the future.

But if you are looking at an early W164, check its date of first registration – if that was before March 23 2006, the big SUV gets a reprieve and 40 per cent cheaper VED. That's because 225g/km plus cars of this age are classed in Band K, so you pay only £285. The production window was just six months, but these tax beaters are out there (see David's Running Report on page 97 for proof of their existence).



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**ML280 CDI Sport**  
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Milton Keynes

## Typical basic servicing costs (Mercedes specialist, including VAT)

MODEL	OIL SERVICE	MAJOR SERVICE
<b>ML320/350 CDI</b>	<b>£250</b>	<b>£500</b> (includes filters, wiper blades)

*Quotes from from Klasse of Fulham*

## Recalls and non routine servicing

There have been seven recalls for the W164 ML, relating to the engine shut off control, an electrical connection in the crankshaft sensor, the automatic tailgate, a leaking fuel filter housing, and a floor mat jamming the accelerator pedal (R/2008/147, R/2008/149, R/2009/031, R/2010/205, R/2012/091, R/2013/017 and R/2013/064).

- ★ **Replace failed turbocharger £1,200**
- ★ **Fix gearbox electro-hydraulic control unit £650**
- ★ **Replace turbocharger inlet shut off motor £500**
- ★ **Renew front and rear brake pads and discs £800**
- ★ **Four premium brand tyres (295/45ZR19) £770**

## Buyer's checks

- ✓ A lack of power indicates that the six-cylinder diesel's turbocharger is close to failure
- ✓ An illuminated engine warning light on the dashboard could mean the turbocharger inlet shut off motor is damaged
- ✓ If the ML goes into emergency limp home mode, it's probably due to a faulty gearbox conductor plate
- ✓ Non functioning electrical equipment could be due to a water damaged signal acquisition module (or SAM) unit behind the offside rear lamp cluster
- ✓ Not many M-Classes are driven off-road regularly, but always check the underside for damage
- ✓ Alloys are pricey so check for kerbing – a good insight into how the car has been treated overall

## What you'll pay

**£8,000-£9,000** 2005/2006 ML320 CDI and ML350 V6s, with 150,000 miles and a patchy service history  
**£9,000-£12,000** 2005/2006 cars, 80,000 to 100,000 miles, Sport trim worth £800 over SE  
**£12,000-£15,000** Pre 2008 facelift MLs, £14,000 is normal starting price at Mercedes-Benz Retailers  
**£15,000-£20,000** All facelift models, and pre facelift ML63 AMG from an independent dealer.  
**£20,000-£25,000** 2010/2011 ML300 CDI/350 CDI with a full Mercedes history and sub 50,000 miles

► Thank you to **Beck Evans** in Kent for the loan of the silver ML320 CDI pictured Tel 020 8302 0860 Web [www.beckevans.co.uk](http://www.beckevans.co.uk),  
to **Klasse of Fulham** for technical advice and servicing costs Tel 020 7385 4157 Web [www.klasse-of-fulham.co.uk](http://www.klasse-of-fulham.co.uk)  
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The vehicle is finished in white with beige interior both immaculately maintained. All the possible Mercedes gadgets are fitted and in full working order making this 1994 class leader, a completely useable and easily driveable modern vehicle, with that touch of nostalgia.

**Specification:** The R129 'Sports Light' SL320 is 3199cc 5sp automatic, two door, sports touring car produced by Mercedes-Benz between 1994 and 1998.

**£17,500 ono**

*Further pictures can be sent but nothing will beat seeing this vehicle in the flesh. Please contact Barry on:*

*01889 881270 or mobile 07785 975397*



The vehicle has a full service history and an immaculate pedigree and is today offered with 41,605 miles from new and a few kilometres recorded on its original continental speedometer which, together with left-hand drive headlights, accompany the vehicle.





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**300SL Roadster 1988F**

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**E200 Estate 1996N**

Onyx Grey metallic, grey cloth, 4 speed auto, airbags, elec front windows, roof rails, cargo net & luggage cover, orig polished 8 hole alloy wheels, orig Blaupunkt, FSH, 45,000m . . . . **£9,950**



**E220 Coupe 1994M - LHD**

Brilliant Silver, Anthracite cloth, 5 speed manual, aircon, front & rear headrests/armrests, electric windows, electric sunroof, original alloys, one owner, FSH, 46,000m . . . . . **£12,950**



**E280 Estate 1995N**

Azurite Blue metallic, grey cloth, 4-Sp auto, aircon, cruise, headrests/armrest, electric windows, electric sunroof, airbags, leather steering wheel, FSH, 69,000m . . . . . **£9,950**



**300CE Coupe 1992K**

Nautic Blue metallic, Mushroom leather, 4-Sp auto, front & rear headrests/armrests, electric windows, electric sunroof, original alloys, one owner, FSH, 46,000m . . . . . **£12,950**



**E320 Cabriolet 1993L**

Pearl Blue metallic, blue leather, new blue soft top, 4-Sp auto, aircon, leather steering wheel, airbag, armrests, illuminated vanity mirrors, orig alloys, FSH, 125,000m . . . . . **£12,950**



**E280 Saloon 1995N**

Azurite Blue metallic, grey cloth, 4-Sp auto, aircon, cruise, front & rear headrests/armrests, electric windows, electric sunroof, OTG, airbags, leather steering wheel, FSH, 53,000m . **£6,950**



**S500 Coupe 1994L**

Nautic Blue metallic, Mushroom leather, 4 speed auto, huge spec inc. climate, cruise, soft close, double glazing, elec sunroof, elec rear blind, orig alloys, FSH, 71,000m . . . . **£7,950**



**190E 2.0 LE Saloon 1993L**

Brilliant Silver, Anthracite cloth, auto, airbag, walnut, elec windows/sunroof, headrests, armrests, Carat Duchatelet body styling, suspension & wheels, FSH, 2 owners, 103,000m . . . **£5,950**

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# NOT SO CHEAP

Bad timing leaves the E-Class estate's owner out of pocket, as road tax renewal and the need for new rear tyres deliver a double financial blow

WORDS AND IMAGES **JAMES MILLS**

## FACTSHEET

**CAR** 2010 S212 E350 CDI Estate

**OWNER** James Mills

**LOCATION** Tunbridge Wells, UK

**PURCHASED** December 2013

**UPDATES SINCE LAST REPORT** Reasonable road tax cost to be paid in monthly instalments, new Pirelli P Zero rear tyres fitted



**S**HELLING OUT hundreds of hard earned pounds on the family car as Christmas looms large on the horizon is the last thing we all need. But this wallet busting scenario is precisely how I found myself at the beginning of December 2014.

The bills had been faint blips on the outer limits of my radar for some time, but as November arrived the intensity of the signal triggered a mental alarm; the E-Class's road tax would expire at the end of the month and the rear tyres needed replacing before the winter weather really kicked in.

Needless to say, neither event was enthusiastically received. Britain's roads are falling to pieces, and the thought of having expensive new tyres chewed to bits by potholes in much the same way our Labrador mangled my freshly resoled suede brogues brought a tear to my eye.

It took the best part of an hour's research to decide which tyres should grace the E350 CDI BlueEfficiency Estate Sport, and guess what? They were the same as the ones that came off.

*Evo* magazine placed the Pirelli P Zero second in its annual tyre comparison test, and given the first placed tyre wasn't available in our car's peculiar size, load and speed ratings (235/65R18 97Y), it was the pick of the bunch.

### TWISTING FORCE

The Black Circles website came up with the best price, but a call to eTyres, which I have used before, came very close to matching the price. Given the latter will fit the tyres at your home, eTyres it was, and £337 later the back tyres looked fit for the winter weather that lay ahead.

It's hard to estimate how long those old rear tyres lasted. When I bought the car in late 2013, they were at 5mm,

so my arithmetic suggests they wear at about 3.5mm a year. Therefore, the new Pirellis will be doing well to last two years. Put that down to the turbodiesel engine's potent torque figure of 398lb ft from just 1,600rpm.

As for the road tax, the bill for the E350 CDI BlueEfficiency Estate Sport is £205 a year, based on CO2 exhaust emissions of 171g/km. It's not great, but a little bit of context is called for

here: a comparable seven-seat family car that peers drive is the Land Rover Discovery, and a 2010 3.0 SDV6 model churns out 244g/km, which equals a slap on the wrist to the tune of £485 a year. It made me feel better – briefly.

However, there was some good news when buying the road tax. For those that have yet to experience the new, digital road tax system, it may be pleasing to know that you can pay in monthly instalments. I paid about an extra £10 in interest to pick that option and spread the damage over the next year – it's a handy feature that many drivers will appreciate.



△ A pair of Pirelli P Zero tyres cost £337 from [etyres.co.uk](http://etyres.co.uk).

△ The V6's 398lb ft of torque could explain the fast rear tyre wear.

△ Windscreen washer fluid topped up ready for use on salty roads.

**It took the best part of an hour's research to decide which tyres should grace the E-Class**

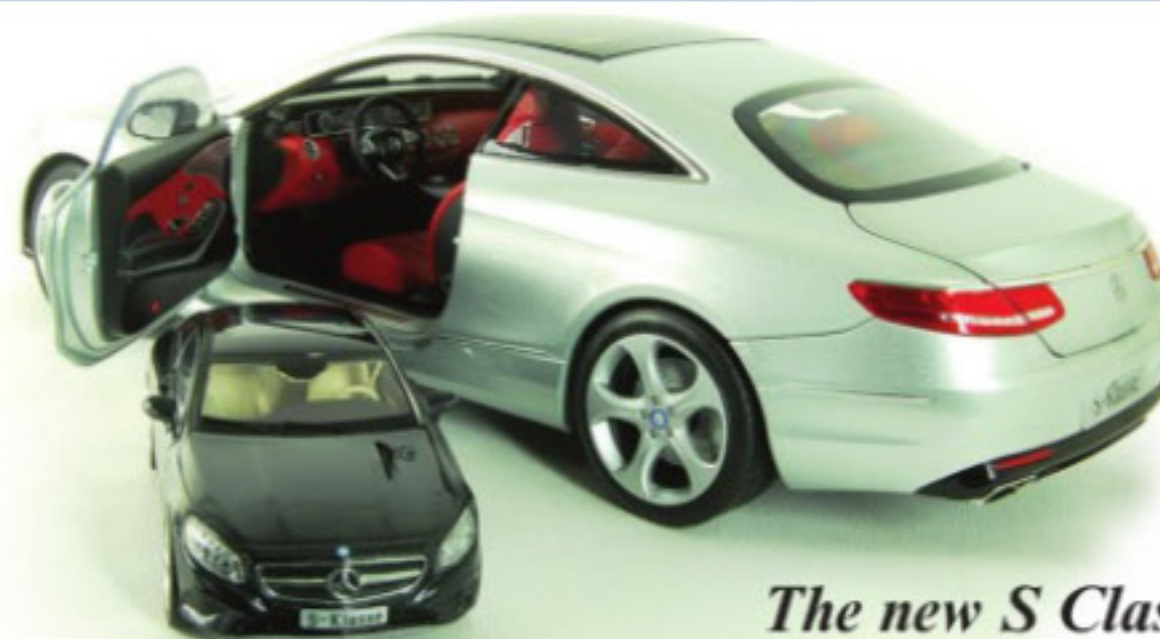


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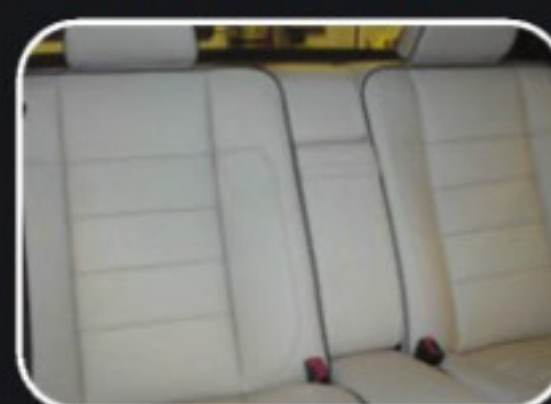


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# SPOKE TOO SOON

Problems strike the classic Mercedes-Benz saloon, forcing its jinxed owner to conduct some thorough investigation work

WORDS AND IMAGES **ERIC RICHARDSON**

## FACTSHEET

**CAR** 1971 W108 280SE

**OWNER** Eric Richardson

**LOCATION** London, UK

**PURCHASED** September 2011

**UPDATES SINCE LAST REPORT** A joyful drive in the W108 ends in frustration as a poorly alternator causes all sorts of running problems



**T**YPICAL. IN MY LAST Running Report (see the December 2014 edition), I mentioned my growing confidence in the W108's ability to cover the miles without a hiccup, only for the thing to slap me in the face and give me a rather testing time as I found myself heading back through central London one evening.

After enjoying a day in Northampton with my nephew, his partner and their two little ones, my wife and I settled into the W108 for the journey home, expecting it to be as uneventful, though enjoyable, as the trip up there earlier in the day. All was well on the M1 motorway, with the traffic moving freely, so we soon found ourselves at Marble Arch in London, ready to do battle on the urban drag strip that is Park Lane's chaotic southbound carriageway.

Swiftly away from the lights, I detected an ever so brief misfire from the engine as I gathered pace. I backed off the throttle as I hit the 40mph limit and all seemed well. At the next set of lights the same thing occurred, only this time it continued – maybe only a couple of cylinders missing every 10 seconds or so, but it was there. Clear of Hyde Park

Corner, thankfully, I headed for a garage on Vauxhall Bridge Road where I pulled in and popped the bonnet.

With a check of all the electrical connections, just to make sure everything was still securely attached, and no obvious problem found (I had no test equipment with me), I closed the bonnet and headed home, the misfire gradually becoming more pronounced. The final mile saw the misfire joined by a regular knocking sound that was related to engine speed. I was not happy. I parked up the saloon and walked home, pondering the possibilities.

**The final mile saw the misfire joined by a regular knocking sound**

### TESTING TIMES

Returning a few days later to try and make a quick diagnosis, I backed the car out of the garage and headed off around the block to see how it behaved. Very well was the answer, the knocking was there, but the engine purred with no sign of the misfire that had dogged the final miles a few days before.

Back at the garage, I removed the distributor cap to find the rotor arm and points in not too bad condition, though the distributor shaft did have a coating of surface rust on it, which made me wonder if perhaps the advance weights may be suffering the same fate, and therefore not moving freely to provide

the ignition advance. Beyond that though, all connections were solid and good, including the earth straps.

Turning my attention to the knocking noise, I used a 10mm metal rod as a stethoscope, holding one end to my ear while pressing the other end to various parts of the running engine to try and isolate the knocking. This may sound daft, but it is an incredibly effective technique. Sensing it was at the front of the engine, I started with the water pump, which sounded good (obviously you have to be very careful of the spinning fan blades) before turning my attention to the alternator, where I heard something akin to a hammer going round in a tumble dryer. Clearly one of the bearings was not happy.

I have a spare alternator on the shelf so keeping the car running will not be a problem, but what is annoying is the fact that the alternator was only rebuilt in September 2012, including new bearings, and since then the car has only covered 1,900 miles. Time to get the spanners out and investigate further. ■

△ Wonderful when parked, moving is proving problematic.

▽ Surface rust on the distributor shaft won't be helping matters.





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# MUSIC MACHINE

Well into the swing of M-Class ownership, its owner sought to upgrade the SUV's sound system with a visit to a reputed specialist

WORDS AND IMAGES **DAVID SUTHERLAND**

## FACTSHEET

**CARS** 2007 W169 A180 CDI/2006 W164 ML320 CDI

**OWNER** David Sutherland

**LOCATION** London, UK

**PURCHASED** November 2007/May 2014

**UPDATES SINCE LAST REPORT** The ML is now iPod compatible, while the A-Class, although receiving less use now, has gone past 40,000 miles



**O**VER THE YEARS, I have learned that if you want a job on your car done properly, take it to a dedicated specialist. So when a sound system matter arises, I automatically call Braybrooks In-Car Enhancements, based in Hertfordshire. It's not exactly easy to get to from my home in south west London, but what proprietor Neil Braybrook doesn't know about the mysteries of modern Mercedes music and Bluetooth systems probably isn't worth bothering about.

Three years ago, Neil installed a genuine Mercedes iPod compatibility kit (for which he is an official agent) in my A-Class. This is an expensive item, at currently £480 fitted, but in my opinion worth every penny. You can connect Apple's game changing music player to the radio by a simple cable, but the hardwired Mercedes-Benz kit allows you to find tracks, playlists and so on via the steering wheel buttons, with the information displayed in the instrument panel, and the iPod also constantly charged. Out went a clutter of CDs from around the car, and in came 4,400 quickly accessible songs.

When the ML320 CDI SE joined us in May 2014, there was no question of it not having the same system. The

journey was made to Braybrooks, and almost before I could get my camera out of the bag and the lens cap off, Neil had whipped out the radio unit, inserted the kit, including the connector in the glovebox, and was reassembling the dash. That is the beauty of knowing exactly what you are doing.

## PLAY TIME

The 164-series M-Class of that era came with a CD changer as standard, which is obviously now all but redundant. Incidentally, the CD changer drops down from a concealed position inside the top of the glovebox, and Neil tells me that, because the head unit in the fascia also swallows a single CD, quite a few M-Class owners are blissfully unaware of its existence!

The next issue was what iPod to use. I wanted one left in the glovebox permanently, but my three iPods were already accounted for: one in the A-Class, one at my bedside, and the iPod Touch wirelessly connected to the Bose system in the living room. It looked like I would have to spend £150 upwards on a new one – until my son came and saved the day.

Amazingly, not only did he still have the fourth generation iPod he took to university seven years ago, but it still worked. However, its battery was all but dead, severely limiting its use – but that doesn't matter when it is constantly connected to an electrical supply, so it's now in the ML (obviously with my fine music library, not my son's weird stuff) and so far is working perfectly.

As the ML320 CDI has the pre wiring for a phone, a repeat purchase I had to make was the official Mercedes Bluetooth unit to make it work. When I

bought one for the A-Class in early 2008, it set me back £235, and now a slightly evolved, but identical looking unit is £51 more. It's brilliant, clicking into place instantly, and phone paring is quick and easy.

Strangely, though, while the earlier unit brings up phone contacts in the instrument panel with first names first, the new one shows last names first, which I find irksome. Neil tells me that's just way it is, and you can't change it. Oh well.

► Thank you to **Braybrooks In-Car Enhancements** Tel 01438 840800 Web [www.braybrooks.co.uk](http://www.braybrooks.co.uk)

△ The ML320 CDI SE now boasts iPod and Bluetooth connectivity.

△△ Neil Braybrook wasted no time taking out the ML's head unit.

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# Mercls for sale



**E240 Elegance**, auto, black, four-door saloon, 1999, 277,000 miles, automatic, one owner, automatic, service history, 12 months MOT, new springs and disc pads all round, new stainless exhaust, all usual Mercedes extras, no advisories on new MOT. £695.00. Tel: 01273 831825. West Sussex. **[BCW11]**



**E220 Cabriolet**, 1996, Smoke Silver, 110,000 miles, long MOT and tax, MBSH, beige leather, air con, fantastic all round condition, grab a New Year bargain. £3,900. Tel: 01302 530665. Doncaster. **[BCP9]**



**300SL**, 1991, 89,000 miles, MOT June 2015, upgraded air con, auto fluid and filter changed, good exhaust, tyres, oil filter changed yearly, clean engine, bodywork, inside and underneath exhaust, club member, always garaged. £6,500. Tel: 01395 515132. Sidmouth, Devon. **[BCP8]**



**C220 CDI Estate**, 2000, Brilliant Silver/blue cloth, 163,000 miles, automatic, electric windows, cruise control, alloy wheels, full MBSH, MOT until Sept 2015, includes spare alloys with Bridgestone winter tyres. Tel: 01299 271222 (evenings). Worcester. **[BCP7]**



**C280 Elegance**, 1994, petrol, excellent runner, 160,000 miles, genuine, walnut dash, leather interior. £2,500 ONO. Tel: 07860 419137. Leicester. **[BCW6]**



**SL280**, 1997/98 model with five-speed autobox, FSH, new MOT, lots of extras, phone for spec, excellent all round condition, Mercedes-Benz Club owner, owned by myself for nine years. £5,500 Tel: 01737 557353. Surrey. **[BCW5]**



**W124 E280**, auto saloon, in Smoke Silver, FSH, MOT to Sept 2015, well maintained in excellent condition, immaculate interior, no bolster wear, last owner for 15 years, kept it garaged, £1,500 spent this year, Engine wiring loom, service. £2,200 Tel: 07890 548699. Ilford **[BCW3]**



**300SL**, auto 1988, silver body, hardtop and leather interior, black soft top, 105,000 miles, one family ownership throughout. £6,200. Tel: 020 87881061 Putney, London **[BCW1]**

**300TE 4Matic**, 124 estate, very rare, MB tort interior, has history file, metallic black, full stainless steel exhaust, restoration or spares. £1,000. Tel: 0121 6047920. Birmingham. **[AB]**



**SLK200 Kompressor Roadster**, Nov 2005, only 39,860 miles, silver metallic with black interior, six-speed manual, one owner, full main dealer service history, MOT until November 2015, superb condition with extras, £8,475 ONO. Tel: 01580 830550. Kent/E. Sussex border. **[LAW13R]**



**C209 CLK320 Coupe Avantgarde**, 2004/53 plate, automatic/Tiptronic, 3.2 V6 engine with 221bhp, 136,000 miles, original 16-inch Mercedes alloy wheels, new MOT, full service history, with all books and manuals, two keys, this example also benefits from the facelift grille upgrade and AMG boot-lid spoiler, part exchange considered. £3,495. Tel: 07785 115526. Wiltshire. **[ABW15R]**



**E280 CDI Estate Avantgarde**, seven-speed auto, excellent car, Mercedes-Benz service records, full black leather upholstery, electric rear tailgate and luggage cover closing, new tyres, alloy wheels unmarked. Tel: 07748 32045. Kettering, Northamptonshire **[ABW14R]**



**300SEL**, saloon, 3.5 V8 auto, stunning original car, originally from USA, absolutely no corrosion, always garaged and properly serviced. £14,995. Tel: 07540 165851 (Gordon) Email: g.glen-whr@sky.com **[LAW10R]**



**500SEC**, this car has a V12 engine conversion, 94,000 miles on the clock. It has been a project car and is 95 per cent completed due to my health problem. I'm very reluctantly selling this beautiful car. £19,500, price is negotiable. Tel: 07429 728909 or 07951 258830. pbabiharan@hotmail.co.uk. Ilford, Essex. **[ABW12R]**



**420SE**, my late father's car, 1988 owned for 19 years with one previous owner, 135 miles, FSH, 26 service stamps, history file, Blue-Black paint, grey interior, always garaged and never smoked in, original unmolested condition, all manuals, two keys. £2,495. Tel: 07831 590041 or 01903 261809. Sussex. **[ABW11R]**



**190D 2.5**, 1992 excellent condition, 54,000 miles, FSH, all the MOTs, unmarked alloys, ads, SRS, cruise control, full leather interior, electric front seats, level adjust rear suspension, lots more additional extras, always kept in garage, non smokers, additional details please contact Tel: 07969 804263, Pembrokeshire. **[ABW10R]**

**C220 CDI Estate**, 2001, Jasper Blue, lovely condition, mint inside, no MOT, needs automatic gearbox module, parts £600 + fitting, garage written estimate available, drivable in 1,2,3 only. £400. Paulmkitchen@tiscali.co.uk Tel: 01985 847885. Wiltshire. **[AB]**





**C240 Elegance**, auto, 1998, Azurite Blue, beige interior, 95,000 miles, all extras and electric seats, immaculately kept, FBMSH, MOT, taxed, same owner for 10 years, very reluctant sale, first to see will buy. £1,595. Tel: 07952 767033. Cottingham, East Yorkshire. **[ABP1R]**



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**E280**, this car has every extra available at the time this car was made, it has full MB service history, you are welcome to come and take a look and test drive before you buy, any questions or an appointment call. £1,750. Tel: 07836 359360. Essex. **[LAW24R]**

**S202 C240 Estate Classic**, 2,591cc V6 petrol, auto, year 2,000, silver, 72,000 miles, original and in very good condition, Mercedes alloys, cruise, MOT, two previous owners, service history. £1,195. Tel: 07711 167619. Romford, Essex. **[AB]**



**300CE-24 Sportline**, 1991, mine for 12 years, 169,000 miles, my specialist mechanic is available to meet, tax and MOT until Oct 2015, e/sunroof, e/windows, e/seats, e/belts, five gears, AMG wheels, black leather, £2,950. Tel: 07973 428170. West London. **[LAW23R]**



**SL55 AMG**, 2003, metallic silver, panoramic roof, sat nav, TV phone prep, only 57,000 miles, FMBH, much money spent, recent suspension overhaul, virtually unmarked and rust free. £19,500. Tel: 01457 766670. Cheshire. **[LAW21R]**



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**300CE Sportline**, 1993 rare modern classic, full AMG livery inside and out, 17-inch split rim alloys, e/w, seats, sunroof, blind headrests and seat belts, excellent condition, only two owners, 71,250 miles, AMG no included, £5,950 Tel: 01883 722041. Oxted, Surrey. **[LAW5R]**



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**C124 E220 Coupe**, 1994, auto, silver over grey with grey leather, 110,000 miles, FSH, new MOT, full respray, new exhaust, new front tyres, 17-inch Mercedes slot alloys, £2,150 ONO. Tel: 01903 5530393. Worthing, Sussex. **[LAW12R]**

**C200 Elegance**, 1994, auto, two-owner car with all history, 44,000 miles, looks and drives like new, metallic grey with blue cloth interior, never had damage or paint, as clean underside as on top, tools etc. Never used, sad sale, wife wanted newer car, bought a C180 coupe, Offers around £2,000. Tel: 01282 547675. Clitheroe **[BC]**



**280SE**, saloon, 1971, with 4.5 V8, this car has come from Texas, left-hand drive, has covered only 75,000 miles, is corrosion free and has nice clean interior, £8,999. Tel: 07540 165851 (Gordon) Email: g.glen-whr@sky.com **[LAW9R]**



**W123 230E**, 1982, four-door, Arctic silver-blue, with blue MB-Tex interior, it has had a lot of recent work done to it and looks lovely, 169,000 miles, everything works as it should, new MOT in October, £1,895. Tel: 07702 564561 or greenmx5@btopenworld.com Newmarket, Suffolk. **[LAW8R]**



**C240**, V6, auto, Titanite Red, cream leather, factory fitted tilt and slide glass sunroof, electric front seats, drivers memory, top of the range elegance, front and rear sensors, 2002 reg, two private owners, FSH, this car is in superb condition throughout, with less than 29,500 genuine mile, next MOT and service October 2015. £4,750. Tel: 01803 526224. South Devon. **[LAP1R]**

**S320**, four-door, 1999, auto, only 75,365 miles, two owners, £3,550 ONO. Tel: 01925 811515. Cheshire. **[AB]**

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**280SL**, 1970, Signal Red with palomino, two tops, fully restored, books and records, rare four-speed transmission. \$65,000. Tel: 001 201 5677224. New Jersey, USA. **[BCP10]**



**300SD**, 1980 Mercedes turbodiesel Tel: 001 609 3839355. USA. **[ABW2]**

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**For sale**, W123 coloured wheel trims, various colours, some are near perfect some have minor scratches or dents £7 to £12 each plus postage costs. Alan Tel: 07741 482899. Southampton. **[ABW9R]**



**Breaking**, 1976 350SE, very good interior, front bumper and engine. Tel: 07913 803993. Long Crendon, Bucks. **[BCW4]**



**Breaking**, for parts a 450SLC, engine and gearbox all good, vehicle still with MOT. Email: paul.zanelli17@gmail.com Tel: 07984 913710. **[BCW13]**



**For sale**, interior of a 1976 350SE, in very good condition. Tel: 07913 803993. Chinnor, Oxford. **[BCW2]**



**For sale**, four wheels from a C-Class coupe with 225/50R16 Continental Premium Contact 2 tyres, fronts have 5/6mm of tread and the rears 3/4mm, the wheels have patches of slight corrosion, the car was written off by floodwater with its winter wheels on, offers over £100, buyer collects. Tel: 01737 843424. Surrey (nr M25). **[ABW16R]**

**For sale**, W123 parts for sale, pair of W123 factory wings, used, good condition £100 per wing, front seat with arm rest in date cloth £125 and a base seat in date, very good condition £30. Tel: 0151 6390149. Wirral. **[LA]**

**For sale**, tinted polished Perspex wind deflector plus fitting instructions to fit R171 Mercedes SLK brought from 'Just Roadster Ltd', as new £75. Tel: 01793 734866. Swindon. **[AB]**



**For sale**, C200 Sport interior in black and grey with redlines in the middle, comes with all four door cards, which have carbon fibre trimmings, four headrests, absolutely stunning condition all the bolsters are mint no rips or burn marks. £495, buyer collects. Tel: 07867 840819. West Midlands. **[ABW13R]**



**For sale**, five 'Mexican hat' classic alloy wheels and tyres, alloys good original condition with centre caps, tyres are 185x14s budget tyres age unknown but have only done a couple of thousand miles, collection from near Southampton, or I can courier for £50 to any UK mainland address, ask for Alan. Tel: 07741 482899. Southampton. **[ABW8R]**



**For sale**, C203 C-Class sports coupe Westfalia tow hitch assembly, type 313189 was fitted to a 2005 model, complete with detachable ball, Ryder Smart 7 wire controller, two keys and operating/fitting manual, very good condition, £199 ONO, buyer collect or £30 carriage. Tel: 0161 7052599. North Manchester. **[ABW7R]**

**For sale**, W123 grille, badged but no mascot, can email picture if required, £30 plus postage (about £7.50), also W123 headlights good condition (except silvering on lens tarnished) £30 each plus postage (£5.50) Alan Tel: 07741 482899. Southampton **[AB]**



**For sale**, Mercedes Bluetooth telephone module with fitting instructions and Sony Ericsson K750i mobile phone with all accessories. £80. Tel: 01793 734866. Swindon. **[ABW6R]**



**For sale**, set of four alloy wheels from R171 Mercedes SLK, condition as new, complete with four Dunlop SportMaxx tyres: 2x 225/45ZR17 + 2x 245/40ZR17 including centre caps, bolts and locking wheel nuts. Buyer to collect or arrange own delivery, £350. Tel: 01793 734866. Swindon. **[ABW5R]**



**For sale**, Mk1 VW Golf GTi, vdo type gauges comes with wiring loom and sender, very rare item to find. In very good condition, would be ideal for any project. £240 no offers, please note: buyer must collect no time wasters. Tel: 07879 215057. West Midlands. **[ABW4R]**



**For sale**, winter tyres and wheels, size 225/45R18 91W, used once, absolutely mint condition. £700 ONO, Tel: 07751 033703. Worcester. **[ABW3R]**

**Breaking Mercedes sports, 113 and 107s.** Tel: 01322 669081 or 07836 250222 **[ABC]**



## NO. PLATES

### YI SLR

**YI SLR**, on retention and ready to go. £1,250 or nearest offer. Tel: 07976 792849. Somerset [AB]

### SLK 230

**SLK 230**, private number SLK 230 for sale, looks perfect on an original SLK. £5,000 OVNO (Plate is currently on retention) Tel: 07798 671331. Southend. [AB]

### N9 ECL

**N9 ECL**, private registration plate for sale, on retention, £250. Tel: 01388 605837 or 07955 851117. Co Durham. [LA]

### E2 CUT

**E2 CUT**, on retention certificate and the assignment fee paid. £600. Tel: 07880 948710. Lancashire. [LA]

### C9 AHS

**C9 AHS**, on retention certificates and the assignment fee paid. £300. Tel: 07880 948710. Lancashire. [LA]

### 6535 MT

**6535 MT**, cherished numberplate on retention and ready to go, assignment fees paid, £1,795 ONO. Please contact Mike. Tel: 077404 79145. Doncaster. [LA]

### S500 GB

**S500 GB**, the perfect plate for any S-Class 500, the plate is presently on our S320, for price and offers please call Vic. Tel: 07712 638766. Sussex. [LA]

### W222 HYB

**W222 HYB**, personalised plate for new S-Class hybrid range, on retention, certificate assignment fee paid. £5,000 ONO. Tel: 01483 282861. Guildford. [LA]

### 190 KO

**190 KO**, private registration for sale, held on retention, £3,500. Tel: 01387 257066, Dumfries. [BC]

## WANTED

**Mercedes R107 420 or 300**, must have FSH, air con, 1988/1989, excellent condition, genuine knowledgeable buyer, willing to travel, cash waiting. Tel: 07795 261280. Lincs. [BC]

**Mercedes cars**, wanted the good the bad and the ugly cash paid on pick up please call, we also have loads of parts for sale please call. Tel: 07984 471472. Birmingham [AB]

**G-Wagen**, 463 locking fuel cap cover and two keys, never used, still in bag. £25 including P&P. Tel: 01475 726360. Scotland. [KL]

**Wanted**, Issue 1 (one) from 2012 of *Classic Mercedes*. Call anytime, John (353)087 6892857, leave message and number and I will call back. Dingle, Co. Kerry. [JKR]

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“What better place is there  
for a convertible, top  
down, than the beach?”



# RICH AND FAMOUS

It may have been over a decade old, but this R129 SL500 Silver Arrow could still turn heads in Los Angeles' public hot spots, as one motoring journalist discovered

WORDS AND IMAGES **REED HITCHCOCK**

**I** AM A COMPLETE SUCKER FOR BRUNO SACCO ERA, boxy Mercedes styling, and of the past four generations of SL roadster, the R129 is my favourite by a long shot. I do still love a nice Pagoda, but frankly the surge in market values has put even the most questionable examples above my pay grade.

The R107 is a beautiful and iconic car, but from a strictly driving standpoint I find them ponderous and – even in 560 form – a little low on power. The current and last generation versions of the SL certainly aren't slow, but they are still pricey (although coming down fast) and replete with technology that will be expensive to fix if it ever goes wrong.

**Enter the R129.** Like all of the post 1963 SLs, the term *Sport Leicht* doesn't really suit the R129, but what they lack in lightness they make up for in performance and solidity. These were the last of the over engineered SLs, sharing key parts with the best Mercedes had to offer in the day, including a chassis based on the W124's and drivetrains common with the W140's.

Despite their girth, however, the R129s have a remarkably sporting yet luxury feel, with smooth power delivery especially in V8 and V12 forms. That said, having owned the V12 in a 140 saloon, and given the relatively small difference in power, the five-litre M119 SL500 is the variant that gets the nod from me – ideally one of the last built in order to get the cosmetic upgrades the R129 received over the years, along with the mechanical and electrical sorting that comes with over a decade of production experience.

This car pictured – a 2002 SL500 Silver Arrow – is part of the permanent collection at the Mercedes-Benz Classic Center in California. It has just a handful of miles on its odometer, and looks and smells as if it had just rolled off the factory floor. The two-tone interior, with special grey burled wood and machine turned gauge surrounds, is unmarked and is a downright addictive place to sit. I have to say: one of the best things about this job is that the Classic Center team lets us drive their cars from time to time, and in one of the most convertible friendly environments there is. Experiencing this special edition R129 SL did not disappoint.

The Silver Arrow limited edition has the later, slightly detuned version of the M119 delivering 302bhp instead of the earlier version's 316bhp. The key

△ Mercedes-Benz Classic Center, USA cares for this car.

△▷ Silver Arrow spec came late in R129 production.

difference is that full throttle fuel enrichment was removed from the later cars, although you'd be hard pressed to feel it by the seat of the pants, as I proved repeatedly to onlookers as I powered the car through the rolling hills and dales of the mountainous headlands east of Irvine.

**In its monochromatic silver paint scheme,** the Silver Arrow maintains a classy yet classic charm, and although prices are presently at an all time low for R129s, they still draw attention the way they did when new, which is no small feat in the car crazy greater Los Angeles area. In fact, I garnered more attention driving this car than I did in a then new, 2006 SL500 which seemed to blend into LA's automotive landscape. The R129 roadster did just the opposite – even 12 years after it ceased to be sold in North America.

So after a thorough flogging through the twisties, I aimed for the coast. After all, what better place is there for a convertible, top down, than the beach? I picked up the renowned Pacific Coast Highway in Laguna Beach and aimed south. More than a few times, I was pleasantly surprised by a “nice car!” from scantily clad beach goers who saw that I was clearly enjoying my drive.

In similar situations, I used to go out of my way to tell folks that the car isn't mine, but sometimes it's OK to bask in the attention. Besides, one of the beauties of the R129 is that although this one isn't mine, almost everyone with a verifiable income can afford one. It's a tremendous amount of car for the money, and still looks every bit the part of range topping, sports-touring car.



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