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January 2015

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MERCEDES ENTHUSIAST

is published on the third Friday of each month

Editorial comment and the latest from the Mercedes Enthusiast team

ALSO AVAILABLE



Mercedes may already be on course for record sales, but there will be no let up in car launches

EVEN BY ITS OWN HIGH STANDARDS, THE YEAR 2014 HAS BEEN AN INCREDIBLY busy one for Mercedes. In the space of 12 months, it has launched a new C-Class saloon and estate, a new S-Class coupe, the GLA, a facelifted CLS, a 9G-Tronic automatic gearbox, a V6 biturbo engine, a plug-in hybrid S-Class, a facelifted B-Class, and a new Mercedes-Maybach brand. Meanwhile, the AMG camp has delivered a host of new cars based on those above, and launched a new V8 biturbo engine in its new GT sports car.

In the classic and modern classic spheres, the R129 SL, W124 E-Class and 460 G-Wagen all celebrated milestone birthdays, and it was 40 years ago this year since the 115-series 240D 3.0 became the torquiest and fastest, diesel powered passenger car in the world, its five-cylinder OM617 motor producing a heady 79bhp, along with 127lb ft torque. Not forgetting classic Mercedes' prolific returns at auctions throughout the last dozen months.

The year 2014 also marked 12 decades of Mercedes' participation in motorsport. And what better way to celebrate this milestone than by dominating Formula 1 - Mercedes won its first ever constructors' championship, and its first drivers' title since 1955. Champion Lewis Hamilton and team mate Nico Rosberg scored 16 victories, including 11 1-2 finishes, both of which are new records for the sport. Elsewhere, customer teams running the SLS



AMG GT3 racked up six titles and 34 wins, while an A-Class took Mercedes' first win in the British Touring Car Championship.

Mercedes may already be on course for record sales, but there will be no let up in car launches, nor a decrease in milestones and other success stories along the way. All we can do is hold on and enjoy the ride...

Kyle Molyneux
Editor

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



Ian Kuah

"AMG's second in-house designed car is here at last," proclaims Ian Kuah, the lucky man tasked with flying to California and its Laguna Seca racing track to test

the new sports car. "Out of the box, the AMG GT is a very complete and polished effort that will leave a strong and very positive impression on anyone who drives it," he continues. "With its superb chassis balance and strong engine, it is also sure to be a great success in motorsport." Read our full verdict beginning on page 30.



Andrew Frankel

"Every time I drive an SLS, I am reminded anew what a hard core sports car it really was," says Andrew Frankel, this month assigned to

pay tribute to AMG's modern day Gullwing and a precursor of the new GT. "Of course, it's beautiful and far easier to live with than most supercars, but it has this other side too, a no nonsense, gloves off approach to the open road that I have adored since the first moment I drove one." Turn to page 38 to find out more.



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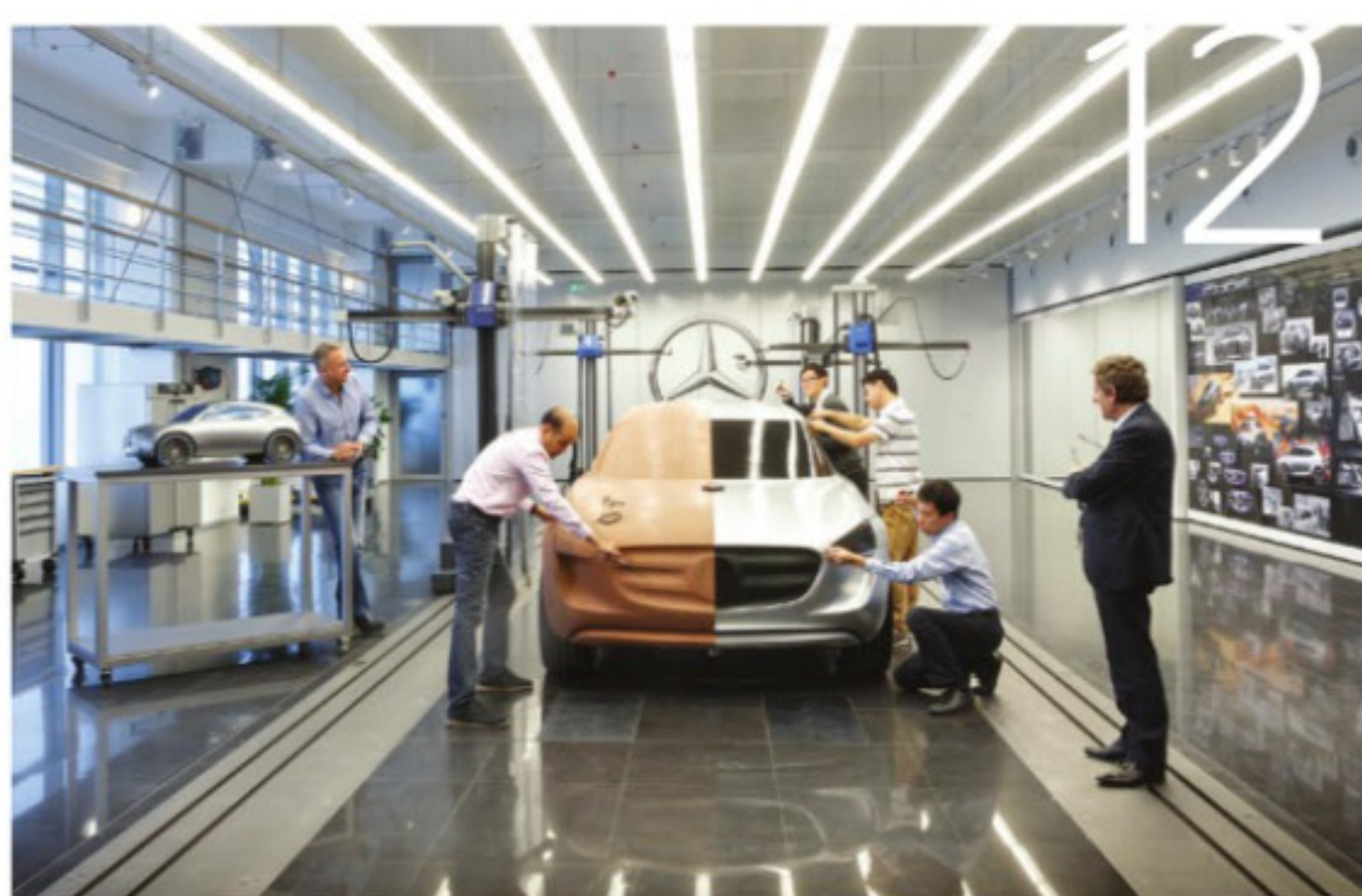
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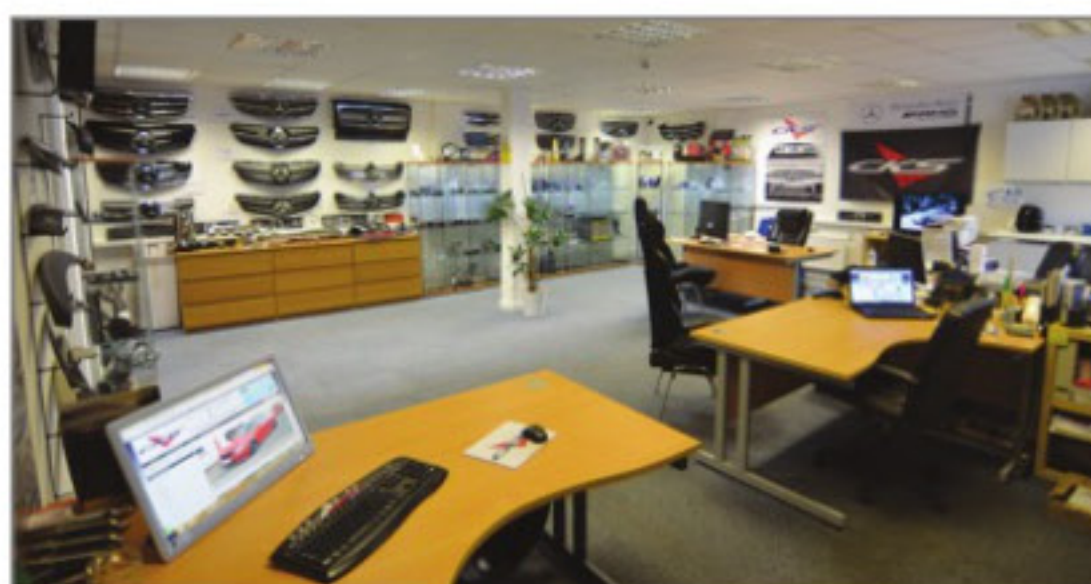
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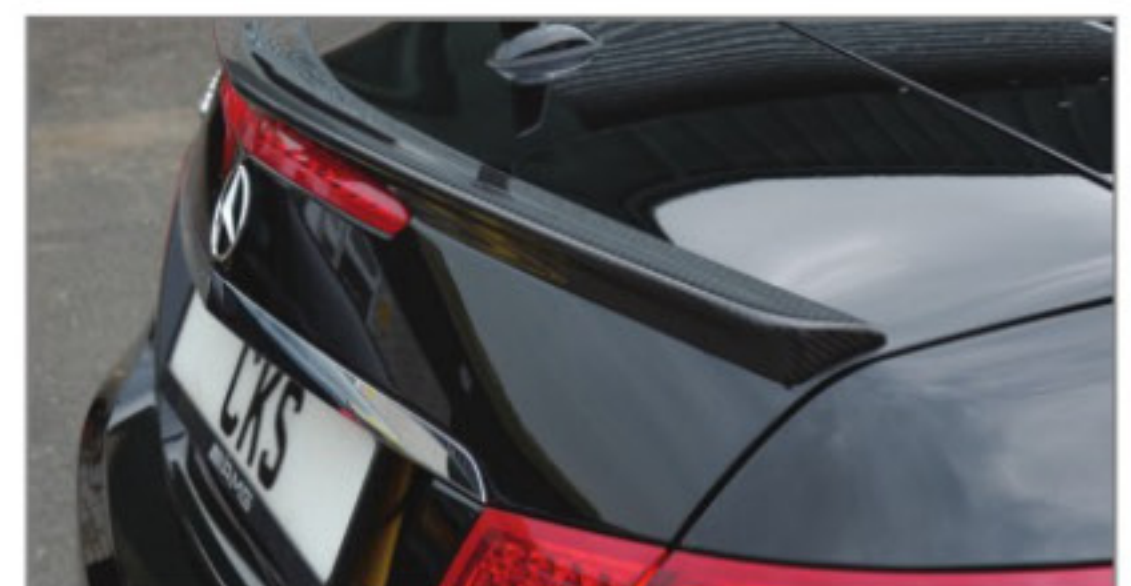
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The latest Mercedes launches, news and motorsport

NEWS



CLA SHOOTING BRAKE

The fifth model in Mercedes' compact car range is the most stylish and intriguing yet – on sale January!



MERCEDES-BENZ HAS FINALLY peeled away the camouflage and revealed its striking new CLA shooting brake – a more practical estate version of the CLA four-door coupe.

The big news is the amount of boot space on offer: starting with 495 litres, which is 25 more than the coupe version has, this jumps to 1,354 litres with the rear seats folded down. The rear seat backs also have an upright 'cargo' position, providing 595 litres of space while still offering seating for three occupants.

Sticking with the rear quarters, headroom in the shooting brake is increased to 947mm, or 40mm more than in the coupe, easing access along the way. Despite this, the CLA shooting brake claims a drag coefficient value of 0.26Cd. Overall, the car is 4,630mm long, 1,777mm wide and 1,435mm tall.

The CLA shooting brake benefits from a host of interior refinements including new steering wheel, dial and switchgear designs. The fixed screen on the dash measures seven inches, but an eight-inch screen is available as an option for the Audio 20 system, and complements the optional Comand Online.

At launch, the diesel line up will comprise the 134bhp CLA200 CDI and the 175bhp

CLA220 CDI, while the 120bhp CLA180, 154bhp CLA200, 208bhp CLA250/4Matic, and 355bhp CLA45 AMG make up the petrol range. All but the CLA220 CDI, CLA250 and CLA45 come with a six-speed manual as standard, these latter cars equipped with a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic.

The most fuel efficient car is the CLA200 CDI auto, capable of 67.3 to 72.4mpg (NEDC combined) with CO2 emissions of 101 to 111g/km depending on the wheels fitted.

Available to order from January 2015 in the UK, the first customers will receive their cars from March. The CLA shooting brake's trim lines are expected to mirror those of the CLA coupe (Sport, AMG Sport, and AMG), and pricing shouldn't be much different either; at present the CLA180 Sport manual kicks off the coupe range at £24,775.



NEW NAMES

Mercedes-Benz is set to revamp the naming structure of its cars. The new system centres around the five core model series: A, B, C, E and S, which will continue into the future. As a tribute to the legendary G-Wagen 4x4, all new SUVs will carry the 'G' prefix. This means the ML will become known as the GLE, and the soon to be launched coupe variant will have

the title GLE coupe. The GL will become the GLS, and the GLK will be rebadged GLC. From 2016, roadsters will carry 'SL' plus a third letter linking them to one of the core model series; the SLK will soon change to SLC.

Different types of engines will be given new designations: c for 'compressed natural gas', d for 'diesel', e for 'electric', f for 'fuel cell', and h for 'hybrid'. Petrol goes without.

New nomenclature Mercedes-Benz model series*

Off-road vehicle/SUV	Core model series**	4 door Coupe	Roadster
G	S	CLS	SL
GLS	E		
GLE	C		SLC
GLC	B		
GLA	A	CLA	

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MERCEDES-MAYBACH

It's official: the Maybach name is being revived! And this time, the super sized saloon will be based on the very latest 222-series S-Class. With extra space thanks to a whopping 5,453mm long body, plus special seats and even higher quality interior fittings, the Mercedes-Maybach will appeal to the most demanding customers.

Set for launch in February 2015, S500 V8 (449bhp) and S600 V12 (523bhp) models will be offered (plus a S400 4Matic V6 for the Chinese market). Unlike in the normal S-Class, executive rear seats are standard and



△ Both rear seats recline by 43.5 degrees.

feature on both sides of the cabin, reclining by up to 43.5 degrees.

We attended the launch of the Mercedes-Maybach S600 at the Los Angeles Auto Show, which you can read about from page 18. We also spoke to sales and marketing boss Ola Källenius about the rebirth of Maybach, so come back next month for that interview in full!



△ AMG SPORT RANGE

January's North American International Motor Show will see Affalterbach unveil a new 'AMG Sport' range to serve as a halfway house between regular Mercedes and traditional AMGs. An uprated engine, 4WD, and special chassis and braking components will be included, the first AMG Sport cars the C-Class and GLE coupe.



△ STARS & CARS

Over 50,000 spectators attended Mercedes' Stars & Cars event in Stuttgart in late November, which concluded a highly successful motorsport season. A total of 64 vehicles took part in 20 cars runs, the oldest from 1914 and the newest Mercedes' 2014 W05 F1 racer. 'World Championship 2014 Collector's Edition' SL63 AMGs dedicated to Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg were also present.



△ MERCEDES SALE

Bonhams has announced a 'Mercedes-Benz Auction' that will take place at the car maker's museum in Stuttgart on March 28 2015, following a successful event last July that generated €12m (£9.5m) in sales - a quarter of which was made by a 500K/540K alone.

□ W124 E60 AMG

Mercedes model specialist minimerc.co.uk has released a 1:18 scale replica of a W124 E60 AMG, created by Otto. Finished in black metallic, just 2,000 of these models will be offered, and each carries a unique build number. Priced at £84.50 + P&P, they can be ordered from minimerc.co.uk.

▽ WEISTEC RECORD

Weistec Engineering has broken another record, this time with a highly modified E63 S 4Matic. The 850bhp biturbo saloon blasted to 174.55mph in just half a mile - making it the fastest E63 S in the world, according to its creator.



CLASSICS BEAT EXPECTATIONS

During Silverstone Auctions' November sale at the NEC Classic Motor Show, one of just 68 right-hand drive W111 280SE 3.5 Cabriolets sold for £219,375, while a restored 190SL obliterated its estimate of £85,000 to £100,000, swapping hands for

£172,500. A ferocious looking CLK DTM AMG Cabriolet - one of just six made in right-hand drive - sold for £126,000, and a mint 280SL Pagoda with a hardtop found a new home for £72,563, some £14,000 more than its top estimated value.

At the end of November, the Historics at Brooklands auction witnessed a 2004, 5,500-mile S500 sell for £17,920, a 16,000-mile SLK350 from 2004 go for £12,040, and a restored, right-hand drive W111 300SE Cabriolet change hands for £76,160.



△ Restored by Redcastle Classics, this 1955 190SL fetched £172,500.



△ This 1970 W111 3.5 cabrio underwent a six-figure overhaul in Oz.

CALLING 300S/Sc OWNERS!

German motoring journalist and writer Martin Häußermann is currently working on a new book about the Mercedes-Benz Type 300S/Sc, among the most luxurious German cars of their time.

His aim is to show as many different coupes, cabriolets and roadsters in his book as possible. Owners of original or restored

300S/Sc Mercedes are encouraged to send in contemporary photographs, and Martin would also like to speak with anyone who came into contact with these cars, through private or professional circumstances, during the 1950s and afterwards. Please email info@movement-media.de.



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MOTORSPORT NEWS

Mercedes wraps up both F1 championships, and helps drivers earn big wins in Australia and Macau

FORMULA 1



Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton was crowned the 2014 F1 World Champion after winning the season finale at Abu Dhabi in late November. His team mate Nico Rosberg finished second overall, cementing the team's position at the top of the constructors' championship. Williams F1 drivers Felipe Massa and Valtteri Bottas crossed the line second and third in Abu Dhabi, handing their Mercedes powered team third overall. McLaren Mercedes' Jenson Button (far right) finished fifth in Abu Dhabi, meaning his team beat Force India Mercedes to fifth place overall. At the time of writing, Button's future was still undecided following the rumour that Fernando Alonso is joining McLaren - as is Honda - for the 2015 season.

SLS AMG GT3



Erebus Motorsport driver Richard Muscat has won his maiden Australian GT Championship in Merc's SLS AMG GT3. Coping well under pressure, he won the final two races of the season at Highlands Park.

FORMULA 3



Felix Rosenqvist emerged victorious in Formula 3's prestigious Macau Grand Prix. The Mercedes powered Mücke Motorsport driver follows in the footsteps of Ayrton Senna and Michael Schumacher.



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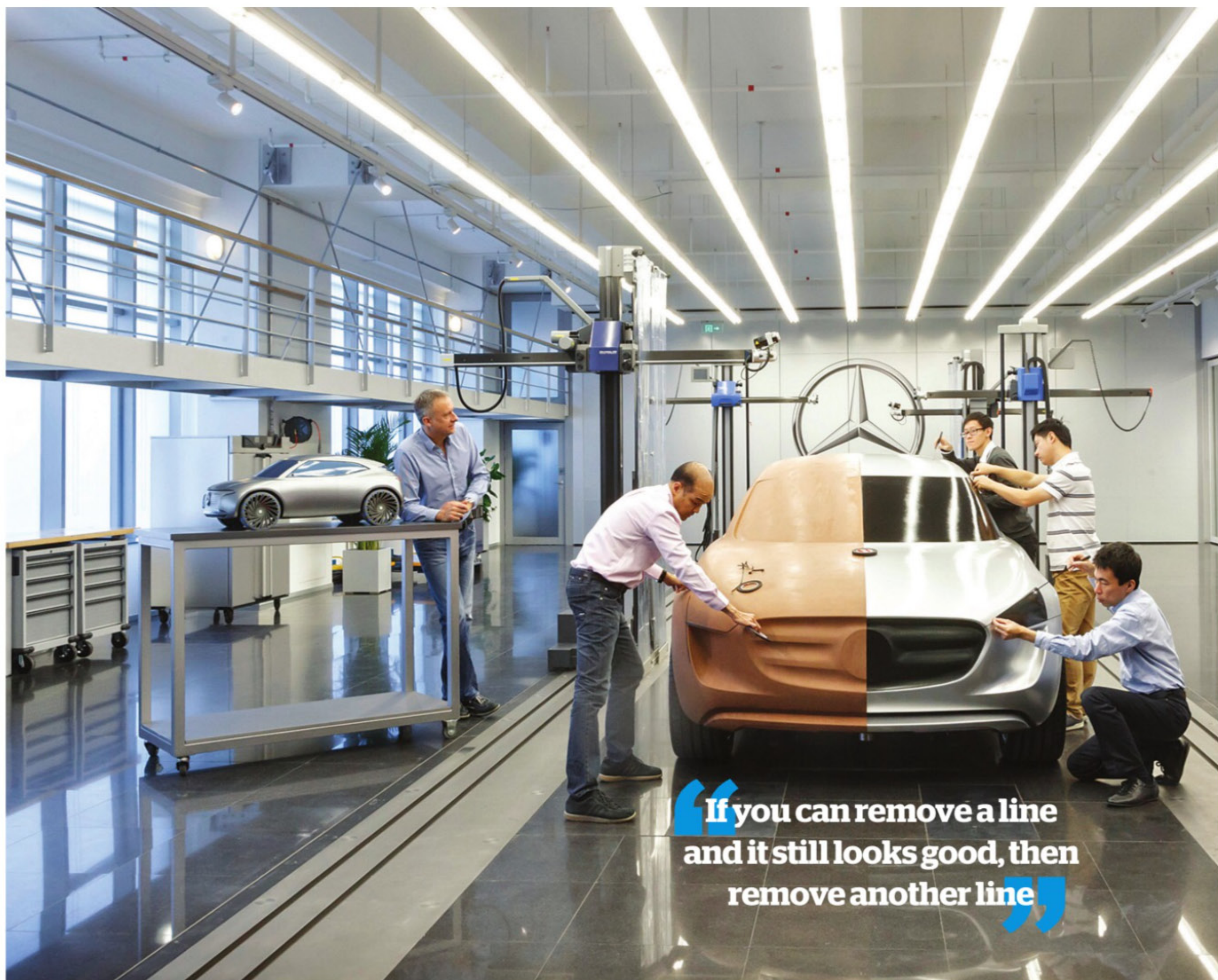
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China is the world's biggest car market and Mercedes-Benz wants a slice of the action



“If you can remove a line and it still looks good, then remove another line”

ASIA AWAITS

Mercedes-Benz opens a new research and development facility in China with the hope of tapping into local cultures and trends

WORDS AND IMAGES IAN KUAH

DESPITE 100 PER CENT TAXES, car sales in China, the world's largest automobile market, hit a record 21.8m units in 2013. Of these, 17.9m units were passenger cars, a leap of 15.7 per cent compared to the previous year.

In the first 10 months of 2014, Mercedes-Benz sold over 200,000 units, more than in the whole of 2013. With the largest sales and service training centre in the Mercedes network recently opened in Shanghai, and 100 new dealerships setting up shop by the end of 2014, sales in 2015 are expected to top 300,000 units.

The opening of the new Mercedes-Benz Advanced Design Center in Beijing presented a golden opportunity to see how the three-pointed star is shaping up in the Middle Kingdom, and witness the unveiling of the G-Code concept car.





△ G-Code is the Beijing facility's first concept car.

▽ A shorter but taller body than the GLA-Class.



△ Illuminated grille inspired by science fiction.



△ From L to R: Hubert Lee, Gorden Wagener, Olivier Boulay.

G-CODE

When I last spoke with Daimler's design chief, Gorden Wagener, in Sindelfingen just before the Paris motor show, he told me that, "Simplicity is the key to the elegant and timeless designs we are striving for now. If you can remove a line and it still looks good, then remove another line."

This new take on the minimalist approach that puts good proportions, dynamic flowing

lines and smooth surface treatment before fussy detailing, is epitomised by the G-Code study concept, a plug-in hybrid powered, compact SUC (sports utility coupe) with four-wheel drive. Its strong but simple shape looks moulded or carved from solid metal rather than assembled, and is the antithesis of the archetypal square rigged image of an SUV perfectly represented by the classic G-Class.

While the lines of the G-Code are as smooth as a dolphin's, its nose treatment is quite aggressive, with a uniquely shaped grille featuring two strong horizontal bars on each side of the three-pointed star. Some speculate that this could be the design for future Mercedes-Benz 4x4 grilles, which will be clearly distinguished from the sport and classic grilles on other Mercedes cars.

As the market for 4x4 vehicles continues to grow, especially in China, it would make sense to give this genre its own identity. A neat feature of this grille is the LED lighting that

changes colour according to the drive mode – a softly pulsating blue when the car is parked, blue stars that move from the outside towards the centre in Hybrid eDrive mode, and purple in Hybrid eco mode. In Hybrid sport mode, the stars change direction, moving outwards to signify the outward shift of energy.

The G-Code is the parting shot from Prof Olivier Boulay, the French born Director of Mercedes-Benz Advanced Design Center of China. Trained at the Royal College of Art in London, and ESAG in Paris, he is the protégé of the legendary Bruno Sacco.

An architect as well as a car designer, Olivier helped to establish the former Mercedes-Benz Advanced Design Center in Tokyo, guiding the architects there on how to create a facility for car designers. When Mercedes decided that the rapidly growing Chinese market warranted an R&D centre in downtown Beijing, which opened in 2006, Olivier repeated the exercise with a small scale studio in 2009.

MERCEDES-BENZ 300SL

private bid sale



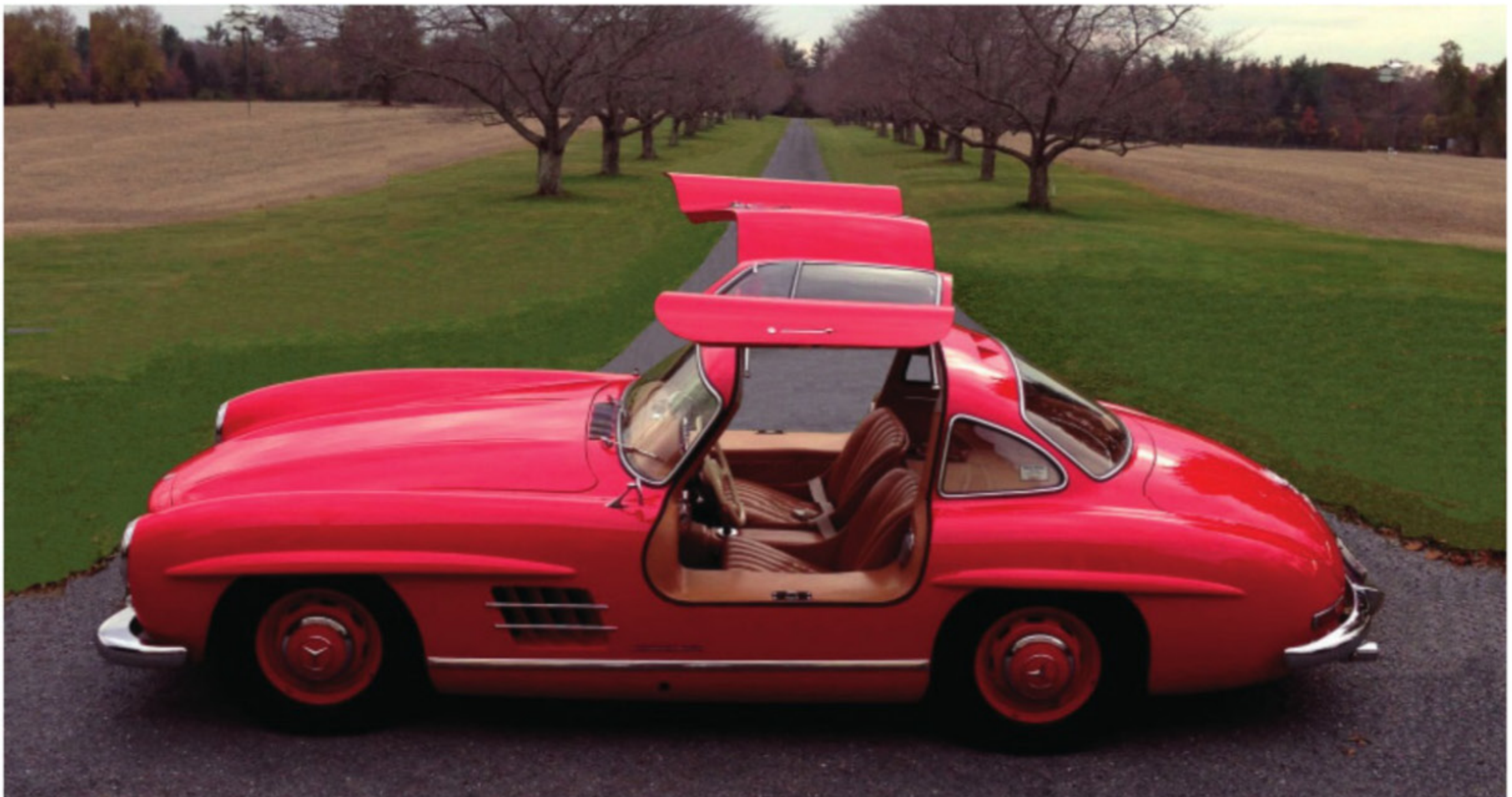
Wonderful records



Almost extinct concave Star



After 30 years of enjoyment, this matching-numbers car got a meticulously documented body-off restoration. John Olson found the car in peak condition, ready for the coast-to-coast drive he would love to take with the next owner. Equipped with quick-ratio steering and the optional NSL sport cam, its race capable manners have not faded with time.



Forty-five years with one owner – Who's next?

1,402 were built. How many have survived? Clearly not enough for one of the world's most admired classics. Serving as Aesthetics Judge, American Industrial Designer **Brooks Stevens** once described the 300 SL's genius to be a perfect mix of firm masculine power with soft, feminine curves. A Who's Who of 300SL specialists have cared for #550360 with 45-year owner **Knight Kiplinger** and previous owner, **Malcolm Pray**. Contact **John Olson**, (phone and e-mail in masthead) for his candid Condition Report, 50 photographs and bid sale steps. Olson personally guarantees all bids are real. You may inspect the car as in a private sale, near Washington, DC

The resource for rare and collectible Mercedes-Benz. Market analysis and sales information for over 30 years!

▷ However, the importance of the Chinese market is such that the decision was taken to invest €112m (£88m) in R&D facilities, of which €13.5m (£10.5m) went into the bespoke Advanced Design Center in Beijing, Olivier undertaking this grand task yet again.

With the new studio in Beijing up and running, the Japanese facility has been closed, and many of its key staff transferred to China where the team is truly multi national. A total of 350 staff work in research and development here, in six different departments. Around 80 per cent of them are Chinese, with the rest from a dozen different countries.

After eight years in the country, Olivier has now handed the reigns over to Hubert Lee, former head of the Advanced Design Center in California, and returns to Sindelfingen.

STREAM ONE

While the plug-in hybrid G-Code could easily be developed into a production car within three or four years should the Mercedes-Benz board

approve it, the designers at the Beijing studio are given as much free rein to dream as their counterparts in California, Germany and Italy. On that note, I was very taken with the Stream One concept car, both as a rendering and as a 1/8th scale model that sat on display. Inspired by Mercedes' 1930s W25 Silver Arrows race car, and the Streamliner, an aerodynamic pathfinder in its day (read about a one-off Streamliner in the October 2014

issue), the Stream One successfully translates their DNA into 21st century form.

With one electric motor powering each of the four wheels, as on the SLS AMG Coupe Electric Drive, the Stream One's air intakes direct cooling air to the electric motors. Designed by Li Yang and rendered by Yusuke Sasae, who used to work in Mercedes' studio in Tokyo, design exercises like this stunning concept keep imaginations on the boil.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

The sheer volume of potential sales in China makes this market a priority for Mercedes-Benz, and just as with the SUV plant in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, production in China with high local content is a logical way to go.

However, another factor, and the reason for opening the design studio in Beijing, is the unique demands of customers in this huge

market. While more and more Chinese car owners drive themselves, it is very clear that company bosses still prefer to sit in the back while a

chauffeur braves the horrendous traffic in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai.

Not everyone can afford a Mercedes S-Class, Audi A8 or BMW 7-Series, especially with the high taxes on cars, so long-wheelbase versions of the compact and mid sized saloons from Mercedes, Audi and BMW are produced in ▷

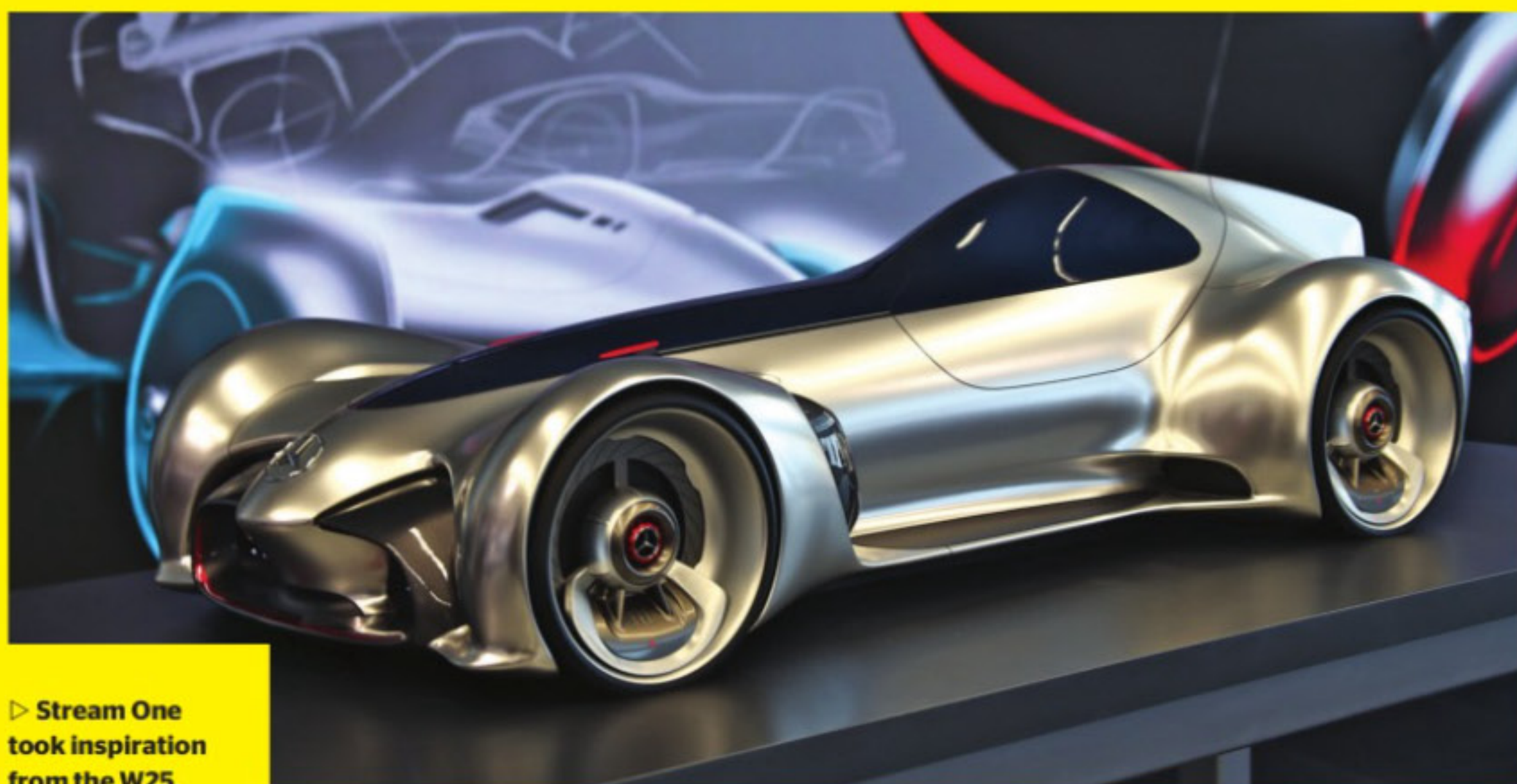
A total of 350 staff work in R&D, in six different departments

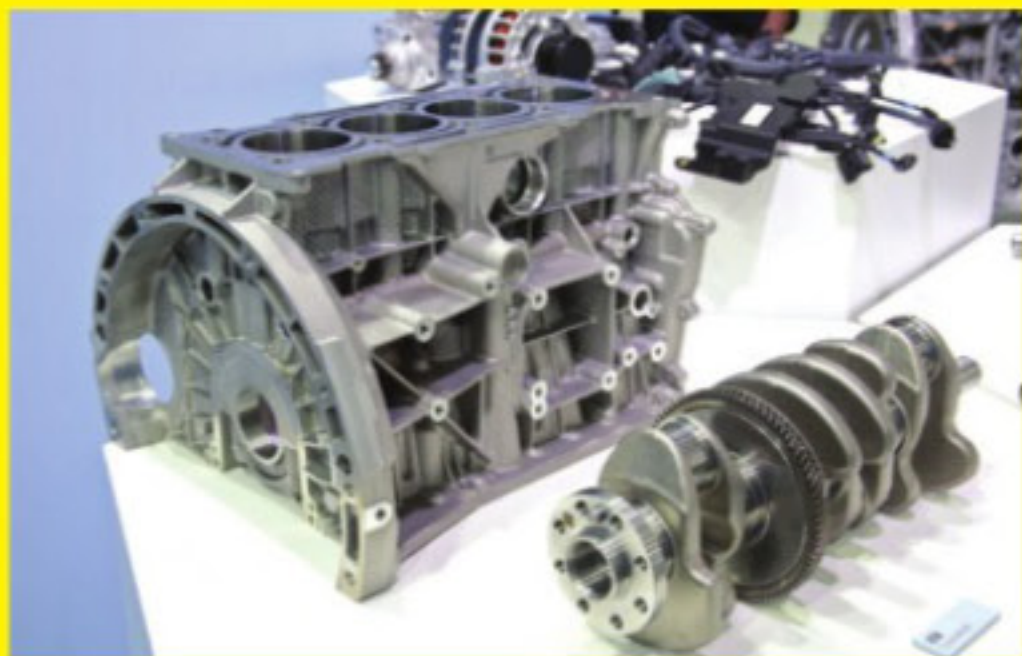


▽ Hubert Lee (R) has moved from the USA.

△ Yusuke Sasae and Li Yang of the Stream One.

▷ Stream One took inspiration from the W25.





△◁ 7G-Tronic Plus imported as a complete unit.

△ Self driving cars are also being tested.

◁ The LWB C-Class built in China, for China.

▷ Extensive testing takes place in China.



Chinese buyers have specific tastes that require extra analysis and interpretation.

“There is no substitute for extensive testing in the unique conditions of the country where a car is sold”

▷ China for local consumption. There was no long-wheelbase, 204-series C-Class saloon, but there is a 205-series variant (V205) and it is 80mm longer than the regular four-door saloon. This car shares its assembly line with the long-wheelbase, 212-series E-Class saloon in the massive new factory facility situated around an hour's drive from downtown Beijing and the new design studio.

The local content in these cars is high, with over 60 per cent of the components, including the interior trim and wiring, coming from 30 local suppliers. One of the massive buildings at the factory is the engine plant where the M270, M274 and M276 engines are made. Major engine components like the block and cylinder heads are still cast in Germany, but these raw castings are machined and finished in China.

The highly complex 7G-Tronic Plus automatic gearbox is imported as a complete unit from the Mercedes transmission factory in Stuttgart.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

We also saw how Mercedes is absorbing the local culture and adapting some aspects of its cars accordingly. For instance, Chinese customers like certain sizes of drinks containers, and the cup and bottle holders are sized to reflect this. In terms of telematics and infotainment, Mercedes engineers work very closely with Tsinghua University to perfect their navigation and information software. They are even in the process of testing and adapting primary safety features to the unique and less predictable way that Chinese traffic, especially motorcycles and bicycles, moves.

There is no substitute for extensive testing in the unique conditions of the country where a car is sold. The locally built and imported Mercedes-Benz models are required to clock up hundreds of thousands of kilometres of testing from downtown Beijing to the inhospitable desert areas far inland. This is critical to confirm that the locally made components are just as durable as their counterparts in German made Mercedes-Benz cars.

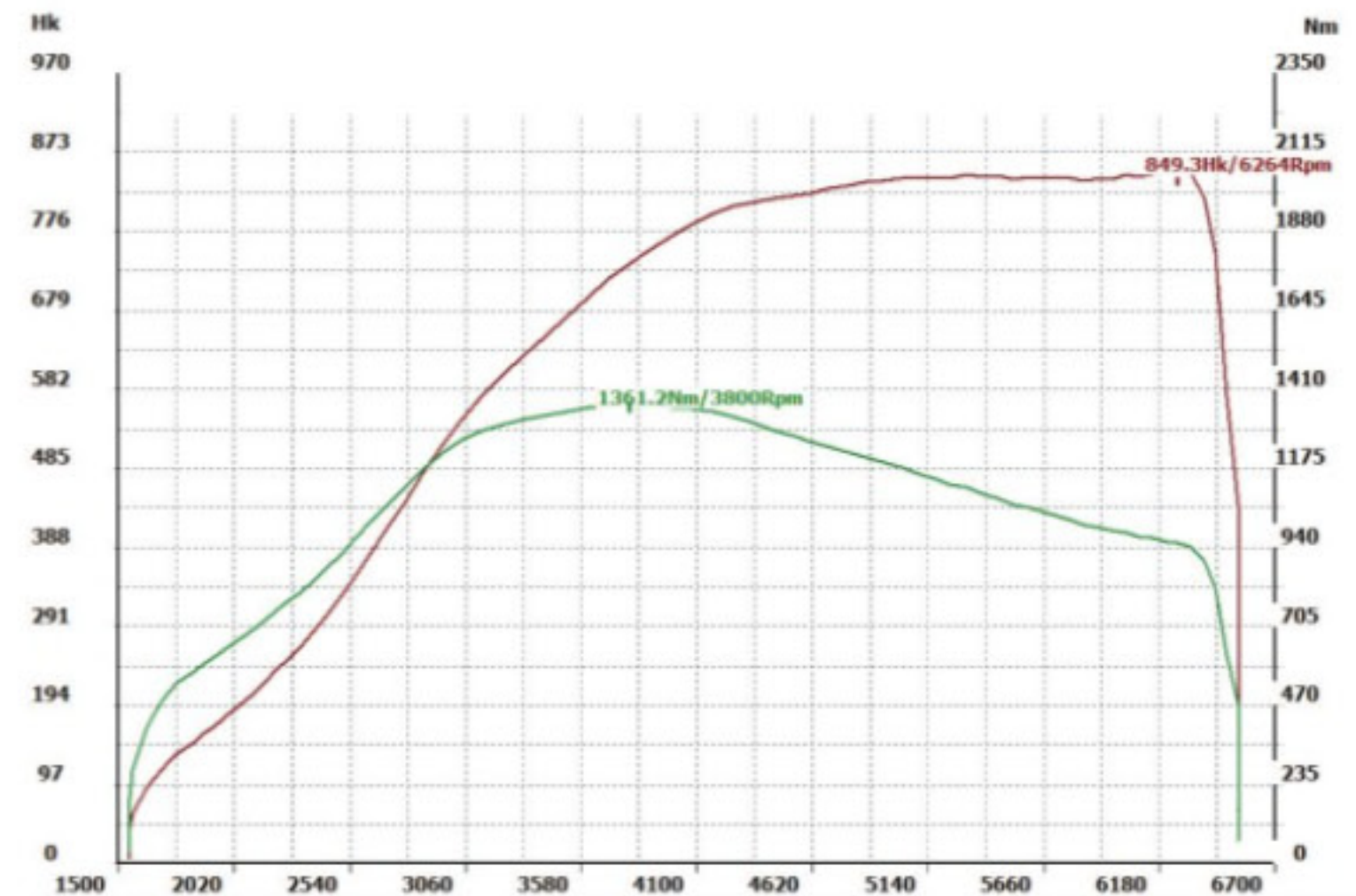
It was very clear from our visit to the new Advanced Design Center in Beijing, and the massive new factory, that Mercedes-Benz is taking the vast Chinese market very seriously. Local adaptation, content and testing ensure that every Mercedes model sold in China will delight its owner just as much as their German built counterparts do elsewhere.

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Mercedes debuts its new Maybach S-Class and shows off the latest cars from AMG

THE RETURN OF MAYBACH

Mercedes chooses the Los Angeles Auto Show to unveil its reimagined Maybach range, based on a lengthened 222-series S-Class chassis

WORDS SHANE O'DONOGHUE IMAGES DAIMLER AG

LOS ANGELES IS FAMED FOR Hollywood stars, its 'west coast' outlook on life, and its notoriously busy highway network. As a visitor, arguably the only good thing about the gridlock is that you get to understand local automotive culture and see it up close. There are thousands of hybrid cars here, mostly Toyotas and Hondas of course, but plenty of Teslas and even a few Mercedes saloons with a 'Hybrid' badge on the bootlid. Those drivers would no doubt have appreciated all the hydrogen fuel cell technology on display in the Convention Center at 2014's Los Angeles Auto Show, which ran at the end of November.

Just as common on the road, though, are performance cars from the AMG stable, and examples of the S-Class on polished rims with the numbers '500' or '600' on the back. After all, limousines and film stars go hand in hand, don't they? Unsurprisingly, the USA and China are the two biggest markets for the Mercedes-Benz S-Class, which explains why the German manufacturer chose the LA Auto Show to relaunch its Maybach brand (just a few hours after the covers were taken off the same car at the Guangzhou motor show in China).

WORLD DEBUT

As you may have read on page 9, the Maybach name is being used a little differently this time around, to mark out the most exclusive versions of the Mercedes range. The cars will be

be called Mercedes-Maybachs and the first, revealed in LA, is the Mercedes-Maybach S600. And it's positively huge. The dark show stand and harsh lighting in the South Hall couldn't disguise the bulk of the new model, though it thankfully does not adopt the previous Maybach's 'challenging' aesthetics.

LUXURY IN LENGTH

There's no hiding the extra length, though. The Maybach model gets an extra 200mm in the wheelbase over that of the long-wheelbase S-Class, for a total of 3,365mm from front axle to rear, requiring a 5,453mm long body. That increase clearly signifies that the owner of this car is expecting to sit in the back. There they'll

find exceedingly comfortable (we know, we had to be prised out) 'Executive seats' as standard, which allow a

seriously reclined sitting/lying position.

And to make sure you don't need to raise your voice to bark commands at the chauffeur up front, there's even a voice amplification feature built in. Mercedes claims that it's the quietest rear seat of any production limousine in the world too, thanks to extensive work done in its new aeroacoustic wind tunnel at the Mercedes-Benz Technology Centre in Sindelfingen. Although the standard car is exquisitely appointed inside, the options list will be long and, presumably, expensive. Not that most buyers will be too fussed, but they should be aware that the integrated champagne fridge eats into boot space considerably...

Under the bonnet (it still carries the three-pointed star) is the regular S600's six-litre V12 biturbo engine. That means 523bhp at 4,900rpm and a monstrous 612lb ft of torque from just 1,900rpm. The weight gain has blunted performance a tad, but with a 0-62mph time of five seconds dead, and an electronically limited top speed of 155mph, nobody can criticise this limo for being slow. Indeed, the Mercedes-Maybach will be available in S500

and S500 4Matic specifications too, the latter car returning identical benchmark figures to the V12 model despite its V8 biturbo generating 449bhp and 516lb ft torque. Four-wheel drive aside, acceleration is helped by the S500's new 9G-Tronic automatic (the S600 makes do with the 7G-Tronic Plus auto). An S400 4Matic will be available in China.

This also means that the rear-wheel drive S500 is considerably greener with better economy (31.7mpg plays 24.1mpg) and lower emissions (207g/km versus 274g/km; the S500 4Matic's figures were unavailable at the time of writing). Probably only half the local residents will care about such things, and they won't be buying the new Mercedes-Maybach.

The Maybach name is being used a little differently this time around



Wagener looks on as Moers discusses the GT.



Exclusive Privacy



△ Based on the V222 S-Class, the Maybach carries the title X222.

◁ The Maybach hits the road in 2015 with a V6, V8 and V12.

梅赛德斯-迈巴赫S级轿车全球首发 Mercedes-Maybach S-Class World Premiere



◁ 'Maybach' badge will help distinguish it from regular 222s.

▽ The GT, Maybach and C63 made quite the impression.



◁ Maybachs shown in China and America simultaneously.

△ The 205-series C63 should sell well on these shores.

◁ Sales of AMG products are only going one way.

▽ The CLA has proven incredibly popular in the US.



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

TAKING THE NEXT STEP



Buying a new Mercedes has never been easier thanks to attractive lease deals, but have in mind what you'll do once the contract ends, says **David Sutherland**

New car sales are booming in the UK, 2014 the first two-million plus year since 2007. The healthy total reflects Britain's improving economy – but what in particular is drawing customers into showrooms are the hard to resist incentives that manufacturers, Mercedes-Benz included, are offering.

How does £2,785 off a brand new C200 Sport sound? No haggling required, and low, 4.9 per cent APR finance to ease the payments. The deals are there throughout the range, so should you fancy an SL400 AMG Sport, you can have a £4,537 discount – sorry, I should have said 'Retailer Deposit Contribution' – on the £72,500 price, along with 0 per cent finance.

The deals Mercedes-Benz offers on new cars are so good that, I have calculated on various occasions, they can work out at about the same price, or perhaps even slightly cheaper, than buying a nearly new car from the same dealer, all things considered.

Mercedes, which entered the 'volume' market in the latter half of the 1990s,

has honed its new car marketing to perfection. It knows that, nowadays, people expect money off almost everything but, along with other car makers, it learned that unfettered discounting led to competition among dealers in the same marque, and often unsettled customers, who felt reluctant to commit because there might be a still better deal somewhere else.

Now, therefore, the price deal, the finance rate and all the other details are there for all to see, under 'Latest

offers' on the Mercedes-Benz UK website. It's what you'll be offered, whichever Mercedes-Benz Retailer you go to, take it or leave it.

What about 'car brokers', you say? If the timing is right they may be able to offer something extra, but remember that if you do business with a broker you are still buying the car from a Mercedes-Benz Retailer, which limits the scope somewhat.

Mercedes' deals publicised online are locked into its Agility finance package, which is a 'personal contract purchase' (PCP) arrangement. You defer a significant proportion of the cost of the car until the end of the

Unless you are paying in full with cash, PCP is the obvious way to finance a new car

contract (typically three years), after which you have various options, including paying this 'balloon' and keeping the car, but most customers hand the car back and take out a contract on a new one.

Unless you are paying in full with cash, a PCP agreement is the obvious way to finance a new car, and widely taken up, due to the monthly payments being about half those of traditional hire purchase (HP) schemes. However, since the financial meltdown it has subtly changed, and if you are considering using PCP you need to be aware of how.

When PCP first appeared in the UK in the early 1990s, the theory was that when the car came back after three years, it would be worth more than the value predicted at the outset, hence the customer would, having made all 36 payments, be left with some equity which could be all or part of the deposit for the next car. But with the recession depressing used car values, few – if any – cars are now worth more than their predicted value, so the customer is left with very little or nothing towards their next car. When, after three years, I took my A-Class – above average condition, below average mileage – back to the dealership, it was valued at £1,000 below the guaranteed residual, so my only sensible option was to refinance the car and keep it, which I did.

Therefore, you need to consider what will happen at the end of the Agility agreement. To switch to another car, you will have to either find a sizeable deposit, or go for a small or zero deposit and make higher monthly payments. Dealers will, of course, do their utmost to get you into another Mercedes, but you don't know what is on offer until near the end of the contract, so there is some uncertainty. One thing they don't want you to do is pay off the

car and keep it – while I refinanced my A-Class through Mercedes-Benz Finance, it no longer offers this facility.

Don't get me wrong, I was happy with my Agility deal (though happier still when I made the last of 72 payments), and would use it again if buying a new Merc. But you really do need to consider the whole life of the deal – not just the highly tempting, up front invitation that affords access to the world's most prestigious car nameplate.



Mercedes' 202-series C-Classes were offered with many different trim lines to capture a larger spread of buyers.

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

AIMING FOR THE TOP



Present at the Mercedes-AMG GT's launch in California, our mystery writer offers his opinion on the company's second in-house developed performance car

The cars on track are on the standard specification tyres," says Tobias Moers, Chairman of the Management Board of Mercedes-AMG GmbH. I'm at the AMG GT launch at the Laguna Seca circuit in California, and Moers is happy to sit and chat in the pitlane as the assembled journalists screeched around the track - with varying degrees of success - while following DTM legend Bernd Schneider.

Bernd's chatty too, and not hanging around, my jape to him that having been here before on the SLS launch, it means the warm up/sighting lap is not so necessary. His hasty, what feels like qualifying pace lap that follows suggests I should keep my mouth shut in future.

There is a real feeling of confidence around the GT, unlike with the SLS - AMG's first attempt at a wholly developed car, launched at the same location. With the SLS, there were many technical presentations, plenty of engineers around, and less focus on just driving the damn thing. That and there was some confusion about whether the SLSs on track were identical to those we had driven on the road. Mutterings of more track biased

suspension settings had the more sceptical among us wondering what else AMG might have done to make the cars drive a bit better.

Moers' statement regarding the tyres is telling in many ways though, and he follows it with, "We want the cars to be representative of how people buy them." Sure, Mercedes-AMG could have fitted the more track biased, optional tyre, but chose not to. The cars on track are Edition 1 versions of the GT S, which means a fixed wing on the back, along with some other small styling tweaks.

Carbon ceramic brakes are a sensible precaution given the hard use the cars are getting on the circuit, but that's it options wise, the only other additions being the numerous GoPro cameras that are inevitable on car launches these days.

The GT has been a long time coming - lighter, nimbler and sharper looking than the SLS, its engine represents a new dawn for

AMG. Is there regret at the loss of the 6.2-litre, naturally aspirated M156 unit that's been AMG's mainstay engine for years now? Not one bit, the four-litre V8 biturbo filling that void with incredible throttle response and the correct, thundering AMG timbre.

In the GT, the company knows it's made a serious contender for the sports car crown, a machine that has got the measure of the ubiquitous Porsche 911. I am perhaps better positioned than most testers to really understand if Affalterbach has the 911 licked, having journeyed here via Willow Springs to drive the new 911 Carrera GTS.

The suggestion that the more powerful AMG GT S might lean more towards delivering a 'grand tourer' experience is utterly blown away on track, where it feels very much the purist sports car. But then on the road it has some GT character, with mighty traction, a generally user friendly demeanour, and the sort of accurate, faithful steering that marks it among the very best in its class.

Those people at Mercedes-AMG have every reason to be confident then, the GT and GT S real triumphs, and having everything they need to fight - and beat - that benchmark in the sports car class, Porsche's 911.

Continuing my discussion with Tobias Moers, he repeats the GT's tag line 'Handcrafted by

racers', which really doesn't sound as ridiculous after experiencing the car on track. The thing is, AMG hasn't forgotten to make it an excellent road going machine at the same time.

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

The company knows it's made a serious contender for the sports car crown



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



LETTERS

STAR
LETTER

ONE OF THE BEST

I am writing in response to the article in the November 2014 issue about your C55 AMG Estate.

I used to own a 2005 C55 AMG saloon. I purchased the car in late 2008 with 21,000 miles on the clock from a Mercedes dealer in Atlanta, Georgia. The car was a one-owner vehicle with a black exterior and Alpaca Grey leather interior.

For the entire time I owned the car, it was absolutely perfect with no reliability issues until the very end. The M113 V8 is a masterpiece. If you do oil changes every 5,000 miles, flush fluids regularly, and carry out preventative maintenance the car will treat you well.

Sadly, my one mistake was not performing a transmission service and last year, with 175,000 miles on the clock, the transmission finally started slipping and locking itself in limp home mode.

At first I thought it was the conductor plate, but it wasn't. I looked into replacing the



transmission but it was not economically viable given the car's value. Much to my sadness, I had to say goodbye to her.

In my opinion, the 203-series C55 AMG is one of the finest cars ever to emerge from Affalterbach. If you maintain the car properly and treat it carefully, it will bring you years of amazing and reliable driving pleasure. I replaced my C55 with a one-owner, 2006, C219 CLS55 AMG with the AMG performance pack, silver paintwork and black leather upholstery.

Your Brilliant Silver, S203 C55 is beautiful, and I am so thrilled to read about a car like my old AMG. It brought back many wonderful memories.

Christopher Hanrahan, USA

MODIFIED S-CLASS

I was surfing the internet and discovered your website! I just thought I would send a couple of pictures of my 420SEL (below), which I have modified and owned since December 2000.

The colour is Mercedes-Benz's Nickel Green, and the stainless steel exhaust system was hand made by a chap in Lytham St Annes, Lancashire. The whole car has been lowered by two inches and sits on Spax sports springs. Although I've lost some of the

original ride comfort, the handling is now far better round corners.

The steering wheel was hand made by Italian craftsmen and matches the dash, as does the gearstick. There's also stainless kickplates with 'Mercedes-Benz' script that glows blue at night.

The 19-inch alloys are made by Koya, and I've added trim above the wheelarches, along with some carefully applied silicon sealant! There is also a non standard front grille and clear headlamp lenses. The car is not used in the rain and

always garaged, so underneath remains totally rust free.

A young technician at a tyre shop asked me the age of the car, and when I replied that it is 26 years old, he realised it was older than him! I told him how long I'd had it, and explained that it had only failed one MOT (due to a broken spring). You can't beat Mercedes-Benz build quality.

Gary Miller, via email

TYRED OUT

As a regular reader of your magazine, and once owner of a CLS63 AMG, I had to comment on the November issue's Merc Man article, which mentioned Mercedes' decision to not supply a full size spare wheel anymore.

This cost me dearly when I had a serious tyre blowout in my CLS on the M6 motorway one beautiful summer morning near Lancaster Services. Due to a line of articulated lorries, it took a while before I could move across the

motorway and access the hard shoulder. So by the time I came to a stop, the tyre was literally in two halves and all Mercedes-Benz supplied was a can of sealant spray and a tyre pump. Under such circumstances, with the tyre in two separate sections, the sealant and pump were no use at all.

Fortunately, I was on my own, for once, and had an overnight bag in the boot. But I was still stuck on the motorway for three hours before a flatbed truck arrived to transport the Mercedes and myself home, with a replacement tyre costing £300, plus a further £150 for transport.

From a safety point of view, it makes me shiver to think I might have had my family with me, and as a result of this experience the car has now been sold. I will never purchase another vehicle without a spare wheel, even though this is the only tyre blowout I have had in 50 years of motoring.

Malcolm Parlane, via email



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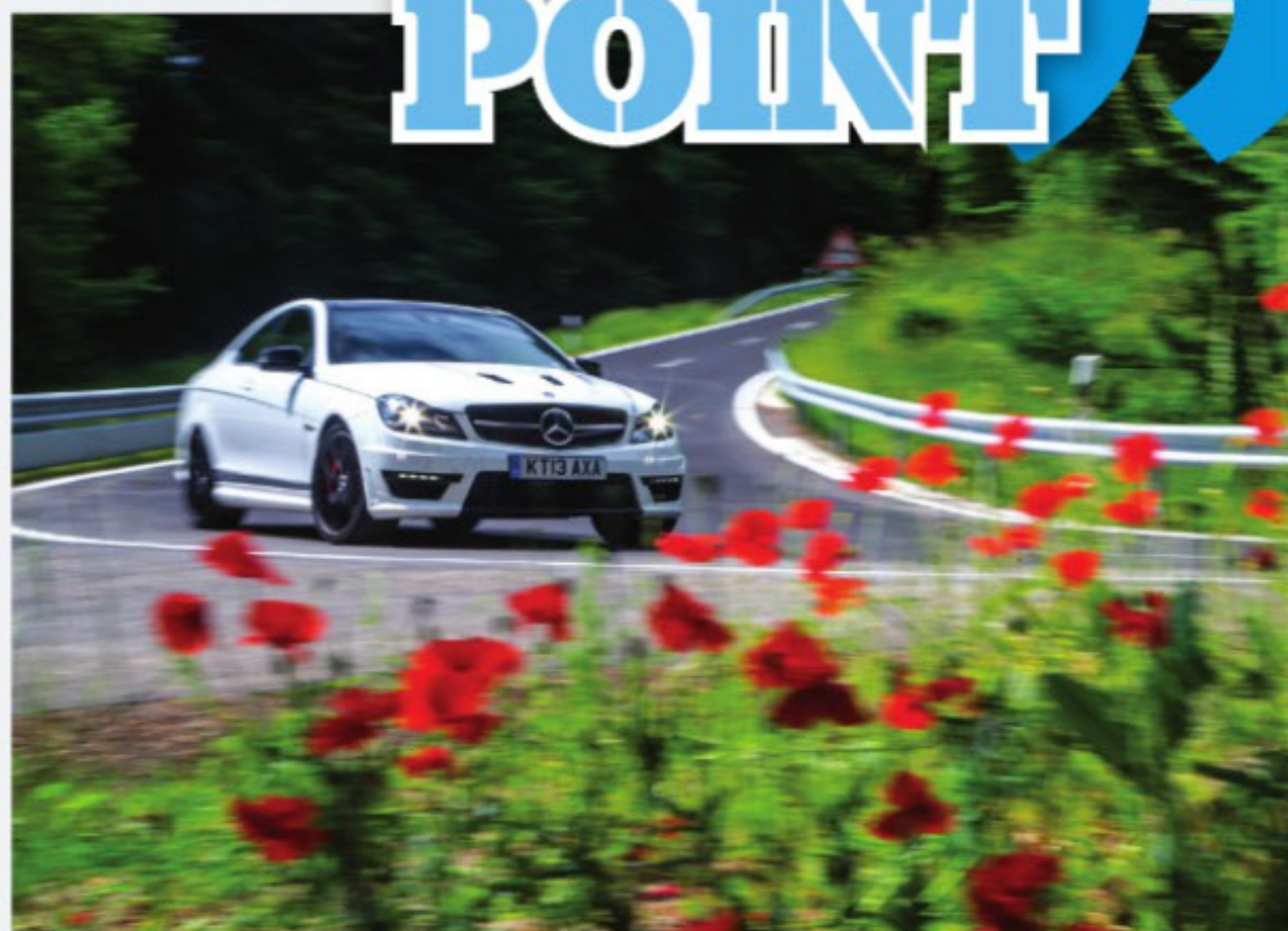
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TALKING POINT



This month's Talking Point... What has been your Mercedes-Benz related highlight of 2014?

"The Mercedes-AMG GT. Much anticipated since last year."
Dilshan Gimhana de Mel

"Tough choice between the AMG GT, S65 AMG Coupe and
the Mercedes-AMG Formula 1 championship clean sweep,
but I think the F1 wins it." **Carlos El Chacal**

"Buying my first Mercedes. It may be an eight-year old C-Class
estate, but I'm unlikely to go back to normal cars." **William Roberts**

"The unveiling of the new GT after a long wait." **@Gary5Edwards**

"Buying a W111 coupe. What could top that?!" **@ObiwanKenobinil**

Take part in **Talking Point** every month on Facebook and Twitter.
See the bottom of page 24 for our respective websites!

MERCSPOTTER



"This is a 1967 Mercedes 230," says reader Frans Willemse. "The
paintwork and upholstery are totally original, and this picture was
taken at a POMC gathering in Pretoria, South Africa. I have inherited
this Mercedes-Benz from my father, who was the first owner. It has
110,000 miles on the clock and is still running well."

Seen an interesting Mercedes or caught one in an unusual situation? Send a
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Rare Moss Green, matching hardtop,
black soft top, cream sport check
interior, automatic gearbox, ABS,
electric windows, fire ext, original alloy
wheels, FSH, 57,000m **£26,950**



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**



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**



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**



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**



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**



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**



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**



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**



230E Saloon 1985B

Arctic White, blue cloth interior, 4
speed auto gearbox, manual windows,
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A look back at Mercedes that deserved more recognition for their sometimes hidden qualities - this month...

WHY I LOVE THE... C320 SPORTS COUPE

Based on the 203-series saloon, the C-Class sports coupe promised a less expensive route to two-door Mercedes-Benz ownership

WORDS SHANE O'DONOGHUE IMAGES DAIMLER AG

MANY CRITICS have put down the first compact coupe version of the Mercedes-Benz C-Class – officially called the C-Class sports coupe – as a bad idea, but its relatively high residual values today suggest that buyers still appreciate its mix of badge prestige and distinctive styling, particularly at the rear. It landed at the end of 2000, rivalling BMW's 3-Series Compact, though many thought it looked more attractive, thanks to bespoke front and rear designs that separated it from the W203 on which it was based.

Rear headroom was at a premium, but this car was never designed for those seeking practicality. Which is why the pick of the range was the C320 model. Behind the grille – with inset three-pointed star – in this version was shoehorned the R170 SLK's sonorous, 3.2-litre, petrol V6.

And that, if I'm being honest, is the main reason for loving it. By today's standards, there's nothing special about this unit – it put out 215bhp and 229lb ft of torque in a fairly lazy fashion – but the car was light enough at 1,525kg, and so it managed 0-62mph in 7.8 seconds and a barroom bragging rights 152mph top speed with an automatic gearbox. Decent numbers by any measure for a

compact car with such a premium badge on the nose and rump.

Indeed, that naturally aspirated engine really suited the sports coupe's rear-wheel drive chassis, and the long throttle travel and smooth, linear power delivery revealed how well balanced it could be. Admittedly, if you like driving a bit quicker, you need to seek out a car with the Evolution sports package to experience the car at its best, as that brought lowered sports suspension, which eradicates the regular car's tendency to float about mid corner. A panoramic glass roof was included with this package too, which complemented the darkened rear end very well.

A FLYING START

My first experience of this car was from the passenger seat of a friend's new pride and joy. He is a Merc man through and through and, due to his job, changed to a new model every nine months. So he had no qualms with exploring the line up in full, and treated himself to the UK's top of the range version of the sports coupe.

I'll never quite forget an 'enthusiastic' demonstration of the car's performance through the Northamptonshire countryside late one night. The evocative exhaust sound stuck with me, but I came away more impressed by



Mercedes-Benz C320 Sports Coupe (CL203)

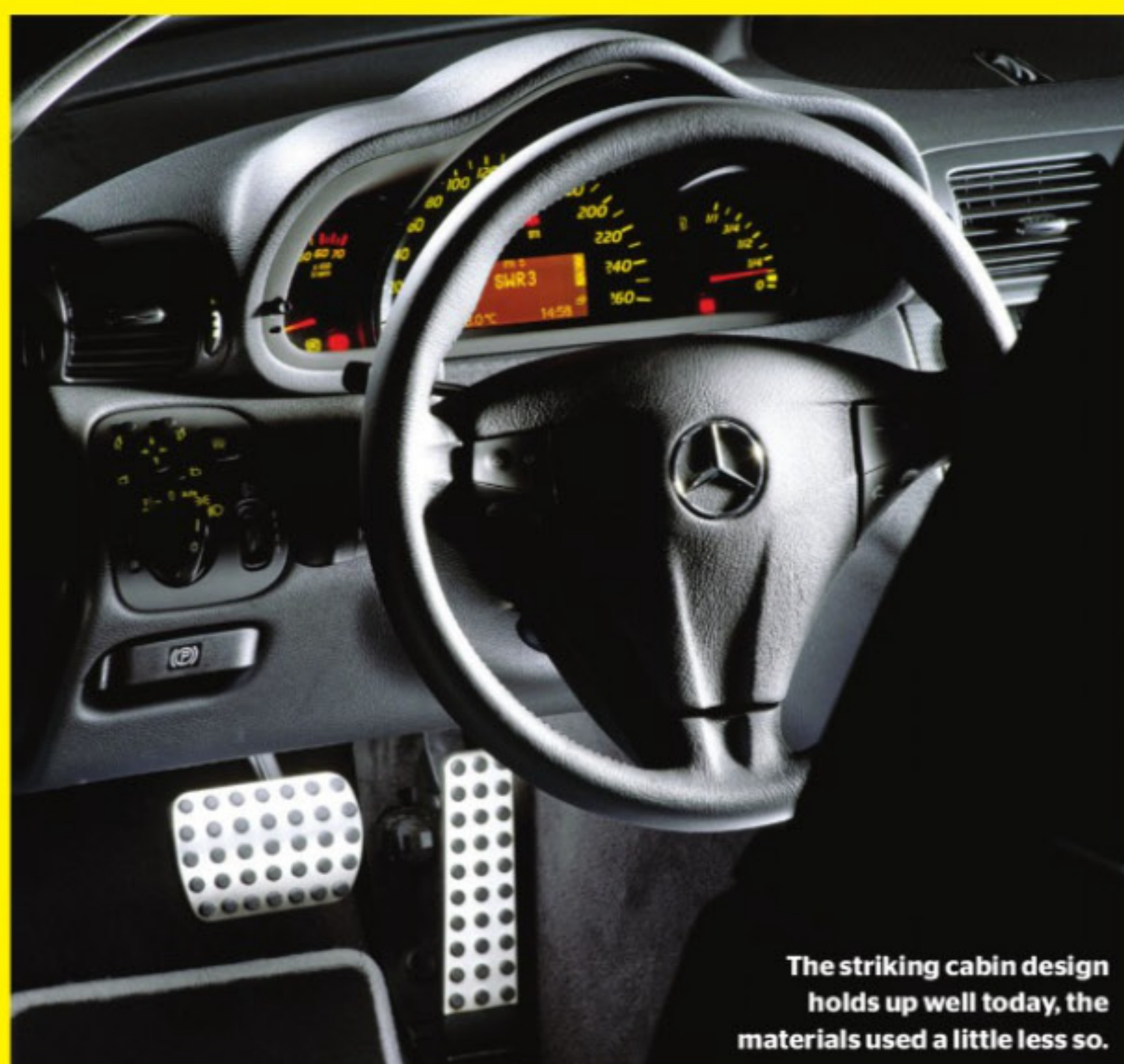
ENGINE M112 3,199cc V6
POWER 215bhp@5,700rpm
TORQUE 229lb ft@3,000-4,600rpm
TRANSMISSION 5-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,525kg
0-62MPH 7.8sec
TOP SPEED 152mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 26.7mpg
CO2 EMISSIONS 260g/km
YEARS PRODUCED 2002-2005

Figures for a standard car; fuel consumption according to NEDC combined

◁△ The five-speed auto does not feel out of place in this athletic C-Class.

◁ Metal covers with rubber studs for pedals of Evolution spec cars.

▽ Sports suspension and 17-inch alloy wheels also came with Evolution spec.



The striking cabin design holds up well today, the materials used a little less so.



the competence of the car's electronic safety systems, and its brakes. My buddy pushed the car to its ragged edge and it just clung on, shrugging off his excesses and keeping us on the road.

Nine months later, he was sorry to say farewell to the C320 (I imagine his wife was relieved), but he admitted it was probably for the best that it went. Not only was it more than quick enough to lose his licence with, it also drank fuel at a frankly scary pace. The official combined cycle figure of 26mpg was pure fantasy, to him at least.

THE AUTOMATIC CHOICE

Although the V6 petrol is more of a driver's car than all but the C30 CDI AMG (not sold in the UK), it's still worth going for the five-speed auto over the standard six-speed manual. The five-speed is now thought of as quite slow-witted, but it was just fine when it was new, and with this V6 engine you'd be more tempted to use the

My friend pushed the car to its ragged edge and it just clung on, shrugging off his excesses and keeping us on the road

manual function than in most C-Classes. Even if you're not the sort of driver to push on, a well equipped C-Class sports coupe makes a unique proposition in the second hand market.

Without the sports suspension it lacks dynamism, but it's more comfortable and is happy to cruise up and down the motorway in an unstressed manner. The interior

feels solid, and although the rear is a little tight for adults, the boot is huge – plus it can be expanded by dropping the rear seat backs.

Choose a C320 in a dark metallic colour and with a nice set of original wheels and the panoramic roof, and it will still turn heads. Start it up and the burble from the exhaust will turn more. What's not to love?



The M112 powered C320 was replaced by the 268bhp, M272 engined C350 in 2005.

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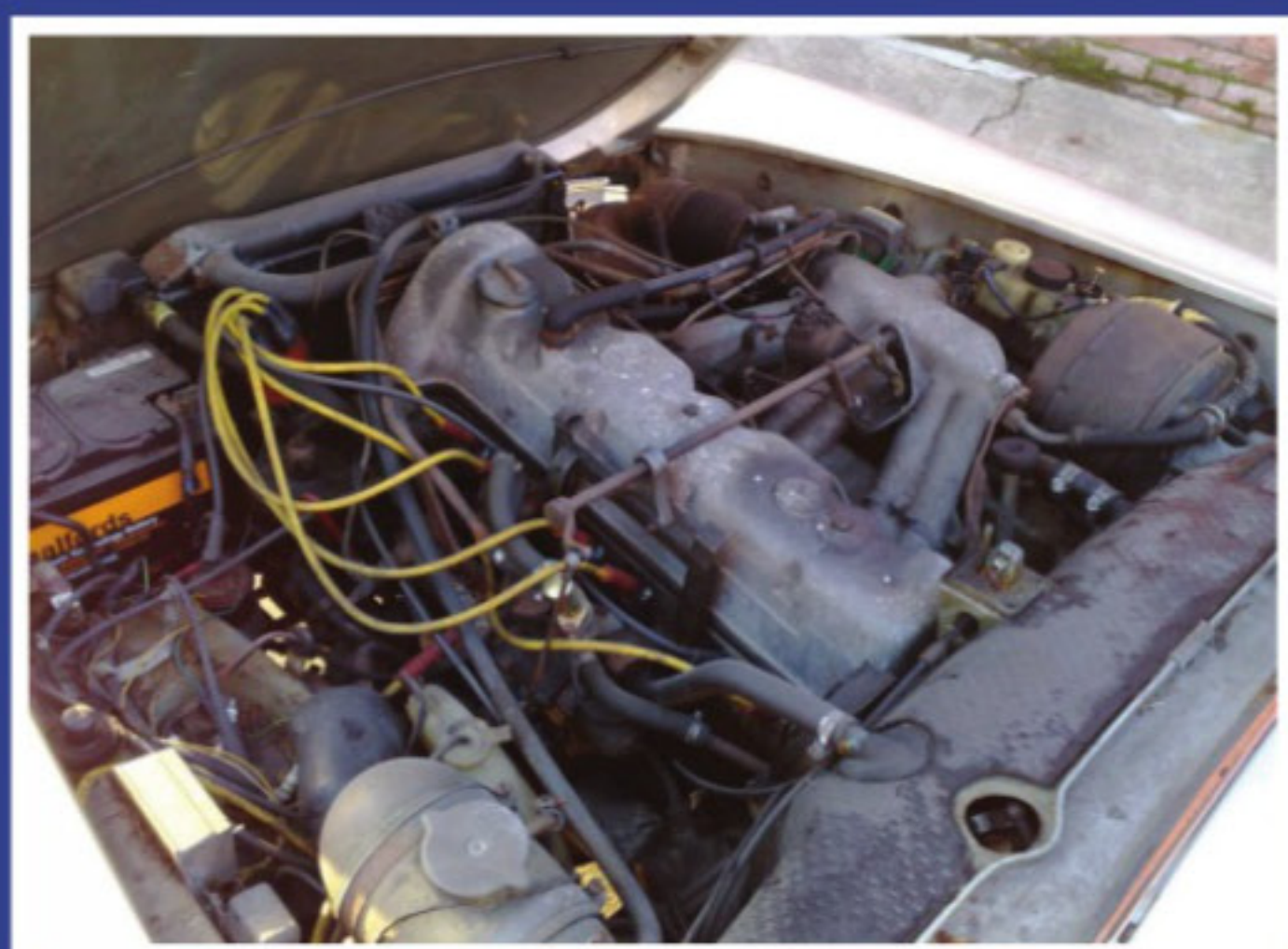
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DEVELOPED
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TO THE HYPE?
WE HEADED TO
CALIFORNIA AND
ITS CHALLENGING
LAGUNA SECA
RACE CIRCUIT TO
FIND OUT...

WORDS AND IMAGES IAN KUAH

DELIVER



W HERE THE naturally aspirated SLS AMG roared, snarled and thundered its way around Laguna Seca when I drove it here on the launch five years ago, the new AMG GT presents an altogether more polished and cultured face to the same task.

More cultured does not mean slower, and AMG's DTM ace, Bernd Schneider, told me his first impressions indicate that the 503bhp GT S (the GT produces 456bhp), on its standard Michelin Pilot Super Sport rubber, is as fast here as the SLS Black Series with its sticky Cup 2 tyres, which means a lap time of around 1min 37sec. "We are going to try the optional, AMG GT specific, semi slick Cup 2 tyres while we are here," he said. "I estimate they will shave a

further 1.5 seconds off, which would bring the lap time down to the 1min 35sec area."

AMG had specific cars for road and track use, the latter all being the GT S Edition 1 model with the fixed rear wing that provides around 10 per cent more downforce than the active rear spoiler on the normal GT and GT S. Luckily, the first GT S I tried on track had perfect tyres, and the car's handling, grip and poise were simply amazing. In combination with power steering that is on the heavy side of medium weighted, but perfectly dialled into the chassis response rate, the front end turned in on cue, homing in on apexes like a hungry shark, while the back end followed precisely with huge amounts of mechanical grip to contain the shedload of torque provided by the mighty twin-turbo V8.

You have to manage the throttle to avoid breaking loose those big rear tyres, especially as there is no turbo lag to speak of from this strong hearted, responsive new motor. The revised rear axle design squeezes every last drop of mechanical grip out of the standard Michelin



Pilot Super Sport tyres, and helps stability when you are pushing the strong, fade free ceramic brakes to the limit coming off the fast straights here. Providing such an impressive performance with these standard road tyres, I would love to try the GT S on the stickier Michelin Cup 2 rubber.

CONTROL YOURSELF

The GT S has a more precise, electronic rear differential as standard (the GT's is mechanical), and this and the optional active engine and gearbox mounts work seamlessly in the background. Together with the stiff torque tube and the new rear axle geometry, the combination ensures a noticeable lack of lateral



The GT is the same width as the original SLS coupe, but slightly taller and shorter.



JUST THE FACTS

	AMG GT (C190)	AMG GT S (C190)
ENGINE	M178 3,982cc V8 biturbo	M178 3,982cc V8 biturbo
POWER	456bhp@6,000rpm	503bhp@6,250rpm (6,000-6,500rpm)
TORQUE	442lb ft@1,600-5,000rpm	479lb ft@1,750-4,750rpm (1,750-5,000rpm)
TRANSMISSION	7-speed auto, RWD	7-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT	1,540kg	1,570kg
0-62MPH	4.0sec	3.8sec
TOP SPEED	189mph	193mph
CO2 EMISSIONS	216g/km	219g/km
FUEL CONSUMPTION	30.4mpg	30.1mpg
YEARS PRODUCED	2014-on	2014-on

Figures for cars as pictured - rpm figures in brackets are for a GT S with the optional AMG Dynamic Plus package as tested; fuel consumption according to NEDC combined; top speeds are electronically limited



△ Exquisite seats with built-in headrests.

◁ New style dials with large central display.

▷▷ Dynamic Select offers fine tuning of the car.



play or lost motion in the chassis under all dynamic conditions. This feeling of purpose instils immense confidence in the driver right from the start. Whether it is a slow turn or fast sweeping bend, the handling and grip are always on your side. This is a car that continues to delight the keen driver as the miles roll away under its lightweight wheels.

Equally impressive is the way the suspension 'breathes' over bumps. We encountered some very challenging winding hill roads en route to Laguna Seca, with mid corner bumps aplenty. Where lesser cars would have been punted off line by some of these undulations, the GT S continued to surprise as its firm suspension and wide tyres refused to be deflected in any way,

THE NEW AMG GIVES YOU OPTIONS

shape or form. Meanwhile, the ability of the superb spring and damper settings to round off short, sharp bumps, whether mid corner or in a straight line, clearly shows that AMG's chassis engineers are at the top of their game.

The AMG GT chassis borrows heavily from the SLS. This is no bad thing, as its transaxle layout with a double-wishbone at each corner, and the same 47/53 per cent front/rear weight

distribution for better traction in all conditions, confers an ideal balance of handling and traction for a front-mid engine, rear-wheel drive performance car.

A WORTHY SUCCESSOR

While the front suspension benefits from a few detail refinements, the rear axle is where the big improvements have taken place. One of the reasons a bespoke race car has such good handling is the 1:1 ratio of wheel to suspension movement often achieved with horizontally opposed springs and dampers across the chassis. Packaging constraints prevent such an arrangement being used on a normal road car unless it is a mid engine two seater.

▷ However, the AMG chassis engineers have managed to work out a change in rear axle hardware that delivers a 10:9 ratio, which is close enough to 1:1 to deliver significant benefits to the geometry and elastokinematics of the revised rear axle.

This greater geometrical purity was achieved by using longer lower wishbones to reduce the deflection angle under bump conditions, while moving the chassis mounting points of the upper wishbones outwards to meet the revised uprights. The positive effect of this simple change is manifested in the better ride and handling of the GT/S. Where a long drive in an SLS AMG leaves you a bit breathless, and your ears a little beaten up by the 'always on' soundtrack of its M159 V8, the new AMG sports car gives you options.

Apart from its vastly superior ride quality, there are also two sides to the GT's V8 biturbo, which allow the car to play long distance cruiser on the one hand and weapons grade track day star on the other. The all new M178 3,982cc litre, 90-degree V8 biturbo AMG motor boasts two turbochargers placed within the vee of the engine, and a dry sump configuration.

POWER OF EIGHT

An undersquare motor with a bore x stroke of 83.0x92.0mm, the hand built, AMG M178 unit has a 10.5:1 compression ratio and 1.2bar of boost in the GT, meaning a wholesome 456bhp at 6,000rpm, and 442lb ft of torque spread between 1,600 and 5,000rpm.

The more powerful GT S version has 503bhp at 6,250rpm with 479lb ft of torque from 1,750 to 4,750rpm. With the AMG Dynamic Plus package as we drove it at Laguna Seca, peak power is maintained from 6,000 to 6,500rpm, and peak torque from 1,750 to 5,000rpm.

The 1,570 kg GT S blasts from 0-62mph in 3.8 seconds and on to an electronically limited 193mph, whereas the 1,540kg GT takes four seconds to hit 62mph and tops out at 189mph. The numbers alone, however, do not adequately describe the smooth punch of the twin-turbo motor, which distributes its torque more evenly across the rev range than the naturally aspirated M159 V8 in the SLS.

Where the M159 motor assaulted both the tarmac and you with its larger than life personality, the new M178 motor speaks more quietly but carries an even bigger stick. The AMG GT also does bombastic when you open the taps fully, but the counterpoint is quiet and relaxed high speed cruising, or even cantering along at suburban speeds with a level of refinement that was simply never written into the SLS script. Hard acceleration brings the characteristic AMG V8 growl to the fore, while the revised AMG Speedshift DCT



Air is channelled to the turbos through clever bonnet insulation.



The M178 will also be used in the new C63 AMG models.





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“ THE REVISED AMG
GEARBOX UPSHIFTS A
SIGNIFICANT 30 PER
CENT FASTER THAN
BEFORE ”



◁ The finely appointed cabin manages to feel sporty yet spacious.

◁ A retractable rear wing as on the SLS Coupe and Roadster.

▷ seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox upshifts a significant 30 per cent faster than before.

Car enthusiasts have an unhealthy obsession with numbers, one of them being the speed of paddleshift gearbox upshifts. However, the fact is that beyond a certain point, an upshift is so fast that in the practical terms of making a road car accelerate faster, it becomes irrelevant beyond bar talk. The AMG DCT gearbox in the GT is now at that point, and the speed and smoothness with which it transitions to the next higher ratio puts as big a smile on your face, as does the deep chested sound of the twin-turbo V8 singing for its supper in between these lightning fast shifts.

A big gripe both the press and many owners had with the SLS gearbox was the recalcitrant software that steadfastly refused to deliver second gear downshifts under hard braking towards a slow bend. During that car's launch a few years ago, this was particularly evident when braking hard towards the 90-degree left hander at Laguna Seca that takes you onto the main straight past the pits. Here, the SLS AMG (and the C63 AMG Coupe Black Series, for that matter) both required two or three pulls of the left paddle before they would engage second gear. That blot on AMG's copybook is now thankfully consigned to history, and the revised gearbox does just as well going down its ratios as up them.

FINE TUNED

As a front-mid engine car, the transaxle equipped AMG GT gives away nothing to the best mid engine supercars in dynamic terms, and bests them for overall handling balance and luggage carrying ability. After all, what mid engine supercar comes remotely close to being able to carry two people and a decent



“ IT TAKES THE JUNIOR LEAGUE SUPERCAR GENRE TO THE NEXT LEVEL ”

amount of luggage across a continent? In its time, the SLS AMG was one impressive machine. But compared to the sleeker, faster and much cheaper AMG GT S, it now feels like a relic from the days of supercars past. While I would not exactly call the SLS two dimensional, the GT is a far more rounded car.

To me, the SLS AMG felt like a work in progress during the first half of its lifespan, but the AMG GT leaves the starting blocks a very complete and accomplished all round machine. With so many facets already polished to near perfection, it takes the junior league supercar genre to the next level.

At the end of a long day of driving on road and track, I drove right past our hotel entrance, and went up and down the road for a few miles either way – twice – just to prolong my seat time in the AMG GT. There aren't many cars that would inspire me to do this.



UK market

GT

Launch Late 2015

Price £97,195

Equipment highlights

19-inch wheels, mechanical limited-slip differential, switchable exhaust note, AMG sports suspension, Comand Online with 8.4-inch screen

GT S

Launch April 2015

Price £110,495

Equipment highlights

19-inch front/20-inch rear alloys, red brake calipers and larger discs, electronically controlled LSD, AMG Ride Control suspension with three modes (Comfort, Sport and Sport+)

GT S Edition 1

Launch April 2015

Price £122,745

Equipment highlights

Front splitter, fixed rear wing, 19-inch front/20-inch rear alloys in high gloss silver and black, carbon roof, rear diffuser with black exhaust tips, AMG Performance seats with leather/suede upholstery and red stitching

Future variants

A GT3 spec racer has been confirmed, while a roadster, Black Series and Formula 1 Safety Car are rumoured

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*“You’ll hear its name and
in the same instant that
inimitable shape will
appear before you”*



The end of an era

Produced for almost five years, the SLS AMG was not just a landmark car for its maker, but also for the supercar segment as a whole – here is its remarkable story

WORDS ANDREW FRANKEL IMAGES STEVE HALL



THEY CALLED IT Mercedes' first home-grown supercar and it was nothing of the sort. They called it the replacement for the Woking built SLR McLaren and it wasn't that either. But even though it arrived 55 years after Mercedes invented the supercar segment with its 300SL Gullwing, and was made in unlimited quantities (Mercedes won't divulge how many, though just over 500 were sold in the UK) from far less exotic materials and sold for a far less exotic price than the SLR, the SLS AMG felt like one of those very special cars. These are cars that in years to come won't require you to go rummaging in the deep and dark recesses of your brain to recall.

“It came with gullwing doors and aluminium space frame construction just like the original SL back in 1954”

You'll hear its name and in the same instant that inimitable shape will appear before you. It was not just a great Mercedes-Benz, it was one of the great supercars of its era.

Was. How strange to be talking about the SLS AMG in the past tense. Little more than five years ago none of us had even seen one, and now its time has passed.

IN THE BEGINNING

It was in 2008 that it became clear that AMG was to become a fully fledged car manufacturer for the first time. There was nothing official then, indeed the car didn't make its global public debut until the Frankfurt motor show in

September 2009, but by then there had been endless scoop shots in various motoring magazines, on and off the record briefings by company



△ Wheels measure 19 inches up front, 20 inches at the rear.

executives, and even a few prototype drive stories of lightly disguised cars.

But it still took our breath away when we saw it there. Then AMG boss Volker Mornhinweg proudly showed me around it and explained





△ The SLS AMG rockets to this sort of speed in no time at all.

what it meant to his company. "This car is a Mercedes-Benz, but even more than that it is an AMG. When you drive it, you will see it is quite different to any other Mercedes you have driven." Different to the SLR? "Completely."

He was right. While the SLR was an intriguing confection of old and cutting edge technologies (a carbon tub but an ageing engine and ancient five-speed automatic gearbox) whose design was argued over at considerable length by Mercedes-Benz and McLaren, the SLS was more cohesive in every way. Like the man said, this was AMG's car from stem to stern. And the company was pleased with it, so pleased in fact that its chief engineer is now the head of AMG itself...

NO COMPROMISES

It came with gullwing doors and aluminium space frame construction just like the original SL back in 1954, but while the former was unquestionably born from a desire to flaunt Mercedes' heritage, the latter was simply the best material

JUST THE FACTS

SLS AMG COUPE (C197)

ENGINE	M159 6,208cc V8
POWER	563bhp@6,800rpm
TORQUE	479lb ft@4,750rpm
TRANSMISSION	7-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT	1,620kg
0-62MPH	3.8sec
TOP SPEED	197mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION	21.4mpg
CO2 EMISSIONS	308g/km
YEARS PRODUCED	2009-2013

SLS AMG ROADSTER (R197)

ENGINE	M159 6,208cc V8
POWER	563bhp@6,800rpm
TORQUE	479lb ft@4,750rpm
TRANSMISSION	7-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT	1,660kg
0-62MPH	3.8sec
TOP SPEED	197mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION	21.4mpg
CO2 EMISSIONS	308g/km
YEARS PRODUCED	2011-2013

SLS AMG COUPE BLACK SERIES (C197)

ENGINE	M159 6,208cc V8
POWER	622bhp@7,400rpm
TORQUE	468lb ft@5,500rpm
TRANSMISSION	7-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT	1,550kg
0-62MPH	3.6sec
TOP SPEED	196mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION	20.6mpg
CO2 EMISSIONS	321g/km
YEAR PRODUCED	2013

Figures for cars as pictured - the GT/GT Final Edition versions of the coupe and roadster built from 2013 had 583bhp/479lb ft torque; fuel consumption according to NEDC combined





▷ available, a point proved by the fact that the SLS was actually lighter than the carbon fibre SLR that preceded it, and cost less than half the money. The engine was all AMG too. Its 6,208cc V8 was the first engine intended exclusively for AMG products, but for the SLS it was completely redesigned and fitted with the over 120 new components required to make it deliver 563bhp without the aid of turbocharging. The gearbox had seven ratios, but it was a Getrag double-clutch transmission and located between the rear wheels to aid weight distribution and traction. Unequal length double-wishbone suspension was used at every corner, just like a racing car, while vast composite brakes were fitted as standard. It was a very proper thing.

On first acquaintance, the SLS was everything you'd imagined it would be: visually striking yet practical enough to accommodate tall drivers and take holiday luggage. That engine fired with a purposeful snarl, but the car itself was sufficiently quiet and comfortable at a steady speed to make extreme distance driving not only possible, but a pleasure.

WILD ANIMAL

However, there was something the car was not inclined to tell you, not at first. In fact, I am sure some owners have to this day not discovered its secret. But the truth is that when you drove the SLS very fast – and I mean the kind of fast that might require a race track – it was not the quiescent servant you might imagine Mercedes would require this car to be. Simply put, it was a bit of a beast.

This was not an endlessly indulgent machine, set up to make you look like a driving god. It was no drift school toy, but a very serious weapon and needed to be treated as such. Those that did discovered a car that was faster even than its vast power suggested (when *Autocar* tested it, it was quicker around its handling course than the more powerful and lighter Ferrari 599 GTB), those that failed to accord it the respect it deserved got bitten. I didn't connect with the SLS when I first drove it because I felt it should

be a car that adapts to the driver and not the other way around. But once I'd stamped my foot a bit and driven the car the way it wanted, no, the way it commanded to be driven, it was simply mesmerising.

But having spent all that time and money creating the SLS, AMG felt disinclined to rest on its laurels. A year after it was launched, AMG unveiled the FIA GT3 racing version which is the only SLS that can still be bought,

the new AMG GT racer not ready until the 2016 season. And it has been monstrously successful, not just on the race track or commercially, but in building the Mercedes-AMG brand. Almost 100 have been sold.

Few could have predicted the next move. At the Geneva show in 2011, Mercedes-Benz showed an SLS powered by electric motors at each corner and, what's more, it said it would put the car into production.

The car was developed and demonstrated as the SLS AMG Electric Drive with a total of 741bhp and 737lb ft of torque for a range of 155 miles. And a few indeed were delivered (including one in the UK) and will continue to serve as a test bed for the electric cars in Mercedes' future. One customer has two.

ZERO EMISSIONS

The version after that was easier to see coming, indeed we knew there'd be a convertible SLS for as long as we'd known there'd be an SLS. And of course, those of us who are predisposed to being sniffy about open cars for their lack of torsional rigidity, had our pencils nicely sharpened in time for its arrival in 2011.

We need not have bothered: in some ways the SLS AMG Roadster was even better than the coupe. It was no slower, weighed just 40kg more and felt as structurally sound as any convertible I'd driven up to that point. What it unavoidably lacked in gullwing doors it more than made up by letting its occupants hear that incredible engine in full voice. And there were even those who said its slightly softer suspension improved its handling.

I would not go that far myself, but it was undoubtedly easier to drive, if a little less precise, which is probably how a convertible should be. And with the thick fabric roof up, it felt pretty much like the coupe too.

Another year came and another SLS with it, this time the promisingly entitled SLS GT. At first glance it looked like a fairly minor update with a further 20bhp for the engine and a single tenth of a second carved off the 0-62mph time, which now stood at 3.7 seconds. In fact, it ▷



△ GT spec SLSs boasted adjustable AMG Ride Control suspension.

△△ Outputs ranged from 563bhp for the first coupe, to 622bhp for the Black.

“In some ways the SLS AMG Roadster was even better than the coupe”

I bought one...

Paul Paney bought this immaculate, early SLS coupe five months ago and has already doubled the mileage on its clock to 5,000. "I'll probably calm down a bit next year, but for now I'm still having too much fun."

A serial Mercedes man, in addition to his ML and his wife's A-Class he owns a W221 S500, an R107 300SL and an R231 SL500. After them, Paul says the SLS feels

"quite hard core, but being a Mercedes-Benz I know the depth of its engineering and that it will still be easy to live with. I've had Ferraris and they were nightmares to drive on a regular basis."

He also reckons the SLS has already hit the bottom of its depreciation curve and that prices for good, clean cars like his have already started to rise. He admits the SLS GT feels more alive than

his car, but he's had the GT gearbox software upgrade and that is enough for him.

Looking at the Black Series parked next to his car he says, "I'm sure it's wonderful for those who want to drive flat out all the time, but it's not a car for me." And looking at his example, surely the most pure and beautiful of all the SLSs, glinting in the sunlight, I can hardly say I blame him.





The Black Series sports extra aero addenda, but all SLSs feel highly stable at high speed.

▷ was a subtle but comprehensive upgrade featuring new transmission software, adjustable AMG suspension, a new suite of wheels and an Alcantara themed interior. To drive, it didn't feel that different to the standard car, rather it felt like one that had spent a more than usual amount of time in the gym, honing and toning.

But the last laugh was by far the loudest. The 2013 SLS AMG Coupe Black Series may not have been quite the most powerful Mercedes offered for sale (that title belongs to the 661bhp SL65 Black Series), but with 622bhp, dozens of kilograms shaved off its weight through the use of materials as exotic as carbon fibre for the body panels and titanium for the exhaust, plus race derived suspension, a serious aero package and a lowered final drive, it was unquestionably the fastest. Curiously, it was also the easiest to drive.

And that, save the cosmetically enhanced but mechanically standard Final Edition of which just 10 found homes in the UK, was that.

Mercedes-Benz, or Mercedes-AMG as the sports car arm is now known, moved on to the wondrous AMG GT and that is another story (read our first drive starting on page 30).

GLOBAL SUPERSTAR

But the SLS is not one of those cars that simply comes and goes. For AMG it was, and will probably remain, the most significant car in its history, as its first not to be based on a pre-existing product. As a device in its own right, you can argue the toss over whether it was preferable to a Ferrari 599 GTB and that in itself proves the car's success. The fact it could,

at the very least, hold its head high alongside the flagship model of the world's most famous supercar constructor while at the same time being as easy to live with as, well, a Mercedes-Benz, is the car's towering achievement.

Remember too that without the SLS there would have been no AMG GT, as large chunks of its structure and suspension are directly influenced by SLS design. And if you are lucky enough to drive the GT, you'll not doubt the identity of its parent. But whatever lofty heights the GT goes on to reach, never doubt where that journey started, for it was right here with the SLS: the original AMG supercar. 🏁



"For AMG it was, and will probably remain, the most significant car in its history"

◁ The M159 V8 with four cams, two headers and dry sump lubrication.

Exotic materials reduced the Black's weight, its ferocious delivery highly intimidating.





Ambassador, you're spoiling us

This stately Mercedes 280SEL spent the first seven years of its life transporting the ambassador of the Vietnam Embassy in London – now restored, it is back on The City's streets once more

WORDS MIKE RENAUT IMAGES MATT RICHARDSON



“The best thing is that the car is completely rust free - the inner arches and boot floor are all perfect”

“Designer Paul Bracq had no easy task when it came to creating a replacement for the popular Fintail models”



SOMETIMES, A CAR WILL EXPERIENCE a dramatic fall from grace. This stretched Mercedes-Benz went from transporting heads of states and prime ministers, to sitting under a tarpaulin on a driveway in west London. Fortunately, for every classic car owner who cannot get a car back on the road, there are enthusiasts like Shan Habib and his business partner Ketan Hirani who can – and do.

By day, these gentlemen run a business installing hideaway televisions in some of the country's most exclusive residences. By night, they are scouring the classified adverts looking for old cars to buy and 'save'. When *Mercedes Enthusiast* visited them, along with a nice R107 SL they had a pair of these long-wheelbase W108/109 saloons, both black and both right-hand drive. The W109 was a 3.5 V8 in somewhat more rusty and battered condition.

"We tend to buy cars we like, do a little bit of work if it's needed, drive them around and then sell them after a few months, or maybe a year, and try something else," Ketan explains. "It helps having storage space at work. We like a bit of everything, but Mercedes-Benz cars are always a favourite."

The 280SEL you see here is just such a car. "We had known about this one for a year before it came up for sale," Shan remembers. "I drove past it while it sat on a driveway near Heathrow, and quickly realised it had a longer

wheelbase. In fact, at first I thought it was a 600 Grosser. It was never driven, so we intended to knock on the door of the house and ask to buy it, but then I saw it advertised for sale online. The original plan was to drop in the engine from a 560SEL we had found, but that turned out to be a lot more work than we first realised. Plus this 280SEL has a nice history.

"When we got the car, the engine was running very roughly and I started to wonder if we'd made a bad decision, especially when the transmission coolant pipe sheared on the journey home," Shan explains. "However, the car just needed a long drive to loosen up again. Aside from that pipe, I don't think it's really needed anything done to it mechanically."

JUST THE FACTS



Mercedes-Benz 280SEL (W108)

ENGINE M130 2,778cc 6-cyl

POWER 158bhp@5,500rpm

TORQUE 177lb ft@4,250rpm

TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD

WEIGHT 1,525kg

0-62MPH 11.2sec

TOP SPEED 115mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 23.0mpg

YEARS PRODUCED 1968-1971

Figures for a 1971 280SEL as pictured; fuel consumption determined at 3/4 of top speed (not more than 110km/h, 68mph) plus 10 per cent

A NEW LIFE

That is likely the legacy of having owners who cared for the car, and a stack of paperwork accompanying the Mercedes is testimony to this. "It was ordered new through a UK Mercedes-Benz dealer on Great West Road, London, then supplied to the Vietnam Embassy on Victoria Road," Shan reveals. "It was registered with the numberplate 'RVN 1', which I imagine stood for 'Republic of Vietnam'. The embassy obviously kept the car in perfect condition and it sold the Mercedes in 1978 with around 75,000 miles showing on the odometer."

The car's second owner was a man named Paul Blake. He took the car to Jersey and kept it until 2001, when it was sold to Le

▷ Gearlever on steering column; no rev counter.

▷▷ Very basic Blaupunkt radio within the dash.

▷▽ Dignitaries would have liked the extra space.



Riche Automobile Restorers. The company restored the Mercedes and Mr Le Riche used the car for some 10 years until it was sold to an elderly local gentleman who brought it back to London. Sadly, he was then told he could no longer drive due to medical reasons and the car sat, presumably on that Heathrow driveway, until it was purchased by Shan and Ketan.

"It came with the original factory build data card, service books and a stack of MOTs and bills," Shan says. "The best thing is that it is completely rust free – the inner arches and boot floor are all perfect." Another great piece of history that stayed with the car is the Metropolitan Police Car Pass badge issued to the Vietnamese ambassador which presumably allowed the Mercedes to be parked anywhere and at any time. "That would be worth more than its weight in gold if it could be used in London today!" Laughs Shan. Sadly, no one currently working at the embassy remembers this Mercedes-Benz. "Too many years have passed," explained the Vietnamese consular in his polite and brief reply to my email.

Shan himself is certainly no stranger to Mercedes-Benz ownership. "I've had a 1967 250SE 3.5 V8, an early W114 280CE, a W115 220 and another 220 that was a Bernese rally car, plus an R129, in fact five or six 1990s SLs," he explains. I'm about to comment, but it transpires Shan is only pausing for breath. "Then I had a 124 saloon, a 124 coupe that I really wish I'd never sold, a 230TE, a 280E, which was a one-owner car, and a gold 380SL. I am never in a rush to sell any Mercedes, I love them all. I'm trying to convince my girlfriend to buy an SLK. I've owned four Porsche 993s and I currently also have a rare, right-hand drive, 'boat-tail' Alfa Spider 1300, but I always come back to owning Mercedes. I'm part of the younger generation that loves older cars."

Designer Paul Bracq had no easy task when it came to creating a replacement for the popular Fintail models. Although handsome, the three-box design of the W108/109 took none of the previous model's styling risks, and the car was also criticised for inadequate brakes, poor demisters and a lack of rear legroom. Praise outshone any criticism though, with the comfortable seats and ride, and confidence inspiring road holding all finding favour with magazine testers of the day. It must be said that the car's lines have stood the test of time.

COMING OF AGE

When the W109 300SEL was introduced in 1966, it was presumed by many that the 'L' in its name referred to the car's 100mm longer wheelbase. In fact, it represented the car's air suspension or 'Luftfederung'. In 1968, when the 2.8-litre 280SEL was introduced, that car did not feature air suspension, so this time the 'L' did indeed mean a long-wheelbase chassis. The

△ M130 was a new unit for the 108/109 range.

△△ The SEL had a 100mm longer body than the SE.



◁ Paperwork reveals this car's intriguing past.

▷ Shan Habib has since sold this 280SEL.

▷ extra 100mm of rear legroom may not sound much, but it is very obvious when sitting in the back of Shan's SEL.

The 280SEL used the then new M130 engine and was one of four new models introduced at the beginning of 1968 – the others being the 280S, the 280SE and the 300SEL, all of which used the 2.8 litre engine. The 280SEL came with power assisted steering as standard, but the radio aerial and windows remained manually controlled unless electric operation was specified as an option.

Out of around 360,000 W108 models built, 91,051 were 280SEs, but only 8,250 were 280SELs. The SEL version of the 280 was only on sale for three years and three months before production ended in April 1971. Although the rest of the range, including the other 280SE variants, would continue to be available into late 1972.



THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

The boxy styling lent itself well to being stretched and the W108 saloon still appears balanced – unlike some similarly elongated vehicles. The SEL gained 100mm in length and some 30kg of weight. While Mercedes-Benz claimed performance was unaffected, the turning circle did increase from 11.68m to 12.02m, and the January 1971 price was DM24,586 – almost DM3,000 more than the 280SE.

On the road, the W108 Mercedes is a smooth cruiser. Thanks to that torquey 2.8-litre engine, the extra weight of the SEL doesn't show – if anything it helps to soak up potholes and undulations. It's only when you need to reverse into spaces, or three-point turn in a narrow street, that the extra length is apparent. "I really like the styling of this car, all those straight lines and subtle curves," Shan enthuses. "The extra length does

make a difference when you have rear seat passengers, and visibility is improved too."

It's a shame we weren't able to find out more about the 280SEL's early life. The 1970s were a particularly difficult period for the country of Vietnam, and it would be fascinating to know who might have sat in that comfortable rear seat in the first years of this Mercedes' service with the embassy. The last time we spoke to Shan, he had sold the 280SEL, but we're interested to see what three-pointed star he brings home next...



◁ A regal drive with just enough power to excite.

△ Succeeding 116 did not have stacked lights.

Thanks to that torquey 2.8-litre engine, the extra weight of the SEL doesn't show



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MERCEDES-BENZ HAS WORKED ITS MAGIC ON ITS FACELIFTED B-CLASS, IMPROVING RIDE COMFORT AND TAKING A LEAF OUT OF THE C-CLASS'S BOOK WITH A BEAUTIFULLY APPOINTED CABIN

WORDS AND IMAGES IAN KUAH



INTERNATIONAL
LAUNCH
DRIVE!



THE ORIGINAL B-Class of 2005 achieved over 700,000 sales, and the second generation car, launched in 2011 has found 380,000 homes in just three years.

Selling a million of any car is tough going, but B-Class sales have proven the worth of the 'sports tourer' formula. With its new front and rear bumpers, front grille and reshaped headlamps with integrated daytime running lights, and the option of LEDs, the facelifted B-Class looks bang up to date. Its class leading Cd of 0.25 is unchanged.

The interior benefits from new instrument faces and detail changes such as the larger Comand Online display. You can now order leather on the dashboard top as an option, and as this is something you look at all the time, it makes a huge difference to the perception of luxury in the B-Class's cabin.

The facelift is all about honing this successful formula with added refinement. Thus, I was very pleased to see that Mercedes has gone all out to address negatives of the early car. The first issue is very significant because it affects a large proportion of B-Class buyers in the UK. Many people prefer the look and stance of a car with lowered suspension and big wheels, so they tick the sport suspension option on the order form. However, the B-Class quickly gained a reputation for a harsh ride with UK buyers because so many people ordered their cars with the sport suspension option.

As I reported from the early car's launch in Austria, the B-Class's sport suspension was uncomfortably firm even on well maintained local roads. Mercedes chassis engineer, Jochen Eck, from the Overall Vehicle Testing Compact Cars department, admitted that even German customers have complained about the hard ride of what is, after all, a family car, not a sports car.

"The two settings we offered before were very far apart," he explained. "The comfort setting had a lot of compliance, while the sport suspension was very firm. After much feedback, we realised that many people want the look of a lowered car with bigger wheels, but without the hard ride."

LISTENING AND LEARNING

"The latest sport suspension drops the ride height by 10mm as before, but we have tuned the spring and damper settings to deliver a comfortable ride. We call it 'sport + comfort', and the 20mm lower AMG Line version now has a 'comfort + low' set up. Thus there is no more 'sport' suspension as such."

The result of this is most impressive. While the car looks

good on 18-inch wheels, its ride is almost as supple as that provided by the old comfort suspension, but with the better roll resistance that comes with the reduced ride height.

The five diesel and five petrol engines (for the UK range see the box on page 57) have all been refined to optimise their consumption and emissions. The B250 4Matic I drove first has 208bhp and 258lb ft of torque, while the B220 CDI 4Matic has 175bhp with 258lb ft of torque. Average fuel consumption for the B220 CDI 4Matic is 56.5mpg, with 130 to 131g/km of CO₂, compared to 42.2 to 42.8mpg, with 154 to 156g/km for the B250 4Matic.

I am not a big fan of front-wheel drive per se, as I hate both torque steer and understeer with a vengeance. However, Mercedes did a pretty good job of the current A- and B-Class chassis, and the sophisticated multi link rear axle, wide

tracks and relatively long wheelbases of these cars minimise FWD vices.

As the new A-Class and B-Class platforms were designed to have 4Matic from day one, this is a brilliant way to round off these cars in the way that Audi does with its Quattro models. It also opens up greater sales potential for Mercedes in countries like

Scandinavia, Austria and Switzerland, where the winters are long and harsh.

The dry roads in Mallorca where this ▷



△ Extra power and efficiency from top diesel.

◁ OM651 diesel with common-rail injection.

“AFTER MUCH FEEDBACK, WE
REALISED MANY PEOPLE WANT
THE LOOK OF A LOWERED CAR
WITH BIGGER WHEELS, BUT
WITHOUT THE HARD RIDE”



JUST THE FACTS

Mercedes-Benz B250 4Matic (W246)

ENGINE M270 1,991cc 4-cyl
turbocharged

POWER 208bhp@5,500rpm

TORQUE 258lb ft@1,200-4,000rpm

TRANSMISSION 7-speed auto, 4WD

WEIGHT 1,505kg

0-62MPH 6.7sec

TOP SPEED 146mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 42.2-42.8mpg

CO2 EMISSIONS 154-156g/km

YEARS PRODUCED 2014-on



△ Wheel design
from the C-Class.

△△ Metal finish
for seat controls.

△△△ Sharp,
new dial design.

◁ Great rear leg
and headroom.

▷ Flexible seats
aid boot space.



Mercedes-Benz B220 CDI 4Matic (W246)

ENGINE OM651 2,143cc 4-cyl
turbocharged

POWER 175bhp@3,600-3,800rpm

TORQUE 258lb ft@1,400-3,400rpm

TRANSMISSION 7-speed auto, 4WD

WEIGHT 1,575kg

0-62MPH 8.3sec

TOP SPEED 137mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 56.5mpg

CO2 EMISSIONS 130-131g/km

YEARS PRODUCED 2014-on



◁ Enlarged eight-inch
screen with Comand.

▽ The 208bhp B250
4Matic is pretty brisk.



Mercedes-Benz B-Class Electric Drive (W246)

DRIVE SYSTEM Electric motor +
lithium-ion battery

POWER 177bhp@9,900-12,500rpm

TORQUE 251lb ft

TRANSMISSION Single-speed auto, FWD

WEIGHT 1,725kg

0-62MPH 7.9sec

TOP SPEED 100mph

RANGE 124 miles

CO2 EMISSIONS 0g/km

YEARS PRODUCED 2014-on

Figures for car as pictured; fuel consumption
and range according to NEDC combined; top
speed of the B-Class Electric Drive is limited

“
FAST HAS NEVER BEEN
LESS FURIOUS
”



▷ launch was held are often covered in sand blown by the wind, making conditions treacherous at times, even in the dry. Here, the 4Matic system showed its traction advantage, and joining a busy main road from a side road is made that much safer. On the twisty hill roads on the test route, 4Matic allows you to deploy the full torque of the lusty turbocharged motors coming out of hairpin bends. No drama, just grip and progress. But note that the 4Matic system adds up to 90kg to the B-Class.

The other issue I encountered two years ago was a difference in the automatic gearbox control software between the petrol and diesel

versions. Back then, I drove the four-cylinder diesel and found the automatic transmission responsive to commands from the paddleshifters to the point where it was borderline sporty. I was very surprised to find that the gearbox programming of the petrol powered B250 to be the exact opposite, its hesitant behaviour totally out of keeping with the smart throttle response of the engine.

The engineers took all that on board and have revised the control software. Thus, I was happy to find that the B250 4Matic I drove in Mallorca now has the crisper response I would expect from such a car, and is all the more

entertaining for it. There never was any fundamental weakness in the second generation B-Class package, and all the improvements to the facelifted car are the result of customer feedback and on going development.

In 4Matic form, with its updated interior and the leather dashboard option, the revised B-Class looks and feels a very mature and versatile, all round family car. For someone who does not need or want an SUV or an estate, this roomy and accomplished five-door could well be the answer.

B-CLASS ELECTRIC DRIVE

Not content to just show us its best selling petrol and diesel B-Classes, Mercedes-Benz also brought along its Electric Drive and Natural Gas Drive versions as well.

Like its Natural Gas Drive sister, the B-Class Electric Drive features unique front and rear aprons, wheelarch flares, side skirts, and alloy wheels. These visual changes help this pair stand out from the crowd, while still retaining the distinctive B-Class look. As I only had time to drive one or the other, I chose the Electric Drive, as this is the version that applies to a far greater number of countries, including the UK.

It is also the more interesting compact Mercedes-Benz technologically, as it is a zero emissions, rather than low emissions vehicle, developed jointly with Tesla, in which Daimler had a small stake until recently (see the news pages of *Mercedes Enthusiast* December 2014).



The taut body control remains, but the ride is more comfortable.



▷△ You may spend more time looking at the electric B's dials.

▷ The first fully electric B-Class will go on sale in the UK in spring 2015.

▷▷ Electric power unit develops 177bhp and 251lb ft of torque.



It may produce zero CO2 emissions, but the ED will hit 62mph in just 7.9 seconds.



When you drive a full electric car or a hybrid in battery mode, the refinement or otherwise of the chassis becomes very apparent. Rolling away from a standing start with no internal combustion engine sound only heightens awareness of other noises, so the inherently low tyre and road noise of the revised B-Class chassis becomes an even bigger advantage.

With 300kg of batteries situated low down in the centre of the chassis in what Mercedes terms the 'Energy Space', with the big electric motor up front, the B-Class Electric Drive tips the scales at 1,725kg. That is 220kg more than the four-wheel drive B250 and 150kg more than the B220 CDI 4Matic.

The electric motor produces 177bhp, with 251lb ft of torque on tap from step off. This gives the Electric Drive a strong push away from rest, with 0-62mph coming up in 7.9 seconds, followed by a 100mph top speed. As with all electric cars, the top speed is limited as the battery charge depletes very rapidly at high speeds. However, as this car is designed to be more of a city and suburban traveller that can cover up to 124 miles (NEDC combined) on a single charge, that is not really a big issue.

The powertrain's strong torque means you can effortlessly zoom through opening gaps in city traffic, and with no screaming engine to bear witness to full throttle progress, the Electric Drive can actually move rapidly from point to point, with minimal drama. In that respect, fast has never been less furious.

Energy recovery on the move helps the car's range, and this is supported by the optional Range Plus recuperative braking system, which can extend the car's range by up to 18.6 miles (30km). The system uses the sensors from the Collision Prevention Assist Plus to increase or reduce the level of recuperation, and uses the energy captured to charge the battery.

When plugged into a three-phase 16A industrial charger, you can expect to see the lithium-ion battery topped off in just three hours, but a domestic wall socket charger will take eight hours, which means charging the car overnight or all day at work.

THE FUTURE IS COMING

Normally, a heavier car should ride better, but I found the uprated springs and dampers used to cope with the B-Class Electric Drive's extra weight took some compliance out of the secondary ride at town speeds. Yet as you go faster, the ride smoothens to become perhaps even better than that of the internal combustion engined sister models.

I grew very fond of the new B-Class Electric Drive. It takes very little getting used to, and you soon appreciate the relative silence of the powertrain, especially when compared to the four-cylinder turbodiesel models in the range. It is a very mature feeling electric vehicle, and crucially for the owner's peace of mind, Mercedes offers an eight-year/100,000km warranty on the battery.



New B-Class in the UK

Launch

On sale now (prices from £21,500 OTR)

Trim lines

SE, Sport, AMG Line

Engines

PETROL

B180 120bhp, 50.4mpg/129g/km CO2 (manual), 52.3mpg/125g/km CO2 (automatic)

B200 154bhp, 50.4mpg/130g/km CO2 (manual), 52.3mpg/125g/km CO2 (automatic)

DIESEL

B180 CDI Eco 108bhp, 78.5mpg/94g/km CO2 (manual)

B200 CDI 134bhp, 65.6mpg/111g/km CO2 (manual), 70.6mpg/104g/km CO2 (automatic)

B220 CDI 175bhp, 67.3mpg/109g/km CO2 (automatic), 56.5mpg/130g/km CO2 (4Matic automatic)

ELECTRIC (SPRING 2015)

B-Class Electric Drive 178bhp, 124-mile range, 0g/km CO2



**“I wanted a
project and felt
like doing something
a bit different”**



More where it counts

Gifted a 3.7-litre V6 from an SL350, this R170 SLK goes better than ever yet stays firmly under the radar with standard looks

WORDS DAVID SUTHERLAND IMAGES TERRY OBORNE

W

ITH A SILKY SMOOTH M112 V6 UNDER ITS bonnet, the R170 SLK320 was enthusiastically received when introduced in 2000. It had taken Mercedes-Benz four years to add the 3.2-litre variant to the SLK range (the delay was probably due to fears that this might cost sales of lower

engined SLs), which hitherto had relied on four-cylinder 2.0-/2.3-litre engines, generally regarded as the one weakness of the otherwise sparkling compact roadster. Now, the SLK was looking less hairdresser, more Porsche Boxster challenging.

However the SLK320, introduced at the R170's mid term facelift, could not have been accused of being overpowered. Its 215bhp was a hardly significant 21bhp increase on the SLK230 Kompressor, while torque, 229lb ft at 3,000rpm, was 23lb ft up, but occurring slightly higher up the rev band. Performance, with a standing start or in gear, was marginally quicker, but the V6's obvious advantage was its engine refinement.

All this was not lost on Steve Shali, proprietor of independent Mercedes specialist Klasse of Fulham, who felt that a little extra horsepower would be absolutely in order. And with his vast experience of Mercedes engines, he also knew that there was a relatively easy way to achieve it – simply drop in the 3.7-litre version of the V6. “The 3.7-litre M112 powerplant is like for like, it has exactly the same dimensions as the 3.2 and it uses the same electronic control units,” he explains. “So you don’t have to think about the wiring and the electrics.” ▷



△△△ The 3.7 just needed an extra oil cooler fitted.

△△ There is no missing these bright dials.

△ The R170 feels nimble and yet comfortable.

△ Switchgear is built to last but lacks some style.

▽ This LHD SLK began its life in Germany in 02.

▷ Desirable spec from late in R170 SLK production.



▷ In previous years, the fairly high values of six-cylinder SLKs and the cost of another engine would have made this conversion an expensive indulgence, given that the aim was to make a subtle improvement. But even the last of the R170s – it was replaced by the R171 in 2004 – can now be bought cheaply, making it a more realistic idea, and by autumn 2012 Steve (whose daily business is mostly routine servicing and repair of modern and classic Mercedes) was in the mood to try it. “I wanted a project and felt like doing something a bit different,” he says.

THE SEARCH BEGINS

Through his motor trade contacts, he found an SLK320 that was being disposed of by an insurance company as a ‘Category C’ write-off, meaning that the car could legally be rebuilt (Category A cars have to be crushed, and Category B cars can be sold only as spares). It was written off because it had been driven too fast through some standing water, an excess of which had entered the low mounted front air intake, penetrated the engine and caused the crankshaft, con rods and pistons to lock up and bend, or suffer other terminal damage. Apart from this, the car was fully serviceable, making it the ideal base for the conversion.

This left-hand drive SLK320 in Amber Red metallic had originally been registered in Germany in 2002, one of the batch of Special Edition models made in the last two years of R170 production. Hence it has some worthwhile extras over standard models, including 7.5Jx17 Evolution wheels, black nappa leather,

“Once the Mercedes is moving and the engine gets into the mid range, the difference between old and new is apparent”



brushed aluminium interior trim, and silver instruments. The engine took a little longer to locate, however. "It is not easy to come across, there were three years of the SL350, three years of the S350, and two years of the ML350," Steve says. "That's a short lifespan for one engine."

But these days, if you wait long enough everything turns up on the internet, and within a couple of months a suitable M112 engine from a damaged SL350 had been acquired. In the meantime, the SLK had been tidied up, including the fitting of new brake discs and pads, and was ready and waiting in Klasse's small but busy workshop in Fulham, south west London. Amazingly, only one modification was needed before the engine could go in, and even that was because it had come from a right-hand drive car. "We had to swap the starter motor to the other side of the engine, but the holes where it fits are marked, so we just had to drill them out," Steve explains.

Engine installed, the SLK320 – or should it by now have been referred to as an SLK350, or even an SLK370? – was found to be not running 100 per cent correctly, so was sent over to CKS Performance in Watford, a specialist in auto electronics as well as performance upgrades, which remapped the engine, eliminating



the misfire and making it perform more smoothly. With the conversion finished, the paperwork surrounding every revived insurance write-off had to be attended to. This involved a trip back to Watford, but this time to the VOSA (Vehicle and Operator Services Agency) inspection centre, where it was assessed to ensure that the damage as documented had been rectified.

PLEASING RESULTS

No power measurements have been taken by Klasse of Fulham, so we have to go on Mercedes' own figures, which

may or may not be the exact outputs on this particular car, but do give a reasonable before and after comparison. On this basis, the new engine output is 242bhp at 5,750rpm, supported by 258lb ft torque from 3,000 to 4,500rpm.

What does this mean on the road? Under the bonnet, this SLK certainly does not look like the traditional tuned car. There is no difference to be seen, apart from the 3.7-litre six-cylinder having an oil cooler, positioned vertically at the front of the engine, which the original 3.2-litre did not have. The V6, with its now superseded three valves per cylinder configuration (two valves for intake, one for exhaust), fires with the first twist

◀ Steve Shali of Merc specialist Klasse of Fulham.



▷ of the key. As with any other Mercedes-Benz V6 or V8 engine, the revs rise briefly before settling down to a tickover so smooth and quiet you might have to consult the tachometer to check that the engine really is running.

However, once the Mercedes is moving and the engine gets into the mid range, the difference between old and new is apparent. The extra power and torque provide a stronger surge of acceleration, giving the SLK – three quarters the weight of the SL350 – a muscular feel it did not previously have. And as revs rise, the engine, running with the standard SLK320 exhaust, gives out a pleasantly fizzing, but still subdued rasp.

Revisiting an R170 SLK for the first time in a while reminded me of what a suitable candidate the original, soft nosed model is for an engine upgrade. It is comfortable and it feels solid, the five-speed automatic gearbox is responsive and slick changing, and the handling is nimble, despite the recirculating ball steering (replaced by rack and pinion for the R171 model). I still find the metal folding roof, which in 25 seconds turns the SLK from a

delightfully proportioned two-seat coupe into an even prettier drophead, utterly marvellous, and even on the dank, cold winter day of our test drive I was keen to see it retracting into the boot to allow me to catch the sound of the more potent V6.

A COMPLETE SUCCESS

Steve Shali did not set out to produce a fire breathing monster that would eat up the drag strip, rather a car that looks and feels much as standard, but with a subtle edge of performance that makes an already good car even better. As I reluctantly handed the keys back to him, I was left wondering why Mercedes-Benz hadn't done the same job in the first place. Who knows, with a bit of extra tweaking it might have turned out a better proposition than the SLK32 AMG, which was certainly fast but, with its supercharger, too hard core for some.

► Thank you to **Klasse of Fulham** for the loan of the car
Tel 020 7385 4157 Web www.klasse-of-fulham.co.uk



△ The 17-inch rims of 'Special Edition' spec.

◁ Perhaps a 370 badge would be more accurate.

Modified cars - how to insure them

Cases are assessed on an individual basis, so be truthful

If you modify your Mercedes in any way, you must tell your insurance company. If you do not, and subsequently have an accident, the insurer can refuse to pay a claim.

Traditionally, mainstream insurers did not like modified cars, and penalised or refused to cover them. But specialist insurers, aware that

performance enhancing upgrades do not necessarily make the driver a higher claim risk, stepped in to assist. How much extra premium – if any – is payable depends on what has been done to the car.

"Vehicles that have performance enhancing modifications, including a replacement engine, are usually referred directly to

the insurer, and will be assessed on a case by case basis," Andy Fairchild, managing director of specialist insurance broker Footman James, told *Mercedes Enthusiast*. "Smaller and one-off modifications, such as alloy wheels, stainless steel exhausts, or lowering of the vehicle can generally be processed without referral."



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Long live the M156!

It may only have Weistec's Stage 1 supercharger conversion, but this 628bhp CL63 AMG has all the performance its racing driver owner desires

WORDS AND IMAGES IAN KUAH

ALTHOUGH AMG'S M157 BITURBO V8 MOTOR debuted in 2010, Mercedes' tuner made it quite clear that the feisty, naturally aspirated, 6,208cc M156 and its M159 derivative would live on in the C63 AMG and SLS AMG. However, as the latter car ceased production earlier in 2014, and only the C63 AMG Coupe will make it into 2015, this means that the reign of AMG's first bespoke motor is almost over.

AMG stressed that, apart from improved fuel economy and emissions, the better torque of the turbocharged M157 V8 significantly improves the low and medium speed urge of the larger models that wear the fabled AMG badge. While few would argue that the first generation, M156 V8 powered E63, CL63, CLS63 and S63 AMG were in any way slow, it is also true to say that they need a fair amount of throttle to really get up and go. Propelling a big, heavy car with effortless ease requires torque rather than sheer horsepower, and torque is what the M157 has in spades.

So what do you do if you own a car with the M156 motor? The Weistec supercharger conversion is one answer and even in its mildest state of tune, it already equals the power and torque of the M157 biturbo engine in its Performance Package form. The core of the Stage 1 and Stage 2 conversions is a twin-screw supercharger with a 2.3-litre displacement, mated to the cylinder heads by a high flow, cast

aluminium T6 hardened intake manifold. While both upgrades use Weistec Engineering's direct drive belt system, Stage 2 benefits from a high flow stainless steel exhaust system with two-inch diameter primary pipes and three-inch diameter mid pipes that significantly reduce back pressure. This exhaust is also a vital part of the Stage 3 conversion, which uses a three-litre capacity supercharger that California based Weistec says is good for up to 1,000hp (986bhp)!

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Intake air reaches the supercharger via a Y-shaped cast supercharger inlet fed by twin throttle bodies, and two air boxes mounted in factory locations allowing OEM installation. The shape of these beautifully cast pieces were developed with computer modelling to optimise the air flow velocity seen at the supercharger's inlet. "Lower back pressure helps a forced aspirated powerplant more





“Propelling a big, heavy car with effortless ease requires torque, rather than sheer horsepower”

◀◀ Reduced back pressure assists output.

◀ Get as much as 758bhp with a Weistec upgrade.

▷ Great factory looks conceal the power within.



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◁ Stoppers by Brembo much needed here.

△ The cabin's traditional feel remains intact.

▽ Weistec has become known for breaking records.



▷ than a naturally aspirated one," explained Weistec Engineering founder and CEO, Michael Weiss. "With boost pressure, the efficiency increase is exponential. So where we use 5 to 6psi [0.34 to 0.41bar] boost with Stage 1, we can raise this by a further 2psi [0.14bar] when we use long tube headers to lower the exhaust back pressure."

ENGINE MANAGEMENT

Intake charge temperatures are kept down by Weistec's proprietary water-cooled intercooler system that sits under the supercharger unit in the valley of the motor. Rated for 986bhp, it has thermal capacity to spare in this application. A high flow water pump with a 30 litres per minute capacity sends cooling fluid around the closed loop system to a radiator positioned low in the front of the car.

The system has a water recovery tank that increases overall water volume to keep charge temperature consistent regardless of environmental conditions. The fuel delivery

The power curve of the supercharged motor mirrors the factory one, but sits at a higher level

system is upgraded, and a set of colder spark plugs fitted to enable the higher combustion pressures. The final part of the conversion is a recalibration of the ECU to accommodate the bespoke fuelling, ignition, and cam profile adjustments required to work with the supercharger system. The sheer quality of the Weistec conversion impresses when you look under the bonnet. The design and finish of the components is aircraft grade, and everything looks as though it left the factory this way.

The black CL63 AMG I drove is the road car of well known, LA based, GT race driver Cort Wagner. Accustomed to power and speed on

track, Cort appreciates the way the CL wafts him to and from race venues. In standard form, however, the M156 motor never had the effortless push he was looking for to keep him engaged when he was in the mood for some entertainment. Cort's 2009 CL63 was upgraded to Stage 1 by Weistec in 2011, and now boasts dyno figures of 637hp (628bhp) and 760Nm (560lb ft) of torque.

WILD HORSES

Its output now considerably enhanced by Weistec's Stage 1 supercharger kit, Cort's CL takes on a much more relaxed character in normal driving. But drop the hammer and it surges forward with a level of thrust that well and truly shades a CL600. However, without the extra heft of the big V12 up front, the supercharged CL63 still responds to the helm as crisply as the standard car when the road turns twisty. The best of both worlds is what Cort was after, and that is exactly what this Weistec conversion has provided. ▷



▷ From off idle to around 6,000rpm, the power curve of the supercharged motor mirrors the factory one, but sits at a higher level. After that it increases at a slightly steeper angle, which can indeed be felt from behind the wheel. In normal driving, however, the much beefier torque curve is what makes the most difference to the way the car performs.

SERIOUS BITE

Even just off idle, the supercharged engine produces way more torque than the stock motor at its peak. And while the standard engine's curve is still building all the way to 4,750rpm, the Weistec motor has reached its sweet spot over 1,000rpm earlier. This extra low down torque makes a huge difference to the way the car picks up from low crankshaft speeds around town.

If anything, it means you can drive around one gear higher everywhere, with the better potential fuel economy that this facilitates. "When we remapped the fuel, ignition and

camshaft curves, we could easily have perfectly mirrored the standard power and torque curves, and simply moved both upwards," Michael explained. "However, we decided to deliver a bit more excitement for our enthusiast customers, several of whom are well known professional racing drivers. So we dialled in more bottom end torque along with an extra bit of punch at the top end."

On the open road, the big CL63 is transformed, the supercharger's seamless delivery noticeably boosting its bottom end strength. This more muscular delivery continues through the mid range, and at the

point where the standard car starts to pick up its skirts and fly, the supercharger is already earning its keep. The lower back pressure of the free flow exhaust and ECU recalibration makes a huge difference to output, with Stage 2 producing 663bhp at 6,200rpm with 662lb ft of torque at 3,650rpm. If you go the whole hog to Stage 3, the result is an amazing 758bhp and 677lb ft of torque.

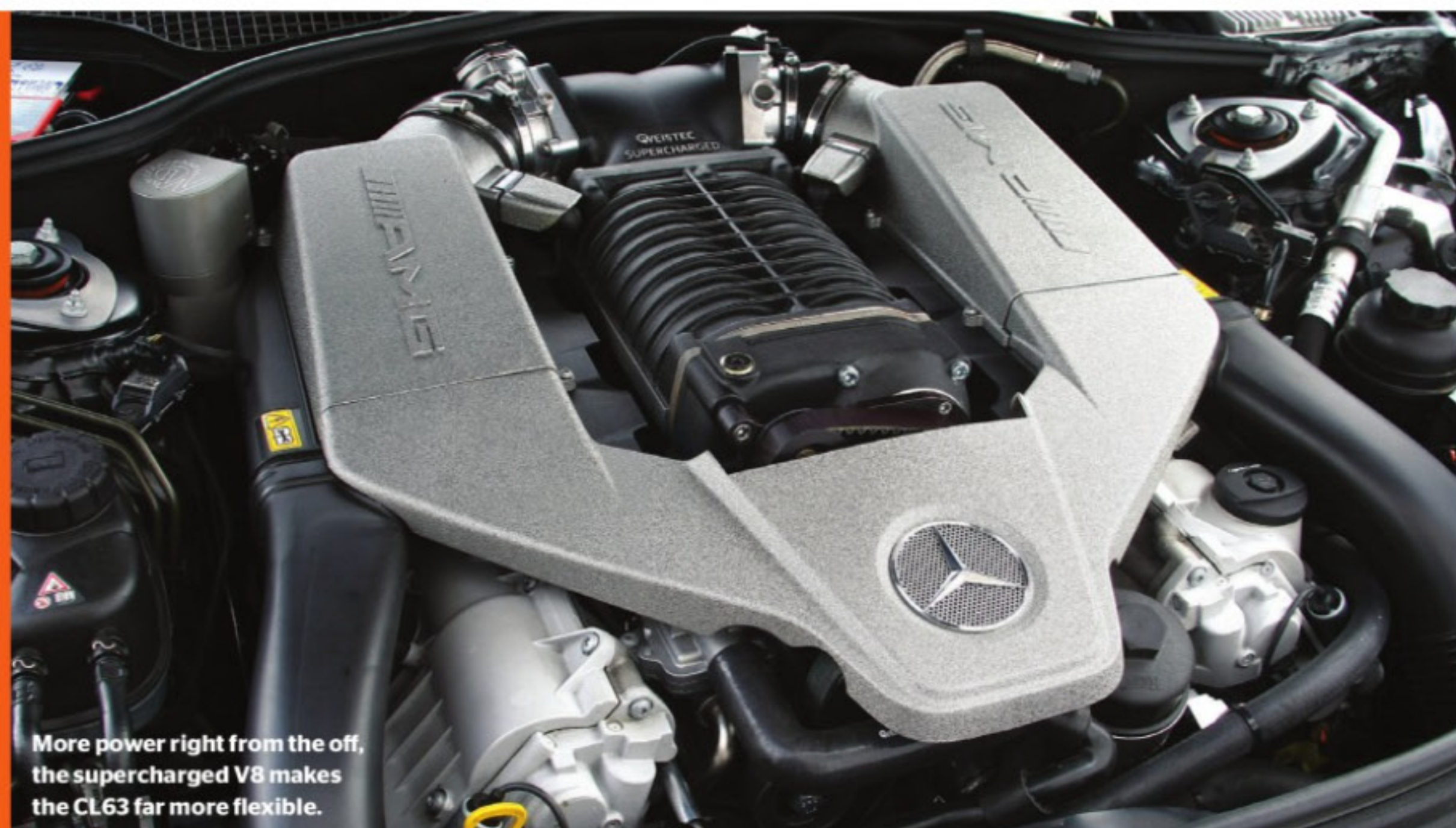
There are a lot of AMG models out there powered by the M156 motor, which continue to give their owners sterling service. But as these cars fall in value, this also opens up possibilities to tune them rather than replace them. And if you have some spare cash left over you can also go for the uprated Brembo brake package as fitted to this car.

The C216 CL was a great car from day one. Picking up a nice, low mileage, five-year old CL63 AMG for well under half its original price, and enhancing it with a Weistec supercharger conversion is a tantalising prospect, to say the least.

If you go the whole hog to Stage 3, the result is 758bhp and 677lb ft of torque



Oil/air separator decreases oil retention by the V8, reduces knocking, and aids engine life.



More power right from the off, the supercharged V8 makes the CL63 far more flexible.

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THE REAL DEAL?

Sharper than your average E-Class coupe, this V6 biturbo powered model hopes to please those buyers disappointed by the lack of a full fat AMG - but does it deliver?

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

“The E400 finds itself as the unwitting pinnacle of both the E-Class coupe and cabriolet ranges in the UK”



WITH ITS 3.5-litre V6 biturbo, the E400 Coupe AMG Line Plus exists as a bridge between the four-cylinder models and the range topping AMG variant. Or rather, it would if Mercedes-Benz had let Affalterbach have its way with the two-door E-Class. And because the E500 V8 is no longer sold in the UK, the E400 finds itself as the unwitting pinnacle of both the E-Class coupe and cabriolet ranges in the UK.

With that position comes great responsibility. Pressure too – all the more so as this test car replaced a C63 AMG Coupe Edition 507 (see *Mercedes Enthusiast* October 2014), which is the swansong for its kind, and sharper and more focused than your average AMG C-Class. With opinions fresh and

perspectives clear on that car, it will take more than a few bells and whistles for the E400 Coupe to liken itself to a proper AMG.

That said, the E400 Coupe certainly pouts, grimaces and poses like a meat eating supercar killer. You notice the alloy wheels first, all 19 inches of them, finished in black and silver, and enclosing uprated brakes. The similarly shiny chin spoiler looks as sharp as a switchblade and is a welcome change to glossy black or carbon fibre addenda bolted to most performance oriented metal these days. The modest bootlid spoiler and twin exhausts suggest the potential for high speeds in this coupe, and with the car's vmax electronically pegged at 155mph, you would be right to assume they are possible.

Differentiating itself from its less powerful brethren, the E400 is equipped with the Dynamic Handling Package, which allows adjustment of the car's dampers, accelerator

pedal response and gearshift times via a button on the centre console labelled 'Comfort/Sport'. These modes are teamed with the 7G-Tronic Plus automatic's Efficient, Sporty and Manual settings, and go some way to replicating the C63's 'tweak-ability', although the E400 actually goes one better in the ride department, offering softer and harder set ups, whereas the C63 stubbornly insists that you feel every inch of every mile travelled.

A MODE FOR EVERY MOOD

The positives continue to flow as you tug open the E400's door and get intimate with the sports seat finished in black leather and contrasting red stitching – a design theme echoed by the door cards, centre console armrest and AMG carpet mats. Should the red seat belts clash with your racing overalls or best suit, you can choose black items instead without incurring a charge. ▷



▷ Granted, things have moved on with the new C-Class, but the E-Class coupe's cabin looks and feels like it was meant to last longer than the length of your lease period, the panoramic glass roof (£1,370) and strips of aluminium on the dashboard, doors and centre console lightening an otherwise dark interior. There are certainly a few elements that whisper 'AMG' in here, although the E400's driver's seat doesn't hug your torso quite so readily as the C63's, and the steering wheel – although fatter than average – doesn't fill your palms so completely. The plastic paddleshifters behind the helm are another downgrade from the pukka AMG experience, although their presence is most welcome in a Mercedes-Benz more likely to tell you about its 0-62mph time (5.2 seconds) than how many polar bears it has saved this week (four – probably).

INTENTIONS ARE CLEAR

The single greatest difference between the E400 and a full bore AMG reveals itself the second the V6 engine catches, a gentle timbre emanating from the front of the cabin, as opposed to a great woofling bark that explodes from the rear when you stoke a 6.2-litre, naturally aspirated V8 built by a man named Kurt in Affalterbach. I think the V6's refusal to express itself at this point would disappoint even those who hadn't stepped from a C63, but Mercedes' sixes are well known for their rich vocals higher up the rev range, so I'm not packing away my ears and stropping off just yet.

Another big difference comes to the fore once the E400 is up and running – the fuel saving, electro-mechanical steering is remarkably light. A quick prod of the Sport button introduces a bit more weight to the system, but it's still a far cry from the C63's even faster rack, which works your forearms by design. Of course, this means the E400 is physically easier to drive, which many would consider a virtue, although once you begin

exploring the car's handling, it becomes harder to judge front end grip, such is the lack of communication transferred from road to brain via your hands.

The steering is quick and the chassis – based on the 204 C-Class's – feels utterly planted yet so manageable when grip is finally breached at the rear. The E-Class coupe's heavier and larger body does blunt agility a fraction, moving around on its mounting points more than the C-Class coupe's as you turn into a corner, and taking a touch longer to settle once you are committed, or encounter a bump mid bend. But most



△ Gearbox's Efficient, Sporty, Manual modes.

▽ The LED lamps are part of the standard spec.



△ Sport and Comfort modes for the dampers.

▽ This pillarless, facelifted coupe is a real looker.



“The chassis feels utterly planted yet so manageable when grip is finally breached at the rear”

JUST THE FACTS



Mercedes-Benz E400 Coupe AMG Line Plus (C207)

ENGINE	M276 3,498cc V6 biturbo
POWER	328bhp@5,250-6,000rpm
TORQUE	354lb ft@1,200-4,000rpm
TRANSMISSION	7-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT	1,735kg
0-62MPH	5.2sec
TOP SPEED	155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION	40.9mpg
CO2 EMISSIONS	161g/km
YEARS PRODUCED	2014-on

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

would never notice the difference and would simply revel in the car's ability to make even a mildly interesting road a whole lot more exciting, the automatic transmission going without a double-declutch simulation with manual downchanges, but eager to add something to the experience whether you are driving quickly or just bumbling along.

SIX REVISITED

If there was a lesser powered engine under the bonnet, this test would be close to its conclusion, but the E400 Coupe's V6 biturbo produces 328bhp with 354lb ft of torque, and that reignites things considerably. The old, 302bhp, naturally aspirated V6 was a peaky thing, whereas the new version always feels at that magic moment of climax, the tiny IHI turbos working together and offering full



△ Red stitching for this more focused E-Class.

◁ More rear headroom than in the C-coupe.



ROADTEST E400 Coupe

▷ twisting force from 1,200 to 4,000rpm. Come 5,250rpm and 328bhp announces itself with a gorgeous, nasally, induction backing track, rewarding those drivers who aren't satisfied just with stroking the car along on a wave of low hitting torque – something that was not always possible with the previous M272 and naturally aspirated M276 V6.

The E400's M276 V6 boasts direct fuel injection and Eco Start/Stop, bringing it right up to date with rival powerplants and earning it EU6 status. On paper, the E400 Coupe will hit 29.7mpg around town and 52.3mpg on faster roads for an official combined fuel economy figure of 40.9mpg. That is an extraordinary achievement given the power on tap, and the six-cylinder petrol somehow manages to be more efficient than an early, 211-series E320 CDI saloon.

HARD TO FAULT

Of course, you'll want to know the real world figures, and I found they're pretty close – an early morning run through suburbia yielded 24mpg, that same journey in heavier traffic dropping the number to 19. On the motorway, the E400 Coupe returned a solid 40mpg sat at 70mph for a prolonged period, so mid 40s at a slightly more sedate pace appears entirely feasible. CO2 emissions are similarly impressive at 161g/km, meaning a £180 road tax bill in the car's first year and £180 thereafter, according to current rates.

All of which are impossible for that two-door AMG C-Class to equal.

So what about the E400 Coupe's price? At £46,110, it is by no means inexpensive, but it's certainly cheaper than a full blown AMG. The other petrol model in the range, the two-litre, £38,420 E200, is not much

▽ Big torque and silky drive with V6 biturbo.

▽▽ The E400 hides its kerb weight well.

more efficient, hitting 47.1mpg on the combined cycle, with CO2 emissions of 140g/km, so there is a lot to be said for choosing the more powerful car if you can afford it.

And powerful it really is. You certainly don't get the gutsy drama of a real AMG, but the E400 Coupe AMG Line Plus revels in its role as a more subtle Mercedes-Benz that happens to be very fast and very capable when the road starts to bend. The fact I came away from a C63 AMG Coupe and did not find the E400 Coupe underwhelming speaks volumes.



“There is a lot to be said for choosing the E400 if you can afford it”



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230SL Sports Pagoda, 1966 finished in striking original brilliant Brunswick Green with complimented new deep red carpets and seats, rear seat, new soft top/hard top, radio cassette, rare four spd, only used on high days and holidays, only 42,000 miles, two owners, garaged from new, lots of history, handbook, all tools, thousands spent over the years to keep this car in superb condition, personal registration number to go with car, Just stunning. £87,750



280SL Sports Pagoda, 1968/9, finished in unmarked gleaming silver with as new soft black hide interior, hard and soft tops, automatic, p/steering, stereo system, Mercedes overmats, only 73,000 miles £1000s spent to keep this garaged kept sports car in magnificent condition. Folder of invoices/old MOTs/ original handbook, all tools. A breathtaking example. More pictures available on our website. £129,500



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



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



560SL Sport, 1988, left hand drive, gleaming Signal Red with Tan hide interior, hard and Tan soft tops, over-mats, light up mirrors, power windows, tinted glass, power mirrors, central locking, air-con, cruise control, stereo system, ABS, alloys, SRS, air-bags, expensive MB car cover, auto, power steering, only 19,000 miles from new, FSH. £49,750



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



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



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



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



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



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



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

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Life ambition

WORDS EWAN KENNEDY

IMAGES DAVE KULESZA

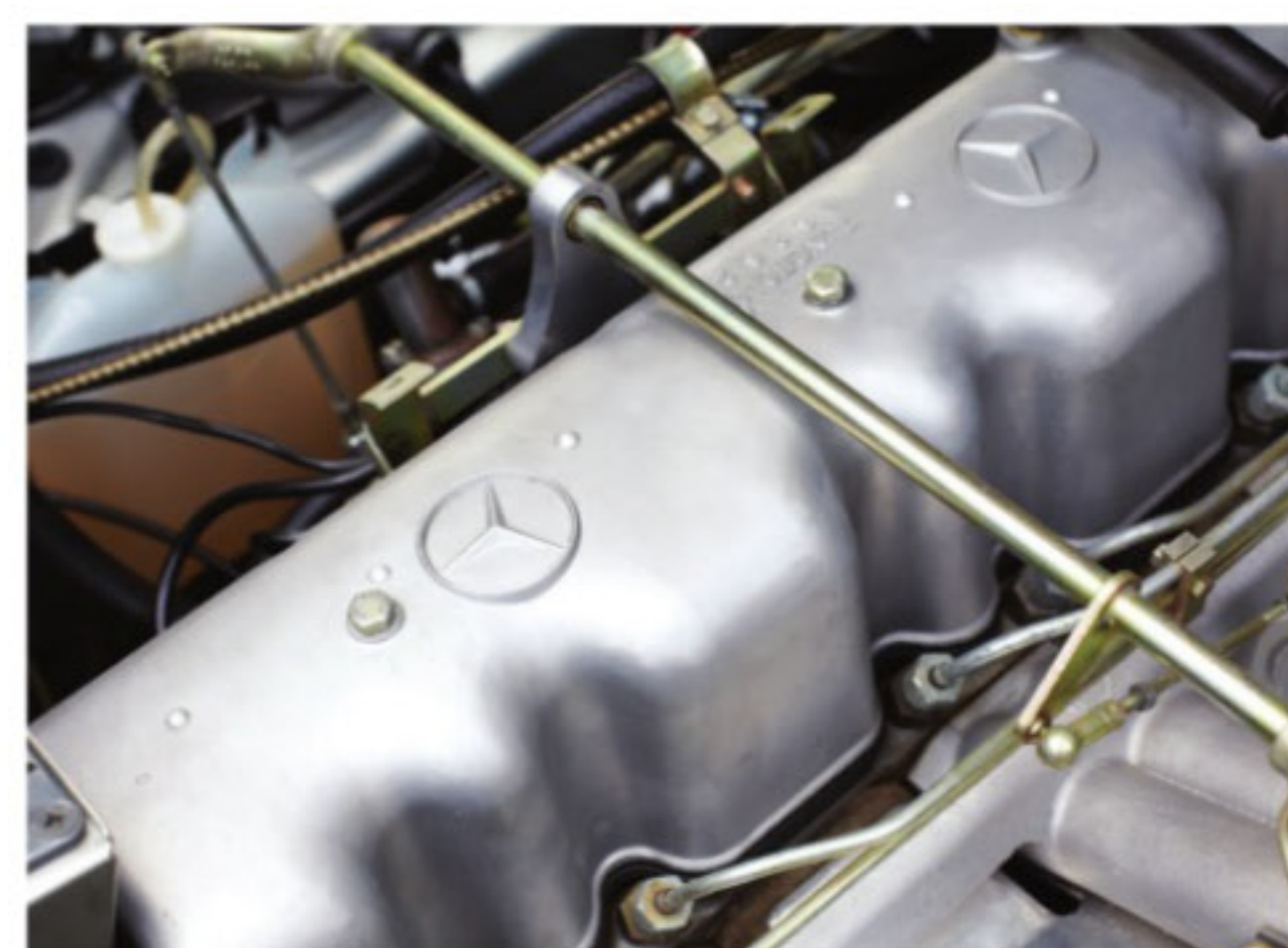
With a passion for Mercedes-Benz cars, award winning Australian architect Taras Wolf has literally built his home around them





△ Taras shares his passion with his daughters.

▽ Beautiful details of the straight-six.



▽ The W113 SL does not get better than this.

▽▽ Pristine dials beyond the padded wheel.



“People think I’m crazy for using these cars so regularly, but I’m determined to enjoy them”

“
Maintaining these cars can be
time consuming, but at the
same time it is also a privilege
”



TARAS WOLF WAS BORN IN AUSTRALIA BUT GREW up in Bangkok, Thailand during the 1970s and 80s. His father was a great car enthusiast, and over the years the family enjoyed the luxury of owning a huge array of European cars. “Amongst our cars, there was always at least one Mercedes, often two,” Taras explained with a smile.

“Over those years we had at least a dozen different Mercedes, but it was not until the mid 1990s that I became a true Mercedes fan myself.

“For quite a while I drove my mother’s 1976 Mercedes 280SLC. It had grown old and tired, so I gave it a full restoration, which was how I learnt to appreciate the quality of design and build that went into every Mercedes from that era. I quickly built up a library of books I could find on Mercedes. I was particularly fascinated by those cars from the 1960s and 70s.

“I really liked good original examples, but these were far and few in Thailand,” he continued. “After the SLC, I went through six more classic Mercedes including two W108 saloons, a W114, two Pagoda SLs and a really nice, black W111 280SE Coupe – all in the space of just a few years, before moving back to live in Melbourne Australia.

“Compared to Bangkok, Melbourne had many more classic Mercedes. Also, the climate is more suitable for the open top models. Parts in Australia were easier to source and there seemed to be more classic car expertise in general,” said Taras. “It never ceases to amaze me that many Mercedes spare parts going back half a century are still available to buy directly through Mercedes-Benz Australia. It just goes to show how committed Mercedes-Benz is to its cars and heritage.

“At 27, I became the proud owner of a very rare, 1971 280SE 3.5 Cabriolet. It might not be *the* most iconic Mercedes-Benz, but only 1,232 were manufactured, meaning they are rarer than the legendary 300SL Gullwing [of which Mercedes built 1,400]. Only 68 of these 3.5 cabriolets were made in right-hand drive form, and only six were originally imported into Australia. Mine is one of the lucky six – I was just in the right place at the right time, and had just enough money to buy it.

A GROWING COLLECTION

“Following the cabriolet were a 1971 250CE and a 1979 450SEL 6.9. All three are exceptional in their own ways. Over the years, I’ve probably touched every part of each of these cars – restoring or replacing things to bring each car up to concours standard. Most of my Mercedes experiences were a by-product of my burning desire to own a silver 280SL Pagoda. My father had one when I was a child, and then after seeing a fully restored one in 1998, I decided that I just had to have one.

“The Pagoda has heavenly looks and typically solid, Mercedes-Benz build quality. Just as importantly, they are still quite modern to drive and are appreciating in value. My 280SL Pagoda dream was finally realised in 2008 after a four-year ground-up restoration. The car had 80,000 miles on the clock when I bought it, and was highly original. It really did not need a restoration, but I wanted the car to feel like it did when it left the factory.



△ Storage space for three cars in this special area.

△◁ The W113 280SL Pagoda is a dream drive.

◁ Taras' cars are part of the Wolf family's setting.

"I confess to being obsessive and needing to finish things to their highest possible standards. I'm an architect and I have the same attitude towards the buildings I design. When talking to clients, I often use my cars as a metaphor for my design approaches and methods – the idea of attention to every detail, and how it is often the smallest features that make the biggest differences. My house has been designed to integrate the cars into the family. There is a space for the cars to live with us. So while I'm polishing the car, I can still be connected to the rest of the family. They can even join in if they choose," Taras added.

"I really enjoy entering my cars into concours events and sharing my passion with family and fellow enthusiasts. I'm proud to say that all my cars are immaculate, original, and concours winners. There are still many more Mercedes cars I'd love to own one day, but for the moment I'm really enjoying what I have. Caring and maintaining such cars to the very highest standards can be time consuming, but at the same time it is also a privilege. I'm

very blessed and I drive each car as frequently as I can to remind me of how fortunate I have been. People think I'm crazy for using these cars so regularly, but I'm determined to enjoy them. These cars were designed to get wet and not be put in glass cabinets.

"The cars and all their history have become interwoven as a part of my life's fabric. The 3.5 Cabriolet, for example, was my wedding car," Taras revealed. "Besides the four classic Mercedes, we also own a 2003 ML350 which serves as the main family workhorse. My children are now growing up with Mercedes in the same way that I did as a child, and I often wonder if they will be influenced by the three-pointed star in the same way that I was – and still am."

The Wolf House Dreaming up a home fit for stars

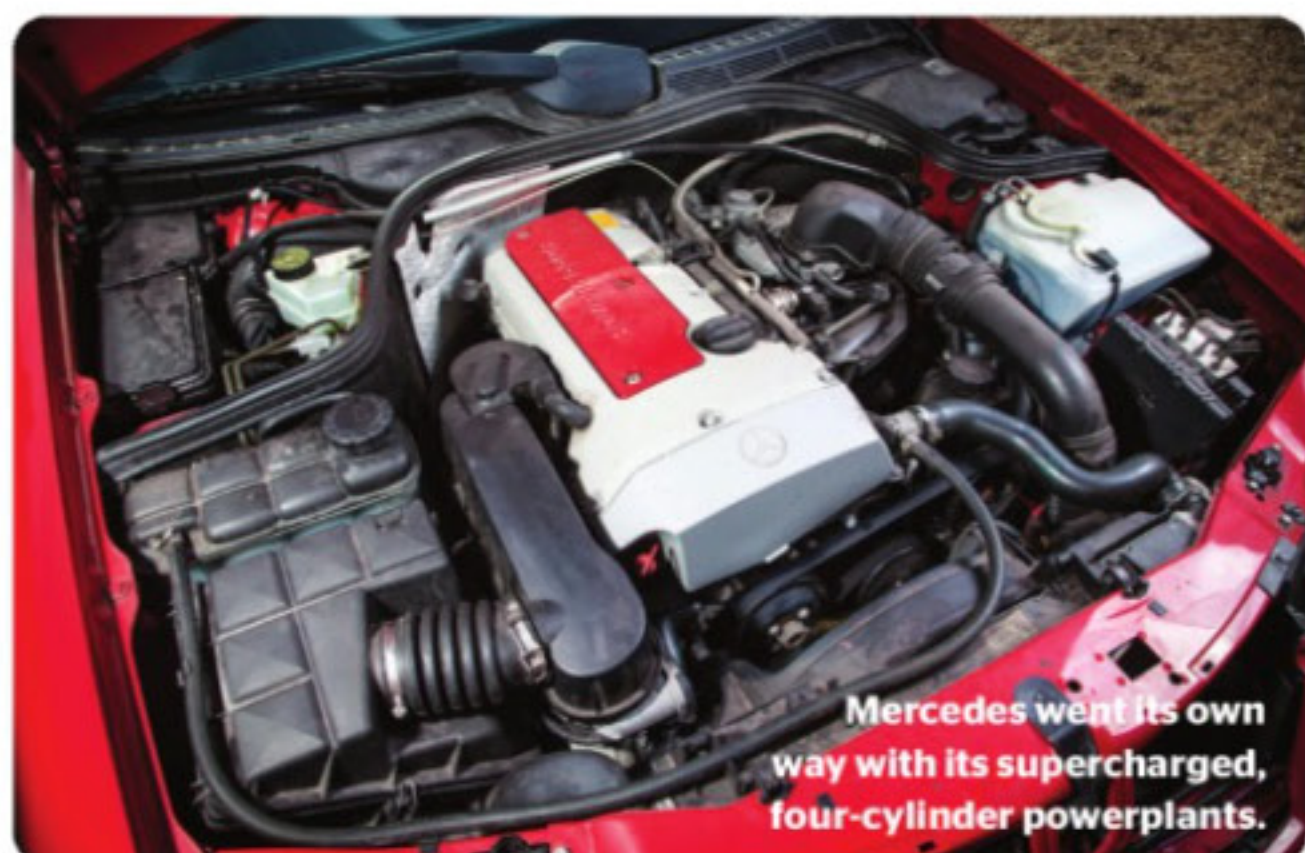
The Wolf House was designed by Wolf Architects for a young family. It had to be energy efficient, light filled, and promote connectivity between the family members, yet accommodate a home office that can operate independently.

It houses the family's varied collections, which include five classic Mercedes, artwork, vintage *Star Wars* memorabilia, and a studio for 20 vintage synthesisers. Underlining all of the above is a subtle 'East meets West' theme inspired by the owners who grew up in South East Asia and are ethnically Anglo-Chinese. The Wolf House – and quite a few of its resident Mercedes – starred in the Australian version of *Dream Build* on ABC TV in 2013.

BEAUTY IN DESIGN

Taras Wolf is enormously enthusiastic about his Mercedes cars, yet is modest in the way he talks about his success as an architect. To get an idea of his superb work, you may care to look at the Wolf Architects website www.wolfdesigns.com.au.

My Merc > **CLK230 Kompressor Cabriolet**



Mercedes went its own way with its supercharged, four-cylinder powerplants.



Mercedes cabriolets impart a sense of sophistication and style that few rivals match.



Based on the 202-series C-Class, the 208 CLK looks mighty fine in solid red.

**On days like this one,
I'll find any excuse to
use the car**



◀ Lady Julia Davis used to own an SLK.

▷ A cool £2,500 restoration for this 2002 CLK.



LADY IN RED

Committing to a CLK230 Kompressor Cabriolet that appeared worse for wear, this owner is now reaping the rewards of her investment

WORDS AND IMAGES **ERIC RICHARDSON**

IF YOU FIND yourself with five minutes to spare today, take a quick look at the classified car adverts and you'll discover that 208-series CLK cabriolets are not in short supply, and nor are they expensive. In fact, they're positively cheap! For instance, a 2001, one-owner CLK320 Cabriolet with 120,000 miles on the clock and a full

was going to cost less than buying another CLK cabriolet from the same year and in the same condition achieved by this car's restoration," explains Julia.

HEAD AND HEART

Sourced in Newmarket, not too far from her home in nearby Cambridgeshire, the car was bought with a desire to upgrade her previous passion, namely an

and found a car that was clearly in need of attention. "There was a lot of rust on it," she remembers. "The inner front wheelarch on the driver's side was practically gone, and there was bubbling around the door handles and key locks. Nearly every panel had rust, and although there had been some repairs in the past, the paint in those areas didn't match, so the car looked a bit down at heel.

"Also, one of the headlight lenses had deteriorated with age and the key fob had stopped working. It didn't look too promising, I'll be honest with you!" Julia concludes with a laugh. "But we bought it knowing the deal would work for us, even after the restorative work."

So, with an imminent holiday, and a desire to see the car's imperfections attended to, including the folding roof which had become inoperative during their short period of ownership, the soft top Mercedes was handed over to Julia's workshop of choice, independent Mercedes specialist Stewart and Wisbey Ltd (stewartandwisbey.co.uk) in Cambridgeshire. "The company's initial view was that the car was in excellent condition mechanically, which was a relief. I asked them to go through the car with a fine-toothed comb and get it back to nearly new condition. All in, the work cost us about £2,500, and for that we have a car with bodywork that looks as good as new."

Returning from her holidays in August 2013, Julia's desire to get behind the wheel of the car was almost unbearable, so a trip in the CLK to see her family in Bolton, Lancashire was hastily arranged. Since then, the car has enjoyed regular use, with numerous trips across England under its belt, while a trip to the Isle of Wight with the CLK section of the Mercedes-Benz Club was planned for the week after we met.

"On days like this one, I'll find any excuse to use the car, even if

JUST THE FACTS

Mercedes-Benz CLK230 Kompressor Cabriolet (A208)

ENGINE M111 2,295cc 4-cyl supercharged

POWER 194bhp@5,300rpm

TORQUE 206lb ft@2,500-5,000rpm

TRANSMISSION 5-speed auto, RWD

WEIGHT 1,645kg

0-62MPH 8.6sec

TOP SPEED 143mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 29.4mpg

CO2 EMISSIONS 237g/km

YEARS PRODUCED 1998-2003

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

it's just to go shopping. Likewise, if I want to visit the family and it looks like it's going to be a reasonable weekend weather wise, we will take the car up there. Come the winter, however, it stays in the garage because I want to keep it in good condition. So it's not quite an everyday car, but given the work it's had done, and my intention to keep it, I think keeping it away from salty roads is a sensible approach to take.

GOING NOWHERE

"I've always loved Mercedes," continues Julia, the passion clear in her voice. "When I was younger, I fell for the then newly launched R129 SL and said to myself that one day I'd have a Mercedes sports car. Back then, I'd never have dared to dream that I would have two of them! It sounds corny, I know, but we all have a dream car and for me that was a Mercedes. It didn't really matter to me which model, just so long as it was a sports car with a cabriolet roof."

While suggesting the CLK is a car with sporting pretensions will fuel serious debate, do not forget that this cabriolet's supercharged, four-cylinder engine puts out 194bhp and 206lb ft of torque, so it is no plodder.

► **Elite Partnership Leadership Training Centre** provided the location **Tel 01371 850800**
Web theelitepartnership.com



▲ 121,000 miles covered, but you wouldn't know it.

▷△ The CLK's soft top does not stay up for long.

▷ Rear seats a big selling point for this owner.



Mercedes-Benz service history could be yours for just £1,500.

So when I met Lady Julia Davis to photograph her stunning, CLK230 Kompressor Cabriolet, my first task was to understand her decision to subject her CLK to a bare metal respray, rather than simply seek out another example from the ample list of CLKs advertised for sale. "Even with the cost of the repairs factored in, it

SLK230 K. "The SLK was a lovely car and beautiful to drive, but it just wasn't big enough for me to use when my daughter and grandson came to visit. So after thinking it over, we decided to look at what other Mercedes might be out there, and came across this CLK on eBay."

Being wary of the pitfalls of buying a car unseen, Julia and her husband Peter visited the seller

CHRISTMAS STEALS

'Tis the season to be jolly, and not just because Santa Claus is in town - there are great deals on new and used Mercedes-Benz cars just waiting to be discovered

WORDS GUY BAKER IMAGES DAIMLER AG/TERRY OBORNE

Mercedes-Benz has consolidated an impressive five per cent market share in the UK



MERCEDES' NEW car sales staff have never had it so good. The market for new cars remains extremely buoyant, with buyers continuing to purchase new Mercedes in record numbers.

Relatively low deposit requirements, sizeable dealer contributions and alluring finance deals continue to work their magic, helping Mercedes-Benz consolidate an impressive five per cent market share in the UK.

In terms of the used car market, however, things are looking a bit less rosy, as Rupert Pontin, Head of Valuations at market analysts

Glass's, explains. "With used car retail demand having taken a downturn recently, the trade has begun to struggle with an increase in stock levels at auctions and in wholesale channels. This means prices will soften in line with the laws of supply and demand."

DIRECT DEALS

But don't expect monumental discounts, as Rupert stressed. "The Mercedes-Benz brand is undergoing a resurgence and demand for its products continues to outdo that of other brands. It's interesting to note that in the last six months, Mercedes-Benz models took up to four places in

the Top 10 Slowest Selling Cars list compiled by Glass's, yet in October it had no entries at all."

So where should Mercedes buyers look for the best deals? Well, franchised dealerships are offering new E-Class estates from £359 a month, with 6.2 per cent APR finance and £4,999 deposit. This buys an E220 Bluetec SE with a seven-speed auto and metallic paint thanks to a big dealer contribution of £4,065. The AMG Line version is £379 a month with a deposit of £5,091.

Main dealers are also offering £1,500 off SLKs over 90 days old and bought before December 31 2014 with zero per cent APR.

Outside the main dealership network, some of the best offers we found were on new B-Classes and MLs at uk-car-discount.co.uk. The company was promoting a saving of £1,094 on a B180 SE automatic, and up to £1,152 on a B180 CDI Sport auto. Meanwhile, buyers could glean a discount of as much as £4,238 off the list price of an ML350 CDI Bluetec SE.

Those in the market for a used Mercedes-Benz should check out Car Giant (see the website www.cargiant.co.uk), which has well maintained, 2010 and 2011 A-Classes from just £6,300, as well as 2010, 2011 and 2012 MLs from about £20,000.

Our best used buy this month...

W169 A160 (2009-2012)

With enthusiastic hatchback buyers prepared to pay close to list price for a nearly new W176 A-Class, the previous W169 model appears unloved at the moment, despite offering ample space and serious economy. The A160 model (which also came in BlueEfficiency guise) makes the most sense as a used buy, with a 94bhp petrol engine that achieves mid 40s fuel economy on the combined cycle, and beats the diesels for refinement. Even late plate facelifted examples struggle to better £10,000 with around 10,000 miles on the clock.

► Are you keen to downsize, but not prepared to sacrifice performance? Then check out our top three Mercedes that are small and mighty yet cost just £6,000!



FORECOURT FIND

A209 CLK200
Kompressor
Cabriolet

Affordable and cherished CLK-Class cabriolets are becoming harder to find, so we were delighted to discover this 2005 CLK200 Kompressor Avantgarde for sale at Mercedes specialist Mercland in Nuneaton, Warwickshire.

With just 44,600 miles on the clock, the sought after five-speed automatic transmission with manual shift mode, a pristine service history and full grey leather upholstery, front and rear parking sensors, a blue soft top, 17-inch alloy wheels, dark ash wood trim, cruise control, dimming and folding mirrors, and climate control, it's one of the best examples we have seen.

It's also packing a 161bhp, supercharged engine, good for a 10.5-second sprint to 62mph and around 32mpg on the combined cycle. The dealer's asking price? A smidgeon under £8,000.

► Dealer information **Mercland**
Tel 02476 386327 Web www.mercland.com



△ Five twin-spoke alloys and light blue metallic paintwork.

▷ The supercharged four-cylinder petrol engine boasts 161bhp.

▽ Light grey leather upholstery and dark ash wood trim inside.



TOP TIPS

BUYING
A HIGH
MILE CAR

Follow our advice to ensure you bag a dependable and well loved Benz that won't reveal nasty surprises

⌚ Plenty of background research will make the difference between buying a bargain and a banger. Do not let yourself fall for the cheapest example - buy the best for the money. However, this tactic may mean you need to travel further afield.

⌚ Stick to immaculate, cherished examples with a low number of owners and complete service histories - even one missed service could come back to bite you, particularly when it comes to an automatic gearbox.

⌚ Given the age of most high milers, you must inspect any potential purchase extremely carefully - always prioritise solid bodywork and good mechanicals over minor issues like stone chips and kerbed alloy wheels, as the latter can be fixed cheaply.

⌚ Steer clear of Mercedes with any modification at all - these could cost the earth to fix if they go wrong. Always buy a standard car - even if you subsequently intend to modify it. And speaking of which, if you do modify it, perhaps restrict yourself to tweaks that can be reversed.

⌚ Once you have bought a high mile Mercedes-Benz, resist temptation to skimp on maintenance, and adhere religiously to the factory servicing schedule. A well maintained three-pointed star lasts a lot longer than a neglected one. Fact.



AUCTION SPOTLIGHT

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

● E300 Turbodiesel Estate

Avantgarde 3.0L, diesel, auto, 2000/Y plate, 178,000 miles, **£775**

● A140 Classic SE

1.4L, petrol, manual, 2004/04 plate, 38,000 miles, **£1,325**

● C180 Elegance

1.8L, petrol, manual, 2004/53 plate, 108,000 miles, **£1,650**

● S320

3.2L, petrol, auto, 1999/V plate, 74,000 miles, **£1,950**

● A150 Elegance SE

1.5L, petrol, manual, 2005/54 plate, 125,000 miles, **£2,500**

● B180 SE

1.8L, petrol, manual, 2006/06 plate, 64,000 miles, **£3,950**

● CLK500 Coupe Elegance

5.0L, petrol, auto, 2003/03 plate, 34,000 miles, **£4,500**

● SL500

5.0L, petrol, auto, 1998/S plate, 82,000 miles, **£4,750**

● E320 CDI Elegance

3.2L, diesel, auto, 2003/53 plate, 69,000 miles, **£5,750**

● S320 CDI

3.2L, diesel, auto, 2006/06 plate, 148,000 miles, **£7,600**

● CLK320 Coupe Sport

3.2L, petrol, auto, 2006/06 plate, 51,000 miles, **£7,700**

● CLS55 AMG

5.4L, petrol, auto, 2005/55 plate, 109,000 miles, **£9,600**

● SLK350

3.5L, petrol, auto, 2004/54 plate, 16,000 miles, **£9,950**

● ML350 SE

3.5L, petrol, auto, 2006/56 plate, 56,000 miles, **£10,100**

● CLS55 AMG

5.4L, petrol, auto, 2005/55 plate, 81,000 miles, **£11,350**

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



TOP 3 £6,000 HOT STARS

Despite the brighter economic future following the global recession, many Mercedes-Benz buyers have decided to stick with smaller vehicles after downsizing to cut running costs. But buying a smaller three-pointed star does not mean you have to sacrifice performance,

or practicality, as these three contenders – two of which are turbocharged, and one has a rorty M272 V6 – ably demonstrate. With short overhangs and nimble handling, these are pocket sized, prestige machines that pack more wallop than your average sized saloon.



A200 TURBO (2005-2008)

Understated styling means the W169 A200 Turbo can go about its business largely unnoticed, yet it can achieve 62mph in just 7.3 seconds with an automatic CVT, thanks to its 190bhp, turbocharged four-cylinder engine.

What's more, a £500 remap can release 226bhp, turning this humble looking Mercedes into a highly amusing hot hatchback. Prices start at £4,000, but buy now – good examples are disappearing fast.



B200 TURBO (2005-2008)

An even rarer beast than its A-Class sibling, the 190bhp B200 Turbo is ideal for those who require a small MPV but aren't prepared to forfeit performance, capable of 0-62mph in 7.4 seconds with an automatic CVT. It packs a high spec too, including 18-inch AMG alloys, sports seats and sports suspension. Prices start at £4,200 and it will do around 34mpg on the combined cycle, which is just a few miles per gallon shy of the A200 Turbo.



C350 SPORTS COUPE (2005-2008)

The C-Class sports coupe's facelift in 2004 brought improved steering whilst the range topping, 272bhp, six-cylinder C350 model available from 2005 offered serious performance. Equipped with a seven-speed automatic, this two-door coupe can sprint from 0 to 62mph in just 6.2 seconds, and the combination of a growling V6 soundtrack and a luxury spec makes every drive special. The cheapest examples sell for under £5,000.

PRODUCTS SHOCKS & AWE

BILSTEIN B8 PERFORMANCE DAMPER RANGE FOR W124 E-CLASS

If you are looking to enhance your 124 saloon's tired suspension, then Bilstein's B8 dampers offer the ideal solution. As an OEM supplier to Mercedes, Bilstein offers dampers for every engine variant of the 124 saloon range – with these monotube design B8 shocks working in perfect harmony with either OEM springs, or any high quality aftermarket choice. Despite maintaining the original comfort of the car, these dampers also increase handling precision. Prices start at £118 plus VAT. For more details see www.bilstein.de.



RICHBROOK LUXURY TAILORED CAR COVERS

Need to protect your Mercedes over winter? Then take a look at Richbrook's Luxury Tailored Car Covers. These lightweight, tailor made covers boast a lightweight construction and are perfect for both indoor and outdoor use. A number of UK car makers have already chosen Richbrook as their aftermarket supplier, and with over 1,000 patterns your Mercedes will be well catered for. Featuring door mirror pockets, elasticated hems and a detachable strap for easy fitment, these breathable, non abrasive covers weigh less than 2kg. Prices start at £89.99 – see www.richbrook.co.uk.



VALET PRO BEADING MARVELLOUS WAX

ValetPro's Beading Marvellous Wax is an easy-to-use, carnauba rich paste wax, with water 'beading' technology that is said to provide a long lasting, high gloss, protective barrier that guards and maintains your Mercedes' paint finish for up to six months. Unlike traditional hard waxes, it can be used on hot or cold surfaces with no loss in quality or durability. Priced at £34.99, Beading Marvellous is available through all good detailing stockists. Visit www.valetpro.co.uk to find your nearest outlet.





Martyn's Car Sales

A selection of some of our classic Mercedes



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



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 **£7,000**



SL320 Auto, 99/S, 78k, 'Azurite', matching leather, special factory maple wood, rear seat, hard top, 2 private owners, FMBSH, superb **£7,500**



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 **£7,950**



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 **£9,950**



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 ... **£10,950**



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 **£13,950**

Other cars available

190E 2.6 Auto, 92/K, 78k, leather **£3,950**
420 SEC, 87/E, Silver, 172k **£3,000**
S280 Auto, 96/N, 75k, leather **£3,450**
E220 W124, 98/R, 44k, manual, air **£5,000**
E220 W124, 01/51, 85k, manual, air .. **£3,500**
SLK 200K, 00/X, 62k, manual, Silver . **£3,650**
560 SEC, 1991, 100k, auto **£POA**
CLK200 Auto Coupe, 02/02, 69k **£3,000**

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ML 350 CDI BlueEFFICIENCY SPORT
2011 (60), 4x4, 7G-Tronic, 37,000 miles,
Obsidian Black..... **£24,995**



SL 55 AMG
2005 (05), convertible, Tiptronic, 46,000 miles,
Brilliant Silver **£22,995**



M350 CDI BlueEFFICIENCY SE
2010 (60), 4x4, 7G-Tronic, 57,000 miles,
Tenorite Grey **£21,995**



E63 AMG
2007 (57), estate, 7G-Tronic Plus, 82,000 miles,
Designo Graphite Grey **£18,995**



C220 CDI BLUEEFF-CY Sport (Facelift)
2011(11), estate, 7G-Tronic Plus, 53,000 miles,
Palladium Silver **£16,995**



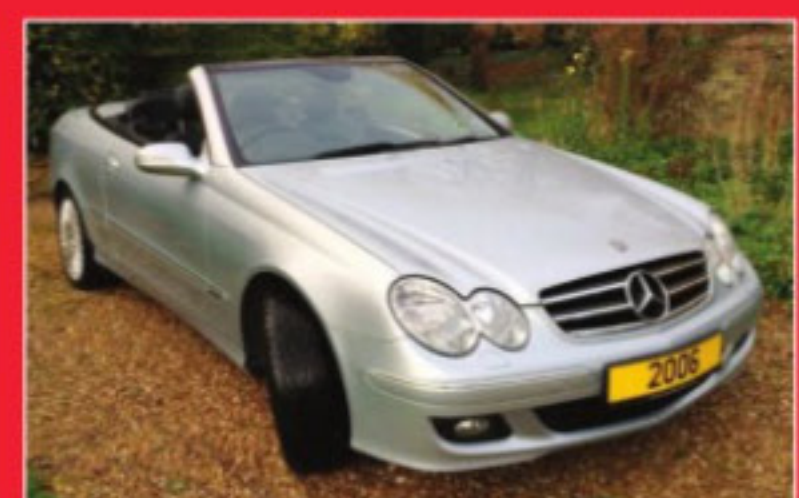
C220 CDI BLUEEFF-CY Elegance
2010(60), estate, Tiptronic, 49,000 miles, Obsidian
Black **£15,995**



SLK 280 (3.0-V6)
2005(55), roadster, 7G-Tronic, 53,000 miles, Benitoite
Blue **£10,995**



C 280 (3.0-V6) ELEGANCE
2007(07), saloon, 7G -Tronic, 41,000 miles, Cubanite
Silver **£8,750**



CLK 280 (3.0-V6) Avantgarde
2006(56), convertible, 7G -Tronic, 69,000 miles,
Tellurite Silver **£6,995**

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MODERN MARVEL

With a high set driving position and practical cabin, the first generation A-Class makes an intriguing ownership proposition

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

THE A-CLASS HAS long been part of the roadscape across Europe, but Mercedes-Benz shocked the market when it launched the first of the three generations of compact hatchback in 1997. The radical design – tall and boxy, and based on a ‘sandwich’ construction, to house battery packs for the planned electric version – had been trailed for four years previously in ‘Vision A 93’ concept form, but many

critics believed that a supermini sized hatchback, and a curious looking one at that, had no place in an otherwise upmarket range of elegantly styled cars.

The 168-series A-Class was in fact a major success, its near 1.1m sales from launch until its evolved successor, the 169-series, was revealed in 2004, adding critical mass to Mercedes’ sales and significantly contributing to its ambitious expansion in volume during the late 1990s and beyond.

It was a clever package, claiming 20 design innovations including a flat floor, weight saving plastic wings and tailgate, and 72 seat position configurations. But it did not feel a particularly well built car, especially inside, so a decade after it was discontinued, can there be any left that constitute a good used buy?

DESIGN, EVOLUTION

A front-wheel drive car with a transverse engine configuration, the 168-series A-Class could not

borrow from existing Mercedes, so two new families of four-cylinder engines were developed. The A140 and A160 used the two-valve, single cam, M116 petrol engine in 1.4- and 1.6-litre guise, producing 81bhp/96lb ft and 101bhp/111lb ft respectively, while the 1.7-litre OM668 turbodiesel – four-valve and twin-cam, and featuring the then new common-rail induction, for more accurate fuel metering – gave 59bhp and 118lb ft for the A160 CDI (not then offered in the UK), and 89bhp/133lb ft in the A170 CDI.

Three lightweight gearboxes were offered, depending on the model: a five-speed manual, five-speed automatic with sequential Tipfunction, and the semi automatic ACS (Automatic Clutch System) with a clutchless manual change. The steering employed a rack and pinion system with electrical assistance.

The on sale date in the UK was September 1998, the W168 offered



△ Clear lenses and body strips for later cars.

The 168-series A-Class was in fact a major success

in Classic, Elegance and Avantgarde forms. Soon after, the astonishing A190 Twin was unveiled, with a 1.9-litre under the bonnet, and another of the same in the rear, the combined output 247bhp. E55 AMG brakes under 18-inch wheels stopped the Twin, but production did not progress beyond two, made for McLaren's two F1 drivers of the time, Mika Häkkinen and David Coulthard.

In June 1999, something resembling a sporty A-Class appeared, the A190, with a 123bhp/111lb ft torque, 1.9-litre, M166 four-cylinder, and 16- rather than 15-inch alloy wheels.

The facelifted 168-series was presented at the Geneva motor show in early 2001, by which time over 30,000 A-Classes had been sold in the UK, and it was an important milestone. The most noticeable and welcome aspect was the redesigned interior, the cheap looking dashboard replaced by one made from softer plastic, while the

switchgear and steering wheel, now height adjustable, were also redesigned. Curtain airbags joined the existing side airbags.

On the outside, the headlamps switched to clear lenses and, in an attempt to make the body look less dumpy, body side strips were fitted. At this point the A-Class, praised for its cabin space, became even more roomy with long-wheelbase models (V168) added to the range, a 170mm wheelbase stretch creating more rear legroom than in a W220 S-Class.

The two petrol engines remained unchanged, and a little more power and economy was squeezed out of the A170 CDI, but the main engine interest arose one year later, in February 2002, when the A210 Evolution was introduced,

its stroked out, 2.1-litre petrol engine producing 138bhp and 151lb ft torque. It looked slightly sporty – if that word can ever really be applied to a first generation A-Class – with its lowered suspension, 17-inch alloys, and leather/Alcantara seats and brushed aluminium interior trim.

Mercedes-Benz subsequently launched two limited editions, the Canyon Orange A140 and A160, and the high spec A+. But the remaining significant development before production ended in May 2004 was the UK introduction of the A160 CDI, now in more powerful and economical form, producing 74bhp/118lb ft torque and hitting 58.9mpg on the combined fuel cycle.

SPOTTED FOR SALE
PRIVATE SALE
A140 L Classic SE
2003/53, black, grey interior, integrated child seat, 53,000 miles, £2,495, Surrey

WHAT TO PAY

The youngest 168-series A-Class may be a decade old, but there still appears to be value

JUST THE FACTS

Mercedes-Benz A140/L (W/V168)

ENGINE M166 1,397cc 4-cyl
POWER 81bhp@5,000rpm
TORQUE 96lb ft@3,750rpm
TRANSMISSION 5-speed manual, FWD
WEIGHT 1,105/1,135kg
0-62MPH 12.9/13.2sec
TOP SPEED 106mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 39.8mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 1997-2004/2001-2004

Mercedes-Benz A160/L (W/V168)

ENGINE M166 1,598cc 4-cyl
POWER 101bhp@5,250rpm
TORQUE 111lb ft@4,000rpm
TRANSMISSION 5-speed manual, FWD
WEIGHT 1,115/1,145kg
0-62MPH 10.8/11.1sec
TOP SPEED 112mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 39.2mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 1997-2004/2001-2004

Mercedes-Benz A210 Evolution/L (W168)

ENGINE M166 2,084cc 4-cyl
POWER 138bhp@5,500rpm
TORQUE 151lb ft@4,000rpm
TRANSMISSION 5-speed manual, FWD
WEIGHT 1,165/1,195kg
0-62MPH 8.2/8.4sec
TOP SPEED 126mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 35.8mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 2002-2004

Mercedes-Benz A160 CDI (W168)

ENGINE OM668 1,689cc 4-cyl turbocharged
POWER 74bhp@3,600rpm
TORQUE 118lb ft@1,500-2,800rpm
TRANSMISSION 5-speed manual, FWD
WEIGHT 1,155kg
0-62MPH 15.1sec
TOP SPEED 101mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 58.9mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 2003-2004

Figures representative of the 168-series A-Class range and include the later A160 CDI offered in the UK; fuel consumption according to NEDC combined

in them if a presentable, late model with low mileage. We saw £4,000 asked for the likes of an A160 Elegance with a full history and which had been a second car, with under 50,000 miles. They are long gone from Mercedes-Benz Retailers' forecourts, and many seem to be trade-ins to clear at used car dealers, with around 80 per cent for sale petrol powered.

The first generation A-Class has taken over from the 190 and 124-series as the Mercedes whose value is liable to double if you fill the fuel tank. But the £200 and £300 cars are to be avoided because they will probably require work costing much more than that. Our recommended budget for a 168 A-Class is £3,000 maximum – beyond that you could buy the superior 169-series A-Class. ▷

168 As **INSIDE AND OUT**

POWERTRAIN

If the A140 or A160 petrol engines are not running correctly, the fault is almost certainly the air mass sensor, which can be an expensive problem to fix, warns Kevin James of Stuttgart Garage in Pontypridd, south Wales, which runs a courtesy fleet of 168s. "It's the most common running problem," he says. "The air mass side of it is what actually goes wrong, but it is part of a sealed unit. It will give a rough idle and a lack of power." Timing chains have been known to snap, but it's not a common issue, he adds.

The diesel engines don't have ECU problems but the injectors can block up as the fuel carbonates after a higher mileage. "You'll probably get a diesely odour in the cabin, and possibly a 'chuffing' noise from the

engine bay." On all models, the starter motor can fail, often flagged by a clicking sound, and this part is expensive to replace because in such a tightly packed engine bay the engine and gearbox have to be dropped to allow access.

Both the manual and semi automatic gearboxes are usually trouble free, the automatic transmission less so.

"The first gear clutch carrier splits, so you will get slipping in first gear and probably an 'F' instead of 'D' on the dashboard readout,"

Kevin warns. "Eventually the car goes into fail-safe mode to protect itself, and a gearbox rebuild is £1,200 to £1,500." You have been warned.

From far left: M166 unit used in all petrol models, starter motor failure could mean a substantial sum to replace it; the five-speed manual is pleasing to use, with a light clutch pedal feel too; thick and high sill of the A's sandwich floor.



SUSPENSION, STEERING AND BRAKES

Under this heading, the 168-series A-Class is at its most troublesome. The spring cups for the front suspension struts are prone to snapping. "Replacement is a quick and inexpensive job - provided you can get the old bits off easily," Kevin explains. "The bolts at the top of the suspension mount can snap off when you try to turn them." At the rear of the car, the radius arms fail. "We've done hundreds of them over the years," Kevin reports. "You'll hear a clonking and banging over bumpy roads." The rear road springs commonly snap too, leaving the compact hatchback slightly down at one side and prone to making a 'twanging' noise on the move.

The steering can be a headache, due to the double problems of a failed power steering pump and the steering column itself partially seizing up. A power steering pump takes only an hour to fit, though the part is quite expensive, but what can be a killer is the column problem, manifested by a snatching and grinding, and also a notchy feel, when moving from one full lock to the other. The cost of replacement can be high in relation to the car's value, so walk away if you find this fault during an inspection.



From top: The A-Class is generally stiff riding but hardly uncomfortable; snapped rear springs will make an unusual sound over bumps in the road.

"The 168 A-Class does not suffer from significant rust issues"

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FOR SALE**
USED CAR DEALER
A170 CDI Elegance
2004/54, manual, metallic
grey, grey interior, 39,000
miles, £3,990,
Bournemouth



Clockwise from top left: Hub caps as standard for Classic trim line; the A-Class was known for its quirky design; wipers move outwards from a central position; new bootlid lock can't be bought separately; Classic, Elegance and Avantgarde specs offered.

BODYWORK AND WHEELS

The A-Class was launched during a time when Mercedes' corrosion protection was poor on some models, so it comes as a surprise to learn from Kevin James that the 168 does not suffer from significant rust issues. This is helped by the plastic wings and tailgate, and the partly encapsulated underside of the body. "When we see rust, it's because an owner hasn't tended to issues such as stone chips," Kevin says. Ironically, an A-Class theoretically has a 30-year anti corrosion warranty.

On pre facelift 168s, the hatchback lock can fail - and you can't buy that part separately, Kevin points out. Check the wheels are in good order, not dented nor badly scuffed. Should the wheels need replacing, they are easy to source second hand.



Clockwise from left: With the rear seats removed the LWB A-Class boasts a 1,530-litre boot capacity; sweeping dash with softer feel brought in during the 2001 facelift; orange tipped needles and arcing dials with yellow backlighting; not all examples were specced with electric windows all round.

INTERIOR AND ELECTRICS

Kevin James feels that although the A-Class interior looks cheap, it does wear well, but he says that one common breakage is the handle for adjusting the height of the driver's seat. When it snaps it breaks the plastic trim surrounding it, however replacement is not expensive.

Wipers can cause multiple headaches. "It's fairly common for the wiper stalk to fail, leaving you with no wipers," he warns. "The pipe for the rear wash can break so look at what is happening when you activate the rear wash - if the water isn't going on the screen then it's going into the rear roof lining."

For the best equipment specification, buy as late a car as you can. "On post facelift cars there's more chance of getting a nice spec, as Mercedes-Benz tended to load the cars up to shift them," Kevin reasons.

168 As **INSIDE AND OUT**

VERDICT

The first generation A-Class is reliable enough and corrosion resistant. However, its low value has made it a throwaway car, and you might find, as others before you have, that a major repair comes near to, or exceeds its value, in practice rendering the car little more than scrap metal. So whatever price you pay, buy on condition, not model or year. That way you have the best chance of taking pleasure from what was once a truly groundbreaking, modern Mercedes-Benz.



'The 'elk test'

- how it changed the A-Class

In what was a public embarrassment for Mercedes-Benz, a Swedish journalist managed to roll an early A-Class while conducting a simulated swerving test to avoid an elk, a substantially sized deer prone to wandering onto Scandinavian country roads.

As a result, modifications were made to the full production A-Classes including 25mm lowered suspension, a wider track, wider tyres, standard fit ESP traction control, ASR anti slip control, and Brake Assist (all 2,600 cars delivered prior to the modifications were recalled by Mercedes-Benz). This is why the A-Class always felt a very stiffly sprung and hard riding car.



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A210 Evolution L
2003/03, silver,
leather/Alcantara seats,
43,000 miles, £2,950,
south London



Typical basic servicing costs (A/B services including VAT)

MODEL	MAIN DEALER	MERCEDES SPECIALIST
All models	£148/EPOA	£135/£310

Main dealer quote from Mercedes-Benz of Glasgow, specialist quotes from Stuttgart Garage

Recalls and non routine servicing costs

There have been two recalls for the 168-series A-Class, both relating to a brake master cylinder malfunction causing an increase in brake pedal travel (numbers R/2001/044 and R/2010/152).

- ★ Repair air mass sensor **£360**
- ★ Replace starter motor **£600**
- ★ Replace failed rear radius arm **£210 per side**
- ★ Replace power steering pump **£660**
- ★ Four premium brand tyres (195/50R15) **£290**

Buyer's checks

- ✓ A faulty engine control unit (ECU) on A140/A160 models can cause poor engine running
- ✓ A diesel smell in a CDI model's cabin can mean clogged diesel injectors
- ✓ The automatic transmission may slip in first gear
- ✓ Front suspension mount cups can break
- ✓ The rear suspension's radius arms can fail, causing a clonking noise over bumps and potholes
- ✓ Grinding noises from the A-Class's steering could mean a partially seized steering column
- ✓ Check for a broken tailgate lock on pre facelift models - you can't buy this item separately

What you'll pay

- £500-£1,000** Running A140/A160/A170 CDI, but required repairs could exceed value
- £1,000-£2,000** All 2002 facelifted models - these should have a long-running MOT certificate
- £2,000-£3,000** Late, 2003 to 2004 A160 CDI in good condition, Elegance and Avantgarde are preferred over the Classic specification
- £3,000-£4,000** Late models with under 50,000 miles and convincing history

► Thank you to **Chatwal Autos** in Surrey for the loan of the A140 L pictured Tel 020 8684 2920 Web www.chatwal-autos.co.uk and to **Stuttgart Garage** in Pontypridd for technical advice and servicing costs Tel 01443 401838 Web www.stuttgartgarage.co.uk

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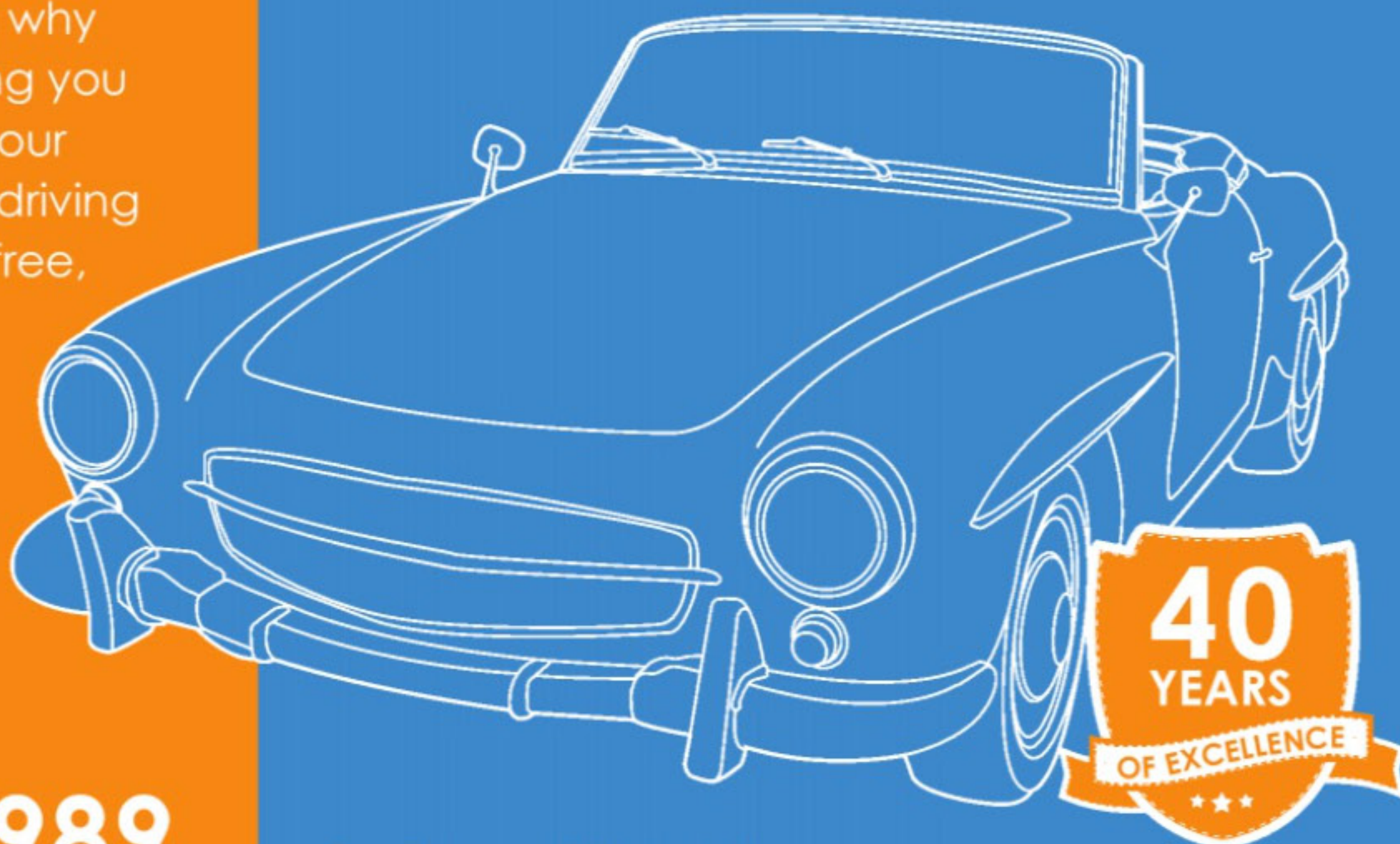
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WORDS **KYLE MOLYNEUX** IMAGES **CRAIG PUSEY/KYLE MOLYNEUX**

FACTSHEET

CAR 2004 S203 C55 AMG Estate

OWNER Mercedes Enthusiast

LOCATION London, UK

PURCHASED July 2014

UPDATES SINCE LAST REPORT Still learning how to bring out the best in the C55, as well as getting accustomed to its lust for Mobil 1 engine oil

△ Initial understeer gives way to quite delicious oversteer.

FOR THOSE READERS not aware, in late summer we traded in our C43 AMG after nine years of ownership and equipped ourselves with this rather lovely C55 AMG Estate, built in 2004 and showing 75,000 miles on the clock (for the full story on that swap, see *Mercedes Enthusiast* November 2014).

Since then, we've put the car to very good use indeed, racking up just over 3,500 miles in the process. As well as starring in a comparison test alongside a 204-series C63 AMG (coming soon), the C55's practical abilities came in handy while shooting this month's SLS AMG tribute at Bruntingthorpe.

Aside from the eerie sight of dozens of disused aircraft lying about the place, including an Olympic branded 747 – under which our AMG sat for a short while – one of the big draws of this former US Airforce base is the two-mile runway, which gifted the perfect opportunity to open up the C55's 5.4-litre V8 and see what happens way beyond motorway speed limits.

Almost nothing, and everything, was the answer. Quickly beyond 120mph, the 362bhp wagon remained as solid as a rock, while the faintest flutter of air was heard licking over the A-pillars. The cabin would have been in near silence were it not for the most rich and satisfying rumble emanating from the

AMG exhaust pipes. The M113 motor continued its vicious onslaught towards 140mph before acceleration began trailing off, and if the speedometer was to be fully believed, this car's 155mph limiter is a touch soft!

COMPLEX CHARACTER

Hitting the anchors for the double right hander at the end of the runway, the C55 pulled up straight and true, before diving for the first apex. But, as sensed on the Welsh roadtrip detailed in the last Running Report, the C55 has a tendency to understeer through fast turns, although a full helping of throttle coming out again brings on the most catchable drift, the relatively soft



springs and long body combining to make the C55 a fantastic car in which to learn the art of controlling oversteer.

With a bit more experience behind the wheel, I discovered it's possible to kill that initial understeer by coming off the brakes particularly quickly and flinging the car into a corner as you would a front-wheel drive hot hatch. Not quite the driving style many would have in mind for such a beast, but I, for one, appreciate a car whose real ability must be unlocked rather than simply received at the first attempt to drive it.

Such tyre shredding antics confirmed the value of self levelling rear suspension on estate cars. The 203-series C55 goes without this feature, and you can feel the rear sagging slightly as the weight transfers to the outer rear corner through a turn, making it even harder for the nose to

hook up with an apex. No big deal, but there is definitely room for improvements to be made in the suspension department...

Various people, including a certain Andrew Frankel, have driven our C55 now, and all climb out mulling over the same question: for the money (not much beyond £10,000), what would you rather buy? It's a good question, and

music to the ears of this editor who pinned his reputation to the new *Mercedes Enthusiast* staff car.

Our C55 does like a drink, though. And I'm not just talking about premium

unleaded fuel (during 3,550 miles, we have averaged 22.2mpg with an average speed of 34mph). Practically all AMG engines, including the M113 lump in our C43, consume oil later in life, and so it has proven with our C55's motor, which required one litre of OW-40 after 700 miles with us, and another litre

1,700 miles after that. Following the spirited stint in Leicestershire, the oil top up warning message greeted us once more, after another 1,100 miles since the last lubrication session. However, Mobil 1's New Life oil costs roughly £17 in a handy, one-litre bottle, or £50 in five-litre form, so the C55's appetite for the gloopy black stuff is not going to break the bank any time soon.

Before the winter is over, we'll get the car in for a check at Prestige Car Service in Hampshire. Hopefully there won't be anything untoward to report back. 📌

△ The C55's 470- to 1,354-litre boot has proved most useful.

△△ Taking refuge under a 747's wing during the SLS shoot.

▽ We experienced the upper reaches of the V8's performance.

The M113 V8 continued its vicious onslaught towards 140mph before acceleration began trailing off



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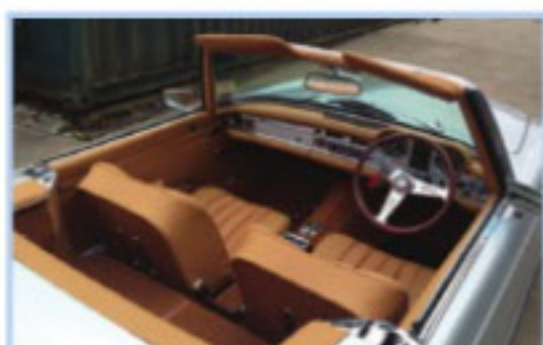
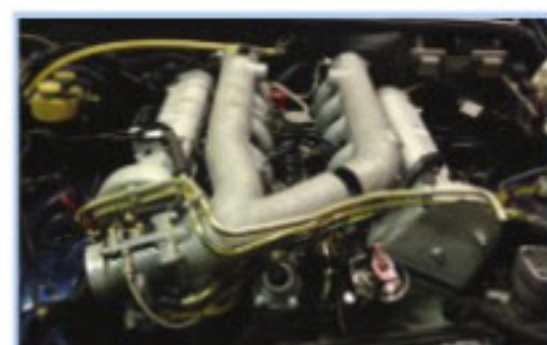
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TIME TO PREPARE

Colder weather necessitates some vital action to keep both Mercedes – and their owners – happy during the winter months

WORDS AND IMAGES **REED HITCHCOCK**

FACTSHEET

CARS 1993 A124 300CE Cabriolet/2011 S212 E350 4Matic Estate

OWNER Reed Hitchcock

LOCATION Virginia, USA

PURCHASED Sept 2011/May 2014

UPDATES SINCE LAST REPORT Tyre and fluid checks for the estate, cabrio stowed away – for now



IT'S TRUE WHAT they say: the older you get, the faster time goes by. I, for one, feel like I was only just writing about spring cleaning and yet here we are in winter – complete with leafless trees and falling temperatures. I saw frost in my garden this morning, which means that it's time to start getting ready for the colder weather – again.

For the E350 4Matic Estate, that really doesn't mean much, except adjusting tyre pressures (lest we risk the incessant wrath of the tyre pressure monitoring system), checking tread wear, and topping up the windshield washer fluid. For me, it also means waxing the bodywork to help protect the nearly pristine black paint, and a quick check of the seat heaters. That last one is a little gratuitous, but given the experience we had with the old S211, and the fact that they represent one of my dear wife's little joys in life, it's in

my interest to check and report back that everything on the car is in fine working order – which it is.

TREAD CAREFULLY

The tyres look pretty good, although the fronts are in much better condition (read: have about twice the tread depth of the rears). I think we'll be fine for the season, but I plan to drive the car when we get our first real snow just to see

how the tyres respond to the conditions. It seems like the rears must have been pretty borderline at the time the car was 'certified' by the Mercedes dealer. That's not the end of the world, but for the price, you would think that

they'd just replace them all around. Shame on me, I suppose, for not flagging them as an issue at the time of purchase. Otherwise, the estate continues to be a solid rock of reliability. We have yet to revisit the dealership for anything service related – scheduled or otherwise.

Otherwise, the estate continues to be a solid rock of reliability

The 300CE Cabriolet has been equally reliable, but that's likely due to the fact that we haven't put more than about 300 miles on it since the last report. With the temperatures dropping rapidly, the car is now safely nestled away in the garage, anxiously awaiting the next time we get the urge for some top down motoring. That doesn't mean waiting for spring, mind you.

Frankly, I like to take a convertible out on a blustery, sunny day, preferably just after light snow. There's just something about putting the top down, the windows up, the heater and bun warmers on, and making fresh tracks in fresh snow. Try it and report back.

Failing that, I still have the standing list of things to do to the 124-series cabriolet. The instrument cluster still needs a new temperature display, and I have yet to decide a plan of action for the kerbed wheels – although it probably makes sense to wait until spring to deal with the latter issue.

However, knowing my luck, I would just scrape the new alloy wheels on something hidden by snow...

△ The black paintwork came up well after a coat of protective wax.

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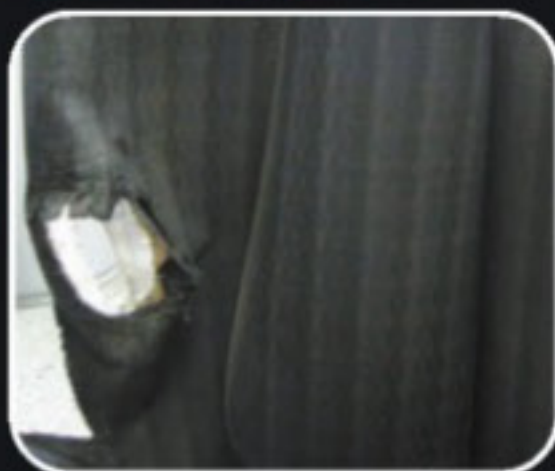
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OLD FAITHFUL

Colder weather sends the R129 into hibernation, while the W108 returns after a stint away, and a long lost friend rejoins the pack

WORDS AND IMAGES **MARTIN BUCKLEY**

FACTSHEET

CARS 1967 W108 300SEb/1996 R129 SL320/1984 W123 200

OWNER Martin Buckley

LOCATION Gloucestershire, UK

PURCHASED Dec 2011/July 2014/Oct 2014

UPDATES SINCE LAST REPORT The W108 reaffirms its class, as the W123 200 returns



IN SEPTEMBER, I GOT a lift up to Manchester and collected the 300SEb from Jeremy Banks who, after the wedding car debacle (see *Mercedes Enthusiast* September 2014), found he had no room for the car at home. I was amazed by how beautifully this car drives, and I decided to either buy it back for myself, or sell it for lots more money as I feel it is undervalued considering its original condition and rarity.

I think the key is detailing and preparing it more intensively, particularly under the bonnet. There has been a 300SE Cabriolet floating around Cotswold Classic Car Restorations, and I was keen to drive it to make a comparison with the saloon. It stood up very well to the test, feeling far more lively and pleasant than the drophead.

Meanwhile, the SL320 has pretty much been tucked away for the winter, although I will shortly pull it out for a clean before it goes into long term storage. With help from two friends,

I refitted the hardtop, which suited me as it was getting in the way on its stand, and improved the car's looks to my eyes.

HARD TO RESIST

At the end of October, I was alerted to the fact that my old W123 200 had appeared on a sales website. I knew this was an exceptionally good car, and I was interested to see the owner I sold it to three years ago had spent £3,500 on ball joints, an exhaust system and various other bits and pieces. But bear in mind he had put 20,000 miles on the car while using it every day.

When I contacted the seller, called Doug, he told me the 200 had garnered much interest, but he was thinking of hanging on to it. However, if I wanted to come and have a look and possibly do a deal, I was welcome. In short: I went, I saw and I bought. But I was not in a strong negotiating position given that Doug had spent all that money on maintenance, and was selling the 200 for what he had paid me for it!

Anyway, it drives beautifully and still goes extraordinarily well for a humble,

carburetted 200. I do feel slightly like a mildly successful Hamburg tobacconist when driving it, but given that my new book, called *Mercedes-Benz W123 – The finest saloon car of the 20th Century?* and written with Mark Cosovich, launched at the NEC Classic Motor Show in November, I feel I should own a W123 again. One thing Doug didn't tackle was the paintwork in the engine bay, which is bright red. So painting the inner wings and bulkhead to match the cream bodywork is the next job.

△ The W108 is back after serving as a classic wedding car.

▽ Welsh singer Bonnie Tyler helped launch Martin's new book.

**In short:
I went, I saw
and I bought**



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

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]**



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. **[ABW11]**



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. **[ABW10]**



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. **[ABP1]**

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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. **[LMW24R]**



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. **[LMW23R]**

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SL55 AMG, 2003, metallic silver, panoramic roof, sat nav, TV phone prep, only 57,000 miles, FMBH, recent suspension overhaul, virtually unmarked and rust free. £19,500. Tel: 01457 766670. Cheshire. **[LMW21R]**



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SLK200 Roadster, Nov 2005, only 39,860 miles, silver metallic with black interior, six-speed manual, one owner, full main dealer service history, MOT until Nov 2015, superb condition with extras, £9,450 ONO. Tel: 01580 830550. Kent/E. Sussex border. **[LMW13R]**



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190E, 1993, 2.6L, LHD, only 27,000 miles, pristine condition, no rust, dings or seat tears, absolutely immaculate, a real time capsule. \$11,500 US. Tel: 001(612) 296 5588. Minneapolis. **[CM10W1R]**

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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. **[ABW13]**

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]**

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For sale, Mercedes Bluetooth telephone module with fitting instructions and Sony Ericsson K750i mobile phone with all accessories. £80. Tel: 01793 734866. Swindon. **[ABW6]**



For sale, set of four alloy wheels from R171 Mercedes SLK, condition as new, complete with four Dunlop Sportmax tyres: 2x 225/45ZR17 + 2x245/40ZR17 including centre caps, bolts and locking wheel nuts. Buyer to collect or arrange own delivery, £350. Tel: 01793 734866. Swindon. **[ABW5]**



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“Overtaking manoeuvres are executed by merely brushing your right foot over the throttle”



TOP OF THE CLASS

Mercedes' S65 AMG is arguably the most flamboyant model in the range, and one contributor discovered its true 12-cylinder potential after just one short stint behind its steering wheel

WORDS AND IMAGES **WILHELM LUTJEHARMS**

MERCEDES-BENZ'S S500 IS ARGUABLY THE PICK OF the current S-Class range. Although I have not been exposed to the S400 Hybrid, the S500 rides incredibly well, has the perfect blend of power and torque, and slips under the radar – unlike the S63 AMG. But for some time, Mercedes-Benz has been known for its over-the-top AMG models, and the latest S65 V12 is no exception.

The S65's exterior is distinctly different to other S-Classes, and pushes the boundaries of taste with its chrome trim for the front air intakes, and larger – and more shiny – 16-spoke alloy wheels. However, no one can fault the long-wheelbase chassis, especially those that take to the rear seats.

It is the person behind the steering wheel who will be the most fortunate though, piloting what is unquestionably the most ostentatious S-Class to date. The neatly contoured seats and elegant flow of the interior reflect pure luxury. When you climb inside this cocoon, you hasten to start the engine, because what the six-litre V12 biturbo delivers is the car's *raison d'être*, after all. As the S65 AMG needs to bridge the gap perfectly between ultra luxury and super saloon, there is a very soft but deep, burbling sound from the exhaust pipes. Squeeze the throttle, and you are gradually pressed back into the perfectly bolstered and masterfully stitched leather seat.

Press the throttle pedal all the way and it is a different story. Although it doesn't feel like it inside the car, I imagine the nose lifts slightly while the rear hunkers down as 737lb ft of torque pushes over two tonnes of Affalterbach's finest down the road. The sheer pace at which the digital speedometer runs through the numbers is astonishing, urging you to search for a sports car at the next set of traffic lights – although I suspect no S65 AMG owner (or chauffeur) would ever stoop that low.

Driving through town, the ride quality is not quite as supple and absorbent as that of lesser S-Classes, and this is partly a result of the larger

wheels and low profile tyres, while the suspension needs to be able to deal with the added weight and performance of this model. But you forget about this aspect of its character as you hit the highway and cruise at an indicated 75mph, with the digitally realised, analogue rev counter floating around the 1,300rpm mark. Overtaking manoeuvres are executed by merely brushing your right foot over the throttle. There is no doubt the S65 delivers a different experience to that of the S63 AMG, although I think both limousines operate on a similar level, in terms of performance and luxury.

If the 222-series S-Class line up is the cream of Mercedes-Benz's passenger car range, the S65 AMG is the double cream dessert.

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