

MERCEDES

SL

THE COMPLETE GUIDE

FROM THE
CREATORS OF

Mercedes
ENTHUSIAST



UK £5.99
US \$13.50
AUS \$14.25
NZ \$16.70



FROM GULLWING TO R231 SL

History, driving impressions, market analysis and more

OH LORD WON'T YOU...



**LEND ME A
IMPROVE MY
FIND ME A
STORE MY**

Welcome to our passion. We are Europe's leading Mercedes - Benz Classic SL specialist. The SLSHOP is the number ONE destination for buying, selling, servicing, restoring or finding a part for your classic. Alternatively why not Hire or Experience one of our fleet for an hour, a day, a month or longer?

SLSHOP

OWNER SERVICES | PARTS STORE | EXPERIENCE

www.theslshop.com | 01789 337 070

MERCEDES SL

Editor

Kyle Molyneux +44 (0)20 8639 4406

Art Director

David 'Spike' McCormack

Designer

Claire Trent

Retoucher

Linda Duong

Publishing Director

Paul Cosgrove +44 (0)20 8639 4401

Advertisement Sales Executive

Lee Warden +44 (0)20 8639 4416

Sales & Marketing Manager

Richard Cosgrove +44 (0)20 8639 4403

Contributing writers and photographers

Martin Buckley, Andrew Frankel, Steve Hall, Terry Osborne, Craig Pusey, Eric Richardson, Charles Russell, Matt Stone, David Sutherland, Alisdair Suttie, Dan Trent, Igor Vucinic

Mercedes SL is published by Sundial Magazines Ltd, Sundial House, 17 Wickham Road, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 5JS, UK.

TEL +44 (0)20 8639 4400 FAX 020 8639 4411

EMAIL info@mercedesenthusiast.co.uk

WEB www.mercedesenthusiast.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS/BACK ISSUES

Individual copies may be purchased from Trinity House, Sculpins Lane, Wethersfield, Essex, CM7 4AY, UK.

TEL +44 (0)1371 853633

FAX +44 (0)1371 851808

EMAIL mercedesenthusiast@escosubs.co.uk

Newstrade Seymour Distribution, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT, UK.

TEL +44 (0)20 7429 4000

Repro Design & Printing Solutions Ltd, The Coach House, 101 Northwood Road, Whistable, Kent, CT5 2HE, UK.

Printing Precision Colour Printing, Haldane, Halesfield 1, Telford, Shropshire, TF7 4QQ, UK.

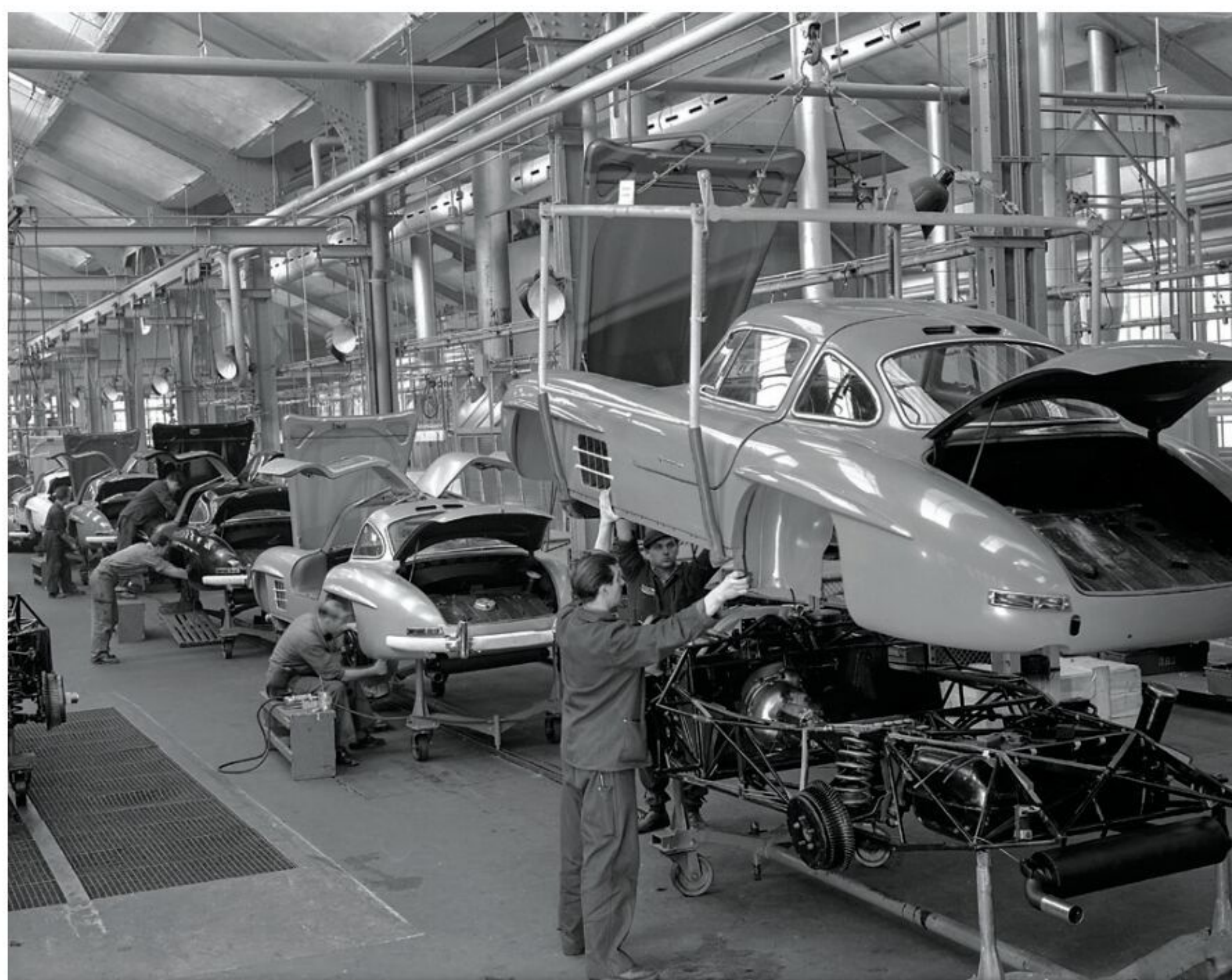
Copyright Sundial Magazines Ltd 2018. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is forbidden without the permission of the publishers. ISBN 978-1-5272-1948-9 Sundial Magazines Ltd. Registered in England no. 4134490.

Conditions for advertising All advertisements are accepted subject to the publisher's conditions of insertion. For a copy of advertising terms & conditions, please write to Paul Cosgrove at Sundial Magazines Ltd, Sundial House, 17 Wickham Road, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 5JS.



Thank you to Mercedes-Benz World at Brooklands in Surrey for providing the 300SL Gullwing, and to SL Shop in Warwickshire for providing all other SLs

COVER IMAGE
DEAN SMITH



During the creation of this special, one-off publication, it was reinforced to me how distinct each generation of SL really is, particularly the cars built prior to the R230 of 2001. Indeed, it's almost as if Mercedes-Benz couldn't quite settle on what its SL should be until that point. And that's certainly no bad thing when you consider the cars that rolled out of Mercedes' German factories between the 1950s and 1990s, as the company carefully honed its SL formula.

These exquisite creations all carry the *Sport Leicht* badge, and yet the appeal of each model is unique, I feel. Desire racing pedigree and the most iconic door arrangement in automotive history? Then you'll need a Gullwing. Want an effortless and wonderfully tough, modern classic cruiser? Then you should look at the R107 – or the succeeding R129 if you're seeking additional modernity. Crave an impossibly elegant, classic roadster that'll tingle your senses on a country road? Then you should really try the Pagoda.

The great news is that, despite values of the classics pushing six figures and indeed beyond these days, getting onto the SL ownership ladder is entirely possible thanks to present used values of the later generations – the current market just one of many areas we have covered in *Mercedes SL*.

When piecing together this title, it also became clear to me that the people behind Mercedes-Benz SLs were as important as the cars, which is why we've covered them too, instrumental characters such as Max Hoffman, Bruno Sacco, Béla Barényi and others – all part of the SL's rich tapestry. What a privilege to tell this story. I hope you enjoy the ride.

Kyle Molyneux, Editor

Editorial



“These exquisite creations all carry the Sport Leicht badge, and yet the appeal of each model is unique, I feel”



6

W198 SL

*From racing
to the road*

20

W121 SL

*The sports
GT is born*

34

W113 SL

*Elegance
redefined*



Countenits

50

R107 SL

Here to stay

70

R129 SL

A quantum leap

86

R230 SL

Technological marvel

W198
300SL





From racing to the road

WITH ITS MOTORSPORT PEDIGREE, ASTOUNDING LOOKS AND LIGHTWEIGHT CONSTRUCTION, THE 300SL ACHIEVED ICON STATUS THE MOMENT IT ARRIVED, AND SPAWNED A ROADSTER MODEL WITH IMPROVED DYNAMICS. ANDREW FRANKEL EXPLAINS HOW IT ALL HAPPENED...

PHOTOGRAPHS
DEAN SMITH,
RICHARD
TRUESDELL
& DAIMLER AG



Below Getting to know M-B's new supercar at the New York show in 1954.

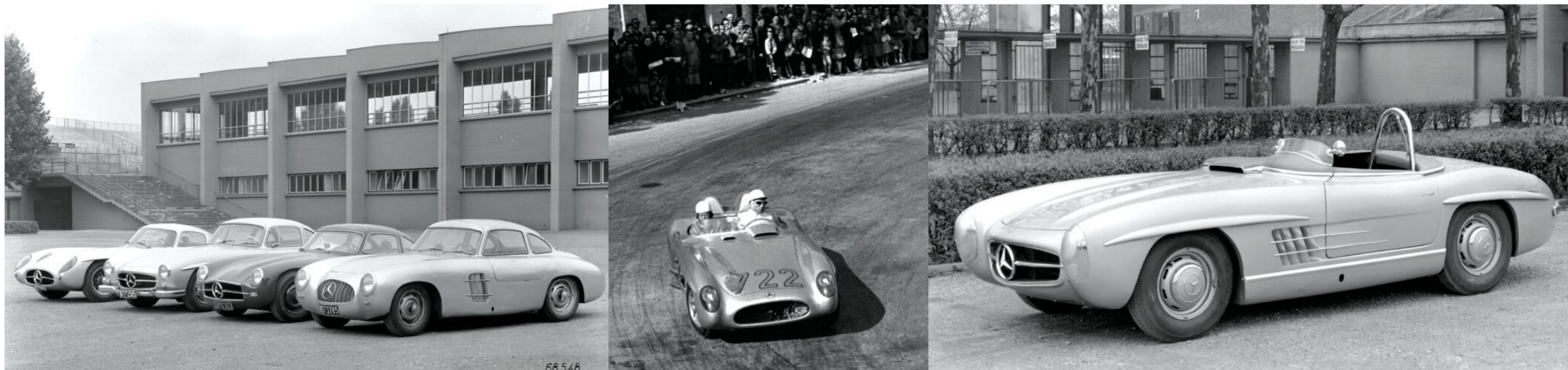


It

might seem hard to believe, but the Mercedes-Benz 300SL, the gullwinged marvel that at its 1954 launch was the most expensive and fastest standard production road car ever built, and therefore the last car in the world anyone actually needed, was a car born out of financial hardship. Had World War Two not happened,

had Mercedes-Benz not been left on its knees as a result, the car would never have been built. Allow me to explain.

After the war, Mercedes-Benz was broke, but knew from its pre-war years of Grand Prix dominance that nothing succeeded like success in motorsport. In 1939 the company had so much money that it designed a Grand Prix car from scratch to compete in just one race (the only two W165s ever built duly coming first and second in the Tripoli Grand Prix), but by 1951 all that was ancient history. The will, from the legendary team manager Alfred Neubauer and his Anglo-German chief engineer Rudolf Uhlenhaut, was there, but the way not. So they looked at sports car racing as a more affordable way to compete and soon realised that even there they'd be up against prototype Ferraris with



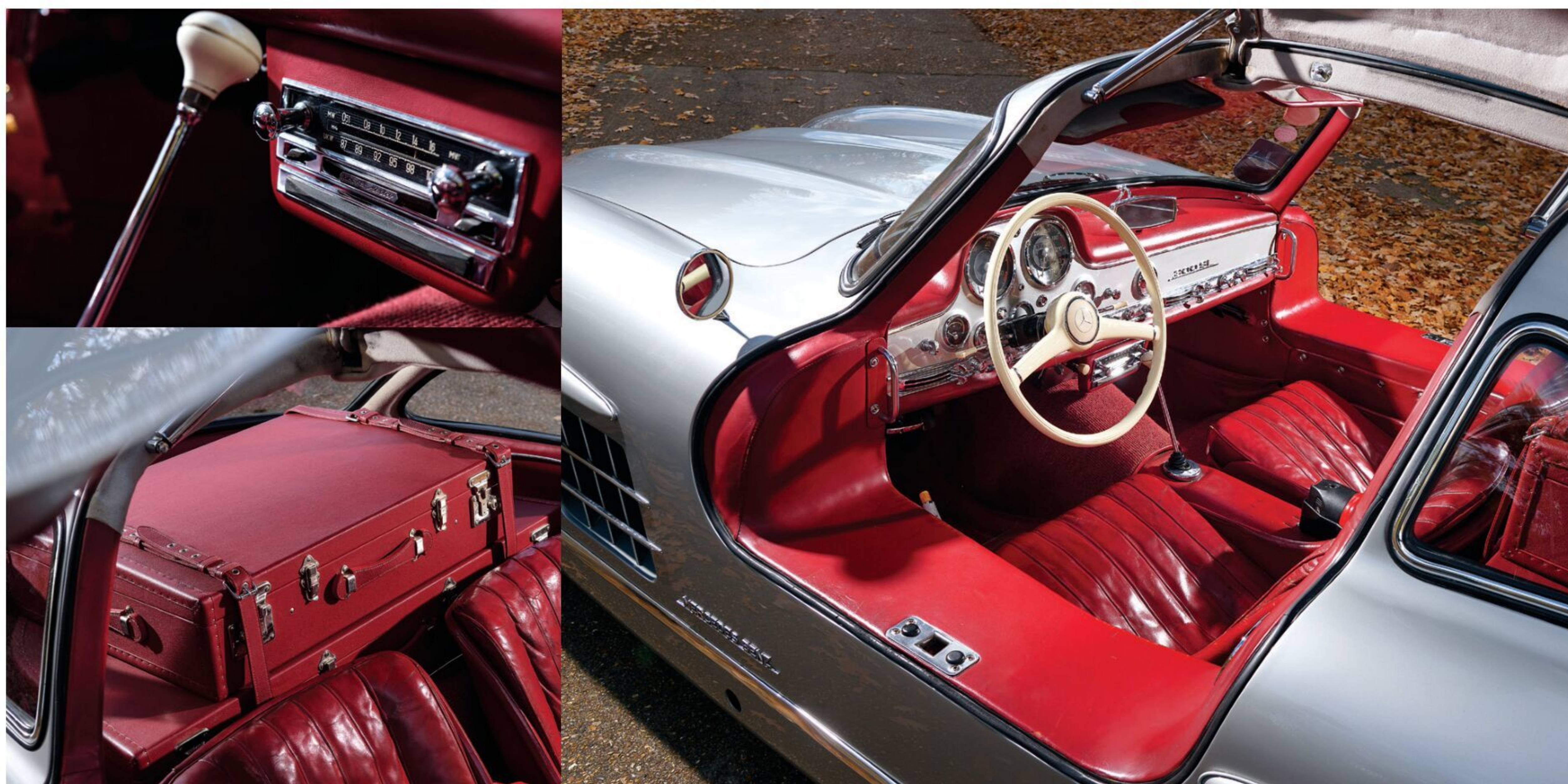
Above L to R: SLR, W198, W194 study and W194 racer.

Above centre Moss and Jenkinson won the 1955 Mille Miglia in a W196S 300SLR.

Above far right 300SLS of 1957 raced by Paul O'Shea in the American Sports Car Championship.

Right This 300SL is on display at M-B World in Surrey, UK.

Below right Moss with Uhlenhaut at Hockenheim, 1955.



bespoke 4.1-litre V12 race engines, when all Mercedes had was the three-litre six-cylinder road motor from the sedate 300 'Adenauer' saloon with 115bhp. The Ferraris had close to 300bhp.

But necessity is the mother of invention and, undaunted by apparently insuperable odds – Mercedes couldn't even afford a racing five-speed gearbox so had to use the clunky four-speeder from the saloon – Uhlenhaut went to work. And while he may not have had much money to chuck at the project, he had no shortage of ingenuity. By the time he was finished, he'd coaxed 173bhp from the engine, but the key was the ultra light tubular structure in which it was installed and the super streamlined bodywork that clothed it. With doors that hinged in the centre of the roof and opened upwards rather than outwards, it looked like a space ship. It was soon to prove that those looks were not deceiving. The W194 – or 300SL (for *Sport Leicht*) of 1952 won both Le Mans and the Carrera Panamericana, the two biggest sports car races of the year. On the track at least, Mercedes-Benz was back in business.

But it was neither Uhlenhaut nor Neubauer who saw the game-changing commercial potential in the design. It was instead an Austrian

“NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION AND, UNDAUNTED BY APPARENTLY INSUPERABLE ODDS, ENGINEER RUDOLF UHLENHAUT WENT TO WORK”



of Jewish extraction called Maximilian Hoffman who had fled from Europe before the war and was now selling exotic cars in the USA. He was keen to make the most of these famous victories, exploiting the fact that the US was now enjoying a post-war boom. He saw that with the right product, not only could he have a profitable car to sell, but one that would transform the image of Mercedes-Benz in the world's most important car market. And the W194 was the perfect starting point.

Over the years there must have been many importers who've told factory top brass that they could sell large numbers of a certain kind of car if only the company would make one. But Hoffman was different and Mercedes-Benz listened. They realised that the W194 presented a once in a generation opportunity

to create a road going equivalent, and without it the resulting W198 would never have even been conceived, let alone put into production. We know it better as simply 'the Gullwing'. As it was, there were remarkably few differences between the Le Mans winning race car and the road going derivative it would spawn.

The proof of that particular pudding lies in the fact that Hoffman only got board approval for the car in September 1953, yet the finished product was ready to be launched just five months later at New York's International Motor Sport Show. Nobody had ever seen anything ➡



“THE 300SL PRESENTED NOT AS SOME RACE TRACK REFUGEE BUT A PURE LUXURY STREET MACHINE”

◆ quite like it before. It was not that it was impossible to buy a road legal Le Mans winner before the Gullwing: at the time all sports cars had to be capable of being driven in public. The difference was that the 300SL presented not as some race track refugee but as a pure luxury street machine with a comprehensively equipped, beautifully finished interior dripping in leather and shining metal. It was quicker than any other road car ever conceived, the first to convincingly lay claim to the supercar title, yet it was quiet and comfortable enough to cover hundreds of miles every day without stressing its occupants.

In all major respects it carried on the good work of the racing 300SL. It had the same space frame chassis whose tubes ran high through the sills of the car to give essential strength and rigidity, necessitating the gullwing doors. Contrary to what many still believe, they were conceived not as a styling gimmick but a racing necessity. The four-speed gearbox was there, as was the three-litre engine, still canted over at 45 degrees to allow for an ultra low body line. The suspension was still all independent by wishbones at the front and swing axles at the rear. Braking was still provided by large drums.

Indeed, the biggest engineering change to the engine was the fitment of a mechanical fuel injection system, which boosted power up to 212bhp – a full 100bhp more than the motor in the saloon. There was a choice of rear axle ratio, including one that provided for a 160mph top speed, though in reality I doubt even a body as slippery as the 300SL's would get much past 140mph. Then again, this Mercedes-Benz has to be seen in the light of what people were used to at the time. In the UK,

the Alec Issigonis designed Morris Minor was perfectly respectable every day transport and had a top speed of just 63mph.

Drive a healthy Gullwing today and you will barely believe it's as old as it is. Almost all of the time. The performance is breathtaking not just for how fast the car will gain speed, but the way it does it, with increasing urgency from the growling, howling engine. And the aerodynamics are more startling still – I have cruised one on public roads at 120mph with a police escort on the Mille Miglia and never had to raise my voice to be heard, despite the fact we'd put the side windows in the boot to lower cockpit temperatures.

And then, just occasionally, it reminds you. You should find the flaw in its handling only once because you'll never wittingly put yourself in a position where it can manifest itself again. It happens when you try to brake and turn at the same time whereupon the forward weight transfer makes the quirky swing arm rear suspension both narrow its track and



Right Production at Sindelfingen was a real hands-on affair.



Left Fuel injected M198 motor at a 45-degree angle.



Right and far right Sindelfingen line in 1955; lightweight space frame chassis.



Left Of 1,400 built, 29 boasted light alloy bodywork.

Above Roadster on same production line as the 190SL.

adopt positive camber at the same time, robbing the rear axle of grip to provide a highly involving driving experience for all the wrong reasons. If circumstances allow, the cure is to get back on the power as soon as possible. If not, good luck. The trick therefore is to brake in a straight line and employ a 'slow in, fast out approach', hitting the throttle hard and early in the corner whereupon desirable negative camber is provided alongside huge traction and completely predictable manners. Driven like this, its handling is delightful.

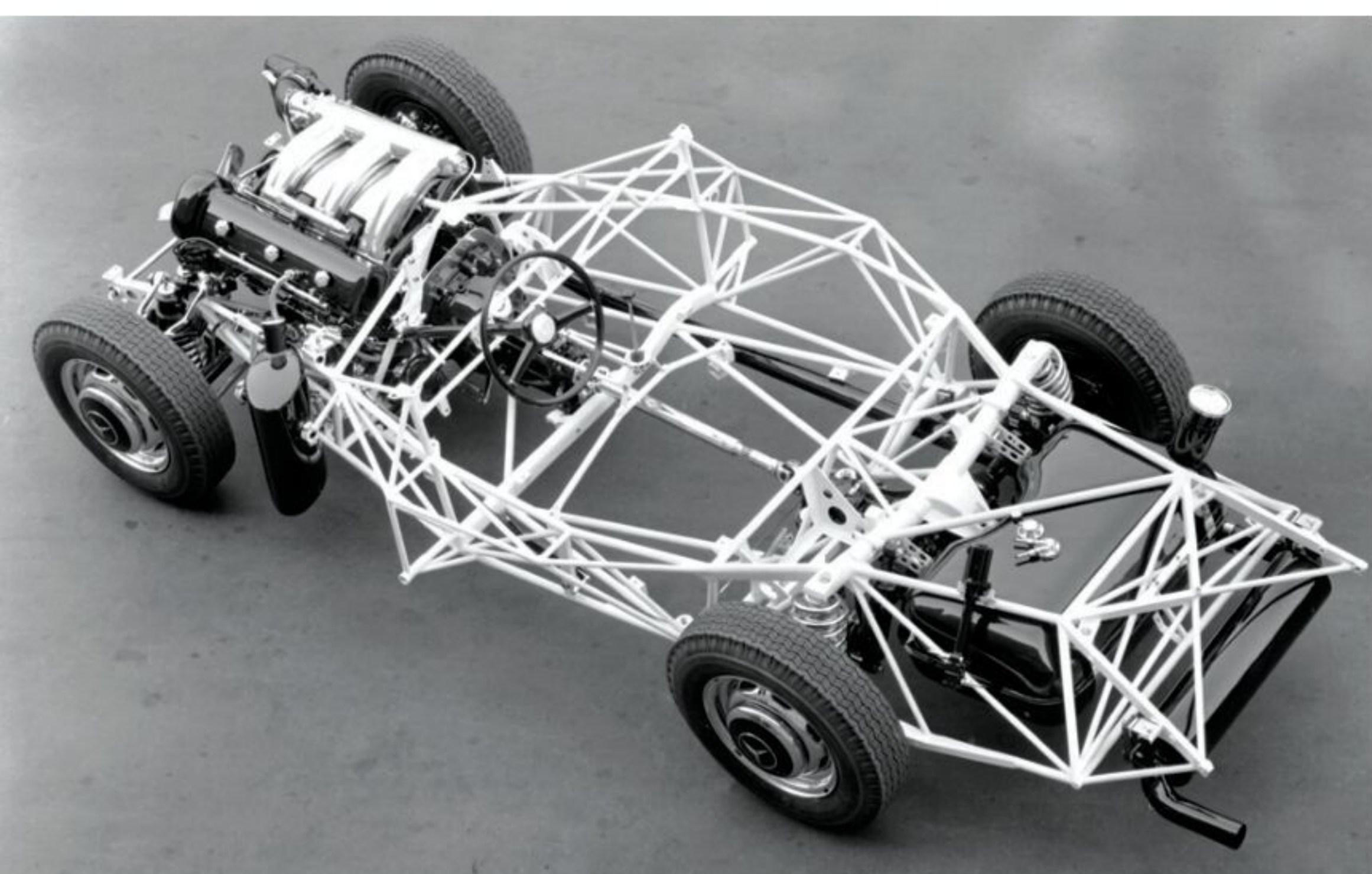
Which is not a word I'd use to describe the brakes. I have extensive experience in two 300SLs and both were as rubbish at losing speed as they were brilliant at gaining it. Calling the brakes 'grossly deficient' relative to the car's performance is overstating it, but not by much.

But that's about it on the downside. And we have another measure worth considering to help us understand just how fast was the 300SL in its day. Most will recall how Stirling Moss won the 1955 Mille Miglia in a 300SLR – effectively his Formula 1 car with a larger engine and enclosed bodywork – in a time that was never to be beaten. Far fewer recall that 300SL road cars, almost stock standard in specification, came 5th, 7th, and 10th, which is to say first, second and third in the GT class, beaten only by purpose built prototype racing cars. After the Mercedes, the next car in the class finished almost an hour behind John Fitch's triumphant SL.

Unsurprisingly, the car was a hit, especially in its intended US market where 80 per cent of production ended up. But as the 1950s wore on, people's appetites changed and soon a convertible was the only thing

in which to be seen. Keen to capitalise on the success of the Gullwing and its already game-changing effect on the reputation of Mercedes-Benz in the US, the factory duly complied.

The 1957 300SL Roadster was far more than a decapitated Gullwing, Mercedes taking the opportunity to quite substantially update the design. Without a roof, there was no place for the gullwing doors, so conventional items were needed. In turn this required a redesign of the space frame to accommodate much lower sills and regain as much



Right Compensating spring at rear helped Roadster's handling.



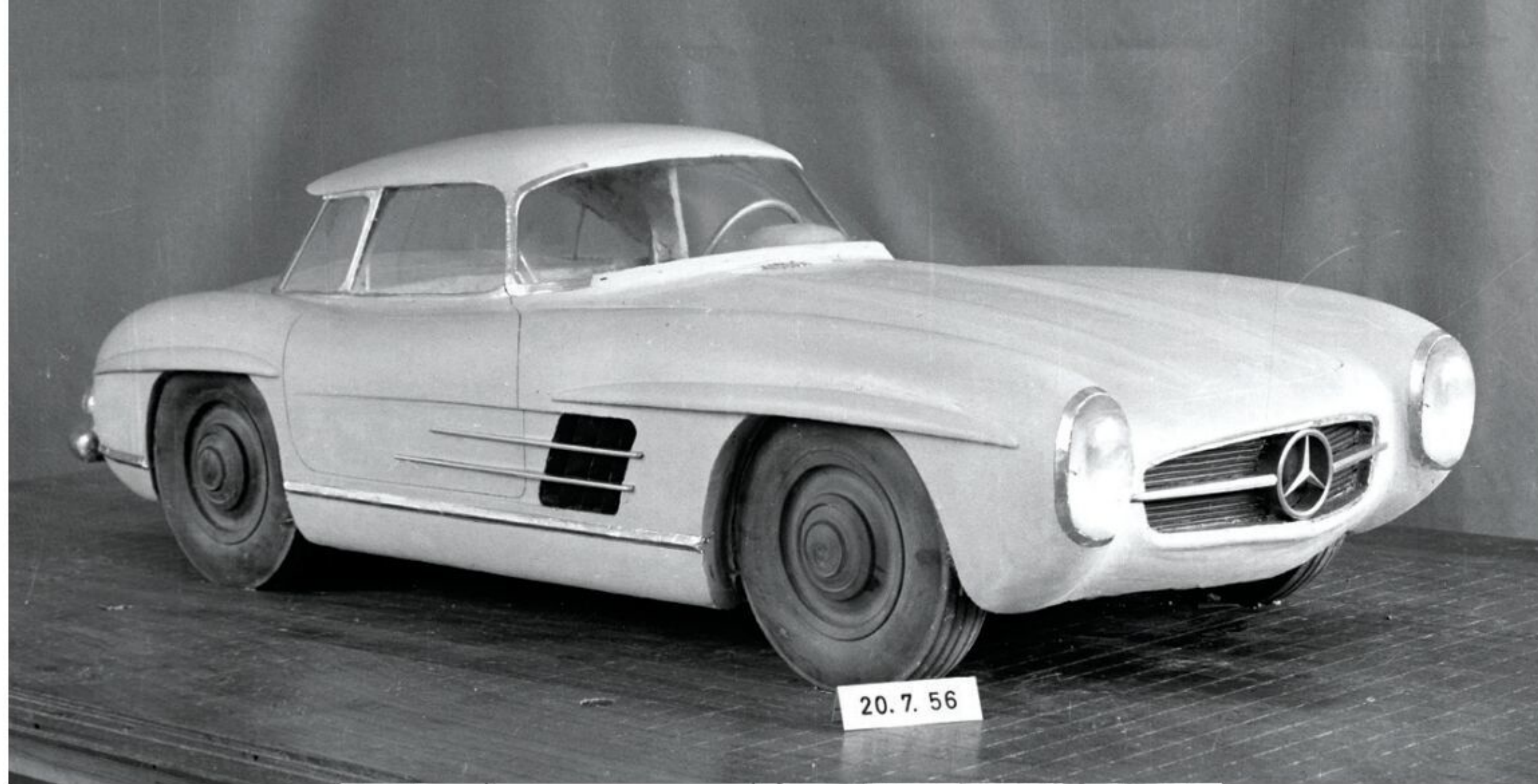
➤ torsional rigidity lost in the process as possible. The result was a little heavier, but this was offset by an engine with a higher 9.5:1 compression ratio, offering similar acceleration to the coupe albeit with a lower top speed thanks to the less aerodynamic roof. Perhaps more important still was a redesign of the rear suspension with a lower pivot point for the axle which effectively tamed if not entirely eliminated its more unorthodox handling traits. And finally, in March 1961, it gained four-wheel disc brakes thereby addressing the car's most serious failing.

The 300SL Roadster stayed in production until 1963, with the final cars being sold with an aluminium engine block that not only made the car much lighter but improved its weight distribution. It is a car whose acquaintance I would very much like to make.

The influence of the 300SL, both the Gullwing and the ultimately commercially even more successful Roadster would be hard to overestimate.

Indeed, they provided Mercedes-Benz with a unique position and credibility among volume premium manufacturers it enjoys to this day. If you want proof, look at AMG's Project One hypercar, a hybrid powered creation using Formula 1 technology to break new ground in the road car arena, just as did the 300SL over 60 years ago. And now ask yourself why, unlike BMW and Audi, Mercedes-Benz is able to sell out such a car when the only others with that capability are low volume manufacturers like Ferrari, McLaren, Porsche and Aston Martin. And while there have been other intervening influences, that credibility dates back to original 300SL, the first supercar, the first car to use racing success to push back the boundaries of road car capability, and one of the finest street legal machines of its or, indeed, any other era.

Thank you to Mercedes-Benz UK and Brooklands Museum (Tel 01932 857381 Web www.brooklandsmuseum.com) for their help with the main photoshoot



Left and below left Scale models and sculptures of the Roadster during development stage.



“THE 1957 300SL ROADSTER WAS FAR MORE THAN A DECAPITATED GULLWING”



Just The Facts

Mercedes-Benz 300SL Gullwing (W198)

ENGINE M198 2,996cc 6-cyl
POWER 212bhp@5,800rpm
TORQUE 203lb ft@4,600rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed manual, RWD
WEIGHT 1,290kg
0-62MPH 10.0sec
TOP SPEED 162mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 29.7mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 08.1954-05.1957
NUMBER BUILT 1,400 (including 29 with light alloy body)

Mercedes-Benz 300SL Roadster (W198)

ENGINE M198 2,996cc 6-cyl
POWER 212bhp@5,800rpm
TORQUE 203lb ft@4,600rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed manual, RWD
WEIGHT 1,330kg
0-62MPH 10.0sec
TOP SPEED 155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 22.6mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 05.1957-02.1963
NUMBER BUILT 1,858

FIGURES FOR CAR AS PICTURED; FUEL CONSUMPTION DETERMINED AT 3/4 OF TOP SPEED (NOT MORE THAN 110KM/H, 68MPH) PLUS 10 PER CENT; TOP SPEEDS DEPENDENT ON REAR AXLE RATIO



CLASSIC SPORT LEICHT

Paul Newman's 1954 Mercedes 300SL Gullwing



A Classic Sport Leicht's quality OEM restoration

Sales, Acquisitions, Consultancy and Restoration/Preservation Services

www.classicsportleicht.com

T

he entities that import, sell, service, develop and support most European brands in North America are large, nearly standalone companies owned by their respective 'mother ships'. Before there was Mercedes-Benz USA, these functions were contracted to independent companies, almost always the outgrowth of a large, influential dealer. Kjell Qvale was among them, operating primarily on the West Coast of the United States. Gentleman racer (and opera singer) Bob Grossman was for a time the official Maserati importer. And likely the most influential and impactful of them all was Austrian Maximilian Hoffmann.

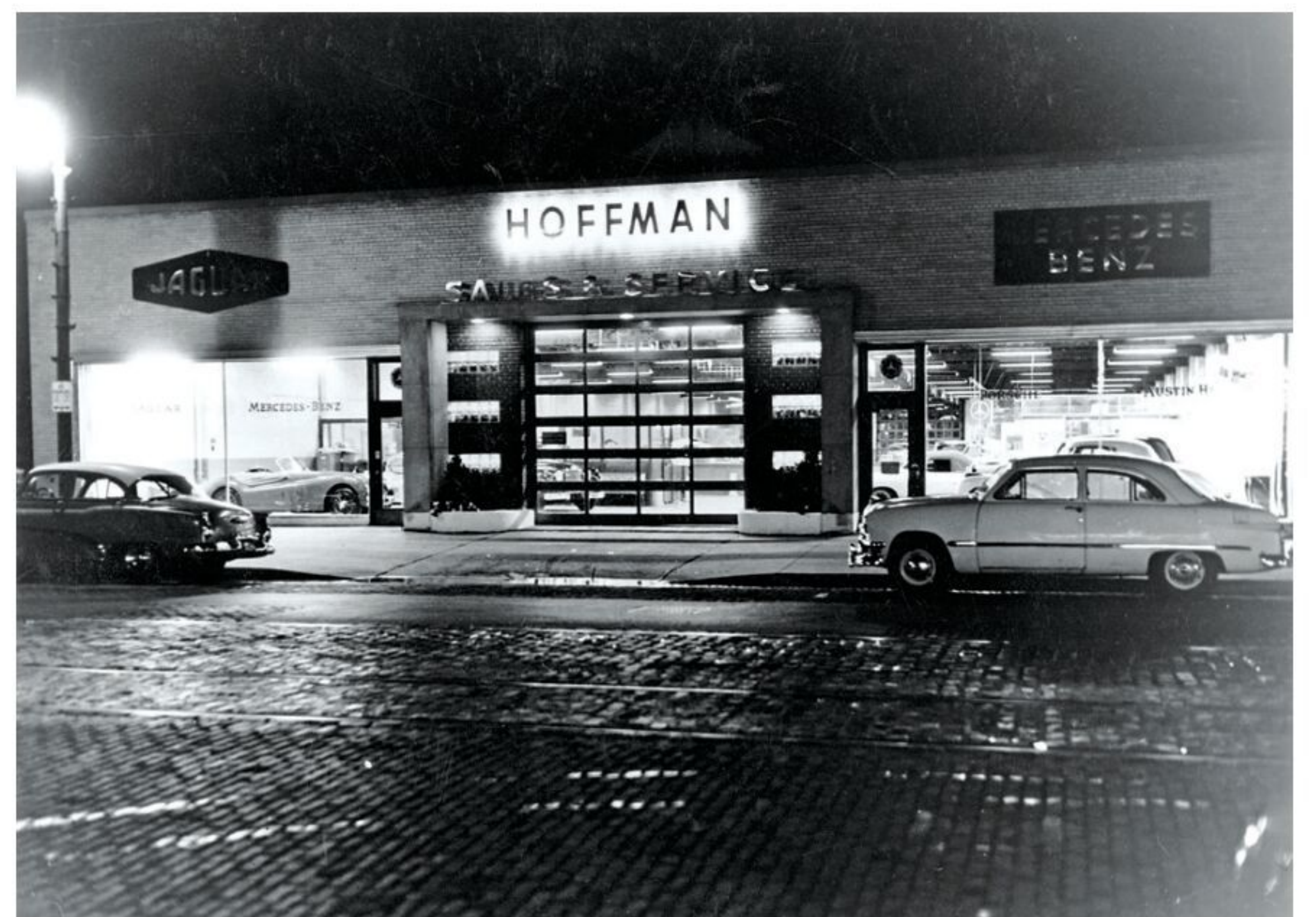
Born in 1904 in Vienna to a Catholic mother and a Jewish father, young 'Max' worked in his father's bicycle manufacturing business. He was interested in the somewhat new and quickly growing sport of motorcar racing and began trying his hand behind the wheel. He soon earned a factory ride as a racing driver with the small Austrian car maker which built the French Amilcar brand models under licence, which of course led to him establishing a dealership for the brand. At the age of 30, he retired from racing to concentrate on his sales business. As his catholic and Jewish roots likely put him at some personal and business risk as the Nazi threat spread across Europe in the 1930s, Hoffmann moved to Paris. Upon the onset of war, he migrated to New York (dropping the second 'n' of his surname to make 'Hoffman') to avoid persecution and war, and in the hopes of selling cars in America.

Having neither the money nor the connections to re-establish himself in the car business in the 'New World', he began producing costume jewellery, a fair departure from selling cars. The jewellery business did well enough that Hoffman could build resources to get back into automobiles. He then established the Hoffman Motor Company in New York in 1947, good timing as most auto production had ceased during the war, and car buyers were hungry for new hardware. Hoffman picked up the eastern US import and supply of Jaguar the following year, just as the company was riding high on the early demand for the exotic new XK120 sports car. Max felt the new Volkswagen also had sales potential in the US, so he collected that franchise as well, plus another relatively new German brand called Porsche. His main dealership was a dazzling architectural wonder, prominently located on Park Avenue at 59th Street in a very prestigious area of Manhattan.

By 1952 he was the Mercedes-Benz importer for North America (after several other of the company's partnerships and import and production efforts in the United States had failed). Hoffman felt at the time that Mercedes' product offerings were a bit stodgy, not sporty or competitive with some of the other brands in his showroom: Jaguar, Porsche, and Alfa Romeo to name a few. He then began exerting his considerable powers of persuasion upon Mercedes-Benz management to give him some sexy hardware to sell. Plus, sports car racing had really begun to catch hold in the States, so he knew there were promotional opportunities to be found there that would ultimately translate to more car sales. Journalist/historian Donald Osborne wrote of Hoffman's "ability to captivate clients with his salesmanship, superb taste and forceful personality. Equally known for his directness and penchant for perfection, his market acumen was not limited to cars: he appreciated great architecture, commissioning a landmark auto showroom on Park Avenue – and soon after, a home in Rye, New York designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. He was also a collector of Impressionist art."

The W194 300SL by this time was a successful racing car, and Hoffman begged, pushed, and cajoled Mercedes-Benz management to develop it into a road going sports car as something that could not only be raced in the Sports Car Club of America, but as a design and technology driven exotic machine that would really draw the buyers to his fabulous showrooms. Certainly company managers were impressed that Hoffman would put his money where his mouth was by committing to an order of 1,000 of the new Mercedes gullwinged sports coupe before the project was even officially approved for production. ➡

Below Hoffman Sales & Service with various marques offered.



“Hoffman begged, pushed, and cajoled Mercedes management to develop the W194 300SL into a road going sports car”



Smart mover

**MAX HOFFMAN BROUGHT MERCEDES-BENZ TO AMERICA,
AND THE 300SL AND 190SL MODELS TO THE WORLD**

WORDS MATT STONE PHOTOGRAPHS DAIMLER AG

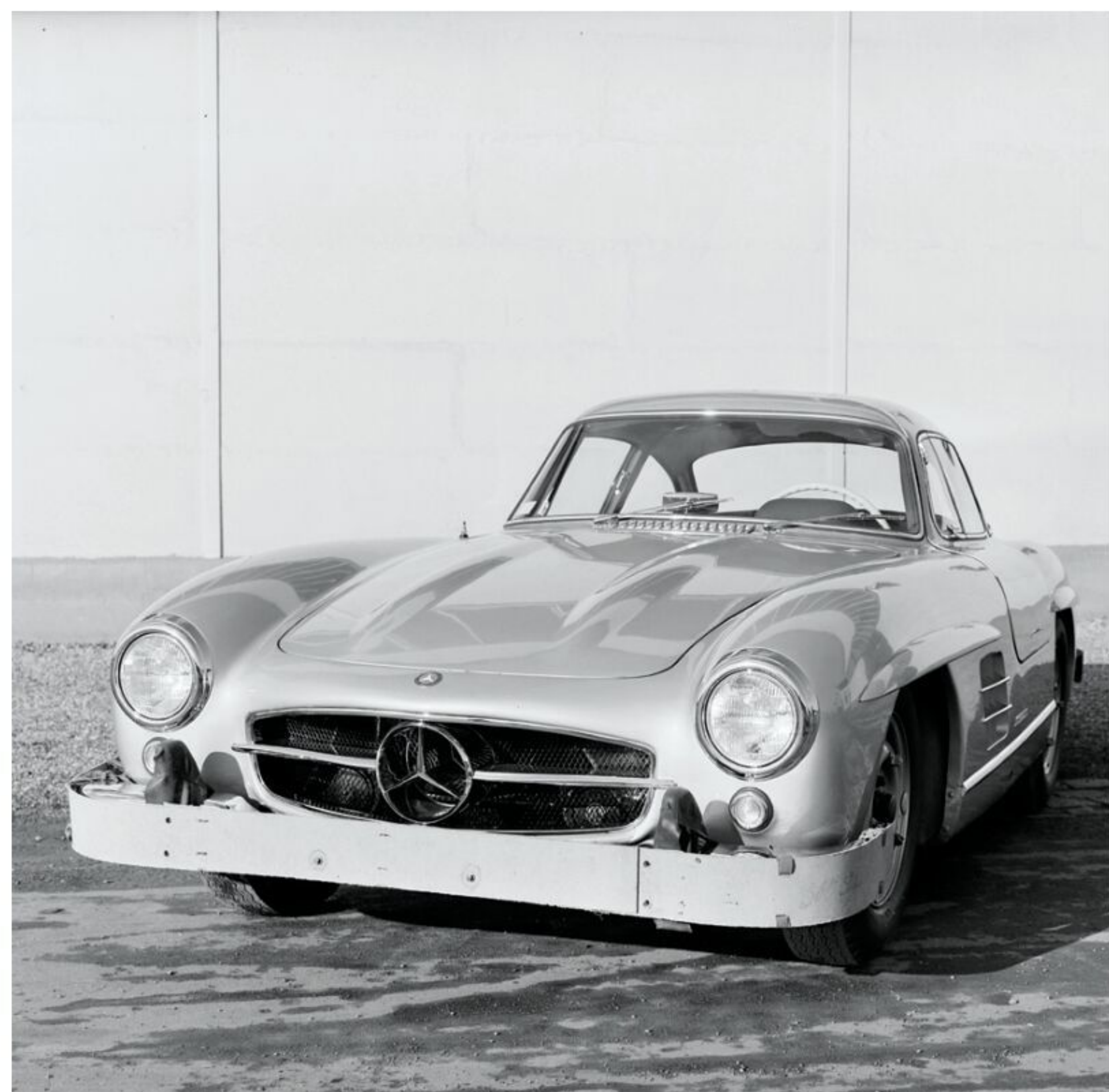


➤ There's little doubt that his established relationships with Mercedes-Benz racing boss Alfred Neubauer, and Austrian Daimler-Benz executive Günther Wiesenthal, helped Hoffman's word be heard.

Further demonstrating his ability to translate his sales success and instinct for reading the market, he was able to similarly influence Porsche into stripping down and simplifying its 356 Cabriolet models into a less costly, lighter weight, sportier model that would appeal to younger sports car buyers and be successful on the race track – that of course became the 356 Speedster. Hollywood icons James Dean and Steve McQueen bought and even raced them, so Hoffman's crystal ball appeared well calibrated.

Within a year, Hoffman was invited by company management to help evaluate the operations of other Mercedes factory importers, several of which were found lacking in capability and it wasn't long before he took over the Los Angeles market territory, and then soon adding the San Francisco and Texas regions to his stable. Hoffman was particular and demanding, insisting that his dealerships always be attractive, immaculate, and well run.

Hoffman also pushed hard for a less aggressive four-cylinder Mercedes-Benz sports car that would be more direct competition to the less costly, also primarily four-cylinder models from Porsche and Alfa Romeo. The powerful Jaguar and Italian upstart Ferrari would run head-to-head with the 300SL. While calling him the father of the resulting W121 190SL (1955-1963) would be an overstatement, there's little question that this Mercedes-Benz model was along the lines of what he was asking for.



Among Hoffman's major accomplishments in all this was convincing Daimler-Benz management to launch these cars in his own backyard

– that being at the New York International Motor Sports Show in February 1954, prior to officially revealing them in Germany or anywhere else. It was a grand affair in the style and tradition of the most prestigious European auto salons, a real coup for Hoffman. And of course, his dealerships had a ready supply of the dazzling new Mercedes sports cars.

Hoffman enjoyed considerable success as an influential importer and luxury car dealer, but the blend wasn't perfect. At least two factors contributed to a slow separation between Hoffman and Daimler-Benz. The first was that Hoffman, by many accounts, appeared to operate the importation and distribution sides of his business in ways that best served his dealerships and not always the cause of the mother ship car maker. And second, even though Hoffman established strong sales points in the previously mentioned major cities and territories, he didn't have the depth and reach that Mercedes-Benz wanted to meet increasing volume needs and projection. Here's where outside influences stepped in and conspired against Hoffman.

American car makers Studebaker and Packard were both struggling in the post-war 1950s, and they felt they could be stronger together as their product lines didn't compete head-to-head. So they merged. Although this union never produced the economies of scale, and engineering product development fruit that was envisioned, Studebaker-Packard had a large, well established dealership network that would give any imported brand grand scale exposure in North America. In an unusual multinational partnership arrangement that involved Daimler-Benz AG, aero engine maker Curtiss-Wright, and Studebaker-Packard, a deal was reached to facilitate the sales of Mercedes Benz products through hundreds of Studebaker-Packard dealerships already operating in North America, Cuba and Mexico, so Hoffman ended up on the downside of that transaction. After considerable negotiation, he resigned his contract with Mercedes-Benz in early 1957 in exchange for a handsome buyout payment. No matter, he still had his dealerships and several other importation and distribution arrangements, so he continued on. He also took up with war torn BMW, coaching that company on its comeback, and on the types of products needed to be successful in the US.

It's impossible to speculate what Mercedes-Benz's fortunes would be today had it not produced and sold cars such as the 300SL and 190SL models; perhaps the company would have come to develop similar offerings without Hoffman's influence. That said, it's clear that Hoffman made things happen, and that his relationship with Daimler-Benz and the three-pointed star brand helped him retire a wealthy man in 1975, without question putting Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Porsche and a host of other automotive brands on the map in North America. He passed away in 1981 at the age of 77.

“Company managers were impressed that Hoffman would put his money where his mouth was”

Above 300SL Gullwing shortly after arriving in the US for delivery.

Top Mercedes dealership in Hollywood, 1955.



● W198 300SL

Friedrich Geiger, styling head

A stroke of genius

Showing considerable talent from early in his career, **Friedrich Geiger** oversaw Mercedes-Benz design from the 1950s all the way through to the 1970s

WORDS MARTIN BUCKLEY PHOTOGRAPHS DAIMLER AG & TERRY OBORNE

Right 123-series another huge hit for styling head Geiger.

Below right Geiger styled the W114 Coupe and drove his own.



F

riedrich Geiger was Daimler-Benz's first styling department director, although he was responsible for many classic Mercedes passenger car shapes long before the notion of a 'styling department' was conceived. Aged just 27 he designed the 500K Special Roadster and was the last of the pre-war generation to retire from Mercedes-Benz at management – and possibly any other – level.

Born in November 1907 in Sussen near the Swabian Alps, Friedrich Geiger joined Daimler-Benz in April 1933 as a test engineer in the body engineering department, working on special projects. Having been appointed Senior Manager in the Styling Directorate in 1969, Geiger retired on New Years Eve 1973, having signed off the shape of the 123-series cars.

He was held in such high regard by his colleagues that a respectful two years were allowed to pass before they officially named his successor, Bruno Sacco who stayed true to unfussy, gimmick free design language that had been Geiger's trademark. To the world outside Sindelfingen, the self effacing, avuncular looking Geiger, rarely seen at motor shows, was something of an enigma. He was a man of few public utterances and is remembered as a modest and even tempered character, but also



Above Geiger came up with the 500K Special Roadster's curves at age 27.

a demanding and strict boss who understood the feel and limits of the materials he worked with.

In the 1950s, as Mercedes began to establish a dedicated styling facility, it was Geiger who reinterpreted Rudolf Uhlenhaut's space frame racing sports car into



“IT WAS GEIGER WHO REINTERPRETED UHLENHAUT'S SPACE FRAME RACING SPORTS CAR INTO THE W198 300SL”

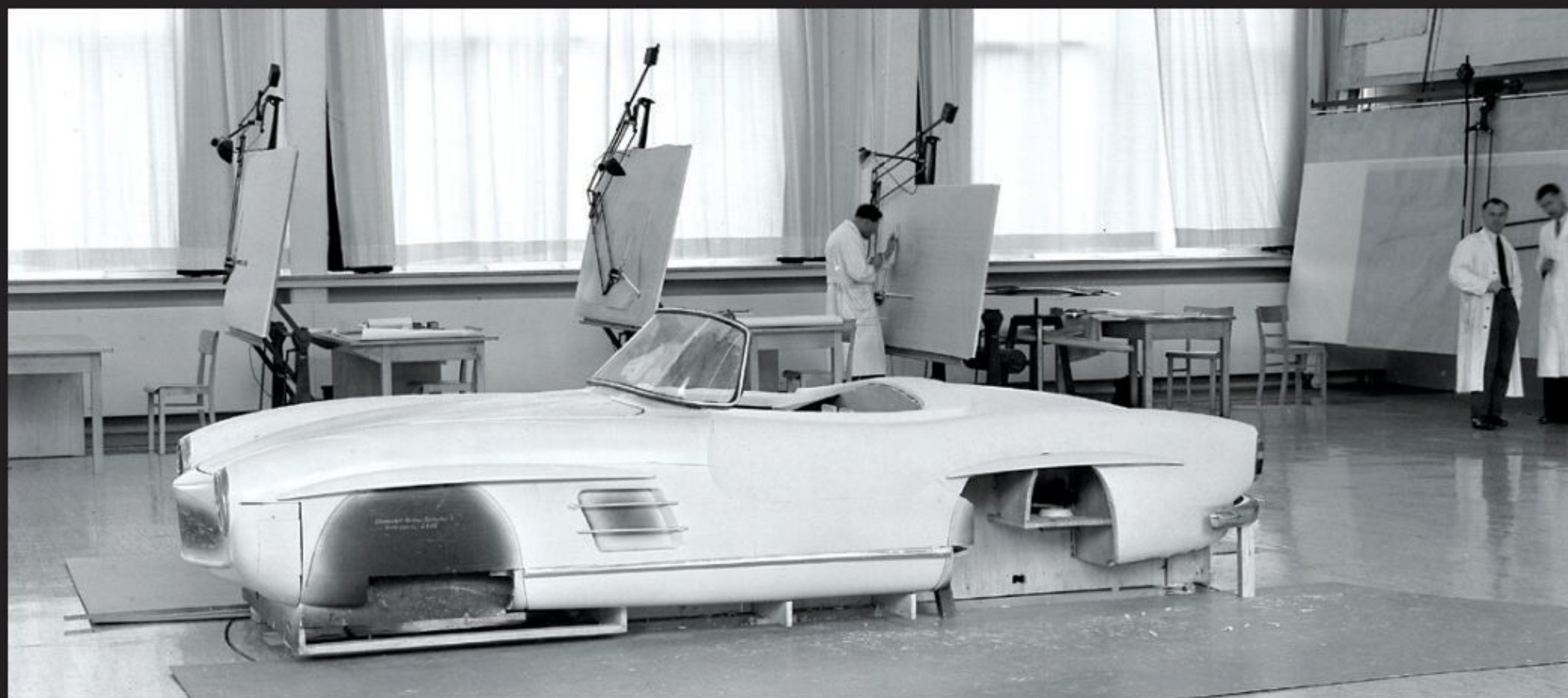
the W198 300SL, conceiving both the 'gullwing' door concept and the star motif in the grille that became the SL's trademark.

When the US importer Max Hoffman asked for a Roadster version, it was Geiger who defined the shape. This was established as early as September 1954, then Geiger's five-man team of engineers, stylists and clay model makers spent another year refining the details, investing more than 7,000 man hours. Geiger was also heavily involved in the body engineering of the 300SL Roadster and is credited with the design of the excellent, fast working soft top mechanism that was the blueprint for subsequent SL hoods.

We tend to link Paul Bracq with the really classic, late 1950s/60s Mercedes shapes, but it was his

boss Geiger who presided over his efforts and was the final arbiter of taste. Strangely, the only car of styled under his leadership Geiger ever expressed any particular pride in was his W114 Coupe design; he drove one himself for years.

As the man who presided over the transition from body-on-frame design to fully safety engineered, self supporting body shells and is responsible for the style and body production engineering of every Mercedes passenger car designed through to 1973, Friedrich Geiger is perhaps the most significant Mercedes figure you might not know anything about. He enjoyed a 23-year retirement, passing away at the age of 88 in Bad Überkingen in June 1996.



Left and above Geiger (white coat) with Wilfert, Nallinger and Bracq; 300SL Roadster work in progress.

W198 300SL

Market view

“Top end buyers and brokers are now asking more questions about authenticity”

Professionally restored 300SL Gullwings and Roadsters command big money, but highly original cars are even more lusted after by collectors and investors alike

WORDS DAVID SUTHERLAND PHOTOGRAPHS BONHAMS, GOODING & COMPANY AND RM AUCTIONS



Gooding & Co's amazing barn finds of 2017.

By a clear margin, the 1954 300SL, or Gullwing as it has long been known, is the most iconic Mercedes-Benz of the post-war years, perhaps ever. And that is reflected in values, 300SLs now among the select band of cars since 1945 that can command a million dollars; we use the American currency because that is where about 1,000 of the 1,400 built were originally delivered, and where the majority change hands.

But the Gullwing, at least 95 per cent of which are reckoned to still exist, is a relatively recent arrival in this exclusive club, many lucky current owners purchasing them when they were merely very expensive, perhaps around

£100,000, and a look at some past auction prices tells the story. In 2003 at its auctions at Pebble Beach in Monterey in California – arguably the highest profile and most prestigious classic car sale on the international calendar – RM Auctions achieved \$236,500 for a Gullwing. Four years later it sold one for \$726,000, in 2011 for \$836,000 and in 2012 cracked seven figures at nearly \$1.2m. Values of the 300SL Roadster introduced to replace the Gullwing in 1957 are not far behind, the price gap ever narrowing.

Gullwings and Roadsters are now rarely seen at classic car dealers, stocking and other costs making this prohibitive. Thus the would-be buyer must not only

think internationally, but penetrate a world where ‘brokers’ facilitate under-the-radar moves from one securely stored car collection to another. They are seen as a blue chip investment rather than a car to be used – a sad by-product of their high values, many would say, as both are still tremendous drivers’ cars despite their 1950s origins.

Presently you’ll need around \$1.5m (about £1.1m) to own a Gullwing recently restored to the highest standard (which many of them are), according to Eric Hjeltness of renowned 300SL specialist Hjeltness Restoration in Escondido, California. But that is probably less than in the recent past. “Prices seem to have gone off slightly, and I think that’s a

correction of the crazy period four to six years ago,” he tells us. “So many 300SLs came out of the woodwork then, and didn’t bring what the seller had hoped for, probably because there were 10 or 15 other cars on the market during the same period.”

During 2017 three international auction houses, Bonhams, Gooding & Company and RM Sotheby’s between them sold seven Gullwings and 10 Roadsters, the average prices including buyer’s commission £996,800 and £853,700, respectively. The year’s most expensive Gullwing was the 1955 example from a long term family ownership, sold by Gooding in Monterey in August for \$1,677,500 (£1,278,900),



Left Monterey saw this 300SL make £1m.



Left Roadster sold for a cool £1m by RM.



Left Gullwing and Roadster from Bonhams.



Left Roadster achieved £800K in Italian auction.

powering past its \$1.3m (£991,000) pre-auction upper estimate and a perfect illustration of the 'barn find' phenomenon of recent years. Unrestored and still even covered in dust, it made £157,000 more than the three-owner, 1957 Gullwing sold in Monterey by RM Sotheby's and described as an award 'winning restoration'.

Original or restored?

"Original cars are far more rare, and probably carry more mystique," Eric explains. "You can buy a fully restored Gullwing quite easily, but where are you going to find an original car?" Among the most extraordinary examples of barn find Gullwing values was seen at the Scottsdale sales in Arizona in January 2014, when Gooding sold two black cars, a very tatty but entirely original car for almost \$1.9m and a fully restored one for \$495,000 less.

The cheapest 300SL Gullwing of 2017 was the bright red 1955 car, which fetched \$919,600 (£678,000) at Bonham's Quail Lodge sale during Pebble Beach week. It had been extensively raced in the US during the 1980s, and two decades before that the car had been fitted with a later, aluminium 300SL Roadster engine. Its relatively modest price reflected its less than concours condition but also the modifications made to it, according to Eric.

"Top end buyers and brokers are now asking more questions about authenticity," he says. "When I first worked on these cars an engine switch wasn't considered important, but now one of the first questions they ask is, 'is it a matching numbers car?'" There's now so much information available, and buyers have become much more knowledgeable."

The highest priced Roadster was the fabulous dark blue 1960 car at the RM Sotheby's Monterey sale which went under the hammer at \$1.4m (£1m), while the least paid during the year was €897,000 (£801,200) for a silver 1957 car at Bonhams in Italy in October 2017. The same auctioneer sold a Roadster for £897,500 at the Goodwood Festival of Speed in late June, its fire engine red paintwork likely to have done its price few favours: "When brokers call me looking for a 300SL, 'it can't be red!' is what they often tell me," Eric reveals.

For the collector, the ultimate 300SL is one of the 29 alloy bodied Gullwings built in 1955/56, but although worth perhaps four times more than that of regular models, pinning down value is tricky because they rarely come up for sale. The last time one was sold publicly was in January 2012 by Gooding & Company for \$4.62m (almost £3m at the time), but later that year in London RM Sotheby's failed to raise bids over £2.4m, and the car went unsold. 

Watch out for...

- Seemingly perfect paintwork concealing a poor body repair carried out many years ago.
- Check it's a 'matching numbers' car, with the engine, chassis and body numbers as per factory records.
- If the car is a fresh restoration, research the restorer's reputation and other work before buying.
- The few remaining original condition cars, even if scruffy, are worth more than new restored cars.
- Factory extras, such as the (albeit heavier) Rudge 'knock-off' wheels and radio, add to a 300SL's value.
- Any modifications, such as disc brakes and seat belts, must have been installed in a reversible fashion.

W121
190SL





The sports GT is born

DEVELOPED IN RECORD TIME AND DEBUTING ALONGSIDE THE 300SL GULLWING IN 1954, THE IMPOSSIBLY GORGEOUS 190SL CAPTURED THE IMAGINATIONS OF ADMIRERS LIKE LITTLE ELSE, WRITES RICHARD TRUESDELL

PHOTOGRAPHS
ERIC RICHARDSON, RICHARD
TRUESDELL & DAIMLER AG



It's a photograph that most classic Mercedes-Benz enthusiasts have seen over the years: the Max Hoffman stand at the 1954 International Motor Sports Show in New York. Hoffman, who introduced Americans to many imported marques in the immediate post-war era, brought two significant Mercedes-Benzes to the other side of the pond that year, the 300SL and 190SL. The 300SL, based on the legendary W194 300SL race car, dominated the news that year. But with just 3,258 Gullwings and Roadsters produced from 1954 to 1963, it was the far more accessible and affordable 190SL, with 25,881 units produced, that ultimately had far greater impact on Mercedes' bottom line, especially in the US, its most important export market.

Today, when an all-new car comes to market, the gestation process often takes four years or more to go from the initial sketch to the showroom floor. When we look back on how the 190SL came to market, we have to marvel that from the initial presentation by Max Hoffman to the Daimler-Benz Board of Management on September 2 1953, to the display stand at the New York show in February 1954, took just under six months. And the first production cars reached showrooms a scant six months after that. How did it fall into place so quickly?

First, we have to understand the sway of Max Hoffman, his powers of persuasion, and the importance of export markets like the US. Next, the willingness of the Mercedes-Benz design and engineering teams to launch the 190SL in the shortest possible time, seeing the success that competitors like Porsche and Jaguar were already enjoying, particularly in North America.

The genesis of the 190SL started in March of 1951 when the Daimler-Benz Board of Management signalled its intent to return to motor racing in 1952, under the direction of Rudolf Uhlenhaut. With the end of World War Two just seven years in Mercedes' rear-view mirror, pressure remained on its finances, so any racing cars needed to use as many existing components as possible. The first result was the iconic 300SL Gullwing race car, introduced on March 12 1952. Its success caught the automotive world flat-footed. Two months later, at the Mille Miglia in Italy, the three-pointed star marked its return to the motorsports arena, with the 300SL driven by Karl Kling and Hans Klenk finishing in second place.

With success in that year's Le Mans and Carrera Panamericana events, Max Hoffman lobbied the Daimler-Benz to produce a road going version of the all-conquering 300SL. But Hoffman was much more visionary than that, seeing that a smaller, lighter, less powerful



Above February 1954: the 190SL and 300SL are presented in New York.

version was needed as well, given the impact that two-seat British sports cars like MGs, Triumphs, and Jaguars were having in the US, as well as cars from Porsche and Alfa Romeo. At first, Fritz Nallinger, Head of Development and Research, attempted to make a two-seat 180 Ponton Cabriolet A the companion to the 300SL, but that proposal was rejected out of hand by Hoffman who said, "I cast just one glance at it, we can't do that, either!"

At this Board of Management meeting the decision was made to develop and manufacture two new road cars, the 300SL and a smaller, lighter roadster that would become the 190SL. Over the next five months work on the 190SL moved forward after the 180 convertible was rejected by Hoffman. Styling with a family resemblance with the 300SL was desired, but in a roadster configuration that would utilise the platform, with modifications, of the newly introduced 180, a unitised monocoque design (the 300SL used a competition derived and more costly, welded aluminium

space frame). According to Mercedes-Benz historian Guenther Baeuerle, all that existed was a handwritten memo from Nallinger with the following notes: "Hoffman desires a small two-seater sports car instead of the 180 convertible A. Form oriented to the 300SL. Windscreen to be exchangeable for a racing shield. Doors with window winders. A choice of aluminium racing doors without glazing. Frame floor assembly similar to the W120 (180 model). Roadster roof."

Incredibly, just three weeks later, on September 25 1953, Walter Häcker, as Head of Design, presented the first drawing of this vehicle,

followed by a plaster model. Going forward another four and a half weeks, to November 28 1953, the final proposal drawing for the New York exhibition car followed. The drawings were handed over to in-house sheet metal specialist, Walter Schueller, who initiated the production of the steel body panels. In the time-tested method, the 190SL prototype's body panels were hand beaten over wooden blocks.

Concurrent with the production of what would be the New York show prototype's ➡



Above Pre production car featured an air intake in the centre of its bonnet.

"THE DRAWINGS WERE HANDED OVER TO IN-HOUSE SHEET METAL SPECIALIST, WALTER SCHUELLER, WHO INITIATED THE PRODUCTION OF THE STEEL BODY PANELS"

Just The Facts

Mercedes-Benz 190SL Roadster/Coupe (W121)

ENGINE M121 1,897cc 4-cyl

POWER 104bhp@5,700rpm

TORQUE 105lb ft@3,200rpm

TRANSMISSION 4-speed manual, RWD

WEIGHT 1,160/1,180kg

0-62MPH 14.5sec

TOP SPEED 106-112mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 32.8mpg

YEARS PRODUCED 05.1955-02.1963

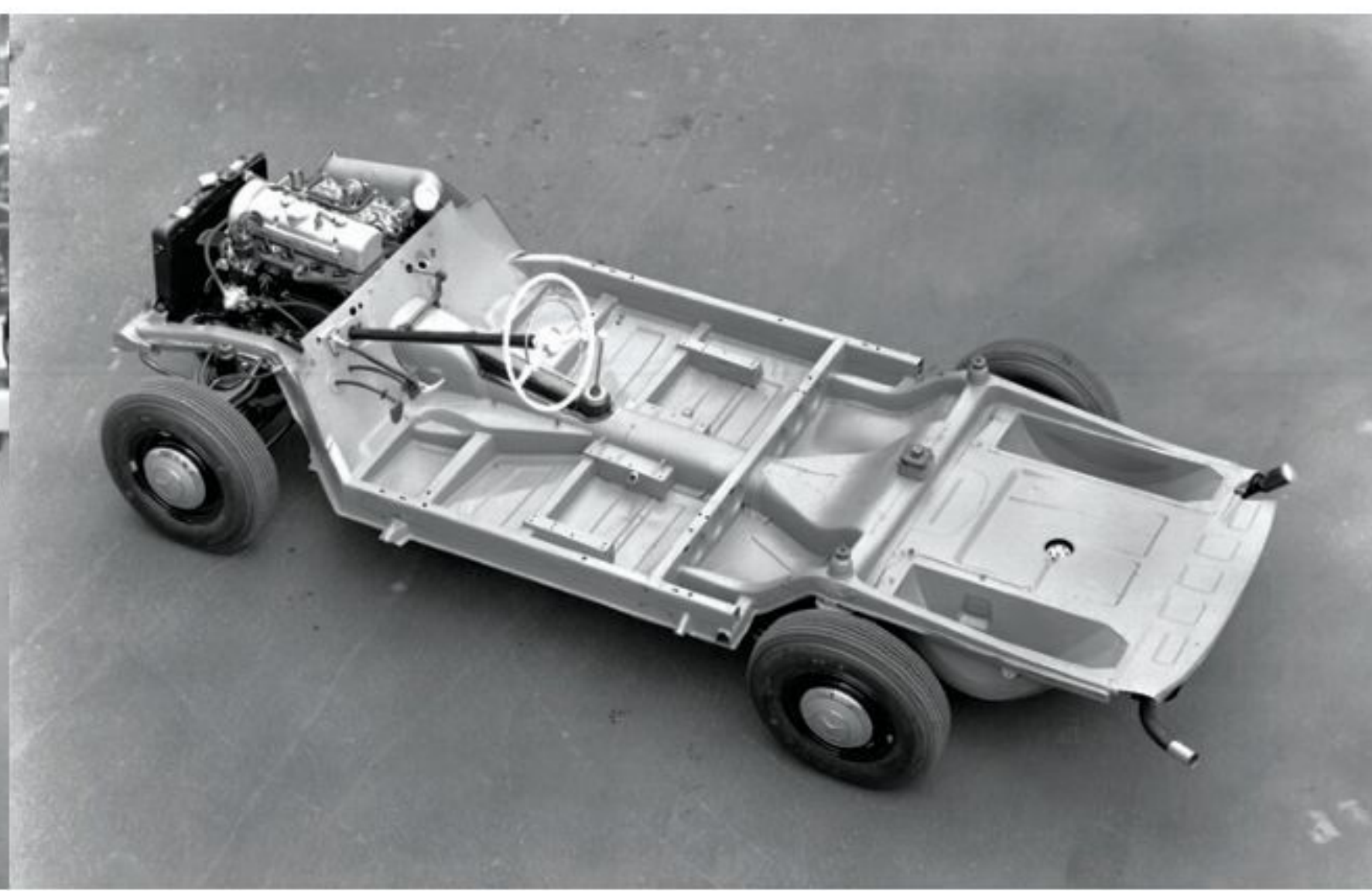
NUMBER BUILT 25,881

FIGURES FOR A 1960-ON CAR; FUEL CONSUMPTION DETERMINED AT 3/4 OF TOP SPEED (NOT MORE THAN 110KM/H, 68MPH) PLUS 10 PER CENT



Above Speedo, water temp and oil pressure gauges with chrome surrounds.

Right The Beatles' Ringo Starr once sat here; this car sold for £28,000 in 1997.



Above Almost 26,000 of the Ponton based 190SL were built by hand at Sindelfingen between 1955 and 1963.

➤ body, chassis development moved forward at what could be considered lightning speed. The 180's floor frame was sectioned, reducing the wheelbase from 2,650mm to 2,400mm. Try to imagine working under such extreme time constraints while at the same time all the planned mechanical components – the engine, transmission, the suspension components, and the new single-joint rear axle – were adapted to the modified chassis. As the 180 was a modern monocoque design, a new front subframe was developed for the 190SL. Baeuerle noted that with all this hectic activity, the careful documentation that was customary at Mercedes-Benz was sidestepped; much of this work came from the minds or the personal sketches and notes of the team working on the project and never found their way into the Mercedes-Benz archives.

January 16 1954 marked the date that the finished 190SL prototype, which was not fully functional (its mechanical components were not close to production ready, especially the engine; a new four-cylinder engine derived from the block of the 300SL six, which was taller than what would find its way under the ultimate production version, necessitating a bonnet design that would end up being replaced), was presented to the Board of Management. Along with the 300SL, the Board of Management passed a resolution to immediately ship the two prototypes to New York. If the reception was positive, the programme would move to the next stage, the plan being to introduce the 190SL before the end of 1954.

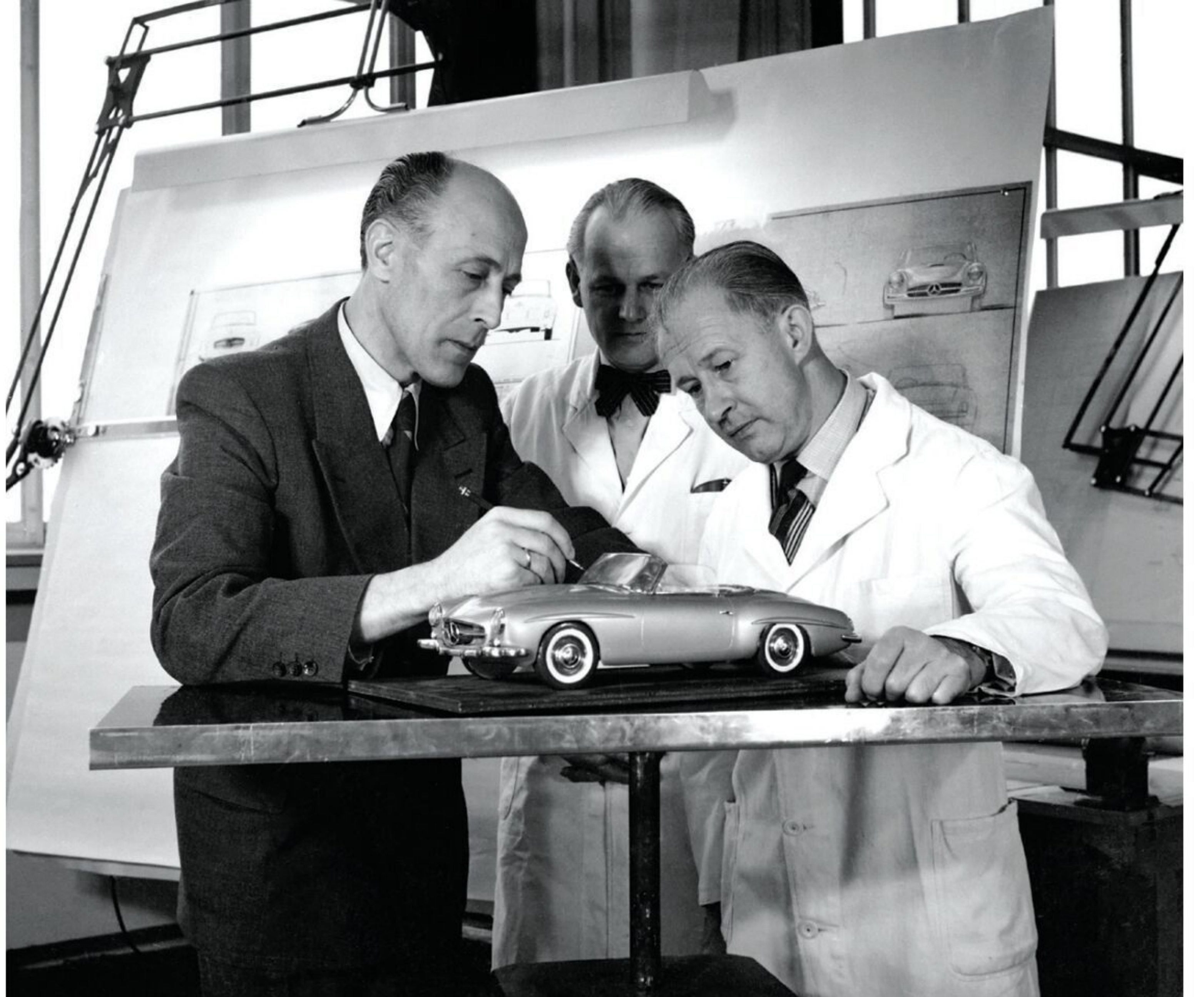
The International Motor Sports Show started on February 6 1954, with the Hoffman Motor Company showing its entire range of automobiles it distributed in the United States. But most of the attention from show goers was directed at the two Mercedes-Benz models, the 300SL and the 190SL. The result of this intense interest? The production of both was given the green light based on the advance orders for each garnered by Hoffman and his sales team. The 190SL was off to a roaring start in its most important export market, the US.

With a full order book in hand, back in Stuttgart the design and engineering team went to work to transform the prototype into the production 190SL with a target introduction before the end of the year. Based on the feedback Hoffman received at the New York show, major changes were brought into the 190SL programme, most incorporated into the second prototype completed in April.

By the third week in August, Walter Häcker completed the final body drawings, incorporating all the design elements, such as the wheelarch eyebrows that would find their way onto the production version. This gave the much smaller 190SL a design language similar to its big brother, which was also moving towards production. That the Mercedes-Benz team in Stuttgart-Untertürkheim could complete both cars simultaneously, given their limited resources at the time, was remarkable. The biggest external difference from the prototype? Forward of the A-pillars, its styling clearly matched the 300SL with



Above Four-cylinder motor with a pair of Solex 44 PHH carbs.



Above A mass delivery of Mercs in New York, 1955.

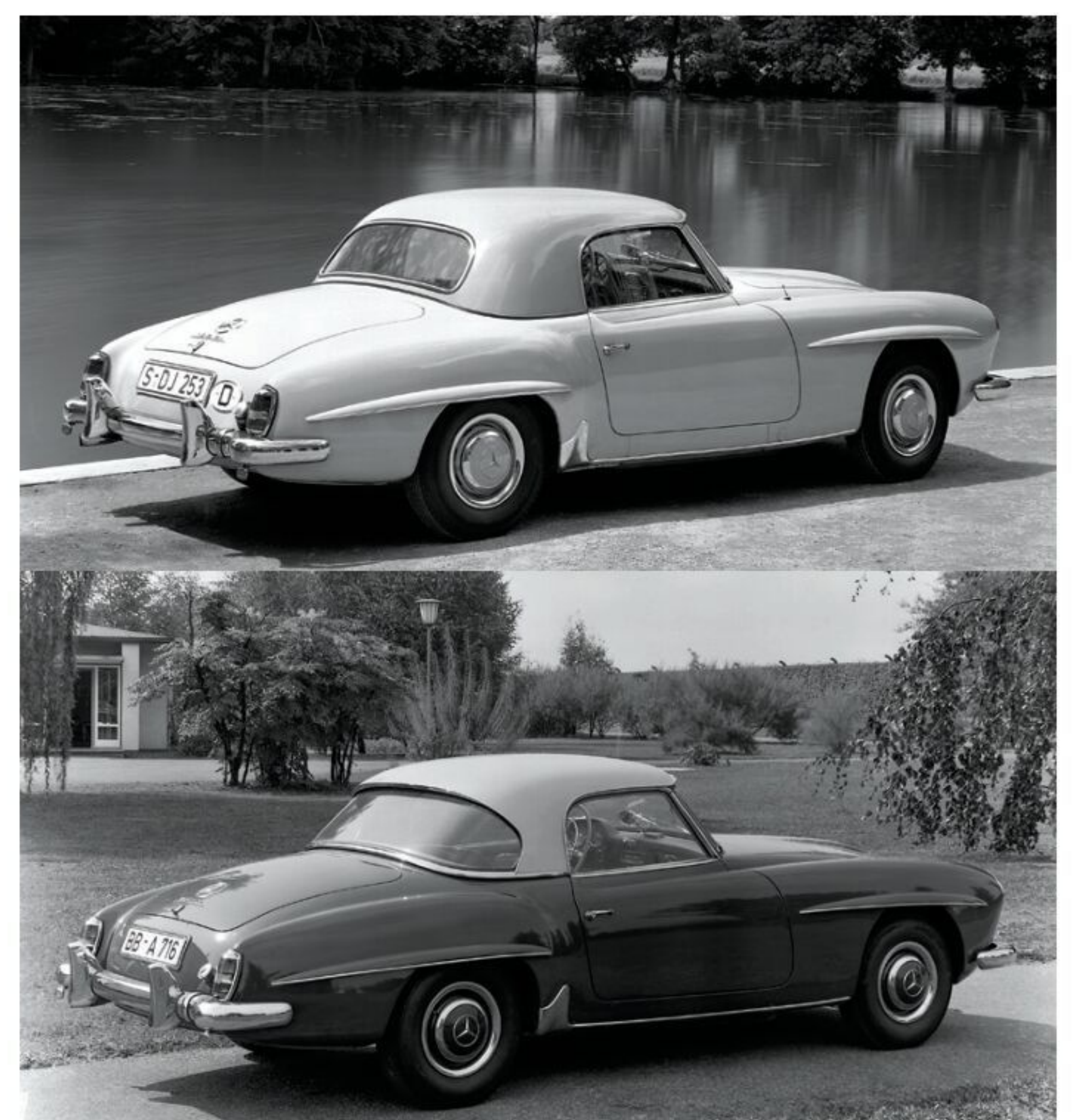
Top Walter Häcker (left) analyses a scale model in 1955.

“BASED ON THE FEEDBACK HOFFMAN RECEIVED AT THE NEW YORK SHOW, MAJOR CHANGES WERE BROUGHT INTO THE 190SL PROGRAMME”

the wings fully integrated into the body structure, with the bonnet scoop replaced by a dome to clear the revised engine components.

December 1954 saw the first two pre-production cars completed and sent on their way to New York. Shortly afterwards, on January 21 1955, there was a celebration at the Mercedes-Benz factory in West Germany. The cause for celebration? A telegram received from Hoffman in the United States that read: “Two days ago we received the first two units of the 190SL: one has already been dispatched by air freight to Los Angeles for the Auto Show, and the other is destined for the New York exhibition room. The car has already been seen here by hundreds of people, who are full of enthusiasm and praise. I have never before seen such a sensational reception on the part of the public as has already been bestowed on this model. We are convinced that we will achieve great business results with this model, but much depends on being able to start with deliveries as soon as possible. We are prepared to take on a minimum of 200 cars per month, and no efforts should be spared regarding production and delivery; otherwise, we could miss the whole season and the current sales potential. Please accept my sincere congratulations on this unique, noble design and the production of the 190SL.”

As it turned out, Hoffman’s enthusiasm was understated, the 190SL was more successful than even he had envisioned. Available as a Roadster with a fabric hood, as well as the slightly more expensive Coupe with removable hardtop (with or without a hood underneath), the 190SL



Above Coupe top with enlarged rear window from 1959.



Above Frank Sinatra and Grace Kelly aboard a 190SL in the film *High Society*; well known 190SL owners include actresses Zsa Zsa Gabor (middle picture) and Cornell Borchers (bottom).



“ITS BEAUTY IS TRULY SOMETHING TO BEHOLD, WITH ELEGANT CURVES, BULBOUS BONNET, AND CHROME JEWELLERY EVERYWHERE”



Above John Lewenauer’s pristine, 24,000-mile example from 1961 – a dream car in every sense for this US based owner.

➤ was owned by many celebrities in period: Miles Davis, Karl Lagerfeld, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Gina Lollobrigida, Prince Rainier of Monaco and Grace Kelly, Ingrid Bergmann, Yul Brynner, Alfred Hitchcock, Françoise Segan, the Aga Kahn, and Ringo Starr all were 190SL owners. But its most notorious was a West German call girl, Rosemarie Nitribitt, who was found murdered in her Frankfurt apartment in 1957. Her black 190SL became known as the ‘Nitribitt Mercedes’ and it was reportedly the same car later crashed by Karl Lagerfeld.

All this matters little to John Lewenauer, editor of a 190SL newsletter. He owns what is claimed by many to be one of the most original examples – a 1961 model with just 24,000 miles showing on the clock. From someone who knows, here’s what it’s like to own, appreciate, and drive a 190SL...

“Getting behind the wheel of a nice 190SL begins with the view when approaching the car. Its beauty is truly something to behold, with elegant curves, bulbous hood, and chrome jewellery everywhere. You know you’re about to embark on something very special – in fact, a work of art. Opening the door does not disappoint, with leather everywhere, from dashboard to rear shelf. The exterior colour of the car carries through to the dash panel, which is adorned with a sumptuous array of chromed instruments. One slides into the furniture quality seat complete with box spring, coco fibre pad, wool batting and

aromatic pleated and tufted leather. A large steering wheel, generally of ivory colour, frames the instrument panel and houses an elegant chrome horn ring and Mercedes star.”

Driving, Lewenauer continues: “A turn of the steering locking key, a pull of the choke, three pumps of the accelerator and a push of the starter button, and the 1.9-litre, four-cylinder engine fires to life. In a short distance, the choke can be disengaged and the car continues its warming to optimal running temperature. The ride is fluid, the steering a touch heavy, the stick shift crisp and the engine smooth. While not a powerhouse and sounding more comfortable in a range up to 5,000rpm, the engine is adequate to move this 1,160kg car to cruising speeds. This Mercedes is most comfortable in fourth gear above 2,000rpm and has enough torque to not require continuous shifting at varying speeds; other gears seem mostly there just get to cruising altitude. And that is exactly what this car is – the quintessential boulevard cruiser. A machine to be enjoyed leisurely coasting along, enjoying the beauty of the day while adding to that beauty with more than ample opulence, style and grace.”

The Mercedes-Benz 190SL was introduced at a time when enthusiasts on both sides of the Atlantic were embracing sports cars. In period, the 190SL competed against cars from the likes of Alfa Romeo, Austin Healey, Porsche, and others. With 25,881 built from 1955 to 1963, it turned out to be one of the most successful.

1st
Place

Best In Show

Pininfarina's Promenade Auto Award, 2017
Miami Design District Concours, 2018

Best In Class

Cavallino Classic, 2018

Excellence In Class

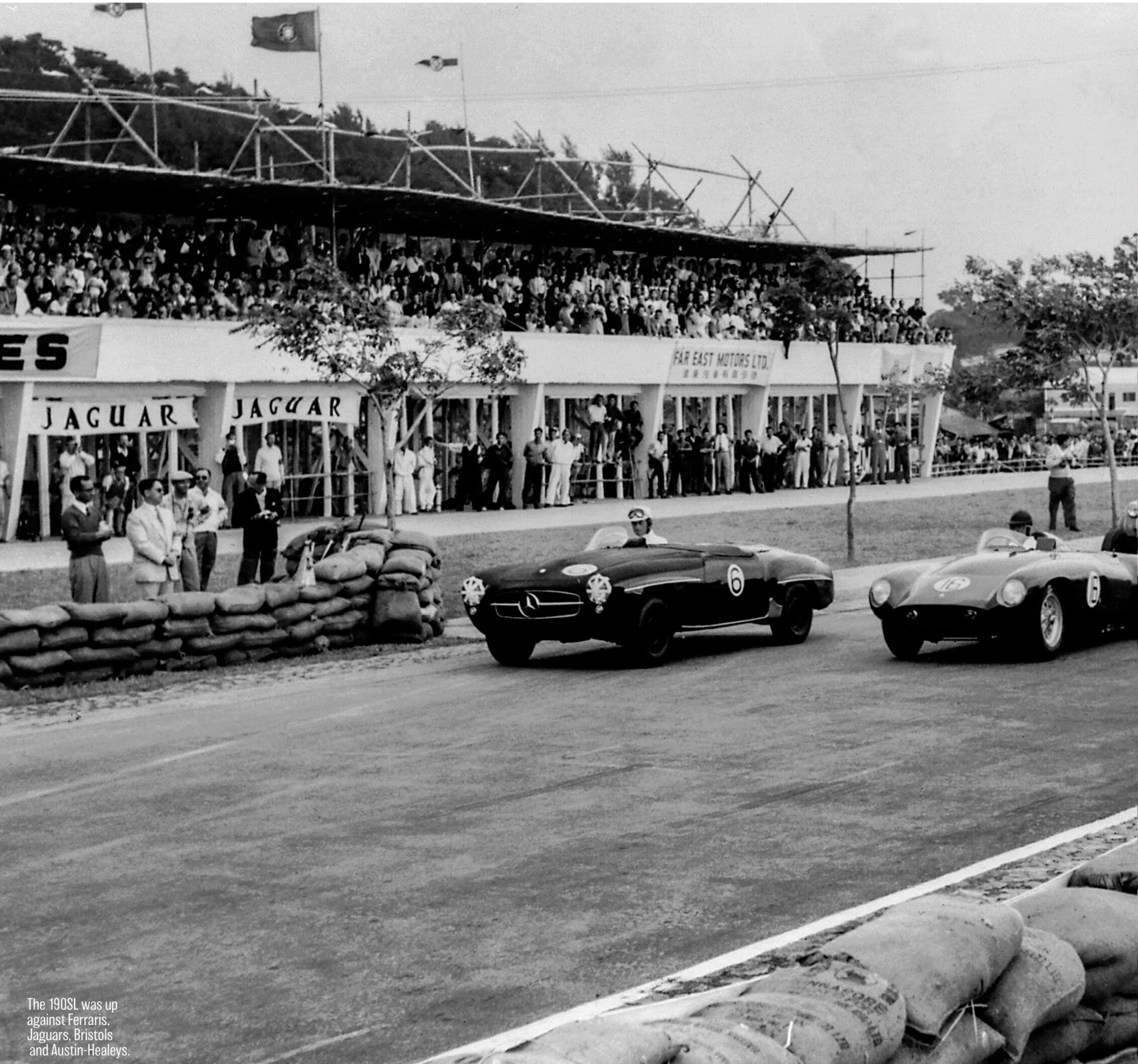
Cavallino Classic, 2018



PALM BEACH CLASSICS

Achieving a perfectly revised work without affecting the historic character of the vehicle in the process. With over 10 years in restoring and selling classic Mercedes, we value our customers through excellence in our work and service.





The 190SL was up against Ferraris, Jaguars, Bristols and Austin-Healeys.

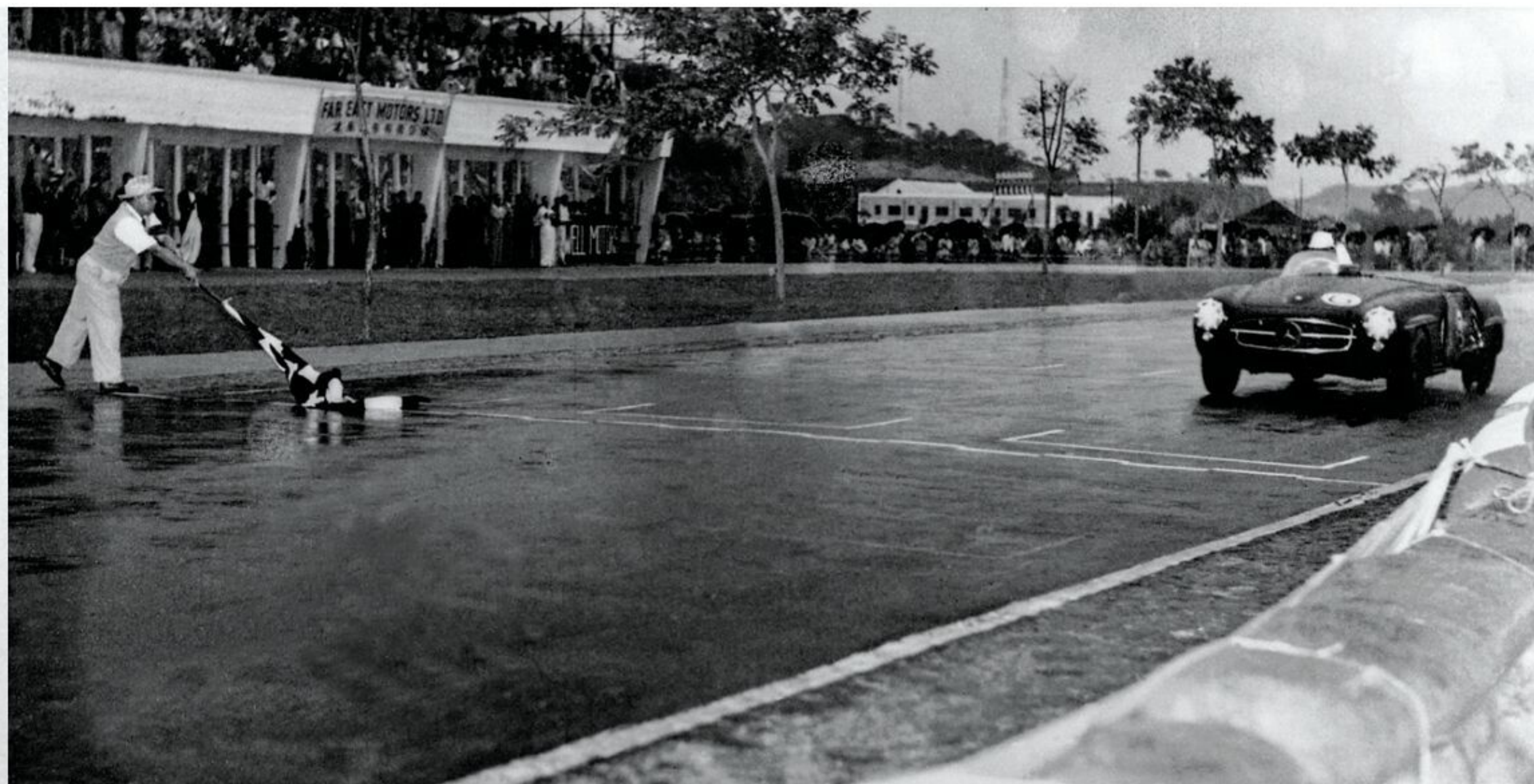


Damage clearly visible on Steane's victorious racer.

“The 190SL that Steane drove was not your usual showroom model”



W121
MACAU
GRAND PRIX
1956
190SL




AGAINST THE ODDS

In front of a packed grandstand, racing driver Douglas Steane took the chequered flag in the Macau Grand Prix of 1956, behind the wheel of a modified 190SL Roadster

WORDS **KYLE MOLYNEUX**
PHOTOGRAPHS **DAIMLER AG**

A Mercedes-Benz 190SL was the unlikely star of the Macau Grand Prix in China in 1956. In torrential conditions, Douglas Steane finished two laps ahead of his closest rival in a Ferrari Mondial. The number 6 Mercedes did not finish the 77-lap race unscathed, however, the modified roadster sporting serious damage to its left flank after making contact with another car. Steane's victory was made doubly sweet by the fact he'd very nearly won the race in 1955, finishing less than a second behind the Austin-Healey 100 of Robert Richie after almost four hours on circuit.

The 190SL that Steane drove was not your usual showroom model, featuring doors made of light alloy and a small perspex windshield. Removal of the soft top, bumpers, heat exchanger and sound insulation reduced the car's weight to around 1,000kg – about 10 per cent less than the standard production Roadster's. Furthermore, the twin Solex carburettor fed four-cylinder was fine tuned, and the ride height lowered to increase top speed, while handling was improved by sports dampers and modified springs. This sports version of the 190SL was entered in the Macau Grand Prix by the Daimler-Benz importer in Hong Kong.

That wasn't the only racing success for the 190SL, though. Also in 1956, the Moroccan general distributor of Mercedes-Benz won the GT class (up to two litres displacement) in the Casablanca Grand Prix. Sadly, a change in regulations made by motorsport's governing body, the FIA, excluded the W121 from further competition. 



HEMMELS

Crafting the world's finest Mercedes-Benz Pagoda SLs

Accepting retail pre-orders now
for Summer 2018 delivery



Call our technical team directly on 0845 230 2 280

www.hemmels.com

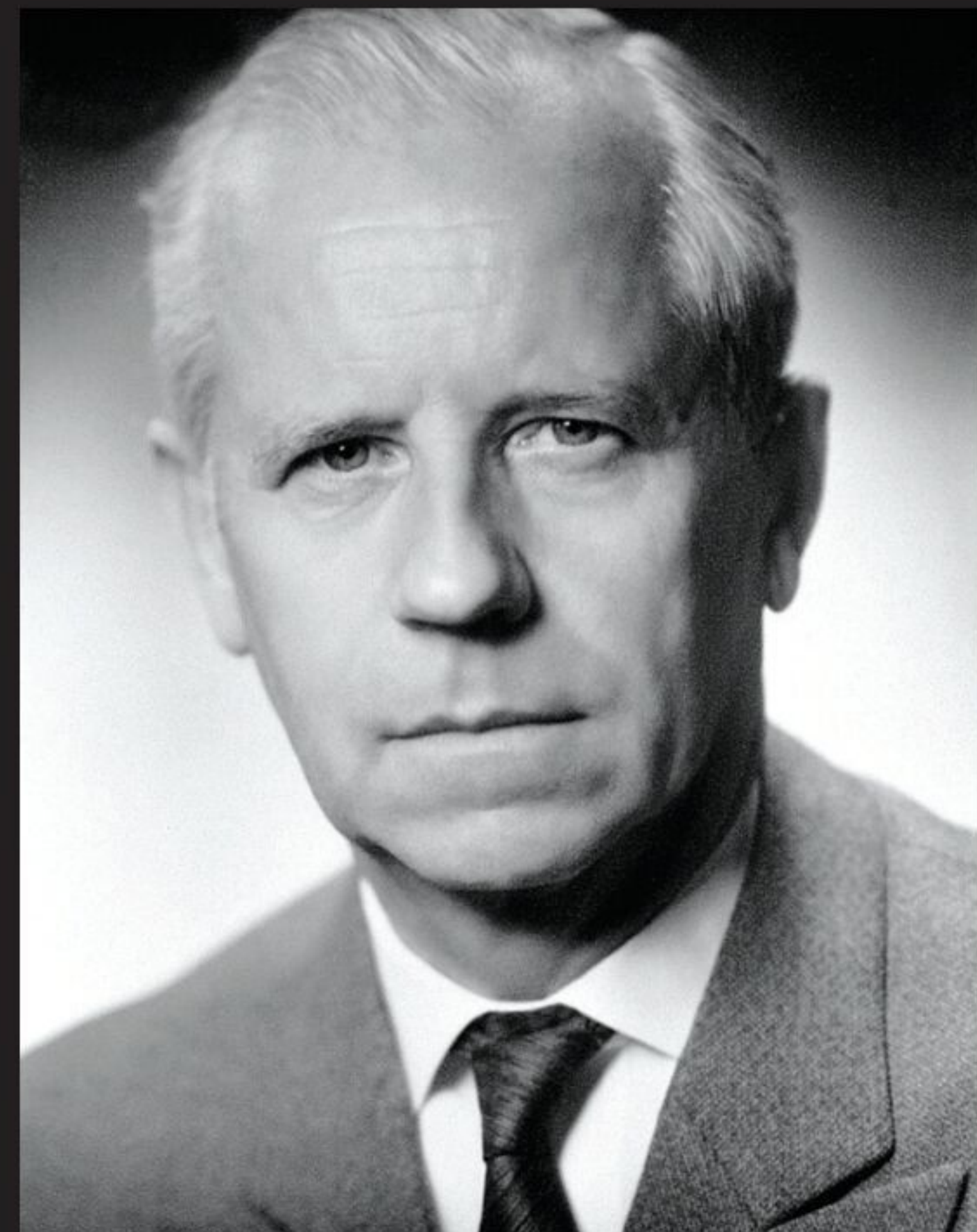
● W121 190SL

Fritz Nallinger, technical director

Leading from the front

One of the fathers of all-round independent suspension, and a great believer in diesel engined cars, **Fritz Nallinger** tended to research and development at Daimler and was also involved in the company's motorsport triumphs

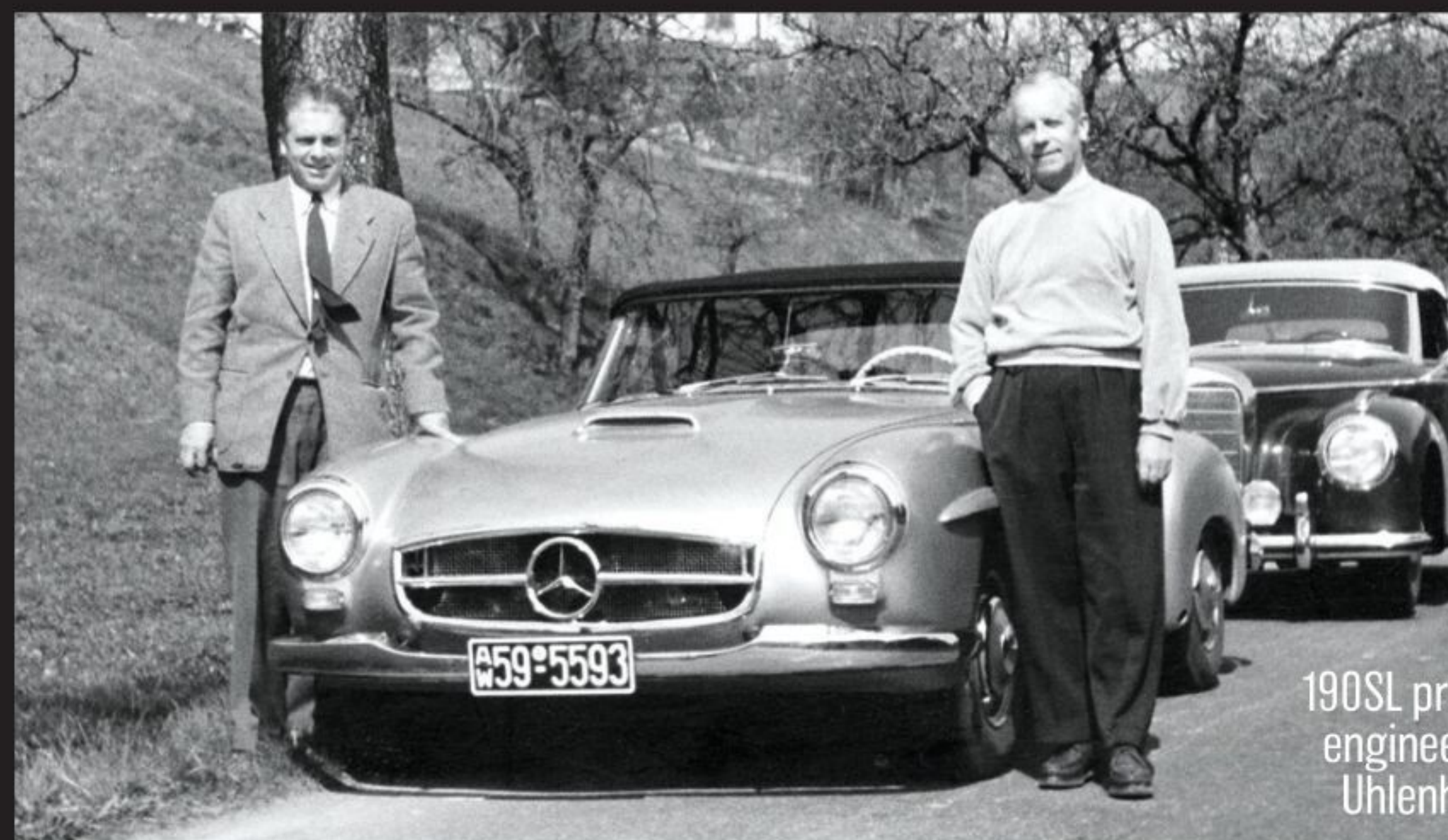
WORDS MARTIN BUCKLEY PHOTOGRAPHS DAIMLER AG



When Fritz Nallinger retired as technical director of Mercedes-Benz in 1965, he had over 300 patents to his name. He had worked for the company for 43 years and was the acknowledged architect of its post-war resurgence. A modest character with an unassuming appearance, he was one of the great scholars of 20th century automobile engineering.

Born in 1898 in Esslingen, near Stuttgart as the fourth child of Friedrich Nallinger, the head of planning at the Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft, Fritz was almost born into the job that came to define his life. Even as a student he spent his spare time working in the Benz factory. By age 13 he had already registered the design of a new headlamp.

Fritz went into the military in 1916 to train as a pilot and was latterly transferred to the testing of aircraft engines. He finished his education at Karlsruhe technical institute in



190SL prototype: engineer Rudolf Uhlenhaut left.

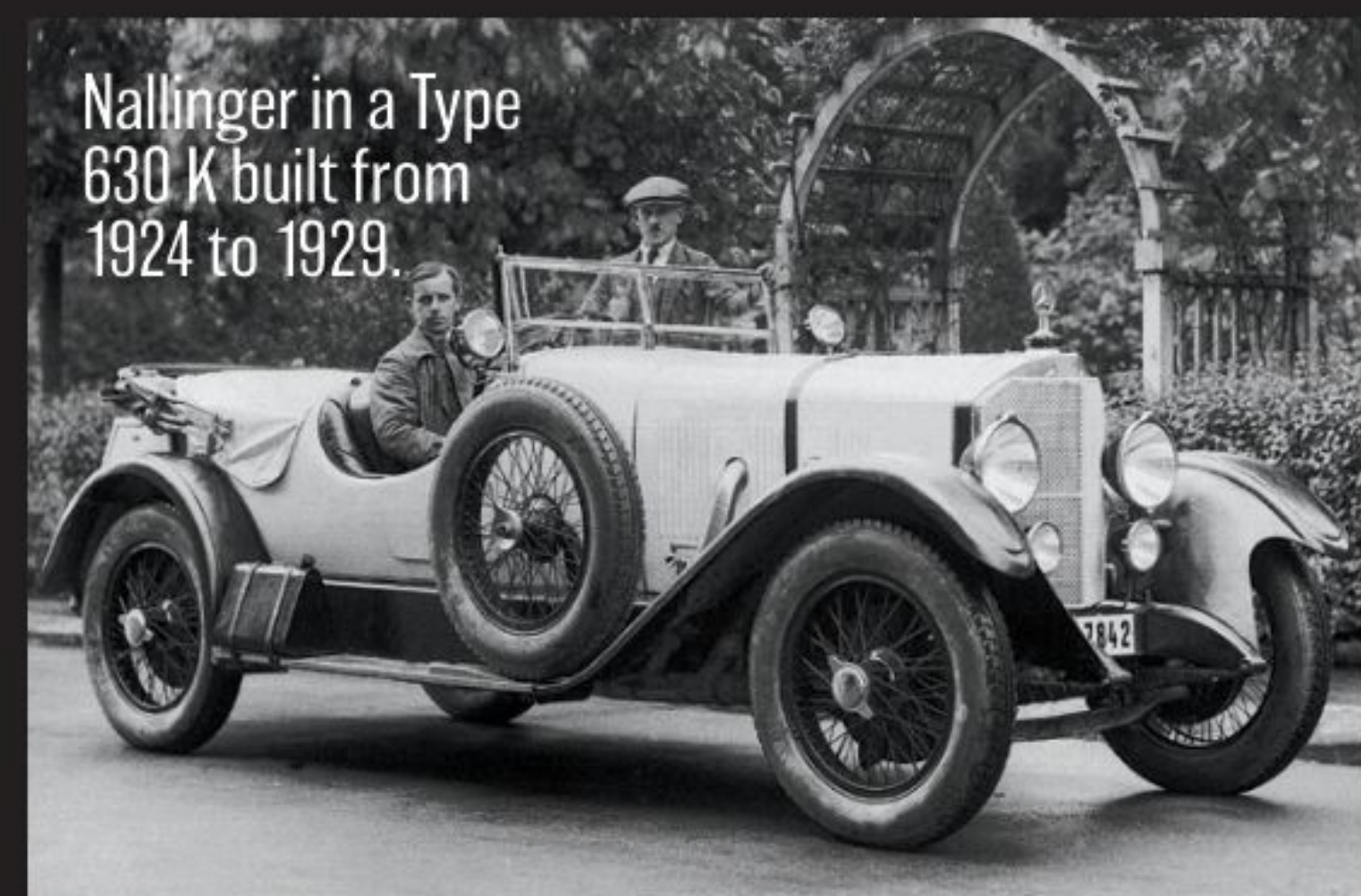
1922 and was offered a job at Benz & Co immediately. In his spare time the young Nallinger raced Mercedes cars, competing successfully in reliability trials. When Daimler and Benz merged

“HE RECOGNISED THE PUBLICITY VALUE OF THE 300SL AND PRESIDED OVER THE FIRM'S RETURN TO RACING”

in June 1926 Nallinger moved to Untertürkheim, where he reported directly to Ferdinand Porsche and then chief engineer Hans Nibel. Fritz was now freer to focus on his own ideas such as the swing axle and a powerful diesel engine that was suitable for use in a passenger car.

Following Nibel's death in 1934, Nallinger presided over the pre-war Silver Arrows racers, from W25 to W165, and also took responsibility for military engines. He became technical director in 1940 and was appointed to the board in 1941. Appointed head of research and development, and with car production halted in 1942, Nallinger's efforts went into military aeronautical concepts.

Post April 1945, Nallinger spent two years in France heading a turbojet design group. He was allowed to return to his job at Mercedes in 1948. He retook his place on the board and concentrated on designing the 300 saloon, Mercedes-Benz's first new post-war car.



Nallinger in a Type 630 K built from 1924 to 1929.

Nallinger was now able to plot Daimler's return to profitability with a greater number of exports as the firm became more international in its focus. He recognised the publicity value of the 300SL and presided over the firm's return to racing. While the 300SL was developed by the racing department at Mercedes-Benz, its baby brother, the 190SL was developed by Nallinger's passenger car team using as many saloon car components as possible. Nallinger also worked on truck projects that led to Mercedes becoming the largest producer of commercial vehicles in the world. Nallinger pioneered unitary construction on the Ponton, crumple zones and disc brakes on the Fintails, and produced arguably the ultimate comfortable sports car in the W113 SL Pagoda.

On Fritz Nallinger's retirement in 1965 his board presented him with a two-door version of the W100 600. The car was a fitting testimony to Nallinger's brilliance and, arguably, the pinnacle of his achievements. Fritz Nallinger enjoyed a near 20-year retirement, passing away at his home in Stuttgart in June 1984. 



Above Famous faces at the F1 closing ceremony at Untertürkheim in 1955; Nallinger far right.

W121 190SL

Market view

“Prices start at £60,000 – you won’t get much below that which doesn’t need a lot of work”

Prices for the Ponton based 190SL have rocketed in the last few years, with buyers seduced by this classic’s exquisite looks

WORDS DAVID SUTHERLAND PHOTOGRAPHS H&H, SILVERSTONE AUCTIONS, GOODING & COMPANY AND LUX CLASSICS



Barn find sold by H&H for over £56,000.

The W121 190SL, built from 1955 until 1963, ran concurrently with the 300SL, as a more affordable roadster based on the four-cylinder Ponton’s underpinnings and mechanicals instead of using an exotic lightweight chassis and six-cylinder power. Its purchase price was half that of the 300SL Roadster, explaining why 25,881 were sold compared to 1,858 W198 Roadsters.

The lesser engineering and exclusivity has always been reflected by market values, but the general rise of the classic car market has hauled up 190SL values across the condition spectrum. Basket case examples that several years ago could be bought for under £20,000, often

snapped up by restoration companies looking for projects, can now make double that. Memorably, in July 2017 at its sale in the Imperial War Museum in Duxford, Cambridgeshire, auctioneer H&H Classic offered a 1960 190SL which had not been used for 30 years and frankly was little more than a collection of rusted parts, expecting it to make £20,000 to £30,000 but selling it for £56,250.

H&H admitted astonishment at the price, and Ellis Simin of 190SL specialist Redcastle Classics in South Wales commented, “The best cars are the ones that have not had a restoration, because you know you’re starting afresh, and if it’s a complete car with the right bits for the year that’s even better.” Ellis reckons that the very



best 190SLs can come close to £200,000, but says of the H&H basket case, “that car is going to owe you £160,000 by the time it’s finished.” But as with 300SLs, the ‘barn find’ lure is strong.

At the top UK and international classic car auctions, 190SLs sold for an average of slightly under

£100,000 throughout 2017. That may seem high for a Mercedes that can’t claim to be a true sports car, but perspective is added by this figure being approximately a tenth of the typical 300SL price. The highest price achieved at auction in 2017 that we spotted was the 1960 silver blue, fully



Left Silverstone Auctions car went for £126K.



Left Just shy of £200,000 for Lux Classic's SL.



Left Gooding & Co's 1960 car made £140K+.



Left Cream SL sold for £118K by Silverstone.



restored car sold by Gooding & Company at Amelia Island in Florida in March 2017. It made \$181,500 (about £146,500) including buyer's premium, although it only just scraped into the lower reaches of its pre-sale estimate range, and the seller had hoped for \$220,000 (about £183,000 at the time).

In the UK, 190SLs were having no trouble making six-figure prices. At its sale at the NEC Classic Motor Show in November 2017, Silverstone Auctions sold a UK right-hand drive 1960 car in silver, that had recently been restored, for £126,000, and also a 1959 car in cream for £118,125, that had also been fully rebuilt by a British specialist.


Fantastic four

The 190SL's value is not age or model related. There was just one factory engine spec – 1.9-litre, twin Solex carburettors and 104bhp/105lb ft torque – and minimal updates during production. Cars from 1956 had revised engine/gearbox mountings, more chrome and Ponton tail lights, while the next year overriders on the rear bumper were made standard. The only feature that might enhance value is a factory hardtop, a rare fitting. A model known as the Coupe had a hardtop but no hood, a model that would have appealed in California with its dry and sunny climate.

Until now, 190SLs prior to 1960 were exempt from the UK's annual MOT test, but as from May 2018 that applies to all W121s, due to changes

to the test system introduced by the department of transport. Its prestige has been boosted by it now being eligible to enter the Mille Miglia in Italy every May, following research revealing that the 190SL had, contrary to previous belief, been entered in the 1956 event and therefore can take part in the modern re-run, and this may have given values a minor lift.

Away from the international auction scene, what will a 190SL in good if not concours condition cost? "Prices start at £60,000 – you won't get much below that which doesn't need a lot of work," Ellis told us. A private seller in Hampshire was asking £78,000 for a white 1961 European spec car that had been exported to Japan and restored there, while well known 190SL restorer Parry Chana of Lux Classics in Essex was advertising a ground-up restored, 1958 example for £199,500 and with the common modification of Weber carburation. But this was not the highest priced example we saw, Parry also having 190SLs priced at £225,000 and £245,000.

This dainty Mercedes has unsurprisingly always lived in the shadow of the 300SL Roadster which oozed so much more glamour than the 190SL, which even in its day was thought of as a comfortable tourer and not a sports car. But it shares the 300SL's styling and some extent its DNA, so as long as 300SL values are rising, the 190SL will be on its coat tails for the upward ride. 

Watch out for...

- Unless rebuilt, the twin Solex carburettors will be worn, causing engine misfires.
- Many 190SLs have had a Weber carburettor conversion.
- An original wiring loom is likely to have degraded, so check to see if a new one is in place.
- The exhaust system may leak where it meets the manifold.
- Look for rust on the floorpan and the boot floor, rear spring mounts and chassis rails.
- Inspect the canvas hood and its frame – a full overhaul usually costs around £2,000.

Elegance

redefined





BEAUTIFUL IN AN UNDERSTATED WAY, THE W113 SL MARKS A HIGH POINT IN MERCEDES DESIGN DURING THE 1960s, WRITES KYLE MOLYNEUX WHO ALSO HAPPENS TO LOVE THE WAY THE PAGODA DRIVES

**PHOTOGRAPHS
CHARLES RUSSELL, ERIC
RICHARDSON & DAIMLER AG**



T

he W113 SL emerged during a time of great societal change, and people who bought this petite and expensive Mercedes-Benz were often in the thick of the action. A few years ago, journalist Mick Brown of the *Telegraph* brilliantly described the 1960s as “a product of affluence and mass consumerism, a brief hysterical interlude in which youth reigned supreme, sex came out from under the covers, elitism and deference were held hostage and, for a fleeting moment, the whiff of cordite hung in the air.”

When it comes to culture, many consider the 1960s a golden age, certainly in the West. But in this decade of the mini skirt, men on the moon, pop rock, and the end of national conscription in the UK, there was a darker and deeply political side that filled the screens of colour televisions and rippled the airwaves of transistor radios. If a car were to shine now, then it would have to fight for its place in the limelight...

Pagoda. It's an unusually exotic nickname for a German manufactured, compact sports car. The term was inspired by the

shape of the hardtop, which sweeps seductively from side-to-side like an oriental temple top, and could be optioned with a sunroof, heated rear window, and even chrome rails. Penned by Paul Bracq, who was working under design chief

Friedrich Geiger at the time, the concaved, coupe-esque lid cleverly controlled air flow and improved vehicle stability, while reducing weight which in turn lowered the car's centre of gravity to the benefit of handling. Under the hardtop and stowed in the boot was a fabric hood with integrated plastic rear window.

If the preceding W121 190SL and W198 300SL Roadster existed at opposite ends of the spectrum to one another, then the Pagoda – offered in 230SL, 250SL and 280SL forms between 1963 and 1971 – was positioned smack bang in the middle of both, with a price to match (DM20,600 at launch). Taut yet supple, its long legs are equally capable of covering the miles as they are strutting down an exclusive high street, and its quick feet can inspire feelings of delight in those who enjoy travelling at intoxicating speeds on curving roads.

The 190SL was based on a 180 Ponton, but – owing to Mercedes' tight production schedule (a '220SL' was considered years before) – the SL Pagoda shared its reinforced underpinnings with a similarly humble yet more modern 220SE Fintail. The platform was cut to size and reconfigured to achieve a wheelbase of 2,400mm – the exact same as the 190SL's. With the modified Fintail base came double-wishbone

“IF THE PRECEDING 190SL AND 300SL ROADSTER EXISTED AT OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE SPECTRUM TO ONE ANOTHER, THEN THE PAGODA WAS POSITIONED SMACK BANG IN THE MIDDLE OF BOTH”

front suspension and a single-joint rear axle complete with compensating spring thanks to lessons learned from the 300SL Gullwing, which had an infamous tendency to manifest positive camber at the rear during moments of extreme suspension loading changes. The compensating spring solution served the W198 300SL Roadster well, but wasn't part of the 190SL's suspension arrangement at any point.

For the Pagoda, recirculating ball steering was again the system of choice but, somewhat surprisingly, only with optional power steering was it faster through rotation than the 190SL's set up – 4.1 turns (versus the 190SL's 3.5), with power assistance reducing that figure to 3.2 turns



Above Straight-six updated for each version of the W113.

Right Three models were offered: 230, 250 and 280SL.



Below Geneva motor show debut in March 1963.





Above Prototypes with side vents and Fintail rear wings.

Right A total of 48,912 cars were made by Benz.

Above The Pagoda really comes alive on a mountain pass.

lock-to-lock. Borrowing yet more thinking from early versions of 300SL Roadster, the 230SL Pagoda featured disc brakes up front and drums at the rear; the dated drum concept was usurped by discs for the 250SL onwards, but the 190SL had to make do with foot numbing and eye-widening drums all round its entire production life.

The W113 SL was officially unveiled at the Geneva motor show held in March 1963. However, just five months later it was tearing up gravel tracks and taking victory in the 3,400-mile Spa-Sofia-Liège Rally with Eugen Böhringer at the wheel and Klaus Kaiser as co-driver, the win serving as proof of the new SL's build quality and sporting credentials. Indeed, the Pagoda was strong by design with ➡





➤ crumple zones front and rear – these a first for a sports car and devised by engineer Bèla Barènyi, the father of the vehicle safety body movement. Further protection measures included steering gear moved back to the firewall, a collapsible steering column, and an ‘impact plate’ in the steering wheel’s centre, this latter feature replaced by a cushioned pad on the 250SL that arrived in 1966. The dashboard, meanwhile, was cleaned of all sharp edges and padded on the top and bottom, and the door handles were recessed. But with enhanced safety came greater weight, so engineers clawed back some lightness by fitting the Pagoda with an aluminium bonnet, bootlid and doors.

The 1960s to early 70s SL came in three flavours, the final two an evolution of what went before. The 230SL of 1963 to 1967 had a 2.3-litre M127 straight-six producing 148bhp at 5,500rpm and 145lb ft torque at 4,200rpm. That was good for a 0-62mph time of 11.1 seconds with a four-speed manual gearbox, or 10.7 seconds when optioned with a four-speed automatic. The most sprightly transmission, however, was the optional ZF S 5-20 five-speed manual, which cut the benchmark sprint to 9.7 seconds. Top speeds were roughly the same no matter what the gearbox – 120mph or thereabouts.

The 250SL was unveiled in February 1967 and featured a development of the 230’s motor – the stroked, 2.5-litre M129 with a

fraction more torque (159lb ft), plus seven camshaft bearings and an oil cooler. The 250SL also boasted an 82-litre fuel tank (up from the 230’s 65-litre capacity) and formed the basis of a new type of Pagoda – the so-called California Coupe, whose name came from its additional rear seats and lack of roadster hood that would otherwise protect against rain when the hardtop is left in the garage.

The 280SL of 1968 was the final iteration of the W113 and featured arguably the best Pagoda powerplant of all.

Equipped with a new high lift camshaft and displacing 2.8 litres, the M130 straight-six mustered 168bhp at 5,750rpm and 177lb ft torque at 4,500rpm, Mercedes-Benz quoting nine seconds flat to 62mph for all transmissions, but top speeds were broadly similar to the 250SLs, at least officially. Apart from the badge on the bootlid, the only way to tell a 280SL apart from its predecessors was its wheel trims; attractive light alloy wheels were an option from August 1970.

The 280SL is considered the model flagship, but it almost wasn’t. Remarkably, a 6.3-litre V8 powered Pagoda was considered. In July 1967, a convoy of three V8 prototypes grumbled their way to Germany’s Nürburgring for evaluation, following criticism from the nation’s motoring press that Mercedes did not make enough powerful



Right Böhlinger waves with Kaiser after rally victory.





Just The Facts

Mercedes-Benz 230SL (W113)

ENGINE M127 2,306cc 6-cyl
POWER 148bhp@5,500rpm
TORQUE 145lb ft@4,200rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,290kg
0-62MPH 10.7sec
TOP SPEED 121mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 27.7mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 07.1963-01.1967
NUMBER BUILT 19,831

Mercedes-Benz 250SL (W113)

ENGINE M129 2,496cc 6-cyl
POWER 148bhp@5,500rpm
TORQUE 159lb ft@4,200rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,360kg
0-62MPH 10.6sec
TOP SPEED 118-121mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 25.2mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 12.1966-01.1968
NUMBER BUILT 5,196

Mercedes-Benz 280SL (W113)

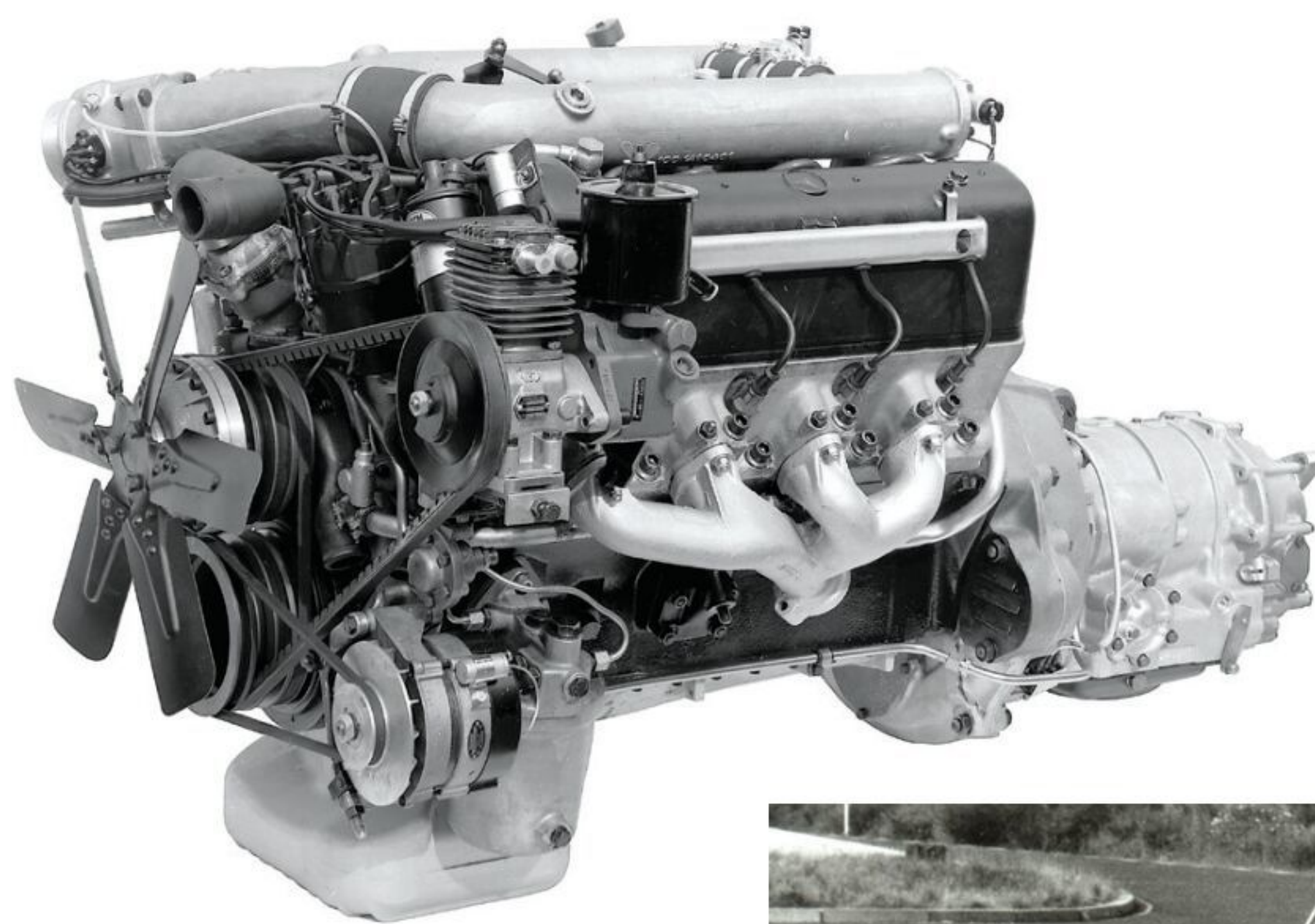
ENGINE M130 2,778cc 6-cyl
POWER 168bhp@5,750rpm
TORQUE 177lb ft@4,500rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,360kg
0-62MPH 9.0sec
TOP SPEED 121mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 24.8mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 01.1968-03.1971
NUMBER BUILT 23,885

FIGURES FOR CAR AS PICTURED; FUEL CONSUMPTION DETERMINED AT 3/4 OF TOP SPEED (NOT MORE THAN 110KM/H, 68MPH) PLUS 10 PER CENT

“JUST FIVE MONTHS AFTER LAUNCH, IT WAS TEARING UP GRAVEL TRACKS AND TAKING VICTORY IN THE 3,400-MILE SPA-SOFIA-LIÈGE RALLY”

Above and top right The California Coupe is very rare.

Below and below right The V8 W113 testing at the 'Ring.



(read: V8) engines. One of those test cars would eventually become the M100 V8 powered W109 300SEL 6.3, with much of its existence owed to hot shoe research engineer and undercover rebel, Erich Waxenberger. The tall Bavarian had somehow managed to fit the W100 600's motor into the Pagoda too, following extensive “welding and relocating work”, according to Mercedes' archives. But despite showing impressive speed around the 'Ring, lapping in as little as 10min 40sec, Waxenberger found the car highly unstable during braking, and the heavy engine put great pressure on the Dunlop racing tyres, ruining the fronts within nine laps, and the rears by lap 16. It would take until the succeeding generation SL, the R107 of 1971, for a V8 to have a permanent home in Mercedes' illustrious roadster.

There is another curio in the Pagoda story, and it involves the work of Felix Wankel, inventor of the rotary piston engine. While evaluating alternatives to the reciprocating piston engine in the mid 1960s, Wolf-Dieter Bensinger, head of engine development at Mercedes,

oversaw the fitment of a three-rotor 'M 50 F' engine in an experimental SL with internal designation W 33-29. Emitting a highly distinctive Wankel buzzing sound under acceleration, this 3.4-litre car produced 203bhp at 5,600rpm and peaked at 127mph. Mercedes was so interested in this technology, engineers racked up almost 43,000 miles in the SL prototype, and even designed the succeeding R107 SL's transmission and propshaft ➔

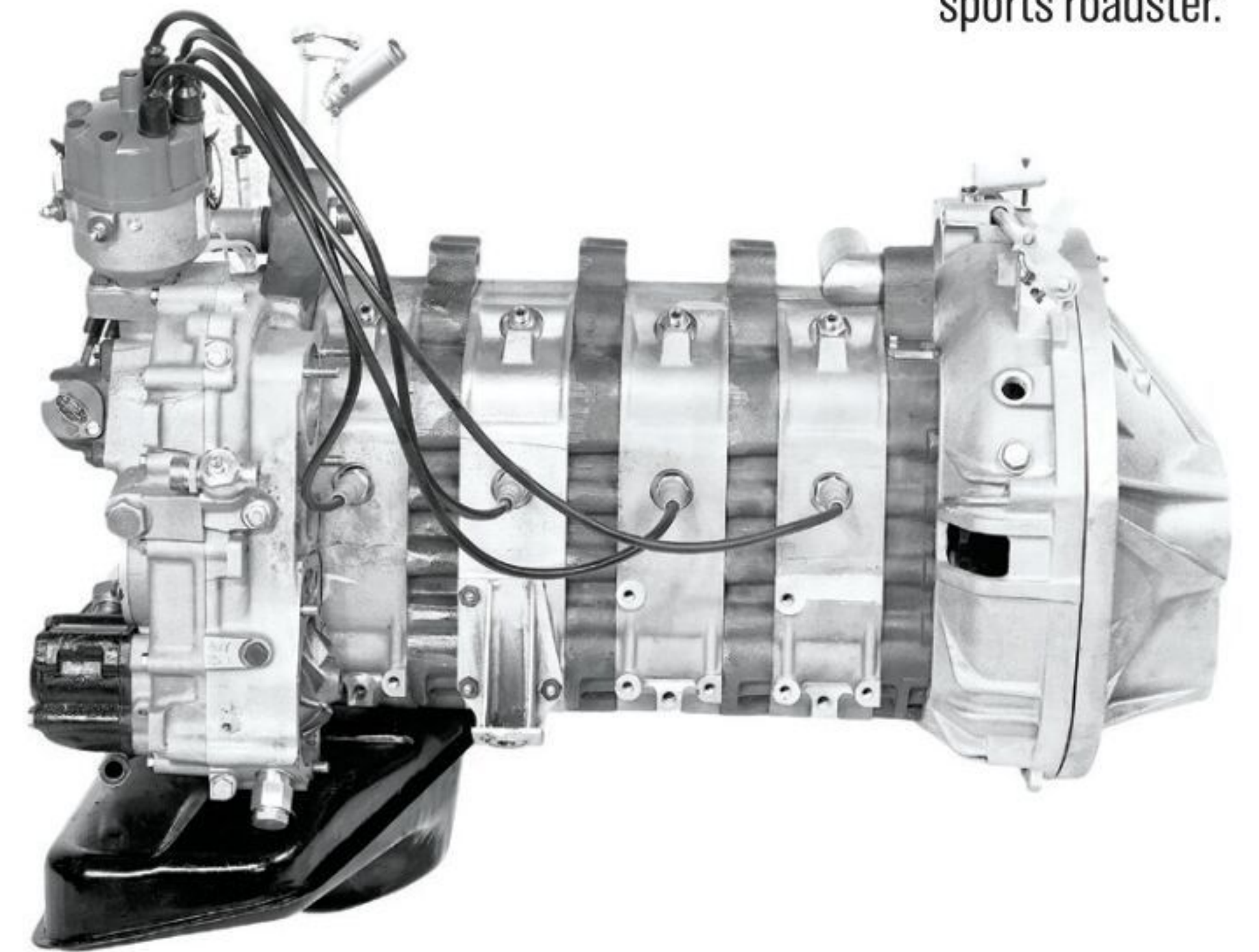




“FOR ALL ITS PRETTY POSTURING, THE PAGODA IS A TREMENDOUS DRIVER’S CAR”

Left Padded dash and steering wheel improve safety.

Below Wankel tech also tested in M-B’s sports roadster.




◆ tunnel in such a way that a rotary engine could be installed. Stuttgart also created the now famous C111 research vehicle in 1969, with three- and four-rotor systems, but high fuel consumption and emissions were the technology’s downfall and Mercedes switched its focus to more traditional powerplants, the development of which had suffered while Wankel motors were put through their paces.

Upright headlamps were very much in vogue at Mercedes-Benz during the Pagoda’s reign, and it is these period features, plus the car’s delicate lines beyond the star badged grille, which throw many admirers off the scent; for all its pretty posturing, the SL Pagoda is a tremendous driver’s car, as well as a competent cruiser. The thin rimmed steering wheel cries out to be held with fingertips rather than in fists, and if you’re travelling with the roof down then all the better – no matter which model you are driving, all Pagoda’s have a crisp and athletic soundtrack, the fuel injected six-cylinders far more

comfortable being revved than the 190SL’s rudimentary, twin Solex carburettor fed, four-cylinder engine.

I wouldn’t blame anyone for preferring an automatic equipped Pagoda, but for those who enjoy spirited driving and more interaction with their carriage, then a well fettled manual transmission is perfect – Zahnradfabrik’s rare five-speeder appealing to drivers of more modern cars and having the added bonus of reducing engine revolutions with that fifth ratio slotted home on faster roads.

Time has only boosted the Pagoda’s image, which is now firmly rooted in the icon league. The chassis’ limits are that much higher than those of the 190SL, and the whole car feels tighter, more alert and more refined overall. And yet there is certainly something more delicate and *classic* about its demeanour compared to the succeeding R107 SL, which is renowned for its robust dynamics and heavy duty build quality. To my mind, the W113 SL is the most beautiful SL of all, and one of the most desirable Mercedes-Benz cars of the last 60 years. 





Nothing but the best.

Engine overhaul, bodywork repair or upholstery, our specialists face every job. Engine dynamometer and frame straightener ensure perfection down to the last detail, because Kienle-restored vehicles are compared with the best - with Mercedes-Benz.



1000
MIGLIA

Main Sponsor
of the Mille Miglia

KIENLE

Automobiltechnik

The World Of Classic Cars - Restoration And Trading

71254 Heimerdingen/Stuttgart · Max-Planck-Str. 4 · Germany
Tel. (49) 71 52/901 63-0 · Fax (49) 71 52/901 63-115
www.kienle.com · email: info@kienle.com

As the leading specialist for the restoration of Mercedes-Benz vehicles we have been setting quality standards for partial and complete restorations, repairs and maintenance for over three decades now. In addition, we own one of the world's largest stock of original parts and high-quality re-manufactured parts, and prepare expert appraisals for Mercedes-Benz vehicles.

We are looking for classic Mercedes-Benz vehicles. Offer us your vintage car, we guarantee a professional brokerage service or buy directly.

Please ask for a portrait of our company available as brochure or DVD for € 10,- each.
Hours of business: Weekdays 8 am - 6 pm and Saturdays 9 am - 2 pm

Visit our large showroom with over 50 classic cars for sale!



W113 SL: OWNERSHIP

Worth the

FOLLOWING AN EXTENSIVE TWO-YEAR RESTORATION, THIS
SERVE DOTING OWNER RICHARD COOPER – HE EXPLAINS HOW



“The car looked pretty good on the surface and had shiny paint. It also drove fairly well, so I reckoned it was a good base to start from”

WORDS ALISDAIR SUTTIE
PHOTOGRAPHS TERRY OBORNE

wait

280SL PAGODA IS NOW READY TO
EVERYTHING CAME TOGETHER

Richard's other Pagoda is another 280, but in LHD.



“I’m attracted to beautiful things, so the SL Pagoda has always been one of my favourites,”

says Richard Cooper. This has led him to own not one but two immaculate W113s that are the culmination of multiple previous SL models.

“It started with an R107 300SL quite a few years ago,” he continues. “Again, it was the looks that first got me into that car and it was enjoyable, but ultimately I felt it was underpowered and not quite what I was after. So I swapped it for a 420SL in Willow Green metallic and that was much better.

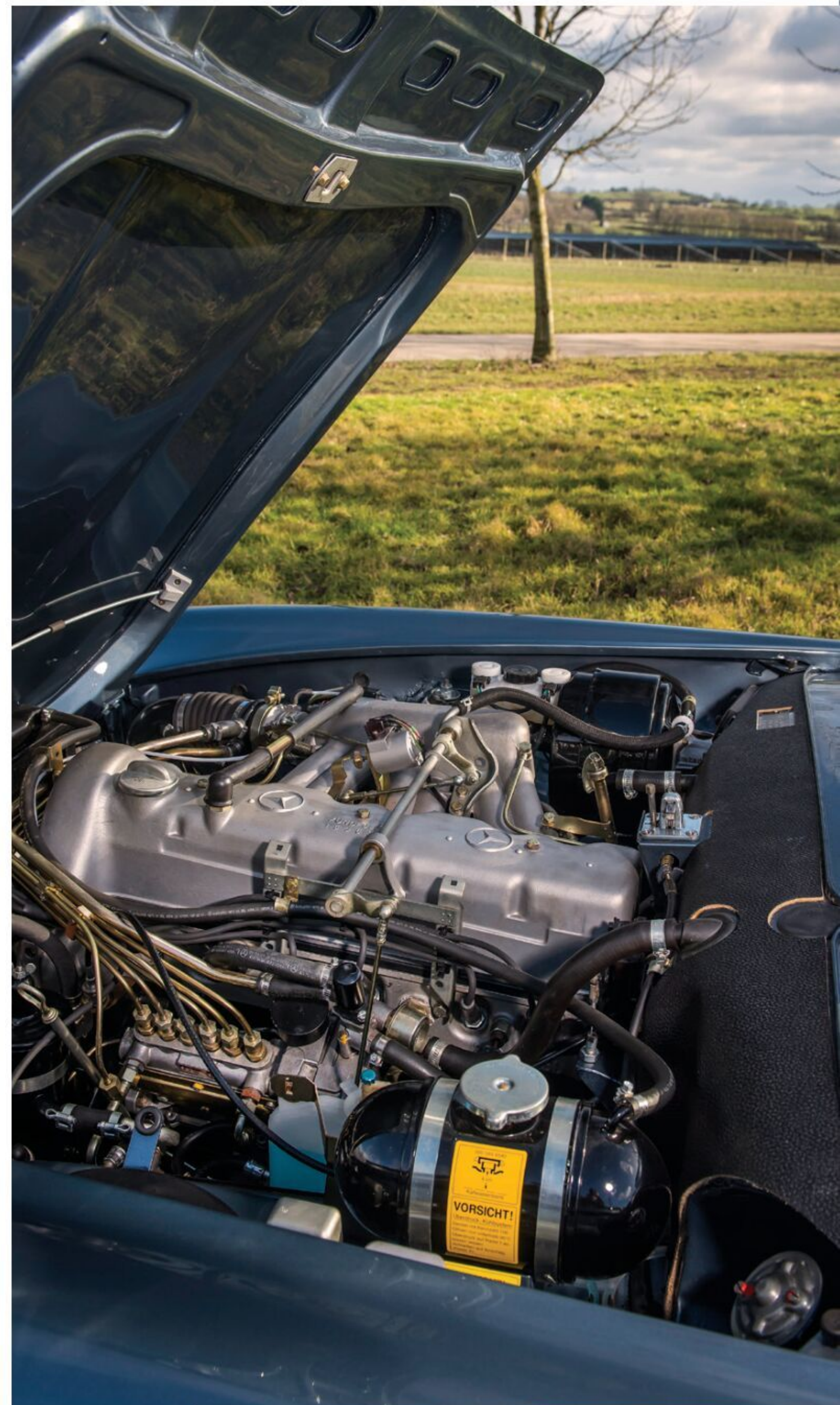
“After a while, I had a change of direction for the use of my cars and sold the 420SL to buy a 560SL in left-hand drive, as I could use it in France. The step up in power and refinement is very noticeable between the various R107s, but I also hankered after a Pagoda to restore. I wanted a W113 that I could bring up to factory original condition rather than modify, as I think the car is very capable as it is. The search was on and I eventually found this blue, right-hand drive model at Silverstone Auctions’ sale at the NEC Classic Car Show in 2015. I knew it was a punt as it clearly had more filler in it than a Wimpole Street dentist’s waiting room.

“It cost £35,000, so it was obvious it was going to need some work, though it looked pretty good on the surface and had shiny paint. It also drove fairly well, so I reckoned it was a good base to start from. It was at this point that I got in touch with Bruce Greetham at SL Shop to discuss the rebuild. Right from the start, I knew I wanted a full data card restoration rather than try to make the Pagoda into something it wasn’t. However, talking with Bruce helped me decide on two changes. The first was the addition of inertia reel seat belts to make the car that little bit safer and easier to use, as I always intended to drive this car and tour with it. My other Pagoda has the original belts and I know going for the more modern equivalents was the right choice.

“The other change is more obvious, as I wanted to swap the interior for a lighter colour to contrast nicely with the mid blue paintwork. I know some purists might say this is a major deviation from a data card restoration, but the colour is an original that would have been available from the factory and I think it sets off the car to perfection.

“One of the toughest parts of the restoration work was sorting the steering wheel as the original had cracked and was beyond repair. It took a long time to find a good replacement, but Bruce and the team at SL Shop seem to be able to find parts that you think are unobtainable, and the standards they work to are among the highest in the world. I always knew my 280SL was going to end up being just what I wanted.

“After I dropped off the Pagoda with SL Shop, the company set to work stripping it down to the very last nut and bolt. To achieve the level of finish and factory fresh originality I wanted, this was always going to be the only way to go. It was a long haul and it’s taken more than two years from start to finish, but the results speak for themselves. I’m no mechanic, so I was very much in Bruce’s hands, but I’m absolutely delighted with the result. ➡



Top Fully rebuilt straight-six dazzles in direct sunlight.

Above Chromed and paint matched hub caps for the 14-inch wheels.

Right Leather colour changed for another hue offered by Benz.



“I knew this car was a punt, as it clearly had more filler in it than a Wimpole Street dentist’s waiting room”





Above Side facing rear seat better suited to a child than an adult.



Right Instruments refreshed to revive their boldness and sparkle.

Far right Richard is looking forward to time in the driver's seat.



◆ “The attention to detail is one of the things that impresses. It started with the body being shot blasted to remove every last trace of filler and corrosion. After that, the floorpans and boot floor had to be replaced, which probably won’t come as a surprise to anyone familiar with the W113. A new fuel tank was also needed. When the body restoration was complete, it was time for the paint shop and that was when I had that ‘wow’ moment I think you get with every restoration. Even though the car was a bare shell, when I saw it in its finished colour, I knew it was the right choice and the car was going to be spectacular.

“This is where so much of the detail work began and you realise just why restorations can swallow up so much time. Often, we were waiting a week or two for parts to arrive, but I was happy for Bruce to take his time. For example, finding the right floor mats was a real piece of detective work, but we got there in the end. The dials also needed to be restored, which is an incredibly delicate job. It’s another example of the care taken by the team that they retained the originals by carefully cleaning and repainting the faces so they look spot on now. All of this is complemented by all of the chrome and brightwork being refinished to look like they just left the factory. I had every nut and bolt nickel plated too, so they will last for another 50 years.

“As the car was coming together, the finish date was pushed back a little as SL Shop asked to display the Mercedes at a couple of shows to demonstrate its work. I couldn’t refuse that, especially when you know it took the company two whole weeks just to line up the doors so they fit perfectly. Now the car is finished and back on the road, and it was a great pleasure to drive it reasonably hard for the *Mercedes SL* photoshoot.

“There are a couple of small things that needed sorting, which is part of the overall restoration process. Then, I’m planning a wine tour of Bordeaux in the 280SL. It’s the ideal car for this sort of trip as the 2.8-litre engine has plenty of power for effortless cruising and overtaking, plus it’s very refined, and the boot and cabin are spacious. I’ve owned a few Ferraris, but none felt as good as this. I also have a Rolls-Royce Corniche, Aston Martin DBS and Austin-Healey 100-6, as well as the other Pagoda – a 280 in left-hand drive. I have a ‘thing’ for cars from films and television, so the Aston is like the one from *The Persuaders* and the Rolls from *The Thomas Crown Affair*. This 280SL is special, though, and I can’t see me parting with it. I may only cover 1,000 miles a year in it, but I’ll enjoy every one of them, and when the car is not being used it’s still beautiful to look at.”

“I’m planning a wine tour of Bordeaux in the 280SL – it’s the ideal car for this sort of trip”

● W113 SL

Béla Barényi, safety guru

Safety first

Finally getting his career break at Mercedes-Benz in 1939, safety engineer **Béla Barényi** invented the vehicle 'safety body' crumple zones, among many other things

WORDS MARTIN BUCKLEY PHOTOGRAPHS DAIMLER AG

Right Tests proved the great potential of crumple zones.

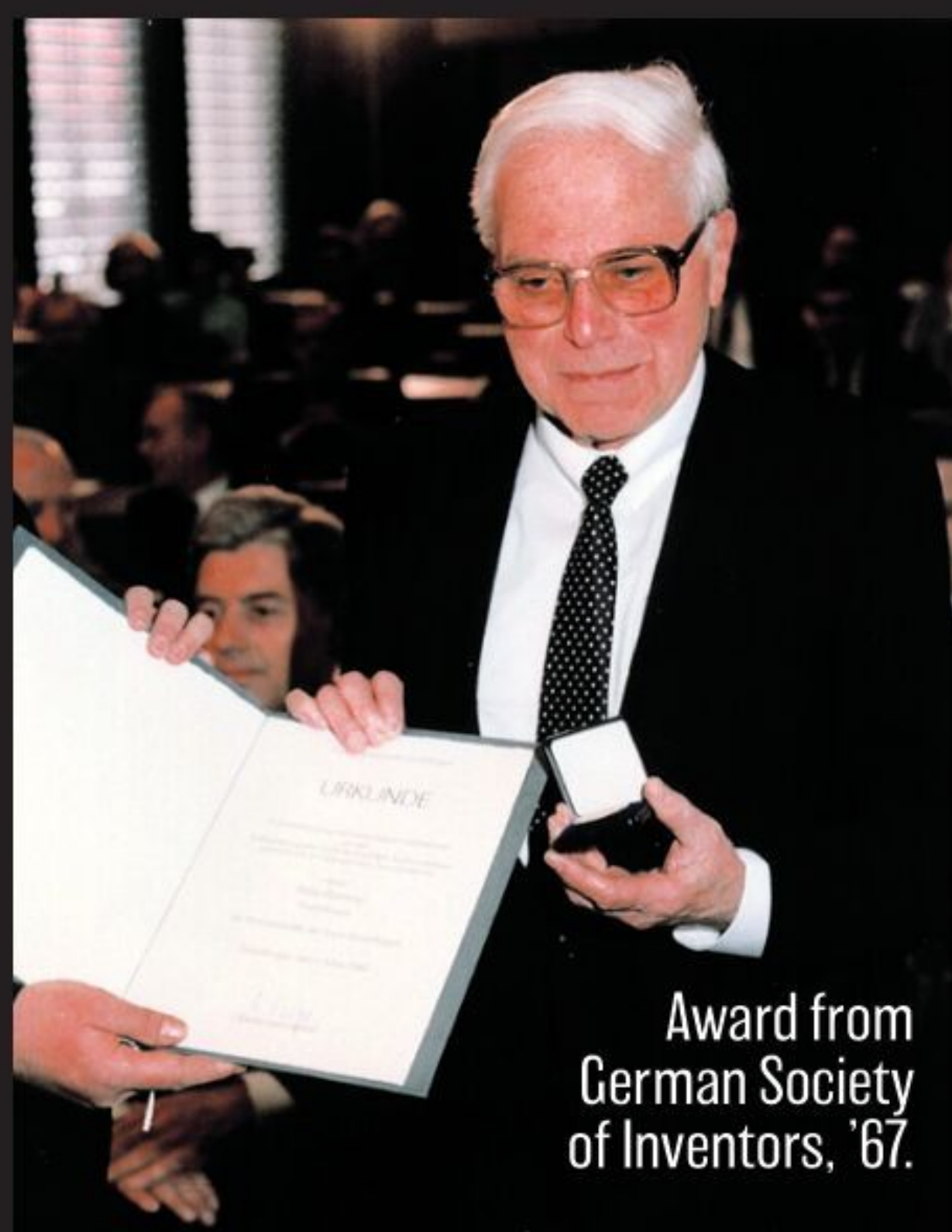


B

éla Barényi was unquestionably the father of 'passive safety', or in other words – systems that help reduce the effects of an automobile accident once the collision has happened. Indeed, this brilliant engineer virtually invented the term, having formulated the difference between 'active' and 'passive' safety in the mid 1960s.

Born into a wealthy Austro-Hungarian family in 1907, Barényi was exposed to the motorcar early in life and was immediately smitten. He was a superb student who graduated from his technical collage in 1926 with excellent results, yet he struggled to find steady work in the motor industry for the first 13 years of his career. Not that he wasted his time: one of the oddest facts about the man is that he conceived the basic design for the VW Beetle while still at collage and, decades later, won a legal battle with VW to acknowledge the fact that he was the 'intellectual father' of its most famous product.

He first invented the crumple zone in 1937 and brought the concept with him to Mercedes in 1939 after finally getting an interview with company chairman Wilhelm Haspel, who immediately recognised the young man's potential. From here Barényi never looked back, heading the pre development department up to his retirement in 1972.



“HE MADE HIS PATENT APPLICATION FOR A PASSENGER CAR BODY STRUCTURE WITH CRUMPLE ZONES IN 1951, AND THESE WERE FIRST SEEN IN PRODUCTION ON THE W111 FINTAIL IN 1959”

His first project for Daimler was a new type of platform frame for the 170V convertible, but all the time he was working on his safety ideas, an unusual calling in an era when car safety was considered to be something best unmentioned. He made his patent application for a passenger car body structure with crumple zones in 1951, and these were first seen in production on the W111 Fintail in 1959, along with the

safety steering wheel which Barényi had been working on for decades, featuring a large, flat impact plate and a deformable section between the impact absorber and the steering shaft. He went on to develop a complete safety steering system for the W123 in the mid 1970s.

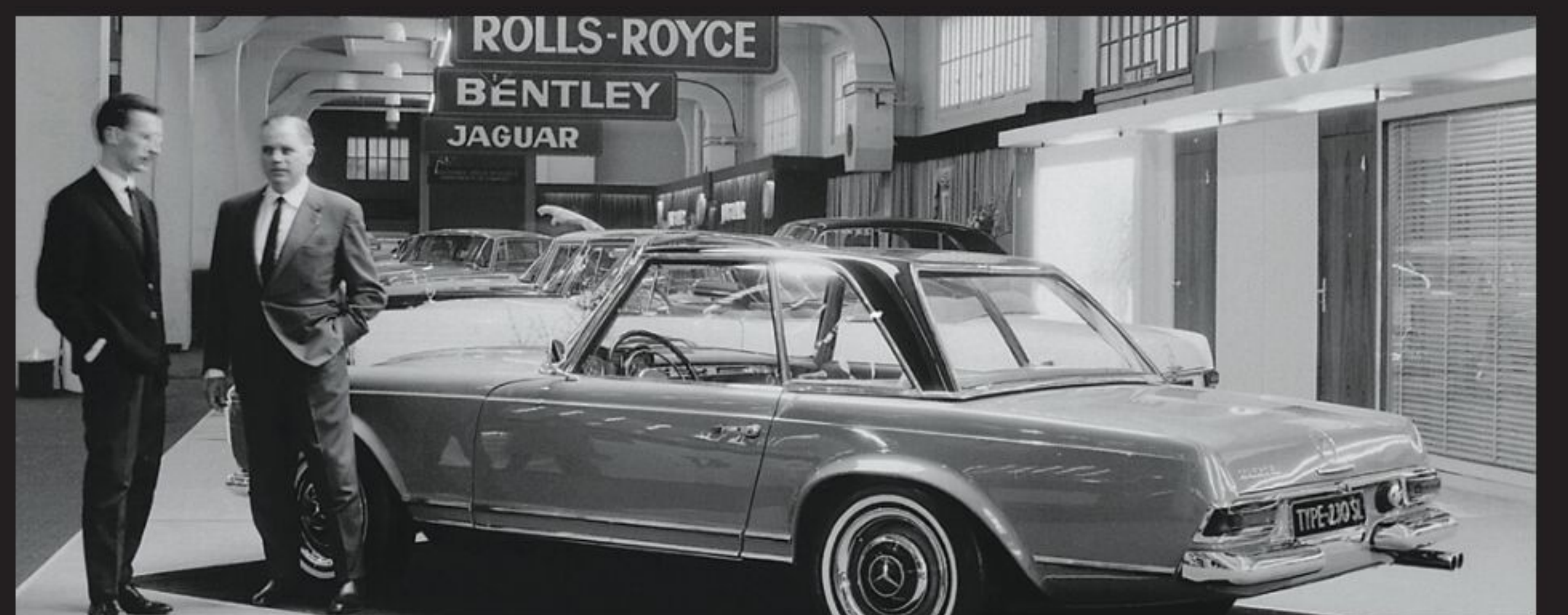
It was Barényi who devised the dish shaped hardtop for the 1963 W113 230SL. There had been hardtop roofs for Mercedes sports cars before, but rather than being an afterthought this one was designed at the same time as the rest of the car and was integral to its image. It was

double skinned and thus much stronger than previous tops, and the tall glass area gave its distinctive 'Pagoda' appearance. It was robustly attached to the car and offered great visibility, too. The 230SL was the first sports car with crumple zones.

When the prolific Béla Barényi retired in 1972, he had over 1,000 patents attributed to him. Undoubtedly his safety concepts helped save millions of lives on the roads of the world and continue to do so to this day. He died in 1997 but the safety theories he developed are still adhered to by Mercedes-Benz to this day.



Above Discussing construction details in 1960; Wilhelm Haspel (right) believed in Barényi.



Above Barényi (right) with designer Paul Bracq at the 230SL's launch in Geneva in 1963.

W113 SL

Market view

“In recent years it has become something of a fashion accessory in celebrity land, the likes of model Kate Moss and racing driver David Coulthard high profile owners”

The pretty lines of designer Paul Bracq’s roadster have aged remarkably well, and demand for mint condition Pagodas has increased dramatically in recent years

WORDS DAVID SUTHERLAND PHOTOGRAPHS SILCHESTER GARAGE, BEVERLY HILLS CAR CLUB, CHESHIRE CLASSIC BENZ, ROSIER CLASSIC STERNE & HEMMELS



Silchester's £87.5K 230SL in left-hand drive.



There is a distinct and simple, age related pecking order in the bloodline of the SL models we cover in these six market analysis: the older the model, the more it's worth, with the youngest, the R230 looking almost absurdly cheap at under £10,000, while the grand original, the 1954 W198 300SL, rarely changes hands for less than £1m. That puts the W113, the fourth

body shape to wear the SL badge and built from 1963 until 1971, approximately in the middle of the price range, but even at that you will pay £80,000 to £90,000 for a car you can drive without work to be done, and well over £150,000 for anything that will catch a judge's eye at a classic car show concours.

But if values are behind those of its predecessor, the 190SL, the gap seems to be narrowing and

there are probably two reasons for this. First, the W113, or 'Pagoda' as it's referred to due to its inverted roof shape, is seen by many as the prettiest SL model, with its gorgeous big headlamps fronting the stunning razor-sharp Paul Bracq designed body. Second, it is a far more modern car to drive and live with than the 190SL, not least because of its sophisticated, fuel injected six-cylinder engine.

The Pagoda is also a more plentiful car, with many of the nearly 49,000 made still in existence. It's often said that it is much easier to find a W113 for sale than one of the close on one million Fintails produced in approximately the same era, the saloon's survival rate very poor. And in recent years it has become something of a fashion accessory in celebrity land, the likes of model Kate Moss and racing driver David Coulthard high profile owners.

However, the Pagoda market, or at least parts of it, has lost some of its vigour, according to Paulo Custódio, proprietor of Berkshire based classic Mercedes specialist Silchester Garage, and who has restored many W113s. "The beginning of 2017 was quite good but after that it was very quiet," he reports. "It does seem to be coming back a bit, but it's still a lot quieter than three years ago. The lower end of the market is doing very well and the top is doing well, but the middle market, those from £80,000 to £100,000 are suffering."

It can be no coincidence that the Pagoda, a Mercedes staple at international auctions, has been less visible at such events recently. Between them, RM Sotheby's and Gooding & Company hardly sold any in 2017, and those that did go under the hammer did not include pristine examples, suggesting that potential sellers of top examples have been holding back in fear of effectively blighting their cars with a did-not-sell result.

For cars seen in advertisements, the red 1966, US spec 230SL with air conditioning Paulo had priced at £87,500 was a typical middle



Left Beverly Hills 230SL at under \$30,000.



Left Cheshire Classic Benz's £100,000 230SL.



Left £220,000 buys a restored Classic Sterne SL.



Left Fully restored car by Hemmels.

market car. So were the same year 230SLs in white at Kent Mercedes specialist Peter Jarvis Classic Cars at £89,750, and in red at Cheshire Classic Cars for £99,995.

If you want the very best Pagoda money will buy, they are out there waiting for you. Rosier Classic Sterne in Oldenburg in Germany was offering a fabulous looking, 1969 280SL, with zero miles since its full, detailed restoration for €255,000 (£225,200), while on the same showroom floor sat a brown, equally pristine 250SL for €250,000 (£220,800).

Best of three

The three versions of the Pagoda – the 230SL, 250SL and 280SL – differ little apart from in engine size, but the last of the line 280SL has always been most sought after. “The 230SL is less attractive to the market,” Paulo tells us. “I would say they are worth 10 to 15 per cent less than a 280SL.” His own favourite is the 250SL. “I personally think the 250 is the one to go for because it’s the rarest. It’s worth more than a 230SL, but it has the same issue – it’s not a 280SL.”

At the other end of the spectrum, restorers such as Paulo have now hoovered up and rebuilt most of the basket case Pagodas, but you will still see a few projects at almost affordable prices, though their scarcity means they may not be in the same country as you. Beverly Hills Car Club in Los Angeles, never afraid to offer project

level cars, was advertising a 1965 230SL in white with red interior, and described as mechanically sound, for €29,500 (about £22,100).

“There is a big demand for restoration projects,” Paulo reveals, telling us Silchester has never been busier in this respect. “It’s a bit like the property market – everybody wants to get on the ladder and make money from the cars, but of course it doesn’t work like that. I don’t think you can do a proper restoration for less than £60,000.”

Joseph Sullivan, boss of Hemmels also believes that restoration is the more lucrative avenue. His Cardiff based firm does not deal in Pagodas per se, but restores them to order for customers, having charged £185,000 in 2017 for an as new, left-hand drive 280SL, or £30,000 more for right-hand drive. “In the last 18 months there’s been a massive increase in demand for our cars globally,” he reports.

And while he has raised his prices by some 15 per cent for new orders taken in 2018, he says his customers are happy to pay, regarding it as an investment. “One customer told me, ‘it’s not spending money, it’s moving money’, and another was told by his insurance company at the time of a pre-delivery visit to us that his car was valued at £18,000 more than he had paid us for it.”

For the best Pagodas, you need serious money. But there’s also a quite wide choice, making it a very accessible classic Mercedes in its own way. **SD**

Watch out for...

- Out of true throttle linkage causes engine misfires.
- Vibration from the engine suggests worn out engine mounts.
- Clunking sounds from the automatic gearbox may be due to incorrect oil pressure.
- The rear axle gaiter commonly leaks oil, replacement is pricey.
- Worn front suspension mounts can make the SL Pagoda feel vague and wandering at the front end.
- The most crucial corrosion traps that need checking are the cabin floor and rear chassis legs.

Here to stay

MERCEDES-BENZ GOT ITS 107-SERIES SL SO RIGHT OUT OF THE BOX, WRITES DAVID SUTHERLAND, THAT THE COMPANY BARELY CHANGED THE DESIGN DURING ITS PRODUCTION LIFE, WHICH LASTED OVER 18 YEARS

**PHOTOGRAPHS
IGOR VUCINIC, ROBB
PRITCHARD & DAIMLER AG**



R107
SL



WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal,
providing you various content:
brand new books, trending movies,
fresh magazines, hot games,
recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price

Cheap constant access to piping hot media

Protect your downloadings from Big brother

Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages

Brand new content

One site



AVXLIVE **ICU**

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open <https://avxlive.icu>



Above Speedometer with marks for max speed in each gear.

“WHEN THE LAST R107 WAS BUILT IN AUGUST 1989, THE ONLY OTHER VOLUME MADE PASSENGER CARS THAT HAD BEEN AROUND LONGER WERE RELICS FROM A PAST MOTORING ERA, THE MINI AND CITROËN 2CV”

Above R107 SL cut from same cloth as SLC and 116-series.

Right 500SL's V8 with 228 to 242bhp depending on year.

Below Cabin of very early R107 with just 188km on the clock.



P

rior to the R107 SL, launched in the spring of 1971, the average production life of a Mercedes-Benz SL generation had been six years. But the fifth model to bear the by now prestigious lettering on its tail stuck around for over three times as long, posting a record 18 years and four months occupation at Sindelfingen, during which time 237,287 were built, almost exactly three times the combined total of the others.

That was an uncommonly long time for any car to remain in production, especially one from a resource-rich manufacturer committed to constantly investing in new products and technology to keep ahead of the game. When the last R107 was built in August 1989, the only other volume made passenger cars that had been around longer were relics from a past motoring era, the Mini and Citroën 2CV.

And the bookends of the R107 life cycle show what marked change had taken place in the car world, the Mercedes roadster arriving while



Above 350SL testing at Hockenheim shortly before its full reveal.

Above and top Lots of room up front; luggage no problem for this boot.

the Morris Minor was still available, and departing at a time by which the fuel injected 'hot hatch' had become the new sports car. Only one other Mercedes, the G-Wagen (latterly the G-Class), has stayed in production longer than the R107, breaking the roadster's record in 1997. Even after being discontinued, the R107 exerted an influence, its glow of desirability even negatively impacting its R129 successor, which although a technically superior car in every way has so far struggled to win over collectors in the way the R107 did the moment it was replaced. So what was the R107's secret?

The R107 was the right car for its time, an era when customers, especially in the US, were seeking ever more luxury. The W113 SL Pagoda had served Mercedes very well, but for all its still stunning looks, it belonged to the 1960s. Mainstream customers were becoming less tolerant of sports car compromises, and this still (just) being the era of cheap petrol, wanted V8 engines, and the bigger the better.

Although the R107 was only very slightly bigger than the 113-series Pagoda – 60mm more in the wheelbase, 105mm in overall length and 30mm wider – its relaxed elegance, in contrast to the early 1960s, almost Italianate sharpness of the Pagoda gave the R107 a more bourgeois look, which was right on the wavelength of wealthy North America. Its increased grandeur, don't forget, also allowed it to serve, in fixed head C107 SLC form, as the replacement for the W111 Coupe, this time with four proper seats.

In the post Ralph Nader safety era, the various safety measures appealed too, making those on the Pagoda seem almost token gestures. For example, the fuel tank was moved from below the boot floor to a considerably less vulnerable position over the rear axle, and there were far fewer sharp switches and other protrusions on the fascia, while the front A-pillars featured deflectors to channel away rain and aid driver visibility, and large tail light lenses with a ribbed surface fought against the effects of road grime to help maintain lighting brightness.

The switch away from the rear swing-axle used in all previous SLs and indeed all Mercedes' post-war cars up until the 1968 W114/W115 might also have been considered a safety advance. As had the 'Stroke 8', the R107 adopted an independently sprung, semi trailing arm set up, offering improved on-the-limit stability due to reduced camber change.

Mercedes test engineer Erich Waxenberger's mid 1960s failure to make the Pagoda a workable V8 saw that roadster capped at 2.8 litres, but from the start, eight was the only number of cylinders on view in an R107 engine bay. For Europe this was the M116 3.5-litre, producing 197bhp and 211lb ft torque, from the W108 saloon and W111 Coupe and Cabriolet that departed soon after the R107's launch, but Americans' 350SLs used a 4.5-litre V8 restricted to 192bhp; after two years European markets got the bigger engine, in freer breathing 222bhp/278lb ft form, and the '450SL' badge was applied to the US model.

The early R107 was summed up thus by the April 13 1972 issue of *Autocar* magazine: "The Mercedes 350SL has lost some of the ➡



Above 350SL testing on a dynamometer at -25C in a cold chamber.

Left and above left This Sun Yellow 450SL starred in the TV show *Hart to Hart*.

Right R107 is larger, heavier and more refined than the W113.

➤ driver enjoyment that used to be associated with the former 280SL, but it makes up for this in term of extra safety,” the weekly title concluded. “Not even the wildest driver could get into trouble and still blame the car.” But there was still praise for its dynamic qualities: “It went through the corners very fast indeed, never at any stage giving doubt or qualms about its behaviour. All the controls respond beautifully.”

Inconveniently, a Middle East war in 1973 precipitated a so-called fuel crisis and multiplying pump prices, forcing Mercedes-Benz for the first time to be seen to be energy conscious. The car maker’s reaction was to install its recently introduced 2,746cc M110 six-cylinder engine into the R107, badging it the 280SL (an equivalent 280SLC appeared too).

Judged purely as an ‘economy’ car it made little sense, the quoted fuel consumption of 22.6mpg bettering the 350SLs by less than 1mpg. However the new model not only highlighted Stuttgart’s willingness to engage with the environment but opened up a new if perhaps unexpected role for the R107, that of a more responsive and satisfying roadster, thanks to the revvy M110 and four- rather than three-speed automatic gearbox. The 280SL sold reasonably well, finding 25,463 customers, although the majority of R107s were V8s and throughout the 1970s the 450SL was the clear favourite, the perfect tool for a sun soaked highway cruise. It wasn’t an American car, but was part of the American dream, especially as deft product placement fixed it in the minds of TV viewers, most

notably in the original series of *Dallas*, aired from 1978, and also in *Hart to Hart* (1979-1984) in Sun Yellow 450SL form.

But those cruises would be unhurried, all the more so as the 1970s progressed, due to falling output from the US spec 4.5-litre V8 engine as ever tougher emissions regulations were met. By 1974, 450SLs sold in California had dropped to 178bhp, a state of tune extended to all other US states in 1975, while the very last stateside 450s, in 1980, mustered a mere 158bhp.

“THE TWO-VALVE M103 SIX-CYLINDER IS NOW A FAVOURITE ENGINE AMONG YOUNG CLASSIC MERCEDES OWNERS”

For this diminished V8 model, matters were re-set in spring 1980 when the 450SL became the 500SL, gaining a version of the all alloy, five-litre V8 that had been developed for the World Rally Championship 450SLC 5.0 and subsequent 500SLC. This produced 237bhp/296lb ft torque, and matters were also improved by the fitment of a four-speed automatic gearbox. Indeed in this form, and titled 500SL Rallye, Mercedes-Benz planned it to be the WRC entry for 1981 before

abandoning the project. The 350SL also gained a new lease of life by evolving into the 380SL and gaining the new, alloy blocked M116 3.8-litre giving 215bhp/221lb ft torque and becoming widely regarded as the best V8 engine in the Mercedes stable.

The 280SL, 380SL and 500SL carried on in production unchanged, bar some tweaks to the V8s’ compression ratio and camshaft timing to improve emissions, until September 1985, for the 1986 model year, when the final R107 engine revisions and spec updates occurred.



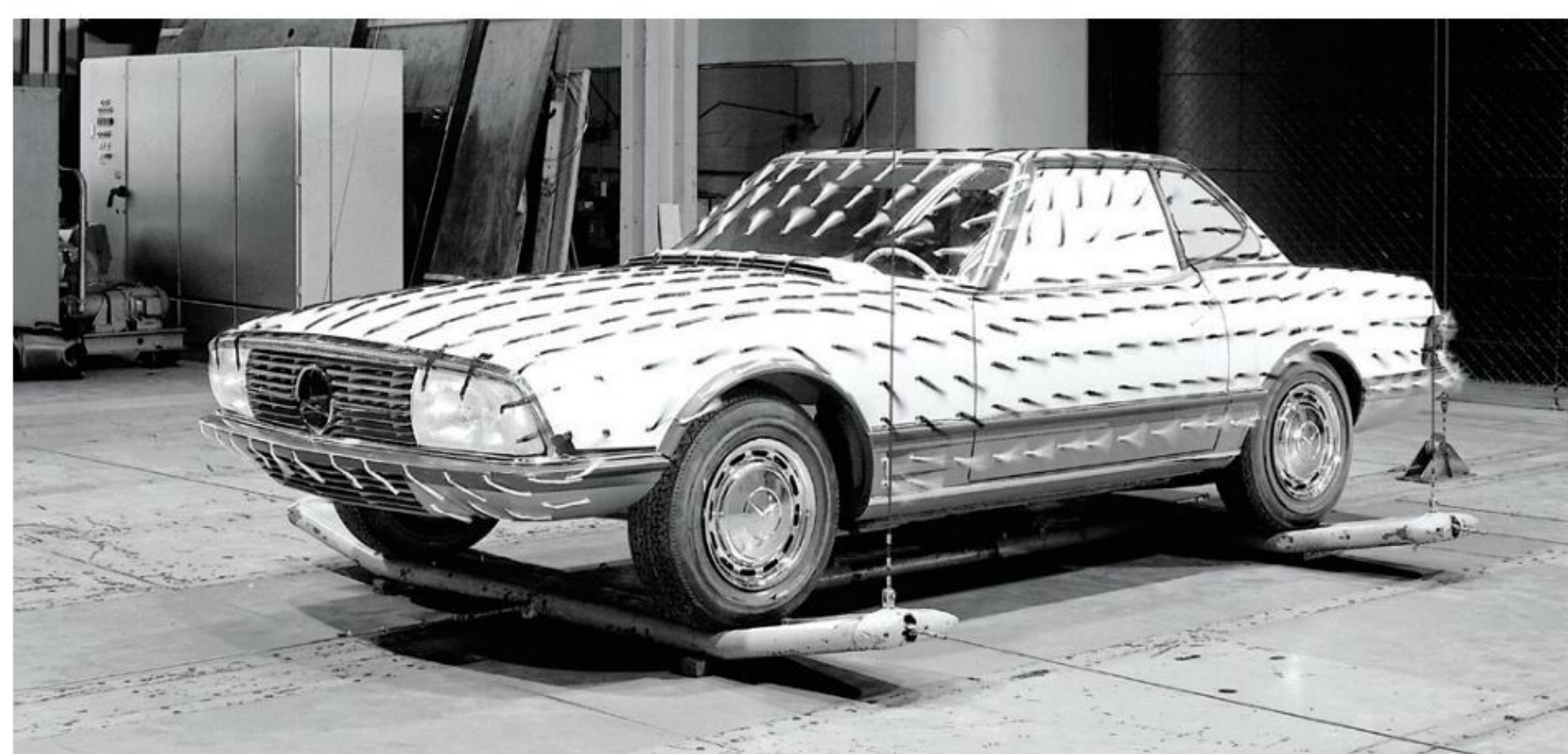


A new flagship appeared, the 560SL, with the freshly engineered M117 5.5-litre V8, which should have been the ultimate R107 but which lacked the expected muscular nature due to its emasculating emissions equipment which allowed only 227bhp and 275lb ft torque to escape.

It was sold only in North America, Australian and Japan, but still the comparisons with European models were obvious: it was 15 per cent down on power compared to the Euro 560SEL with the same but non catalyst engine, and even behind the 500SL. Nonetheless, it is now by some margin the most collectable R107, and considerable numbers of the 49,347 built have found their way back to Europe to be enjoyed by admirers not allowed to buy them 30 years ago.

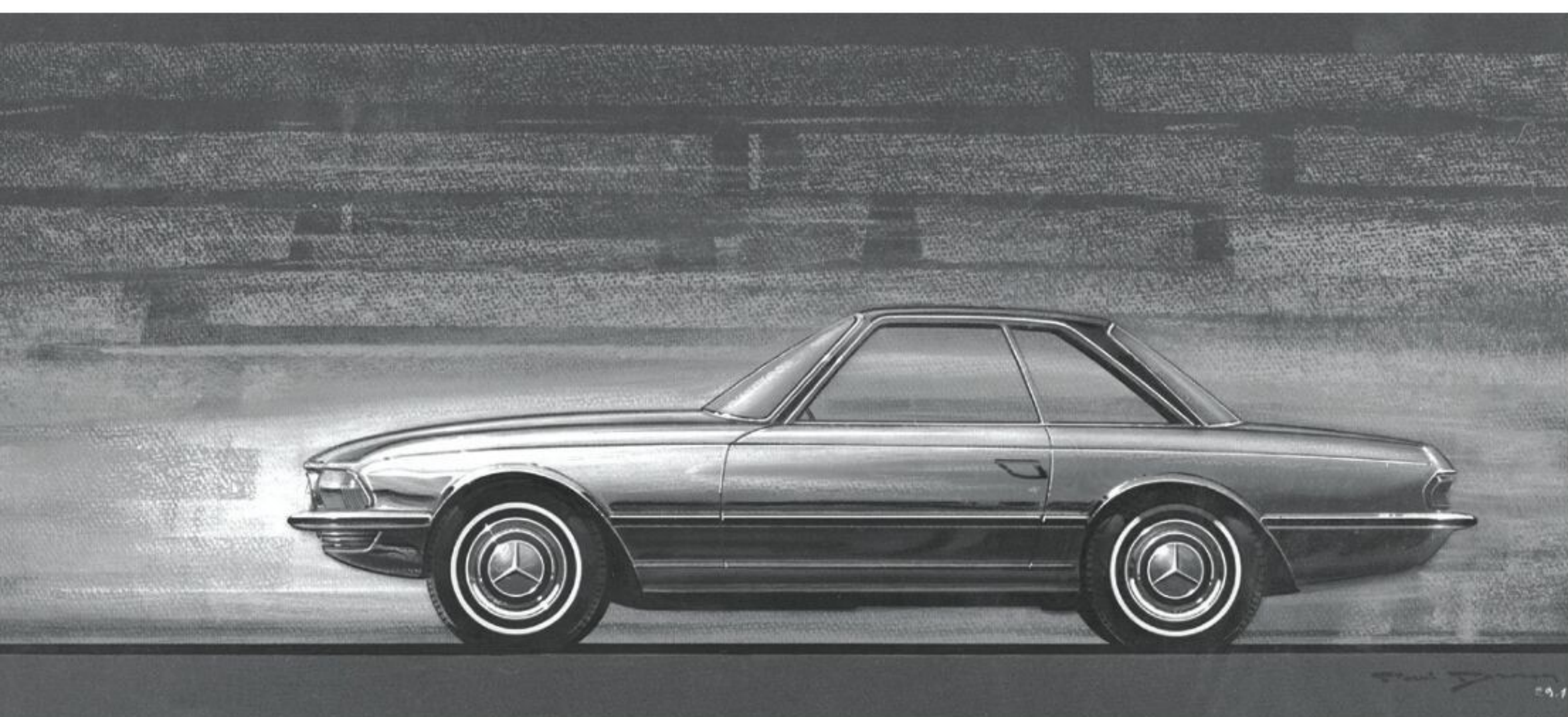
The 380SL's engine rose to 4.2-litre for the 420SL, and the 280SL unit was replaced by the new six-cylinder, three-litre M103, hence for the first time in 22 years the illustrious '300SL' appeared on a new Mercedes. The M103 was entirely different in character to the M110: it was single- rather than twin-overhead camshaft, which might have seemed a backward engineering step, but it was easily the smoothest six-cylinder Mercedes had produced to date, notably sweet when revved hard. The two-valve M103 is now a favourite engine among young classic Mercedes owners, who love it not only for its refinement but for its simplicity compared to the succeeding four-valve M104 straight-six, which with its added electronics can be more troublesome.

By now 14 years old, new engines plus other small changes including an inch bigger, 15-inch diameter wheels with lower profile tyres and retuned rear suspension could not disguise the R107's age. A not



Above Wood model shown with various grille styles in 1972.

Top Wool threads glued to 1968 design study help to show air flow.



Left and far left Drawing by Paul Bracq in July 1965 led to these scale models.

◆ infrequent question to Mercedes-Benz was how much longer could it carry on? In those final years, *Car* magazine's pithy, opinion forming 'The Good, The Bad and The Ugly' column mercilessly downgraded the R107's description to "Fat and cumbersome" and summed it up as a "Well built Triumph Stag."

However, in a less sensationalist analysis in 1986, *Motor* still found plenty to like about the 300SL. While pointing out that its test track 8.4 second 0-60mph didn't compare well with a Porsche 944 or Jaguar XJS 3.6, the magazine said, "Despite this, the car feels a good deal quicker on the road than the figures would suggest, helped considerably by the engine's willingness to pull its rev-limited 6,200rpm maximum engine speed."

The Mercedes steering attracted the same praise and complaint it had for years.

"Although the assistance is subtle, the weighting stays constant, irrespective of speed or lock, which does rob the driver of some road feel," *Motor* reported. "This is all exacerbated by a huge steering wheel which manages to rub your knees while still obscuring the rev counter." But the last words of the test were a tribute to the Stuttgart way: "At the end of the day this is a good Mercedes and a good rag top. For some, the combination will always be irresistible."

Perhaps because it had been around so long, some customers correctly anticipated its impending, fast track classic status and purchased cars to lay down. Over the years since, some of these have emerged on to the market, and have been sold for more than the owner paid. But it is only quite recently that R107s appear to have entered a new category: cars that present a sound business case for full restoration. The high cost of a professional ground-up rebuild presently requires a sale price of perhaps £80,000 or more, and there are now signs that an R107 can achieve that. As a result, dilapidated cars once considered too far gone for anything other than scrap can be suitable donor material, and if not for a full revival then for careful stripping for spares.

Nearly three decades since it was last built, the R107 SL embodies the beauty and grace of the inimitable brand that is the Mercedes-Benz roadster, a car that will hook many into the star marque. It profited its maker for 18 years and is now the gift that keeps on giving.



“PERHAPS BECAUSE IT HAD BEEN AROUND SO LONG, SOME CUSTOMERS CORRECTLY ANTICIPATED ITS IMPENDING, FAST TRACK CLASSIC STATUS AND PURCHASED CARS TO LAY DOWN”

Above A five-speed manual was offered but rarely chosen by buyers.

Below Rubberised rear spoiler of 500SL helped set the V8 model apart.



Just The Facts

Mercedes-Benz 280SL (R107)
ENGINE M110 2,746cc 6-cyl
POWER 182bhp@5,800rpm
TORQUE 177lb ft@4,500rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,500kg
0-62MPH 10.1sec
TOP SPEED 121mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 22.6mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 08.1974-08.1985
NUMBER BUILT 25,436

Mercedes-Benz 300SL (R107)
ENGINE M103 2,962cc 6-cyl
POWER 185bhp@5,700rpm
TORQUE 188lb ft@4,400rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,510kg
0-62MPH 9.4sec
TOP SPEED 123mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 20.2mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 09.1985-08.1989
NUMBER BUILT 13,742

Mercedes-Benz 350SL (R107)
ENGINE M116 3,499cc V8
POWER 197bhp@5,800rpm
TORQUE 211lb ft@4,000rpm
TRANSMISSION 3-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,540kg
0-62MPH 9.5sec
TOP SPEED 127mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 21.7mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 04.1971-03.1980
NUMBER BUILT 15,304

Mercedes-Benz 450SL (R107)
ENGINE M117 4,520cc V8
POWER 222bhp@5,000rpm
TORQUE 278lb ft@3,000rpm
TRANSMISSION 3-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,580kg
0-62MPH 8.8sec
TOP SPEED 134mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 19.5mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 07.1971-11.1980
NUMBER BUILT 66,298

Mercedes-Benz 500SL (R107)
ENGINE M117 4,973cc V8
POWER 242bhp@4,750rpm
TORQUE 289lb ft@3,750rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,610kg
0-62MPH 7.3sec
TOP SPEED 140mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 17.8mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 04.1980-08.1989
NUMBER BUILT 11,812

Mercedes-Benz 560SL (R107)
ENGINE M117 5,547cc V8
POWER 227bhp@4,750rpm
TORQUE 275lb ft@3,250rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,680kg
0-62MPH 7.7sec
TOP SPEED 139mph
YEARS PRODUCED 09.1985-08.1989
NUMBER BUILT 49,347

FIGURES REPRESENTATIVE OF RANGE AND FOR CARS WITHOUT A CATALYST (EXCEPT 560SL) - KERB WEIGHT DOES NOT INCLUDE 40KG HARDTOP; FUEL CONSUMPTION ACCORDING TO EEC URBAN; 450SL ONLY AVAILABLE FOR EXPORT TO US UNTIL 1973, AND 560SL EXPORTED TO NORTH AMERICA, JAPAN AND AUSTRALIA

HILTON & MOSS

ACHIEVING PERFECTION



SERVICE



SALES



RESTORATION

The best or nothing



Sales: M11 Business Link, Forest Hall Road,
Stansted, Essex CM24 8GF

Aftersales: Raynham Road, Bishop's Stortford,
Herts CM23 5PJ

5 minutes from M11 Junction 8
45 minutes from London Liverpool Street
5 minutes from Stansted Airport

Follow us on   

Tel: +44 (0) 1279 813907 www.hiltonandmoss.com

Classic Mercedes-Benz Service | Sales | Restoration

Email our Restoration Specialist Gavin Thorn at gavinthorn@hiltonandmoss.com



280SL has a sporty soundtrack, but some consider it slightly underpowered.



SIX OR EIGHT?

TWO WRITERS WITH MUCH EXPERIENCE BEHIND THE WHEEL OF R107 SL ROADSTERS ARGUE THEIR CASE FOR BUYING THE ENTRY LEVEL SIX-CYLINDER AND EIGHT-CYLINDER MODELS – BUT WHICH EXPERT DO YOU AGREE WITH?

280SL

WORDS MARTIN BUCKLEY PHOTOGRAPHS ERIC RICHARDSON

It's human nature to aspire to the biggest and the fastest version of almost any car, particularly if it is a vehicle intended first and foremost as a pleasure machine, like a Mercedes-Benz SL.

It would be wrong, however, to dismiss the 107-series 280SL (built from 1974 to 1985) as some kind of poor man's poverty model, a straight-six weakling in a world of muscle bound V8s. It might have been created to appease post fuel crisis consciences – and at the same time offer a useful capacity related tax break over the 350 and 450SL – but this M110 twin-cam was really the lean traditional sports car motor in Mercedes' arsenal of high output gasoline engines.

First seen in 1972, it had already proven itself in the W114/115 'New Generation' and 116-series S-Class saloons. With fuel injection it only gave away 15bhp to the 350SL's V8; drive the two back-to-back and you would be surprised to hear it was that much. Mercedes made up for the torque deficit by closing up the gear ratios in the 280SL's automatic gearbox. The turbine like effortlessness of the V8 was replaced by an eager responsiveness that allowed, in fact encouraged you, to wind it out to 6,500rpm. The gears were there to be used in a 280SL, and while a manual 'box was available not many buyers specified it, probably because Mercedes had developed its automatic to such a high level of versatility and responsiveness that stirring your own gears was looking increasingly pointless.

So the 280SL was still a civilised town car, with all the attributes of saloon like chassis refinement of the

350 and 450, but had a crisper feel to it that seemed to link it more closely with the preceding SL Pagoda. It was still not a sports car and Mercedes-Benz did not intend it to be (it was too pleasant to drive, too comfortable, too universally desirable to align itself with those hair-shirt parameters), but it could not be denied that with less weight over the front axle the 280SL turned in slightly better than its V8 siblings, and there was something to be said for that.

Of course, all V8s naturally have a pleasing tone, but with its twin camshafts in full throated song, and the 12 counter balance weights of its seven-bearing crankshaft smoothing out its bottom end, there was something joyously and unrepentantly mechanical about this engine that made the 280 sound like a sports car no matter how the rest of the car insisted it wasn't.

The way it looked physically shouldn't really have a bearing on how one feels about a particular engine, but this is a case of what looks right is right: somehow there is a proud feel to the polished cam boxes and methodical layout of this engine that no subsequent straight-six Mercedes unit ever recaptured. Where the V8s look vaguely industrial, there is an elegance to the architecture of the 280SL engine that makes it an object you want to look after, to covet. In the end, I would always buy an R107 SL on condition and history rather than engine, but all being equal I would say a 280SL is marginally preferable to a 350SL. With no spoilers, MB-TEX seats, hub caps rather than 'Mexican hats', and a strong and unapologetic 1970s colour (such as, say, gold) I think you'd have your ideal R107. ➡

“Where the V8s look vaguely industrial, there is an elegance to the architecture of the 280SL engine that makes it an object you want to look after, to covet”



350SL

WORDS KYLE MOLYNEUX PHOTOGRAPHS TIM SLADE

Good points well made, Martin. But I must politely disagree. What you really need is a V8 engine, entry level or otherwise, in your R107. Granted, that dinner plate sized air filter perched over the 350SL's motor doesn't have the same allure as the 280's towering twin cam covers, but there is much else to champion about going the eight-cylinder route with your R107 purchase.

The 350SL's additional torque (211lb ft versus 176lb ft, depending on the year), available from lower in the rev range, makes you feel like a canoeist gliding downstream; all you need is the merest physical effort to make good progress. Thus, you are always playing to the 107's strength as a cruiser. Sure, you can wring its neck, but how often will drivers of such a sophisticated and appreciating Mercedes do that these days? And anyway, when it comes to these two powerplants, I would argue the V8 beats the six-cylinder's vocals whenever you do open the taps.


Like the M110 straight-six, the 350SL's 3,499cc V8 (M116) had already served in other Mercedes before the R107 came along, debuting in the engine bay of the 108-series 350SE/SEL 3.5 of 1971. Many have a passion for small block V8s, and this motor suited the SL perfectly. There isn't even much of a weight penalty for two extra cylinders, Mercedes' archive resource stating just 40kg difference between the two models, so you can hardly say the 350SL suffers dynamically.

Furthermore, the M116's cast iron construction dampens noise levels to a greater degree than an

alloy motor can. Better still, with one eye on US emissions laws of the time, Mercedes-Benz made sure its small block V8 could maintain the same efficiency to *at least* 50,000 miles without needing any major attention, so it's incredibly well engineered by design. Of course, the 350's V8 consumes more fuel than the 280's motor, but if you take the automatic transmissions for comparison, there's barely 1mpg difference in day-to-day driving, at least according to Mercedes' figures.

The one downside to the 350SL that I will concede, however, relates to the near universally applied automatic gearbox, which has just three speeds. If that dampens your spirits, then consider instead the succeeding, 1980-on 380SL which came with a four-speed auto as standard. If you like your R107 rarer than most, then the 350SL has that going for it, too – important in this day of collectable classics. Mercedes-Benz made 15,304 of them compared to 25,436 280SLs, which makes finding a good one a light and rewarding challenge.

Roof off with sunshine beating down, and traffic ahead encouragingly non-existent, surely it's a V8 soundtrack you want for your SL experience. The R107 was the first of its kind to feature eight cylinders and the formula has stuck to this day, so clearly Mercedes was on to something.

No matter whether you're considering a 350, 380, 420, 450, 500 or 560 – just make sure your R107 has a V8. You won't regret it. 

“Roof off with sunshine beating down, and traffic ahead encouragingly non-existent, surely it's a V8 soundtrack you want for your SL experience”



Eight-cylinder charm is there in spades, but the 350SL model is harder to find.



Breathing new life into an

SL

A MARQUE SPECIALIST REVEALS WHAT IT TAKES TO FULLY RESTORE A TIRED R107 ROADSTER

WORDS DAVID SUTHERLAND PHOTOGRAPHS TERRY OBORNE

At some stage, most classic car lovers will have looked at the down-at-heel, rusty shell they were tempted to buy and saw a gleaming machine restored to its full glory, as perfect as on the day it rolled off the production line. The lengthy, painstaking and expensive process necessary to take it there was conveniently not considered.

So what is involved in a full restoration, thorough enough to win silverware at a classic car meeting? We asked Bruce Greetham of classic Mercedes specialist SL Shop in Stratford Upon Avon, Warwickshire, who has undertaken many rebuilds on SLs and other period Mercedes, to take an R107 as an example and describe the journey from basket case to beautiful.

The first step is an obvious one: find a car. But it must be chosen carefully to ensure the economic aspect stands up. "Some customers want to restore a car for sentimental reasons, in which case the cost element is not so important, but in most cases the value of the finished vehicle must be borne in mind when choosing an R107 to restore," says Bruce. "A car with a mileage of between 80,000 and 100,000 miles is often the starting point."

And what is the likely cost of an R107 rebuild? "It depends on the level of restoration the customer requires," Bruce tells us. "A full body-off restoration can go to £100,000, and it can go to more than £150,000 if we are talking about a V8 500SL that's fully optioned including air conditioning, given its added complexity over the six-cylinder 300SL." Bruce adds that at this point the customer must not only fully understand the cost, but have the commitment to see the project through; SL Shop works on a staged payment plan for each project in line with milestones and expectations, restoration typically taking a year.

"Some customers, particularly if they're based overseas, like to pay us a 20 per cent block of the total estimated bill, and we work up to within £5,000 of that amount, and then ask for more," Bruce tells us. "We need to be sure we're not financing their restoration! Other customers like to be invoiced every month." Customers should also accept that a full restoration is best seen as a long term investment. While the R107 SL is currently rising in value, even the top prices realised will barely recoup the bill for work done, at least for the time being.

With the R107 obtained and the budget understood, the next stage is to draw up a project management plan. "We'll inspect the car and break down the work into six stages," Bruce continues. "These stages are: body and chassis preparation and fabrication, mechanical work, paintwork, interior and general cosmetics, road testing and shakedown to sort any snags, and final detailing and presentation to the customer."

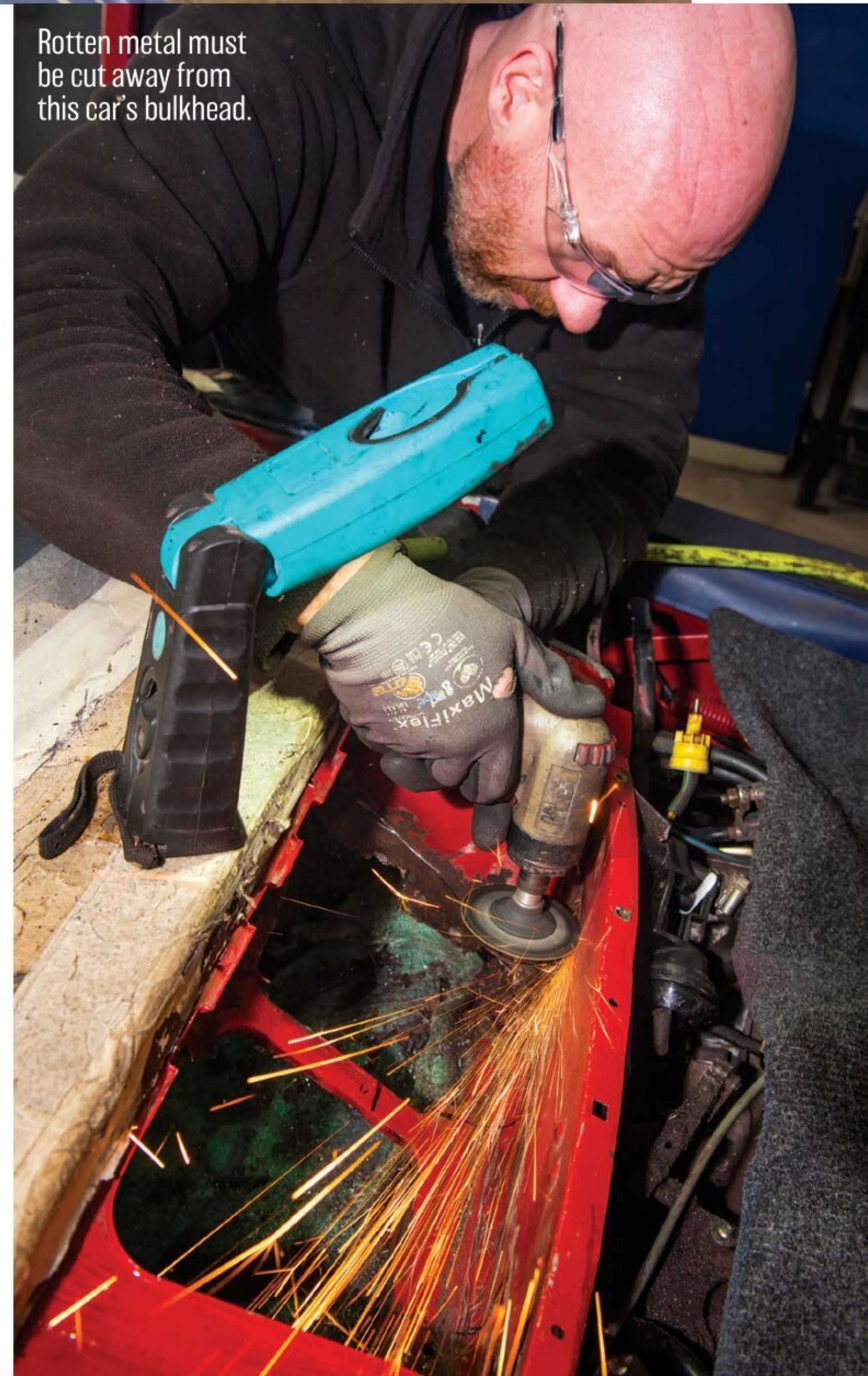
On an R107, the biggest single issue tends to be the bulkhead between the cabin and the engine bay, which is almost always rusty, sometimes beyond repair. Caused by blocked drain channels, the corrosion is very difficult for the untrained eye to spot, being completely hidden under plastic covers. No R107 restoration can be complete without this rectification, because although even a badly rusted bulkhead won't affect an SL's structural rigidity, the water let in will cause the carpets to smell musty, the floorpan to rust and the electrics to randomly fail.

With long experience of R107s, SL Shop has devised its own specialist repair or replacement service. The new bulkhead is, unlike the original, galvanised and the





Stripping a car leaves nowhere for flaws to hide.



Rotten metal must be cut away from this car's bulkhead.



“So what is involved in a full restoration, thorough enough to win silverware at a classic car meeting?”

Top tips

- ◆ A full restoration on any classic usually takes at least a year.
- ◆ A professional restorer will expect staged payments throughout the project.
- ◆ Restoring an R107 SL to showroom condition can cost £100,000 to £150,000.
- ◆ A ground-up R107 restoration will exceed the finished car's present value, so it's best regarded as a long term investment.
- ◆ Generally speaking, there are six stages in a restoration: body and chassis preparation, mechanical work, painting, interior, final shakedown, and customer handover.
- ◆ The biggest bodywork issue on an R107 is invariably a rusted engine bulkhead.
- ◆ New paintwork can only look top class if the metal beneath has had 200 to 300 hours of preparation work.
- ◆ Chrome parts for R107s are very expensive, so replating may be more appropriate.
- ◆ The correct leather, vinyl or cloth upholstery must be located and fitted if the cabin is to look 'factory'.
- ◆ A final, exhaustive shakedown is essential to eliminate problems that inevitably arise during the restoration.

➤ company provides photo evidence and a sticker and certificate for further proof that the work was carried out. Repairing the bulkhead takes many hours, numerous parts on the engine bay side having to be removed, as must the dashboard, the heater, wiring and insulation. The approximately £5,600 price of this alone gives a good indication of the costs of car restoration done properly. Other metalwork repairs are certain to be required. "We'll probably need to re-fabricate with new metal the front and back chassis legs, the inner and outer sills, the floor pans and the boot corners," Bruce points out. "Even the later cars suffer if they've been left outside for many years."

The next stage is painting, a process that will define the quality of a car's restoration. But before any paint is applied, the metalwork must be expertly prepared, and for the best possible result all previous paint must be removed. Painting over old paint is a compromise.



Bulkhead cutaway shows before and after treatment.



New suspension components fitted to this subject.

“You have to get the chrome right, as this can make or break a restoration”

Sand blasting is one of the ways to achieve this, blasting the surface with sodium (better known as baking soda), or media (small pieces of material, such as ground walnut shells for gentle blasting, or steel beads for a stronger effect). This way, the bodywork is not subjected to the harsh chemicals in stripping fluids. Immediately after the body has been blasted, an epoxy primer should be applied to prevent surface rust developing.

Once the paint is removed, the bare metal will show many small imperfections, and 'resurfacing' is the process of flattening these out. This has to be done in long hand, with each little bump sanded down by hand, and it's a time consuming process typically taking 200 to 300 hours. This alone will account for a sizeable chunk of the labour bill, but it should be remembered that a paint finish can be no smoother than the surface it is applied to.

"Flattening and sanding is the only way to ensure no defects as the paint settles down," Bruce explains.

The actual repainting process is an exact science. For solid colours, five to six coats are generally recommended for a top finish, the eventual ideal paint depth 2-3mm; a metallic finish requires two or three coats to give 1mm depth of colour, and then several coats of clear coat to a 2mm depth. After two weeks the surface should be wet sanded several times. Done to perfection, the surface will be flat and have depth.

With the classic market now valuing originality much more than



New wood trim parts help lift the cabin's appearance.



Exhaust pipes in stainless steel resist effects of corrosion.



Fitting new rubber seals is a big part of any restoration.




in previous times, retaining the original interior trim and its irreplaceable patina is the preferred route for many customers. But if trim is too deteriorated to revive, replacement leather, vinyl or cloth must be fitted, and established restorers will have their own sources. "You can still get all the original fabrics, leather and MB-*Tex* – there's a lot of new old stock around," says Bruce. "With the Sport Check design cloth, the black, grey, blue and cream are easy to get, but the darker colours like mid red and green are more difficult. But we will produce our own supply of these soon." He stresses the need to avoid cutting corners. "You have to go to the German producers, because only they supply leather with the correct perforations. English leather won't do."

Interior mouldings for the R107 can be problematic, Bruce reports. "Dashboards are no longer available, so if the dash is cracked you have to source a second hand item and work with that, or cover the top of it with

leather. Centre consoles aren't available either." Exterior fittings for the R107 are easier to get hold of. "Chrome parts are usually still available but this varies from year to year, depending on what has been re-manufactured," Bruce says. "For example, the star for the front grille is not available at the moment, but in three months it may well be back in production." Some customers prefer chrome to be replated in the interests of originality, but care is needed to get the best finish. "You have to get the chrome right, as this can make or break a restoration," Bruce insists. Some of the trim on the R107 isn't actually chrome, but stainless steel with an anodised finish, for example on top of the doors.

After the final assembly, the car will be driven a minimum of 300 test miles, with the roof up, and down, and in daylight and in the dark, to make sure everything is working correctly and nothing has come loose. A nut and bolt re-check follows, with all the bolts

underneath, as well as on the steering and suspension, given a little mark to indicate they've been inspected.

With the car signed off mechanically, it undergoes a three-day detailing and polishing process. "That only takes place once everything else is done, no major work on the car is carried out after that," Bruce explains. When the customer arrives to collect the car, he or she receives a special binder with all the relevant paperwork. Some customers are happy with the standard folder, but others want something more decorative, for example the front of the folder trimmed in the car's seat leather. And after all the time in the workshop, and all the money spent, the hope is that the weather on handover day is good enough for the customer to enjoying driving their dream Mercedes-Benz off into the sunshine. 

Thank you to SL Shop for its help with this feature Tel 01789 337070 Web www.theslshop.com

R107 SL

Market view

Given that the R107 has not been built for nearly three decades, values are largely dependent on condition rather than model

Prices of excellent condition R107 SLs are on the rise, as many consider these solidly built roadsters sound investments

WORDS DAVID SUTHERLAND PHOTOGRAPHS CHESHIRE CLASSIC BENZ, SL SHOP, EDWARD HALL & SILVER ARROWS

Below
One-owner
300SL in Surf
Blue at Ed Hall.



The R107 series, made from 1971 until summer 1989, is the first SL to be termed a 'modern classic' rather than simply a 'classic'. And it is exactly what that label implies: a desirable Mercedes roadster radiating period charm but which still has something of a contemporary feel to it, a car that could be used for a long journey, as opposed to a fragile oldster that must be carefully nursed along the journey.

It is ironic, then, that the R107 hit the classic market running as soon as it was discontinued to make way for the technically superior R129 SL. The final UK

new prices for R107 SLs were around £33,000 for the six-cylinder 300SL, £38,000 for the V8 420SL and £42,000 for the V8 500SL, and values of well kept cars never slipped much below those levels. The R107 was among the exclusive club of cars that did not first depreciate to a low point before being discovered as a classic and values heading back up again.

The continuing rise in values, driven by the increase in the overall classic car market, has seen prices climb above what the cars cost new. Of course, being a car that despite its high new price was delivered in comparatively

large numbers in the UK, not all R107s were looked after, and some dropped to banger level, so for a number of years it was possible to buy a £5,000 car. Although those who did would probably find themselves in possession of something barely useable. But these cars have largely disappeared now, a few restored but most taken into the care of Mercedes specialists like Warwickshire based SL Shop to boost spares inventories.

Given that the R107 has not been built for nearly three decades, values are largely dependent on condition rather than model. But the 500SL – the

traditional, big engine Mercedes roadster – tends to find buyers more quickly. So how much do you need to buy an R107, straight-six or V8, that you can enjoy rather than treat as a perpetual running project?

"Prices have been motoring along steadily for the last five or six years, possibly driven by demand for the Pagoda which caused value to cascade on to the R107, but there has been a bit of consolidation of late," observes Peter Lewis of classic Mercedes specialist Cheshire Classic Benz near Macclesfield. "If you want something that's immediately driveable you'll be paying



Left CCB's 300SL up for £24,000.



Left Ed Hall's low mileage 500SL at £50K.



Left £60,000 will bag Silver Arrows 500SL.



Left SL Shop's fully restored, £100K 300SL.



Left Cheshire Classic Benz's £24,000 280SL.

£12,000 to £13,000, but it will probably have 200,000 miles on the clock and have cosmetic issues.”

A reasonable R107 can be purchased for £15,000 to £20,000, but business with a classic car dealer usually starts at £20,000, though mileage will usually be over 100,000. Peter had two six-cylinders for sale priced at £24,000, a 1984 280SL with 80,000 miles and a 1987 300SL with 113,000 miles, while included in the stock at Edward Hall in Oxfordshire was a 1986 300SL with 130,000 miles at £29,950.

Pre or post facelift?

The most sought after R107s are the autumn 1985 facelift models, when the 280SL became the 300SL, the 380 the 420, and the 500 received various engine modifications. Larger, '15-hole' wheels distinguished these cars. "There's a significant difference in the value of 1985 facelift cars; it could be as much as 25 per cent higher," Peter contends. The 560SL, only originally sold in the US, Australia and Japan, has been imported in some numbers and makes a premium over the 500SL.

But Peter has also noticed increasing interest in the now rare, early 1970s 280, 350 and 450 models. "When any Mercedes-Benz gets to a certain age, interest in the 'original' cars increases, these seen as the purer design before the facelift," is his explanation.

What shows on an R107 odometer is crucial. "They are extremely mileage sensitive," says Edward Hall. "Once the mileage ticks over 100,000 it impacts value considerably." A very good R107 with under 50,000 miles can command £50,000, current advertisements suggest. Edward's 1987 500SL with 47,000 miles was priced at £49,950, and he says it would fetch more had it not been in Willow Green, a less desired hue. Silver Arrows in Putney in London listed a 45,000-mile 1986 500SL at £59,950.

The prices asked for the very best condition R107s now look eye-watering. SL Shop's highest priced example was a fully restored, showpiece 1987 300SL in red with tan leather, advertised at £100,000. But can such high asking prices translate into sales, or is there, as Peter Lewis suggests, a certain amount of "flexibility" built into them? Edward Hall comments of his 1989 300SL in Diamond Blue with 17,000 miles, priced at £68,000: "I haven't even put it on the website yet and I've had a number of enquires."

There has always been debate over the merits of the six-cylinder and V8 R107s, some preferring the more nimble handling of the former, others loving the latter's effortless V8 torque. On this, Peter Lewis simply says, "My advice is don't worry about what's under the bonnet, just get yourself a good car." 

Watch out for...

- The engine bay bulkhead is a major rust trap and cannot be seen from the outside.
- Listen for a rattling timing chain on the V8 engine, most audible when the motor is cold.
- A heavy clunk when selecting reverse means the automatic gearbox very likely needs a rebuild.
- Excessive play in the steering can possibly be adjusted out, but if not, a new steering box is needed.
- The early fuel injection systems can be temperamental, causing the engine to run badly.
- An ABS light that stays on after start-up indicates that either anti lock sensors or the ABS unit itself is faulty.

NEED MORE MERCEDES?

Satisfy your appetite for the three-pointed star with *MERCEDES ENTHUSIAST* and *CLASSIC MERCEDES*



Mercedes Enthusiast

The magazine dedicated to all things Mercedes-Benz cars

New or classic, standard or modified, so long as it wears the three-pointed star it has a place in *Mercedes Enthusiast*, the monthly magazine covering all things Mercedes-Benz cars.

Every month we keep you up to date with the latest news, spy shots and the very newest models to come out of Stuttgart, mixing this with features on timeless classics, adored modern classics, used bargains and much more. And don't worry, we've not forgotten Mercedes' illustrious, decades long reputation for world beating innovation and for building world beating racing cars. Nor have we overlooked the dedicated owners whose infectious enthusiasm for the marque cannot fail to inspire.

With the honest passion that can only come from an independent magazine, backed up by stunning photography, if you want to indulge your love of all things Mercedes, don't miss *Mercedes Enthusiast*.

www.MercedesEnthusiast.co.uk

Classic Mercedes

Celebrating the world's greatest cars

Classic Mercedes brings you the most desired and coveted cars with the three-pointed star on the bonnet from the iconic SL Gullwing of the 1950s and takes you right through to the adored 'young classics' of the 70s and 80s built to Stuttgart's traditional battleship grade durability.

Each issue offers you the best from around the world of classic Mercedes. We'll be driving them, telling you what to look for when buying them and delving into our favoured manufacturer's long, illustrious history, going behind the scenes, remembering some famous faces and celebrating the company's golden years of motorsport success with the legendary Silver Arrows.

If you like your Mercedes dished up with a purely classic flavour, then *Classic Mercedes* is for you.

www.ClassicMercedesMagazine.co.uk



Available **NOW** from all good bookstalls and on subscription



HK-ENGINEERING

Your Partner for MB 300SL

Passion Perfection Tradition

In the old convent of Polling near Munich / Bavaria

Tel: +49 (0) 881/925 609 0

Fax: +49 (0) 881/925 609 19

info@hk-engineering.com

www.hk-engineering.com

Mercedes Insurance

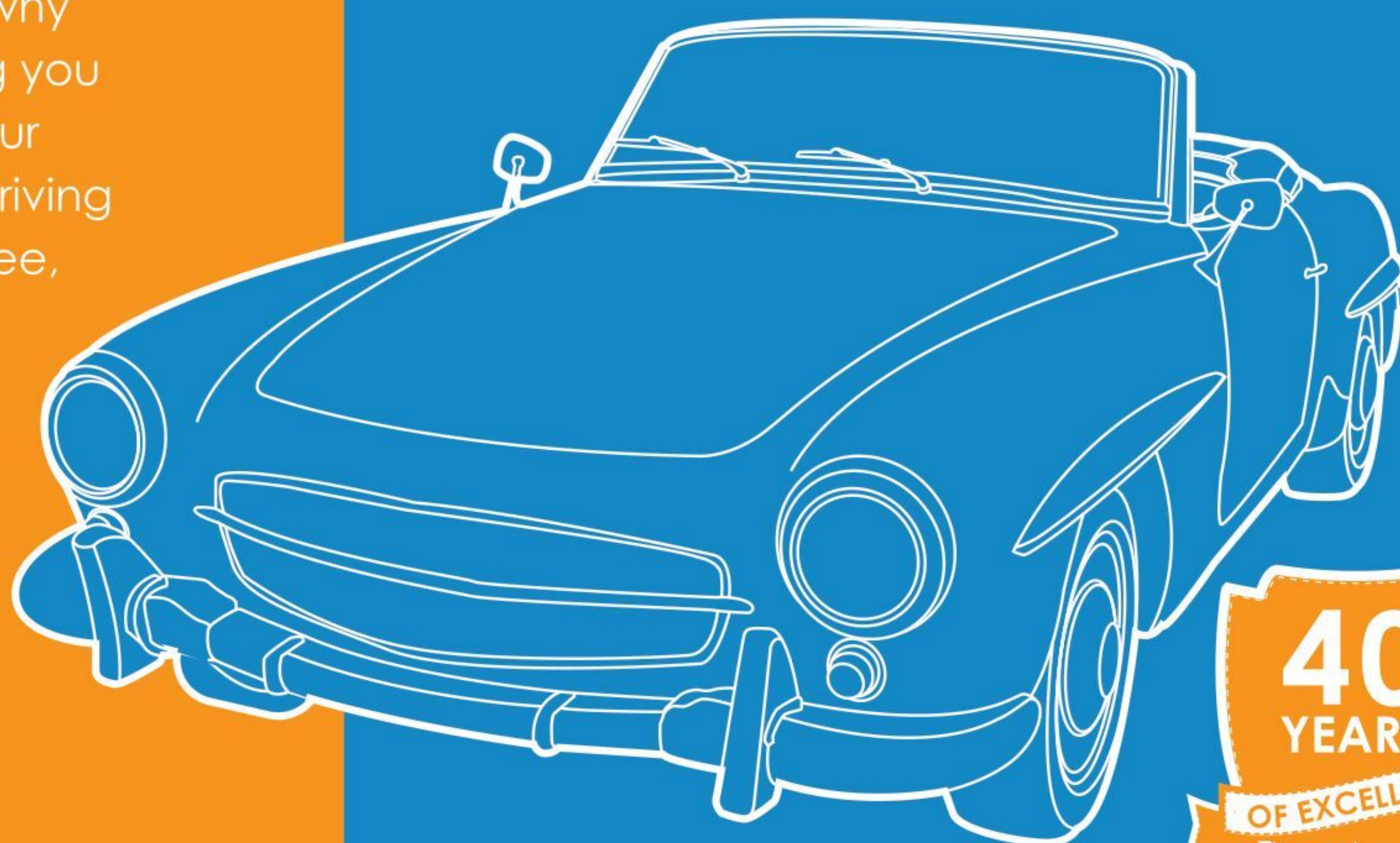
Adrian Flux know how much you love your Mercedes, that's why we are dedicated to finding you a great policy tailored to your specific requirements and driving history. Call us today for a free, no obligation quote.



0800 085 5000
adrianflux.co.uk

Authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority

YOUR PRIDE AND JOY



Benefits available can include:

- FREE Legal Cover
- Breakdown Cover
- Agreed Value
- Club Member Discounts
- Modifications Cover
- Limited Mileage Discounts

A quantum


R129
SL

GIVEN THE R107 SL'S NEAR TWO-DECADE PRODUCTION RUN, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY HARD FOR MERCEDES-BENZ NOT TO ADVANCE THE DESIGN OF THE NEW GENERATION R129, WRITES MARTIN BUCKLEY, BUT FEW ANTICIPATED JUST HOW FAR STUTTGART WOULD MOVE ON THE GAME WITH ITS HIGH TECH ROADSTER

PHOTOGRAPHS CRAIG PUSEY,
DAIMLER AG & TERRY OBORNE

leap





As the end of the 1980s approached, the R107 SL was just about the longest running show in town, straddling the era of Abba (via punk rock and the new romantics) to Kyle Minogue and Rick Astley. You may well have played your Tom Jones albums on a big clunky eight-track in the first of the 350SLs, but you would be glorying in the high tech sophistication of a new CD player in the last of the V8 powered R107s.

But enough with the musical/in-car entertainment analogies. Let's just say that while Mercedes production models generally had longish life cycles (at least in those days), 18 years as one of the world's most desirable glamour cars is an extraordinary record. A successor to the 107 was being planned in the early 70s, but had to be put aside in favour of the 190 saloon project, a crucial move down market that was more commercially critical than a replacement SL sports car, particularly when the current model was still selling well: the North American market 560SL sold to the tune of over 49,000 cars in its final four years!

The R129 SL project was not restarted until 1981 and the basic design was settled on in 1984. Its design changed many times over the intervening years as engineers and stylists spent months in the wind tunnel sorting air flow, shut lines, the profile of the nose and fine tuning the shape of the A-pillars to get a long nosed, short deck profile that would slip through the air with an impressive 0.32 drag coefficient. ➡

ZO



Just The Facts

Mercedes-Benz 300SL (R129)

ENGINE M103 2,960cc 6-cyl
POWER 187bhp@5,700rpm
TORQUE 192lb ft@4,500rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,650kg
0-62MPH 9.5sec
TOP SPEED 139mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 18.8mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 03.1989-06.1993
NUMBER BUILT 12,020

Mercedes-Benz 300SL-24 (R129)

ENGINE M104 2,960cc 6-cyl
POWER 228bhp@6,300rpm
TORQUE 201lb ft@4,600rpm
TRANSMISSION 5-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,690kg
0-62MPH 8.4sec
TOP SPEED 143mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 18.5mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 03.1989-06.1993
NUMBER BUILT 26,984

Mercedes-Benz 500SL/SL500 (R129)

ENGINE M119 4,973cc V8
POWER 316bhp@5,600rpm
TORQUE 347lb ft@3,900rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,910kg
0-62MPH 6.5sec
TOP SPEED 155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 17.7mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 03.1989-06.1998
NUMBER BUILT 79,827

Mercedes-Benz 600SL/SL600 (R129)

ENGINE M120 5,987cc V12
POWER 389bhp@5,200rpm
TORQUE 420lb ft@3,800rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 2,050kg
0-62MPH 6.1sec
TOP SPEED 155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 18.2mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 07.1992-05.2001
NUMBER BUILT 11,089

Mercedes-Benz SL280 (R129)

ENGINE M104 2,799cc 6-cyl
POWER 190bhp@5,500rpm
TORQUE 199lb ft@3,750rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,540kg
0-62MPH 9.9sec
TOP SPEED 140mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 20.8mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 07.1993-08.1995
NUMBER BUILT 10,319

Mercedes-Benz SL320 (R129)

ENGINE M104 3,199cc 6-cyl
POWER 228bhp@5,600rpm
TORQUE 232lb ft@3,750rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,850kg
0-62MPH 8.4sec
TOP SPEED 149mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 19.9mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 06.1993-06.1998
NUMBER BUILT 32,223

Mercedes-Benz SL320 (R129)

ENGINE M112 3,199cc V6
POWER 221bhp@5,600rpm
TORQUE 232lb ft@3,000-4,800rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,830kg
0-62MPH 8.4sec
TOP SPEED 148mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 24.6mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 06.1998-07.2001
NUMBER BUILT 7,070

Mercedes-Benz SL500 (R129)

ENGINE M113 4,966cc V8
POWER 302bhp@5,600rpm
TORQUE 339lb ft@2,700-4,250rpm
TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,890kg
0-62MPH 6.5sec
TOP SPEED 155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 22.2mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 06.1998-07.2001
NUMBER BUILT 23,704

FIGURES REPRESENTATIVE OF PRE AND POST FACELIFT RANGES; FUEL CONSUMPTION FOR 280SL, 300SL, 300SL-24 AND EARLY SL320 AND SL500 ACCORDING TO EEC URBAN, THE REMAINING MODELS ACCORDING TO NEDC COMBINED; TOP SPEEDS OF 500SL/SL500s AND 600SL/SL600 ELECTRONICALLY LIMITED

➤ That figure was taken with the hardtop fitted, incidentally. Topless, with the side windows lowered, it managed 0.43Cd which, interestingly, was better than the previous SL with its hardtop fitted. Overall, the R129 was 29 per cent more aerodynamic than the R107, with 50 per cent less axle lift and much less turbulence in the cabin with the hood down. There was now the option of an air deflector to reduce buffeting even further.

The new SL sat on a wheelbase that was 2.3 inches longer than its predecessor and a substantially wider track front and rear. US buyers got an SL that was a full 4.3 inches shorter than the federal spec R107 now that the engineers had found a way of incorporating the impact bumpers more neatly. About the only area the new car lost out to the old one was in boot capacity, but the difference was small and acceptable given that the new car had a powered hood.

Look at an R107 alongside an R129 today and the two cars look only distantly related; with its chrome bumpers, tall rubber and intricate details it is hard to reconcile the mindset that created the 1971 350SL with the spare elegance of Bruno Sacco's 300 and 500SL of 1989. It's almost as if there is a missing link, a 'lost' model somewhere in between.

The R129 would prove to be a remarkably enduring shape; it needed only minor tweaks like colour coded bumpers and door handles and softened tail lights in the mid and late 90s to keep it fresh. The options list got ever longer too, tempting buyers with gadgets like a garage door opener transmitter in the rear view mirror and a rather snazzy Panoramic hardtop complete with a glass roof.

“LOOK AT AN R107 ALONGSIDE AN R129 TODAY AND THE TWO CARS LOOK ONLY DISTANTLY RELATED”

The long gestation period of the new SL, launched at Geneva in March 1989,

had been a blessing. Here was an opportunity to get everything about this far more complex motorcar absolutely right. As the first new SL in almost 20 years, it could hardly fail to be an improvement on an outgoing model that, despite its advanced years, still represented the pinnacle of Mercedes owning aspirations for many people.

The new 300SL, 300SL-24 and 500SL were launched into a world that still expected nothing less than the very best from Mercedes in terms of durability and refinement but was perhaps becoming less immune to the driver appeal that rival glamour cars seemed to offer. Not that the new SL had all that many direct rivals. The Porsche 911 Cabriolet was more of a hard core driver's machine, while the ageing Jaguar XJ-S dialled in the compromise in favour of refinement and absolute ride comfort. Princess Diana obviously agreed because she sold her XJ-S Cabriolet in favour of a new (leased) 500SL in 1991, much to the chagrin of the tabloid press. That car now resides in the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart.

The year 1989 was a vintage year for fast new cars; Geneva motor show visitors witnessed the launch of the Alfa SZ, Lotus Carlton and ZR1 Corvette, and the debut of the 190E 2.5-16 Evolution. BMW's new 850i V12 coupe was still months away and, being fixed roof only, was

Right The late Princess Diana's R129 in Stuttgart.





Above and left 2+2 cabin understated and sturdy; ADS suspension.

Below Targa study of 1974 showed one solution for the R129.



not really a credible rival for the versatile R129 SL. The Bavarians were more focused on stealing Mercedes-Benz's thunder as builders of quality family and executive cars rather than challenging its dominance in the luxury roadster class.

While some questioned Mercedes' loyalty to the recirculating ball steering box over rack and pinion, all doubts were dispelled once the armchair critics got behind the wheel of the new SL. Here was a perfectly poised car, its weight resting equally between anti dive, negative scrub radius front suspension and the five lateral and longitudinal arms of its multi link back end. The handling was vice free and involving, the ride comfortably firm and free of scuttle shake.

The R129 ushered in a new era of driver aid acronyms: ASR was an optional traction control system, ADS a combination of pneumatic height adjustable suspension and electronically controlled adaptive damping that could automatically adjust each wheel to individually optimal settings according road surface, load and driving style, and even lowered the car at speed to improve stability. It was a £3,000 option on the sixes and V8s, but would become standard on the 600SL, a 389bhp fully optioned V12 flagship model still two years away from launch. This 48-valve, 155mph piece of overkill cost almost £90,000 when it finally arrived in the UK (and nearly £100,000 by the time it disappeared from our price listings in 2000), and found 11,089 customers worldwide.

Mercedes-Benz claimed that SL safety levels matched those of its fixed roof cars, not only because of the hugely rigid, 124-series derived floorpan, but because the windscreen pillars were now solid castings, and the car featured an ingenious, spring tensioned, high tensile steel rollbar that popped up within three tenths of a second of its sensors detecting that there was too much fresh air between the wheels and the road. The man behind that idea was Karl-Heinz Baumann.

As before, a hardtop was standard, a non structural alloy construction which was 22kg lighter than before, but was still a two-man job to lift off the car. And at last there was power operation for the soft top, a superbly contrived mechanism that could raise or lower itself in 30 seconds via a system of 17 limit switches, 15 pressure cylinders and 11 solenoids. It was a joy to behold as it automatically



Left and above left 600SL/SL600 V12 largely unchanged during production.

SUBSCRIBE NOW TO Mercedes ENTHUSIAST

**AND SAVE
UP TO
£10!!!***

SUBSCRIBE NOW BY DIRECT DEBIT AND GET 12 ISSUES FOR JUST £45.20*

Don't miss a single issue of MERCEDES ENTHUSIAST – have your personal copy delivered every month for a year, usually before copies are in the shops.

Postage is free and there's a saving of £6.20 on 12 issues or £14.80 on 24, if you pay by cheque or credit card. Pay by Direct Debit (UK only) and it costs just £45.20, saving you £10.00 on the shop price! There's usually a saving if you order from outside the UK too – exact savings will vary depending on the price of MERCEDES ENTHUSIAST in your country.

THERE ARE FOUR EASY WAYS TO ORDER

Phone +44 (0) 1371 853633

Go to our website www.MercedesEnthusiast.co.uk

Fax +44 (0) 1371 851808

Post it to Mercedes Enthusiast Subscriptions, Trinity House, Sculpins Lane, Wethersfield, Essex CM7 4AY, England

*When you pay by direct debit (UK only).



Name

Address

.....

.....

..... Post code

Email

We do not allow other companies to use subscribers' details for sales and marketing

PRICES AND WAYS TO PAY (please tick as appropriate)

UK 1 year £49.00 2 years £95.60

Europe 1 year £60.00 2 years £118.00

Rest of World 1 year £67.00 2 years £130.00

I enclose my cheque payable to Sundial Magazines Ltd

OR I wish to pay by credit card



Card No

Expiry date Security no.

Signature

**Mercedes
ENTHUSIAST**

SUBSCRIPTION FORM



SUNDIAL MAGAZINES LTD

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society to pay by Direct Debit

Please complete this form and send it with the rest of the subscription form to:

Mercedes Enthusiast Subs, Trinity House, Sculpins Lane, Wethersfield, Essex CM7 4AY

Please do not send it to your Bank or Building Society

Name(s) of Account Holder(s)

.....

Bank/Building Society account number

Branch sort code

Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society

To: The Manager

(Name of Bank/Building Society)

Address

.....

.....

.....

Postcode

**Mercedes
ENTHUSIAST**

Originator's Identification Number

6 8 2 1 5 8

Reference (office use only)

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society

Please pay Sundial Magazines Ltd Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Sundial Magazines Ltd and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

Signature(s)

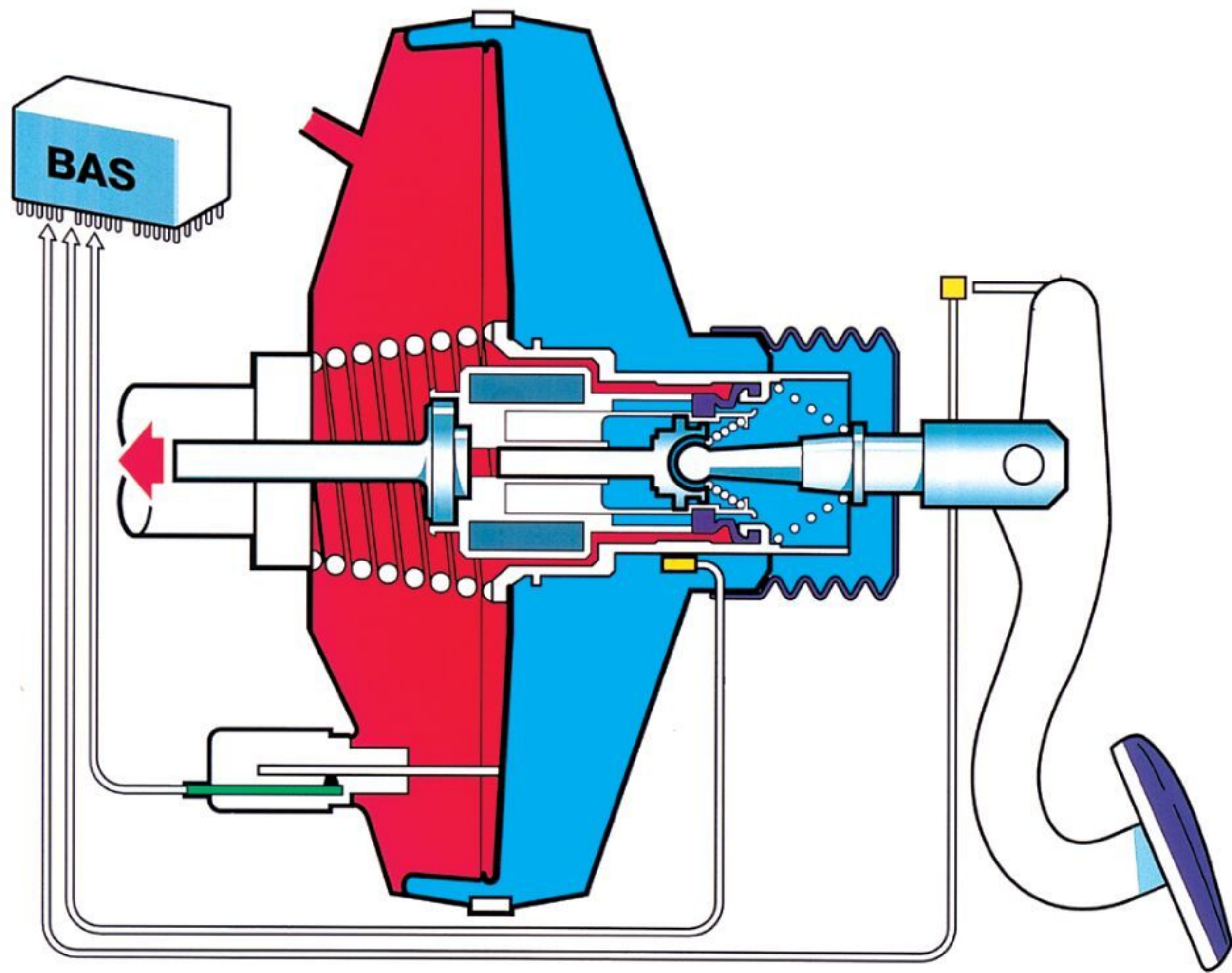
Date

Banks and Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit Instructions from some types of account.

OR Take my payment of £45.20 by Direct Debit (UK only)
Please complete the Direct Debit form on the right

SL01

Post to: MERCEDES ENTHUSIAST Subscriptions, Trinity House, Sculpins Lane, Wethersfield, Essex CM7 4AY, England



Left Electronic Brake Assist applies maximum braking force faster.

Right Mille Miglia R129 SLs were built from 1994 to 2001.



Special editions

◆ lowered the side windows, raised the rear of the hood and opened the rear cover, at the same moment unlatching the roof from the top of the screen, folding the roof back into the stowage area and then putting the side windows back up: all at the touch of a red switch located above the transmission tunnel.

Even the superbly engineered and embracing seats were symptomatic of the deep thought that had gone into this Mercedes. They latched automatically and featured strong magnesium frames. With smart colour coded integral belts they formed part of an advanced restraint system that included tensioners and full power adjustment, optional memory settings and 2.5 inches more travel on the runners than before. Leather seems to have been a default level of trim on these cars (in fact with the power seat option it cost an additional £1,800) but cloth was available. Optional heated seats, combined with the excellent heating/demisting system, made the SL an unrivalled top-down car on sunny winter days.

There were seven lockable cubby holes inside the R129 (which locked with the doors on a remote blipper) but the rear seats were better thought of as storage space to augment the boot. You sat well back in the SL's wheelbase, facing a traditional instrument cluster and big, rather taxi like steering wheel (airbag optional until being made standard) that were what was expected of a Benz; a 190D owner would have recognised the positioning of the light switch and the multi function column stalk. Hood up, there was little wind roar but some questioned the use of a plastic rather than a proper glass rear window.

ABS was standard on the new SLs no matter which engine you went for. The entry level car was the 12-valve 187bhp 300SL with a three-litre straight-six (M103) engine. Equipped with a four-speed ◆

Name

Number built

| | |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Mille Miglia Edition | 77 (SL500/SL600/SL55 AMG) |
| SL Special Edition | 630 (SL280/SL320/SL500) |
| 40th Anniversary Roadster Edition | 250 (SL320) & 500 (SL500) |
| AMG SL60 Limited Edition | 25 |
| Special Edition | 500 (SL280-SL600) |
| designo MB UK | 150 (SL320/SL500) |
| designo MB Japan | 67 (SL320/SL500) |
| SL Edition | 708 (SL320/SL500) |
| Formula One Edition | NA (SL600) |
| Final Edition | 693 (SL320-SL600) |
| designo Vintage Edition (UK) | 49 (SL280/SL320) |
| designo Heritage Edition (UK) | 49 (SL280/SL320) |
| Silver Arrow Edition (USA) | 1,415 (SL500) & 100 (SL600) |
| Silver Arrow Edition (UK) | 100 (SL500) |

Data from book 'Mercedes-Benz SL Faszination Seit Sechs Jahrzehnten'



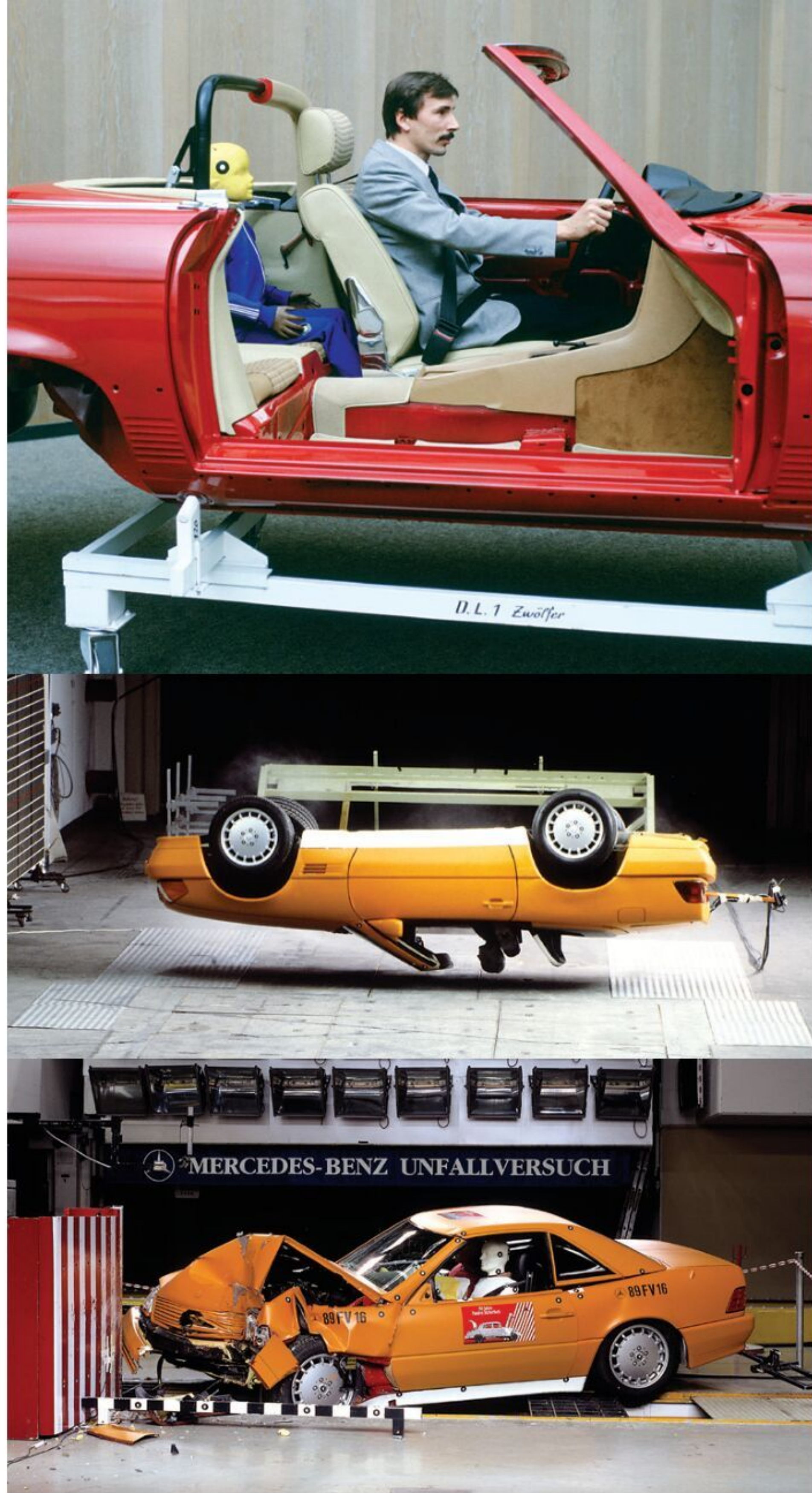
Above Designo Vintage Edition also known as the Alanite Edition.

“THE HANDLING WAS VICE FREE AND INVOLVING, THE RIDE COMFORTABLY FIRM AND FREE OF SCUTTLE SHAKE”



Above M119 V8 in pre 1998 500 models is divine - silky and torquey.





Left and below left Karl-Heinz Baumann and his innovative roll-over bar design.

“THE NEW SLs WERE OF COURSE IMMEDIATELY POPULAR THROUGHOUT THE WORLD WITH PRICES THAT WERE REASSURINGLY EXPENSIVE”

➤ automatic (rather than five-speed manual), Mercedes claimed it was good for 139mph, 0-62mph in 9.5 seconds, and got up to 30mpg: not bad considering it had to shift over 1.6 tonnes.

The 300SL-24 was the first Mercedes-Benz to use the 24-valve, 228bhp straight-six (M104). This one had hydraulic tappets, pent roofed combustion chambers and, most intriguingly of all, a 20-degree adjustable inlet camshaft; at speeds above 2,000rpm, to seamlessly boost torque and reduce emissions, it could advance itself by way of an engine management controlled hydraulic actuator which changed the position of the sprocket wheel against the camshaft. At high revs, beyond 4,700rpm, the actuator retarded to allow the inlet valves to close later in the combustion cycle.

While the V12 was marginally faster and smoother, the 500SL was all you really needed. The latter's 24-valve, five-litre V8 used similar cylinder head technology and, at 322bhp (316bhp from September 1992), was the most powerful Mercedes production engine yet that could take this grand roadster to 62mph in 6.2 seconds and on to a

limited 155mph. Driven reasonably discreetly, the 500SL could still give over 21mpg with a range of 350 miles from the 80-litre tank.

While the V8s only came as automatics (four-speed at first, five-speed later) the 300SL-24 could be optioned with a sportier form of five-speed manual with a dog leg first and was geared to pull its top speed in fifth rather than fourth. Production of the R129 commenced from the spring of 1989 in Mercedes-Benz's Bremen plant, former home of the Borgward motorcar.

The new SLs were of course immediately popular throughout the world with prices that were reassuringly expensive: at launch in the UK the basic 300SL cost £44,660 when you could buy a 5.3-litre V12 XJ-S HE for £32,000. The last of the R107 500SLs had retailed at £41,200 in 1989. In 1991, *Car* magazine noted that a 24-valve 300SL test car, with options alone amounting to the cost of a new Rover 214

saloon, was three times the price of a Lotus Elan SE at an astonishing £61,826.

But somehow the higher the prices got the longer the waiting lists became: the R129 enjoyed a 12-year, 204,000 unit run that embraced nine different engines and 14 model types (not including the various AMG models) as Mercedes-Benz strived to keep fresh and relevant into the start of the 21st century.

The first big update came in 1993 with a change in badge nomenclature with 'SL' preceding the engine size.

The SL500 continued as easily the most popular R129 but some manoeuvrings among the six-cylinder models signalled the demise of the 300SL and 300SL-24 valve in favour of the SL280 and SL320. Both were 24-valve straight-sixes although, from 1998, the last (and rarest) of the baby SLs had a new species of single-overhead-camshaft M112 V6. The year 1998 was also when the SL500 changed from the M119 V8 to the SOHC M113 'emissions orientated' V8 based on the M112 V6.

With the 30th anniversary of its launch just around the corner, the R129 SL is firmly established as a truly classic Mercedes, a car apart in many respects that was carefully created to suit any mood or whim. With hardtop fitted it was (and is) a refined personal town carriage, a compact, dignified and easy-to-drive, 150mph two-seater still equally at home maxed out on an autobahn as it is negotiating a supermarket car park. Remove the roof and it assumes the personality of a classic Mercedes roadster that was, in my humble opinion, nearer to being a sports car in the true sense than any SL since the Gullwing. ✎

Thank you to Mercedes specialist Edward Hall for its help with the main photoshoot Tel 01844 339666 Web www.edward-hall.co.uk



Left and below left Production of the folding hood at Bremen in 1989.



SILCHESTER GARAGE LTD

Classic & Sports Car Restorations

HAVE YOUR CLASSIC MERCEDES-BENZ RESTORED OR REPAIRED BY SPECIALISTS



Whatever your requirements, we are one of the most qualified and experienced restorers in the UK to carry out a small repair or a complete restoration on your classic Mercedes.



Silchester Garage Ltd only use genuine parts where possible, however, we carry over £200k of rare used stock parts for your classic Mercedes. We wouldn't have everything in stock, but depending on your requirements there is a good chance that we have it.

We are also experts in custom-built exhaust systems for classic and modern cars. We are not just about modified and customised cars!

Our comprehensive range of silencers enables us to offer close matches to virtually every silencer ever made. We are therefore able to build efficient and durable stainless steel exhaust systems on most classic, vintage and even veteran cars.



Tel: +44 (0)118 970 1648 Mob: +44 (0)7830 352823

R129 SL:
AMGs



FIREPOWER FROM AFFALTERBACH

SYNONYMOUS WITH HIGH POWERED MACHINES, IT WAS ONLY NATURAL FOR TUNER AMG TO WORK ITS MAGIC ON THE MERCEDES-BENZ SL, THE R129 GENERATION AROUND DURING A TIME OF GREAT CHANGE IN AFFALTERBACH AS DAIMLER TOOK AMG UNDER ITS WING

WORDS IAN KUAH PHOTOGRAPHS CRAIG PUSEY & DAIMLER AG





“The fact that the M119 V8 featured DOHC and variable inlet valve timing made it eminently tuneable”

After the evergreen G-Wagen and the Unimog, the SL roadsters have the longest shelf lives of any Mercedes models, with the R107 SL and its R129 replacement produced for 18 and 12 years respectively. Such long production runs provide plenty of time for facelifts that include new powerplants, and the R129 SL benefited from hosting two generations of six- and eight-cylinder engines in its engine bay. And thanks to the V12 in its flagship model, the R129 was even able to challenge major league supercars on autobahns across Germany.

In 1990, a few months after the revolutionary new R129 SL had been unveiled, official co-operation between Daimler-Benz AG and AMG began, with Daimler taking a controlling interest in AMG in 1999. With AMG's cars now sold through official Mercedes-Benz dealerships, Mercedes' whole vehicle homologation and warranty now became part and parcel of the AMG experience, which meant an even more rigorous set of testing and quality standards in Affalterbach.

V8 Power

AMG had already updated Mercedes' 32-valve M119 V8 engine while the company was still independent. The fact that this engine featured



DOHC and variable inlet valve timing made it eminently tuneable. AMG's displacement conversion bored and stroked the later open-deck variant of this engine from 4,973cc (96.5x85.0mm) to 5,956cc (100x94.8mm) as the M119.960 AMG. The resulting 376bhp and 428lb ft of torque, up from 322bhp and 353lb ft, slashed the official 0-62mph time to 5.6 seconds, although magazine tests of the day saw times closer to five seconds.

Top speed was still electronically limited to 155mph, but if the limiter was removed the v_{max} was around 185mph. It is known that later versions of this engine produced up to 409bhp, thereby exceeding the stock 402bhp output of the larger and heavier V12 in the 600SL.

Known as the AMG 500SL 6.0 in pre-Mercedes days (see the Beryl Blue car pictured, created for the Sultan of Brunei and advertised for sale by specialist Edward Hall in Buckinghamshire for £69,950), this potent roadster became the SL60 AMG when the Mercedes-Benz naming system was re-aligned in 1993. The SL60 AMG was offered from 1993 to 1998 and was the most numerous R129 SLs fettled by the tuner in Affalterbach.

Above SL60 AMG is becoming a big favourite among Merc collectors.

Below Pre merger 500SL 6.0 AMG once owned by the Sultan of Brunei.





Above Rare SL55 AMG did not have a supercharger but still made 349bhp.

➤ Three years from the end of R129 SL production, the SL320 and SL500 models switched to the new M112 and M113, three-valves-per-cylinder engine family, and AMG produced a 5.4-litre (5,439cc), long stroke version of the 302bhp, five-litre (4,966cc) M113 V8. With 349bhp and 391lb ft of torque on tap, this motor was also used in the W210 E55 AMG, SLK55 AMG, C55 AMG, S55 AMG and CL55 AMG. Later, tuned to 395bhp, it powered the SLK55 Black Series, which featured a fixed hardtop.

The AMG M113 motor also found its way into the R129 as a stopgap model for customers who wanted a V8 powered AMG SL. This marriage created the first car to wear the SL55 AMG badge, but as just 65 were made between 1999 and 2001 it is a very rare beast indeed. Of these, 10 were RHD models commissioned by Mercedes-Benz UK as a Mille Miglia limited edition in 1999, with an 11th car allegedly produced in 2000.

Subjectively, the lighter, more compact M113 V8 lacked both the sheer punch and feeling of raw aggression inherent in the outgoing six-litre four-cam M119 motor. Historically, the proto-SL55 AMG was totally overshadowed by its 493bhp, supercharged successor, whose M113 Kompressor

motor turned the R230 SL55 AMG of 2002 into an instant legend, and so AMG's V8 powered R129 SL was almost forgotten completely.

V12 Power

Mercedes' all alloy, six-litre, 48-valve M120 V12 bowed in with the 140-series 600SE/L in 1991. Rated at 402bhp with 428lb ft of torque, this immensely powerful engine soon found its way into the R129 Roadster, resulting in the 600SL/SL600. The first AMG tuned V12 SL was known as the SL70 AMG. The 7,055cc (91.0x90.4mm) displacement was the result of a bore and stroke stretch from the stock 5,987cc (89.0x80.2mm). Retaining the Bosch LH-Jetronic injection with two hot wire air mass sensors and two distributors, Affalterbach's M120.982/983 E70 version of this engine was rated at 489bhp with 531lb ft of torque.

In late 1995, the Mercedes V12 engine (M120.983) gained the fully electronic Bosch Motronic ignition system, and the 7,055cc AMG version was designated M120.980/981 E72. Together with 'traditional' tuning measures such as high lift cams and uprated valve springs, output climbed to 518bhp backed by 546lb ft of torque.

Below Perhaps the most exotic AMG SL is the the 73 badged V12 rocket.





According to AMG, the LH-Jetronic equipped cars had the earlier four-speed automatic, while the ME equipped V12s were paired with the later five-speed automatic. In theory, the early 7,055cc, pre-Mercedes co-operation cars were all badged SL70 AMG and delivered in 1995. A total of 150 cars were allegedly converted in 1996 and 1997, and to further confuse matters, some of the higher output 7,055cc cars were badged SL72 AMG.

Production ceased for almost a year, and then in late 1996 the AMG catalogue announced the return of the V12 SL as the SL73 AMG. The months in between were used to revise the V12 motor, increasing its displacement to 7,291cc (91.5x92.4mm) with a longer throw steel billet crankshaft, and titanium connecting rods replacing the steel ones.

As the aim was the optimisation of torque and throttle response rather than outright power, the output of 518bhp at 5,500rpm was unchanged, but torque increased slightly to 553lb ft of torque at 4,000rpm, while the lighter connecting rods reduced inertia for better pick-up. The 0-62mph

time of 4.8 seconds was impressive for a nose heavy roadster weighing 2,050kg, and it is estimated that a total of 85 V12 SL AMG cars, including 42 SL73s, were built up to 2001, when R129 production ceased.

Of course there was even more headroom in the big AMG V12, and various sources quote the output of engines powering the SL-, CL- and S-Class cars made for the Brunei Royal Family at 557bhp. I personally inspected one of the hand made Brunei

140 Estate cars in late 1997, and it had an AMG badge on the left side of its tailgate with a corresponding 'Brunei 555' badge on the right. Whether this denoted its engine output, or the Royal Family simply liked the symmetry of this number is anyone's guess, although the blue

6.0 AMG pictured earlier carries a sticker with 'Magic No. 575' text, so perhaps there is a link.

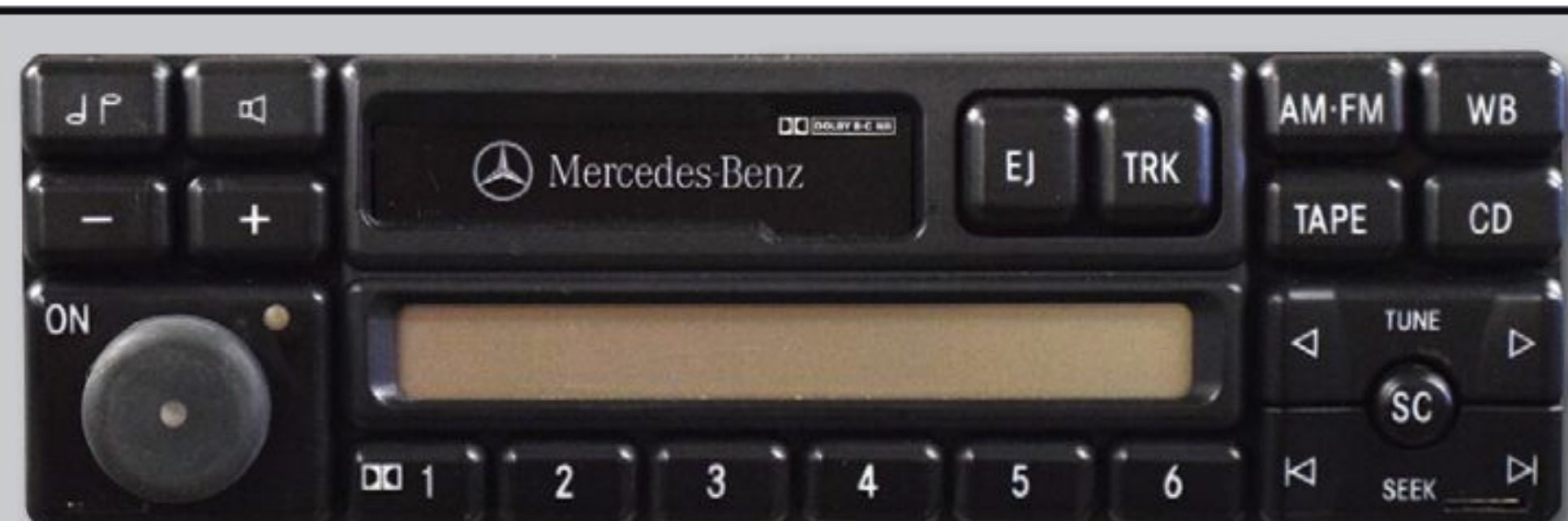
The total number of V8 and V12 R129 SLs that emerged from AMG's works between 1990 and 2001 can be measured in the low hundreds. The pre merger cars in particular are rare machines with great pedigree as well as collector appeal that seems to grow by the month.

“Of course there was even more headroom in the big AMG V12”





Specialists in Mercedes cars from the 1970s to the 1990s
Always a stock of superb R107 and R129 SL Roadsters for sale
We are always looking for interesting Mercedes for consignment sale or outright purchase
Servicing, repair, bodywork and restoration all carried out in house by our expert team
Based on the Buckinghamshire/Oxfordshire border



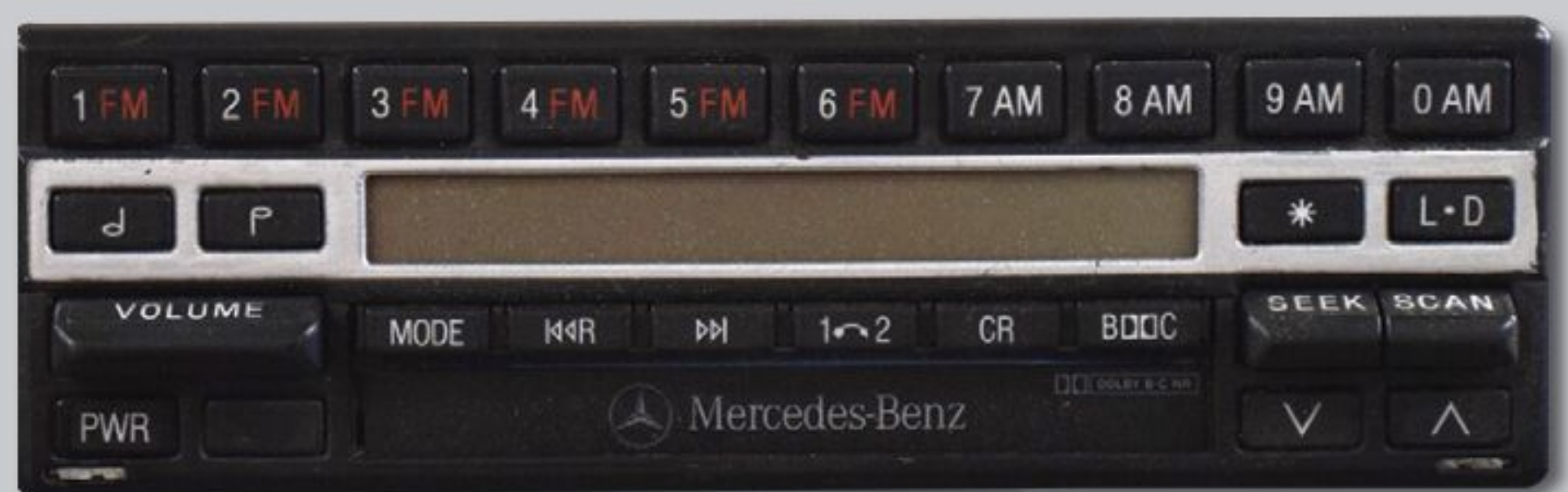
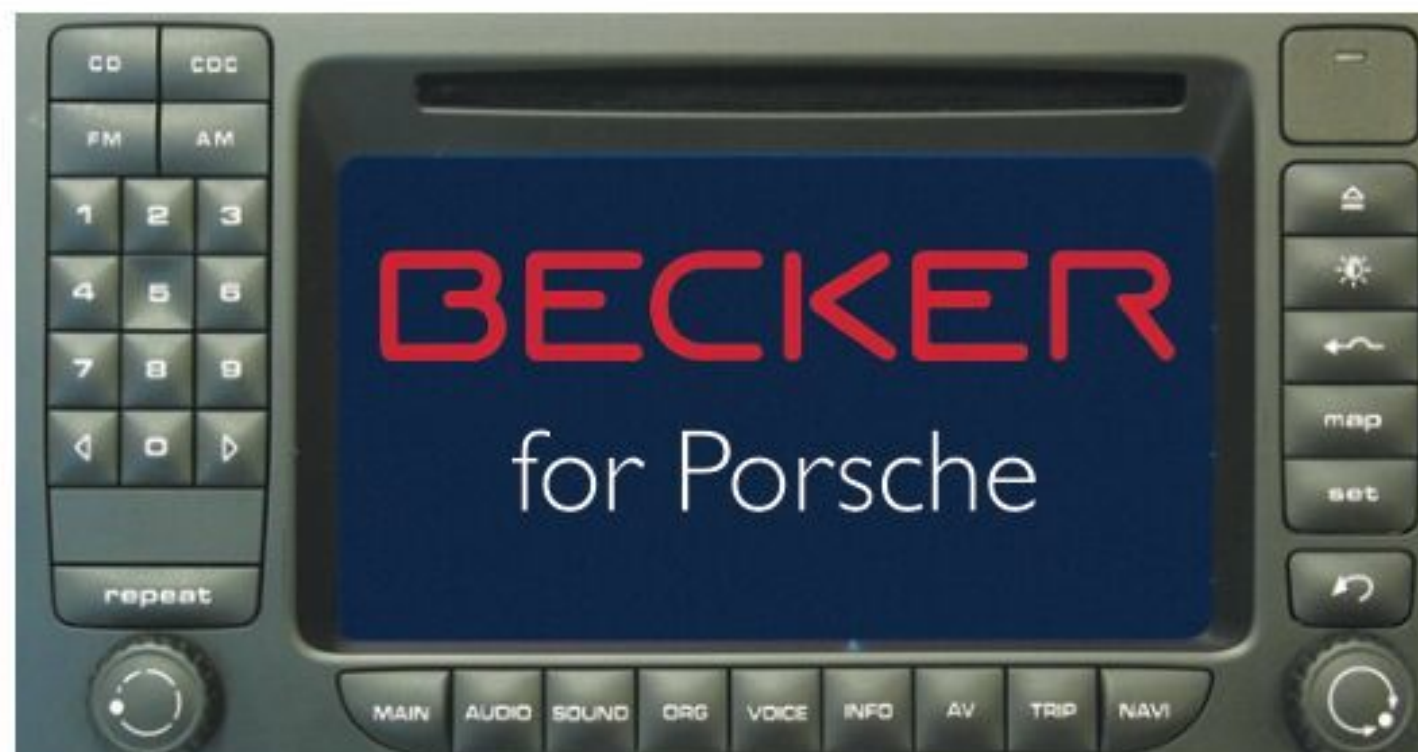
www.**BECKER**AutoSound.com



BECKER AutoSound LLC
101 US Highway 46W,
Saddle Brook, NJ 07663, USA

Give us a call: +1 201 773 0976

Repair – Restorations – Sales – Upgrades – Classic Speakers – OEM Amps – AUX Options – Hirschmann Antennas



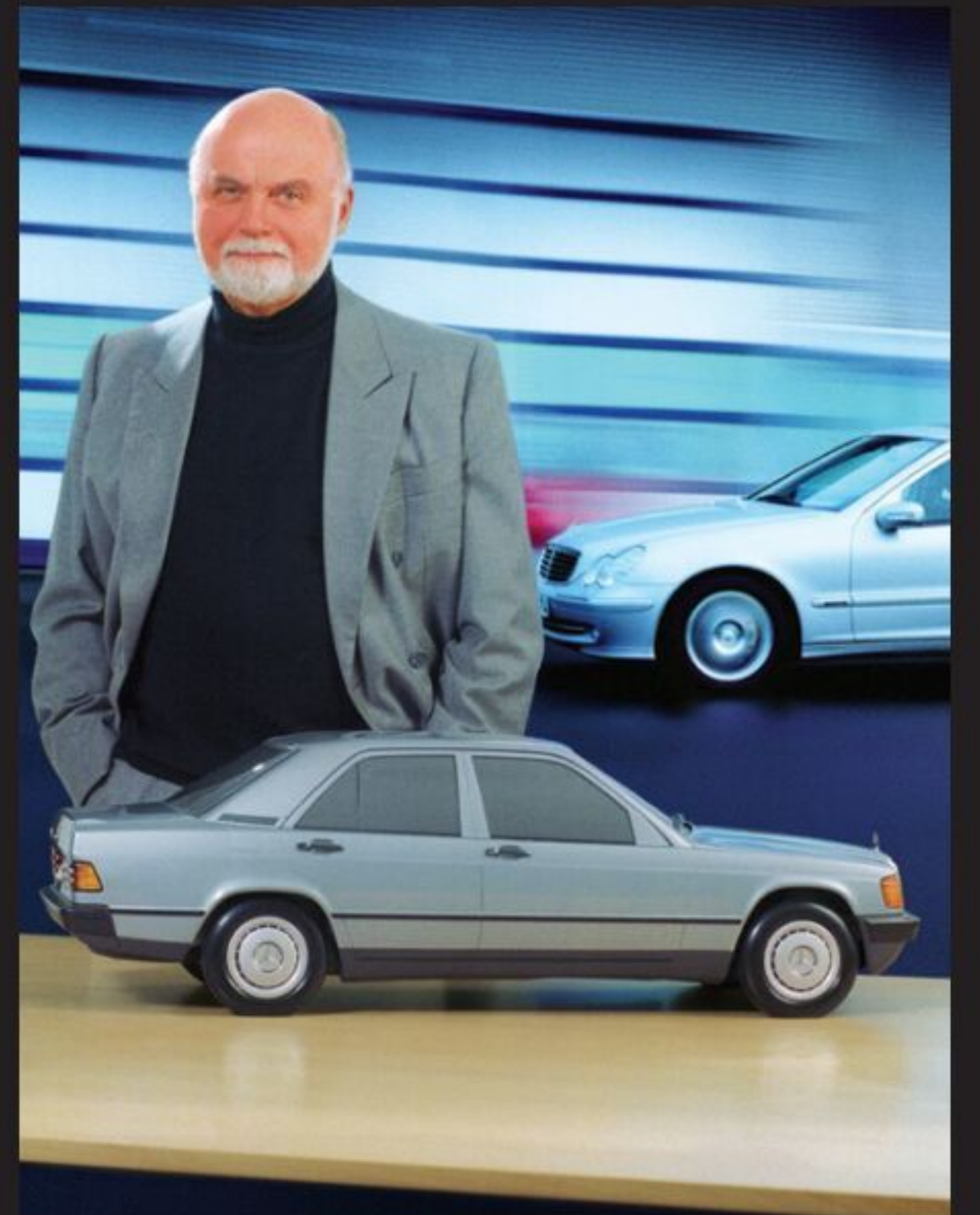
● R129 SL

Bruno Sacco, designer

Italian's job

Rising through the ranks, Latin designer **Bruno Sacco** defined a generation of three-pointed stars that remain favourites among lovers of the Mercedes-Benz brand

WORDS MARTIN BUCKLEY PHOTOGRAPHS DAIMLER AG



Born in Udine, Italy in November 1933, Bruno Sacco was a Mercedes-Benz enthusiast even as a young boy and had enough general interest in all things German to learn the language early on. He originally trained as a surveyor but studied engineering in Turin before doing short stints at both Ghia and Pininfarina. However, after meeting Mercedes chief body development engineer, Karl Wilfert in 1957, he arrived for his first official day of work in Stuttgart on January 13 1958.

He worked first under Wilfert, then the safety pioneer Béla Barényi and assisted Paul Bracq on the 230SL Pagoda and W100 600. His first complete designs were the C111 mid engine, Wankel powered research cars. In 1975, aged 41, Bruno Sacco became chief engineer at Mercedes-Benz but those in the

know must have seen it was only a matter of time before he replaced Friedrich Geiger as head of design.

Sacco was now free to put his own stamp on the visual identity of Mercedes-Benz passenger cars, beginning with

“SOMEHOW THE R129’S SQUAT, BULLISH STANCE COMMUNICATED THE STRENGTH AND SOLIDITY OF THE ENGINEERING”

the 126 S-Class. Sacco was a great advocate of maintaining a family identity between the various models. If the 1981 to 1991 SEC coupe version of the 126 is, arguably, the best looking of

Sacco’s creations, then there can be no debate about which was the most commercially important. The 1982 W201 – better known as the 190 – took Mercedes-Benz into a market it had never involved itself with before: the compact family saloon class.

It was a tough brief: a car that had to attract new younger buyers to the Mercedes brand but not alienate existing customers. Sacco and his team rose to the task magnificently: his handsome, crisply contoured 190 saloon, with its squat grille and sharply chopped tail, still looks pleasing today, almost 40 years later. By the time the 190 appeared, the 124’s shape was frozen, essentially a longer, wider reinterpretation of the smaller car’s basic profile.

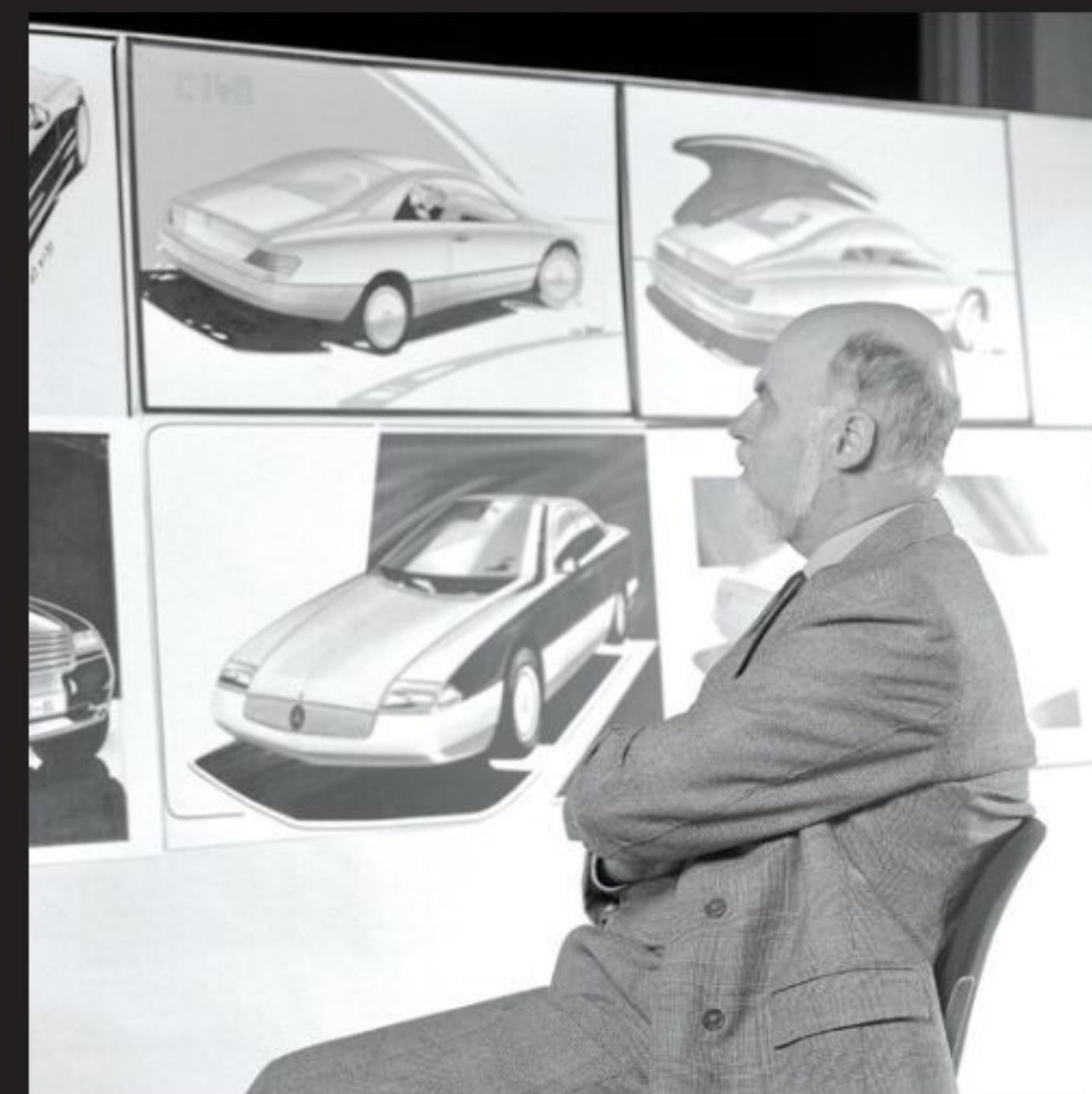
Sacco has called the R129 SL “the most perfect car of my career.” Somehow the car’s squat,

bullish stance communicated the strength and solidity of the engineering; equally the crisp tail treatment and the strong wedge profile linked it unmistakably with his W201 and 124. The market loved the R129 and there were waiting lists for the new SL before it was even officially announced. The taste and judgement of this refined Italian gentleman gave his designs a family feeling and a special flavour; satisfied owners insist these classic Sacco era cars are the best Mercedes of all.

Who can say what Bruno Sacco thinks of all this adulation? He does not give interviews any more. Now in his 80s, it is typical of his quiet, straight-forward approach that he has removed himself from the equation and now lets his great designs do the talking.



Above C111 one of Sacco’s most iconic designs.



Far left Chief engineer at M-B from 1975.

Left His best car? The R129 SL, says Sacco.

R129 SL

Market view

“In the last year to 18 months, R129 prices have kicked off, and as values have risen, more cars have come to the surface”

After a quiet period post production, the classic car market is finally waking up to the merits of the 1989-2001 Mercedes SL, with prices increasing

WORDS DAVID SUTHERLAND PHOTOGRAPHS FAST CLASSICS, CHARLES IRONSIDE, AVANTGARDE & SILVER ARROWS



Early 500SL at Fast Classics - yours for just under £37,000.



The perceived wisdom was always that a convertible Mercedes-Benz would be a sure-fire investment, its glamour and rarity enough to prize collectors' chequebooks wide open. And when the R129 model SL was launched in 1989 that premise seemed likely to be upheld when the roadster – a big technological

leap after 18 years of the preceding 107-series SL – instantly generated a long waiting list and over-list resale bids from the impatient.

But when in turn the R129 was replaced in 2001 by the R230 SL, the car did not assume the instant classic status that the R107 did on being discontinued. Some late examples were squirrelled away

in the hope of a future payday, but the R129 was seen as little more than another prestigious, once expensive car working its way down the used car food chain. So overlooked was it that up until quite recently shabby early examples were down to around £3,000, and the R129 had become the first SL in history that seemingly few wanted.

There was no obvious explanation. Total production of 204,940 was over 32,000 less than that of the R107, so over supply was unlikely to have been a major factor. And it was an 'old school', solidly built Mercedes – indeed, arguably the last one – which people usually loved. Perhaps it was simply the way it looked, its styling devoid of chrome and a little clinical compared to any previous SL.

But, finally, redemption is in sight. The classifieds still contain cars for £6,000 to £7,000, but they've been cleared of the walking wounded and, significantly, R129 prices have risen above those of early R230 SLs. It's taken 15 years, but the R129 is now starting to be loved. "In the last year to 18 months, R129 prices have kicked off, and as values have risen more cars have come to the surface," explains Ashley Nickells of Fast Classics in Bramley, Surrey. "But all the usual boxes have to be ticked – it must have low mileage, be in good condition and have a complete service history."

A buyer's market

No previous SL had been offered with so many different engines. Early cars were three-litre straight-six (two- or four-valve), five-litre V8 and six-litre V12, and the R129 was among the first showroom Mercedes to be tuned by Affalterbach, in SL60 AMG form. The first facelift, in 1995, saw the five-speed automatic gearbox installed in the V8s, the second update, in 1998, introduced 2.8-/3.2-litre V6s and replaced the SL60 AMG with the 5.4-litre SL55 AMG. The 7.3-litre



Left £50K would buy this SL60 at Silver Arrows.



V12 SL73 AMG was added, but built in tiny numbers.

While an SL320 or SL500 (prior to 1993 they were badged 300SL/300SL-24 and 500SL) can be easily purchased for under £10,000, finding a fault-free, fully prepped car takes more than that. Long established Hampshire classic Mercedes specialist Charles Ironside was asking £18,950 for a 1991 500SL in blue-black over tan leather and with 58,000 miles, while Fast Classics was offering a late, 1999 SL320 with 50,400 miles for £18,995.

Six, eight or twelve?

However, Ashley Nickells reckons that the main action is above that level. "The most popular price point for us seems to be early to mid £20,000s, that's a price a lot of people feel comfortable with when getting into a classic Mercedes." He also feels the practical nature of the R129 is now scoring: "As well as being a classic that's not going to break the bank, it's a completely useable car that won't break down."

The model that most seek is the SL500. "It's the most popular, it's the classic Mercedes V8 roadster," he says. It is also possible that the pre 1998 500s might develop a special following due to them having the four-valve, twin-cam-per-bank M119 V8 whereas cars after that used the three-valve, single-cam M113.

If present asking prices reflect reality, 'time capsule'

examples are now commanding semi serious money. Ashley had located a right-hand drive 1994 SL500 that had been originally delivered in Japan and which had covered just 2,883 miles, having a Japanese service history to prove it. Describing it as "the best R129 available", his asking price was £36,995 and he was confident of achieving at least £36,000.

It's quite likely that several of the limited edition R129s will have extra appeal in the market, such as the 1995 Mille Miglia cars and the run out SL500 Silver Arrow from 2001, both with special equipment. Avantgarde near Tamworth was asking £54,000 for a 17,500-mile example of the latter. But there is one model whose presence will cause a flurry like no other: the SL60 AMG. South west London based Silver Arrows asked £49,950 for a 1998 car (one of the last 60s) in Obsidian Black and with 64,000 miles, while the most expensive car we saw was at Oxfordshire's Edward Hall, where a 1997 silver example with 42,580 miles wore a £64,950 tag (see the AMG feature on page 78).

However Charles Ironside offers a steadying observation: "Many people would not notice the difference and I don't think an SL60 AMG is worth double the price of an SL500." But he calls R129s in general "a good long term purchase, as they were very well made cars."



Left 50,000-mile SL320 at FC for £18,995.



Left SL500 Silver Arrow at Avantgarde.



Left Ironside's 58,000-mile 500 for £18,950.

Watch out for...

- The crank sensor on V8 engines can fail, causing poor starting when the motor is hot/warmed up.
- If the automatic gearbox fails to select fifth gear, then it may be necessary to rebuild the transmission.
- Corrosion attacks the front and rear wings, the front suspension tops and the bootlid.
- Electrical faults on the optional adaptive damping make the ride feel very hard and unforgiving.
- No cooling from the air conditioning system means a leaking condenser, which is expensive to replace.
- Faulty hood sensors will prevent the electrically powered hood from operating correctly.

THE MOST ADVANCED SL TO DATE WAS ALSO ONE OF THE MOST STUNNING – DAVID SUTHERLAND DESCRIBES THE PRODUCTION LIFE OF THE HEAVYWEIGHT MASTERPIECE THAT IS THE R230

PHOTOGRAPHS
DAIMLER AG &
STEVE HALL

R230
SL



Technological marvel





Left Folding metal vario-roof was a genuine revelation.



Above and above right Pre production testing with the R230 in Morocco.

T

he life of the R230 SL generation that entered showrooms in autumn 2001 is said to have begun five years earlier when in that summer a top secret document circulated among Mercedes-Benz's most

senior employers laying out the aims and basic parameters of the replacement for the R129 SL, then halfway through its production run. By that stage preliminary design work had already been submitted by Mercedes' studios in Stuttgart, California and Tokyo, and unsurprisingly the seventh SL was planned to be better to drive, more comfortable, more spacious and lighter in weight.

But specifics apart, the R230 was going to be the *future*, 15 years into the future, was Mercedes' stated aim. SLs always have been about tomorrow: the original, 1954 300SL staggered with its aeronautical lightness and style, and each successive model has highlighted a new attribute that has perpetuated the SL badge as the defining force in

premium roadsters. But it is perhaps the R230 that has embodied the most new technology compared to its predecessor, and it has certainly written an important new chapter in the SL story.

After the dozen years of familiarity with the R129, whose virtues were under the skin rather than the skin itself, the R230 presented at the Deichtorhallen art gallery in Hamburg, northern Germany was a stunning sight, its super sleek body, with the first truly interesting SL nose since the 1963 Pagoda, being one of these shapes that seemed to be moving at pace even when stationary. And although already seen for five years on the R170 SLK, the metal vario-roof that collapsed in on itself (and which we look in more detail elsewhere) in a matter of seconds continued to astonish.

"We have to go as far into the future as possible while keeping a little of the tradition," Mercedes-Benz design chief Peter Pfeiffer explained to the press in 2001. "The SL grille is the only thing that's fixed, the designers had complete freedom with everything else." They were, of course, working on the car knowing that the Mercedes powered, McLaren developed SLR was around the corner, but apparently this had little or no impact on their thinking. "There are





Right Sweeping cabin curves; Comand in centre.

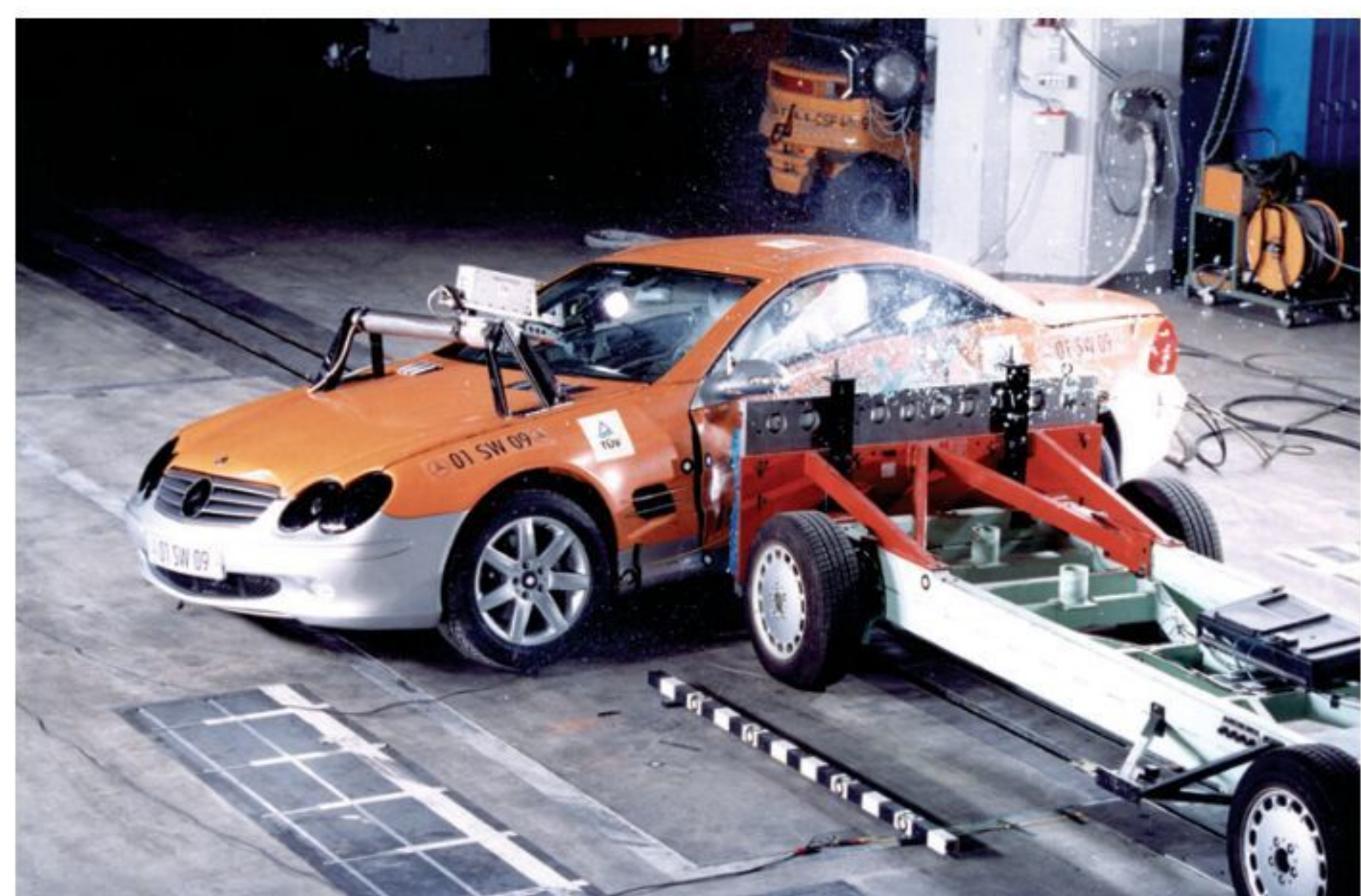


details, like the side grilles which are a small bridge between old SLs and the new one,” continued Pfeiffer, who retired from Daimler in 2008 after 40 years service with the Stuttgart car maker. “Look at the new car and you see the myth of old SLs in a new definition.”

The drama continued inside, where the orderly rows of squared switches and the instruments on a flat panel of the R129 and most other Mercedes models had been replaced by a wild flourish of organic curves for the dash panels and pleasingly frivolous looking controls. The R230’s 45mm longer wheelbase over the R129 allowed extra cabin space, although for this SL Mercedes finally gave up on rear seats, concluding that seats that couldn’t take people were a marketing gimmick, and replaced them with a storage shelf.

This being Mercedes’ brave new world of on board electronics, the R230 bristled with new tech, such as Comand information/navigation, the active cruise control Distronic, ‘brake by wire’ Sensotronic Brake Control designed to quicken and enhance brake action in an emergency (although this

“THIS BEING MERCEDES’ BRAVE NEW WORLD OF ON BOARD ELECTRONICS, THE R230 BRISTLED WITH NEW TECH”



Left Side airbags protect against heavy side impacts.



Left Peter Pfeiffer (right) head of R230 SL design.

would come back to haunt Mercedes a few years down the line, when it proved troublesome on high mileage cars, not just SLs). But the feature that would have the most significant impact on the R230’s character was the Active Body Control (ABC), which would help Mercedes in its quest to refresh its owner demographic by giving the R230 true sports car handling. Again, more about that technology elsewhere in this magazine.

The R230 went on sale in the UK in August 2002, and such was its presence that a sole engine seemed all that was needed. It was the three-valves-per-cylinder, five-litre V8 (M113), good for 302bhp and 339lb ft torque. It was known, though, that the SL55 AMG sharing a 469bhp/516lb ft, 5.4-litre supercharged V8 with the CL55 AMG would follow later in the year, while the V6, the SL350 with the M112 3.7-litre, but actively suspended only if the ABC option box was ticked, arrived in early 2003. The SL600 also launched in 2003 sharing a title with the V12 R129, but much different under the bonnet, its engine a 5.5- rather than six-litre unit, and with twin turbochargers giving 493bhp backed up with 590lb ft.

Of course an SL range wouldn’t have been complete without a tribute to the Mille Miglia, the challenging and dangerous Italian road race won by Stirling Moss and Denis Jenkinson in 1955 in a Mercedes 300SLR. The Mille Miglia Edition of 2003, based on the SL350 and with special silver paintwork, classic red leather seats and a glass roof among its special trim and equipment, truly was a limited edition, just a dozen being made.

The R230 model roll out had been predictable, but what followed next was unexpected, perhaps excessive, some would have said. In 2004 the Affalterbach tuner – soon to be fully bought out by DaimlerChrysler – undertook more spanning on the R230 and out popped the SL65 AMG, equipped with a six-litre, twin-turbo V12 good for a surely outrageous 604bhp and 737lb ft torque.

Hence by the mid 2000s it seemed like Mercedes-Benz was leaving nothing to chance at the top end of the roadster market, offering a trio of super exclusive models, all with very different characters. The least expensive was the SL55 AMG, priced at £97,000 and of the three was the favourite, with over 19,000 built. Its supercharged engine (later updated to 493bhp and then 510bhp) delivered vibrant performance, with huge torque from almost no revs at all, making every journey an occasion. The models delivered with the AMG Performance Pack, derived from the 2001 F1 safety car spec, were even more edgy, featuring bigger, 19-inch wheels with 255/35 front and 285/30 rear tyres, larger brakes, firmer suspension and an additional engine oil cooler.

Just The Facts

Mercedes-Benz SL350 (R230)

ENGINE M112 3,724cc V6
POWER 242bhp@5,750rpm
TORQUE 258lb ft@3,000-4,500rpm
TRANSMISSION 5-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,755kg
0-62MPH 7.2sec
TOP SPEED 155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 24.1mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 10.2002-02.2006
NUMBER BUILT 21,520

Mercedes-Benz SL500 (R230)

ENGINE M113 4,966cc V8
POWER 302bhp@5,600rpm
TORQUE 339lb ft@2,700-4,250rpm
TRANSMISSION 5-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,845kg
0-62MPH 6.2sec
TOP SPEED 155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 23.3mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 07.2001-03.2006
NUMBER BUILT 72,778

Mercedes-Benz SL600 (R230)

ENGINE M275 5,513cc V12 biturbo
POWER 493bhp@5,000rpm
TORQUE 590lb ft@1,800-3,600rpm
TRANSMISSION 5-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 2,025kg
0-62MPH 4.7sec
TOP SPEED 155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 19.6mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 04.2003-01.2006
NUMBER BUILT 3,086

Mercedes-Benz SL55 AMG (R230)

ENGINE M113 5,439cc V8 supercharged
POWER 493bhp@6,100rpm
TORQUE 516lb ft@2,750-4,000rpm
TRANSMISSION 5-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,955kg
0-62MPH 4.7sec
TOP SPEED 155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 20.9mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 12.2001-02.2008
NUMBER BUILT 19,022

Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG (R230)

ENGINE M275 5,980cc V12 biturbo
POWER 604bhp@4,800-5,100rpm
TORQUE 737lb ft@2,000-4,000rpm
TRANSMISSION 5-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 2,110kg
0-62MPH 4.2sec
TOP SPEED 155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 18.7mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 06.2004-2010
NUMBER BUILT 3,055

Mercedes-Benz SL350 (R230)

ENGINE M272 3,495cc V6
POWER 268bhp@6,000rpm
TORQUE 258lb ft@2,400-5,000rpm
TRANSMISSION 7-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,825kg
0-62MPH 6.6sec
TOP SPEED 155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 27.4mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 02.2006-02.2008
NUMBER BUILT 6,698

Mercedes-Benz SL500 (R230)

ENGINE M273 5,461cc V8
POWER 383bhp@6,000rpm
TORQUE 391lb ft@2,800-4,800rpm
TRANSMISSION 7-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,910kg
0-62MPH 5.4sec
TOP SPEED 155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 23.2mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 01.2006-2011
NUMBER BUILT 26,778

Mercedes-Benz SL600 (R230)

ENGINE M275 5,513cc V12 biturbo
POWER 510bhp@5,000rpm
TORQUE 612lb ft@1,900-3,500rpm
TRANSMISSION 5-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 2,045kg
0-62MPH 4.5sec
TOP SPEED 155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 20.3mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 2008-2011
NUMBER BUILT 930

Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG (R230)

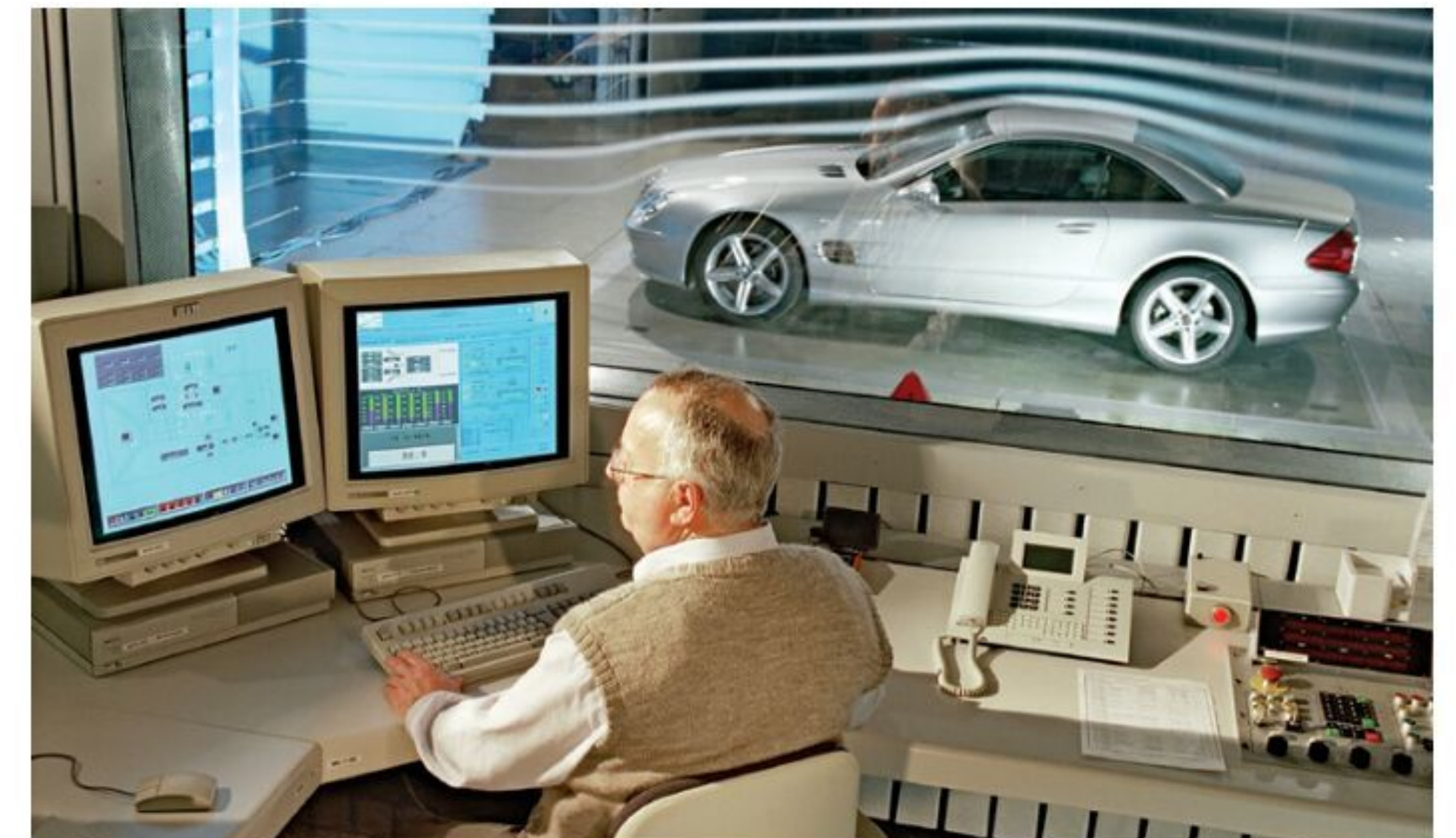
ENGINE M156 6,208cc V8
POWER 518bhp@6,800rpm
TORQUE 465lb ft@5,200rpm
TRANSMISSION 7-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT 1,970kg
0-62MPH 4.6sec
TOP SPEED 155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION 20.3mpg
YEARS PRODUCED 2008-2011
NUMBER BUILT 4,940

FIGURES REPRESENTATIVE OF PRE
 AND POST FACELIFT RANGES;
 FUEL CONSUMPTION ACCORDING TO
 NEDC COMBINED; TOP SPEEDS
 ELECTRONICALLY LIMITED

Right Fine tuning the vario-roof system on a rig.



Below Engineers achieved a drag coefficient of 0.29



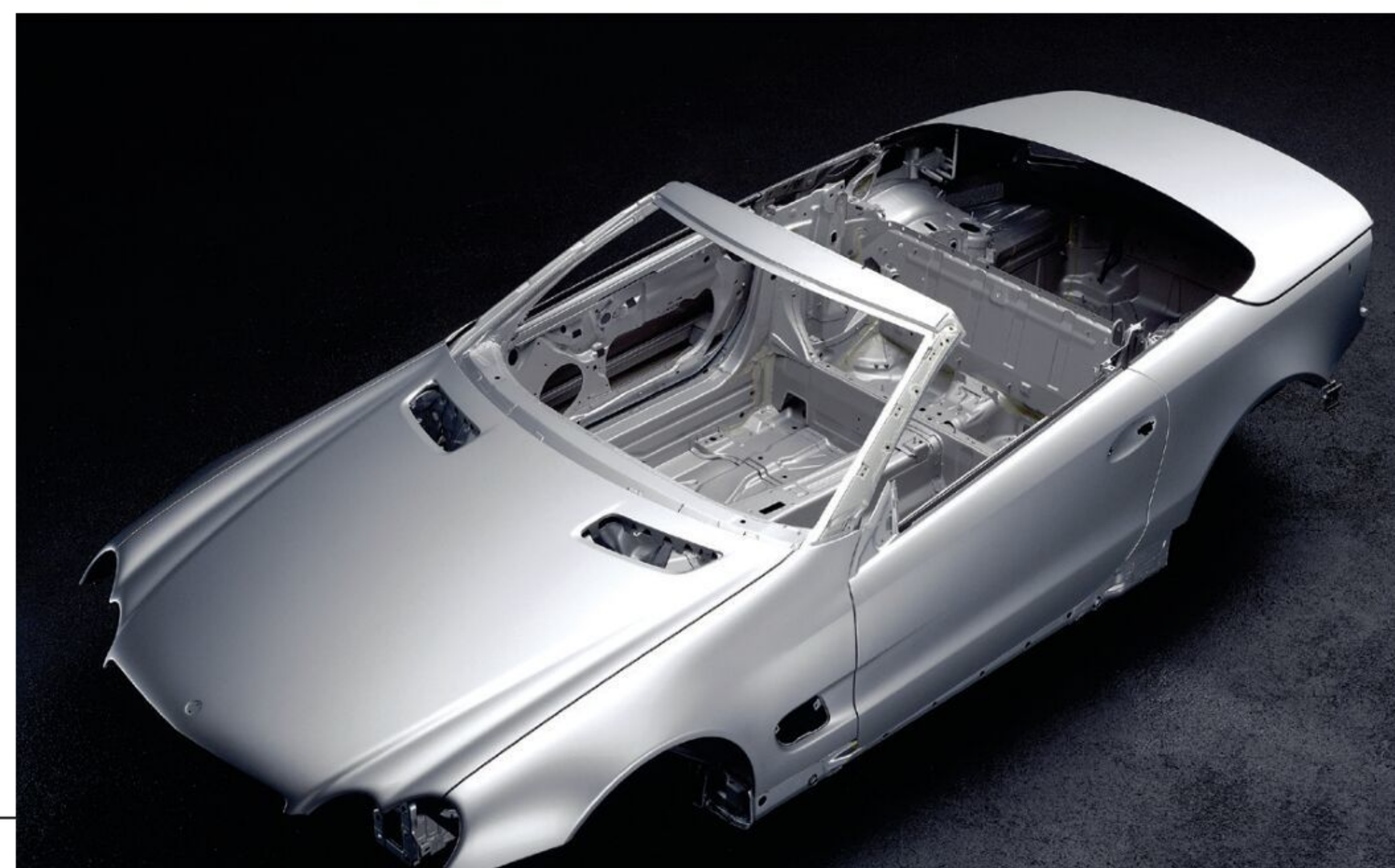
➤ The SL600 cost £100,000 and offered silken refinement but far less personality than the Kompressor model, while the SL65 AMG, priced at just under £150,000 had simply staggering acceleration but at the same time managed to be quite a clinical feeling machine. It looked almost as if Mercedes built the SL65 AMG just to prove to the industry that it could.

Although the R230 was the consummate sophisticated roadster, engineers found plenty of upgrades for the first of the model's two facelifts, in early 2006. The SL350 now used the 3.5-litre, four-valve M272 V6, which although of lesser capacity produced 11 per cent more power at 268bhp, torque remaining unchanged. The SL500 switched to the M273, four-valve, 5.5-litre V8, enjoying a 27/15 per cent increase to 383bhp/391lb ft, and the SL600 was tickled up to 510bhp and 612lb ft. The 7G-Tronic automatic gearbox had been fitted to the SL500 in 2003, and now the 350 used it – but, no doubt in view of their massive torque levels, the supercharged V8 and the V12s stuck with the five-speed.

The facelift also nudged the R230 further along the sports car route. An optional Sport transmission added steering wheel paddleshifters to replace the hardly tactile buttons on the back of the wheel, and the ABC suspension was refined to give a claimed further two-thirds reduction in body roll, while the steering received a more direct ratio.

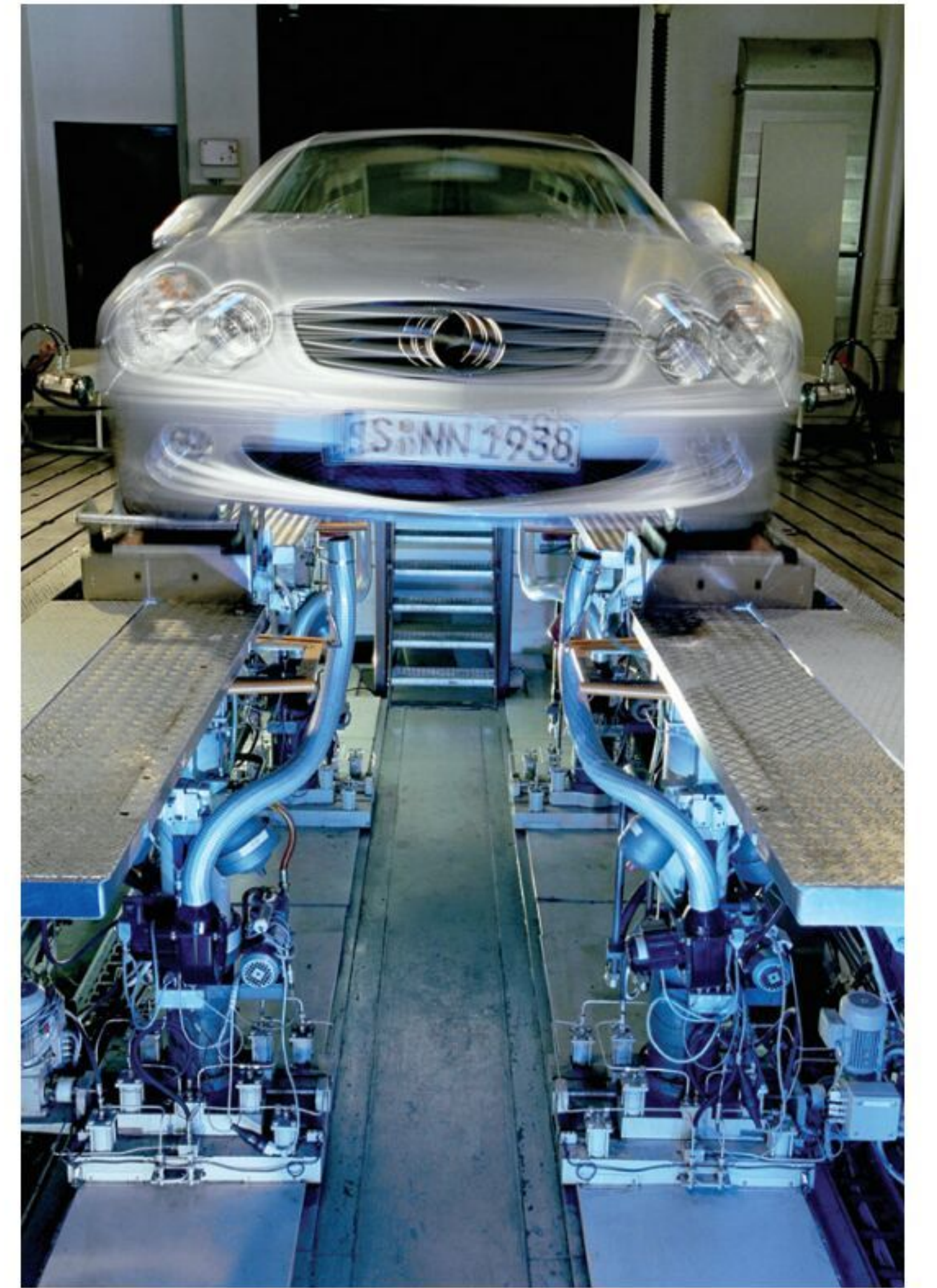
Two years later, in January 2008, more changes occurred, including the first significant exterior update. Whereas the previous facelift had witnessed minor revisions in the form of a new front bumper with three cooling intakes, a new grille and tail lights, this time the appealing oval twin lamps gave way to large, single, partially squared lenses either side

“ALTHOUGH THE R230 WAS THE CONSUMMATE SOPHISTICATED ROADSTER, ENGINEERS FOUND PLENTY OF UPGRADES FOR THE FIRST OF THE MODEL'S TWO FACELIFTS, IN EARLY 2006”





Left Update of 2008 brought swept back headlight design.



Right Testing the capabilities of the ABC suspension.

of a more aggressively style grille, reflecting that the corporate look of Mercedes-Benz had moved on. The SL350 got a new, higher revving version of the 3.5-litre M272, producing 312bhp/265lb ft torque.

However the limelight stealer of that facelift was the SL63 AMG, which replaced the SL55, by this stage Stuttgart keen to move on from the fuel-inefficiency of the Kompressor V8, said to use significant energy merely to operate its supercharger. It was a berth for a landmark engine, the 6.2-litre, normally aspirated M156 V8 that was the first engine AMG had designed and built from scratch – and also the last big capacity motor the tuner made before moving to the cleaner and more efficient if less characterful twin-turbo V8s now used in all cars from Affalterbach.

For the SL63 it produced 518bhp, slightly more than the SL55 AMG gave, and 465lb ft (12 per cent less), but the figures are largely irrelevant because while Mercedes models often undergo engine changes without feeling much different, this was not the case with the SL63. Whereas with the M113 equipped car you rode the wave of torque, the 63's M156 barks quietly but sharply on start-up, and although it serves up ample mid range pull even if maximum thrust is way up at 5,200rpm, it wants to rev hard, power peaking at a thundering 6,800rpm and with the redline at 7,200rpm. It also benefited from the new four-mode, AMG Speedshift MCT seven-speed transmission featuring 'double-declutching' for downshift blipping, and a Race Start launch control system.

A conversation of a new type is now occasionally being heard: will the R230 become a classic in future years? Some say that being mechanically very complex, sold in large numbers and without the

accepted classic/young classic era precludes it. We're not so sure, because while most SL350s and 500s will in old age no doubt be despatched by emissions and/or unpalatable maintenance requirements, we feel a well preserved few will survive, especially if they bear the AMG signage. Indeed, the SL55 AMG with the fore-mentioned tasty Performance Pack is already being seen for sale at way above book price for a decade old SL, and the rare SL65 AMG will surely always create a stir, even if only to remind everyone of the 'good old days' when there was no shame in offering an enormous capacity internal combustion engine.

The R230 was replaced by the R231 in 2012 (see below), but probably not too many people noticed. The new model, although featuring innovative lightweight alloy bodywork and a new range of engines, looked like a close evolution of what went before, with the much the same profile. It wasn't broken, so Mercedes-Benz didn't try to fix it, instead evolving it to ensure that almost six decades on from the W198 SL it could still claim to offer the world's best roadster. **SD**



Right The R231 SL succeeded the R230 model in 2012.



Left Lightweight construction gave a sporting edge.





R230 SL: ABC SUSPENSION & VARIO-ROOF

COMFORT AND CONTROL

WORDS DAVID SUTHERLAND PHOTOGRAPHS DAIMLER AG

The two technical aspects that defined the R230 SL, launched in 2001, were the sophisticated, ground breaking Active Body Control suspension (ABC), and the engineering masterpiece that is the metal vario-roof which turns the SL from a weather-proofed coupe to a fully open roadster in seconds. As you would expect, these two systems that changed the R230's nature so dramatically over the preceding R129 SL didn't happen overnight, being the reward for much research and investment, and here we take a close look at how both systems were developed.

Active Body Control

When Mercedes replaced the W113 SL with the larger and heavier R107, it was happy to sacrifice some of the Pagoda's perky handling in the interests of comfort, which is what owners seemed to prefer at the time. Therefore, while well set up in the chassis department, with safe and predictable handling, the R107 was definitely happier in a straight line than in the hairpins. That thinking was evolved for the R129, but by the mid 1990s, when that car's successor was being planned, Mercedes had come to the conclusion that more of a driver's car was needed, hence the far sportier nature of the R230.

But Stuttgart's engineers had first explored suspension aids when developing the air sprung system for the W100 600 launched in 1963, and been looking into active suspension since the late 70s, when an electronic suspension strut was tested, hence the debut of ABC on the C215 CL launched in 1999 was no light bulb moment. Early problems included the unavailability of electronic systems that could operate quickly enough, and although an experimental, active 126-series S-Class was running by 1987 it was still way behind what was required in terms of reaction speed and ride quality.

However, for the 1989 R129, Mercedes' first production system had been readied, that car's

Adaptive Damping System (ADS). A series of five sensors monitoring road speed and changes in road surface regulated the stiffness of the shock absorbers, softening them for a straight, level road, and firming them up for corners, while dropping the ride height by 15mm above 75mph.

The chief benefit of ADS was to provide a constant and level ride, but by the launch of the C215 CL, engineers' 20 years of research had finally reconciled the conflicting aims of using soft springing to allow good ride comfort, and controlling cornering roll to offer flatter, crisper handling. Microcomputers allowed what might best be described as virtual anti roll bars.

Active Body Control concentrates the clever tech in the super sophisticated – though obviously very expensive – suspension strut. Within the top of each strut an hydraulically activated plunger piston moves up or down and in the process makes the coil spring within the strut either stiffer or softer. Therefore, when the car pitches, rolls or lifts at the front or rear, the plungers move to neutralise the effect.

The changing pressure in the struts is regulated by sensors which record the level of the car above the ground, its acceleration and other attributes, and sends the data to a pair of microcomputers in the active suspension unit, which process it and deliver the optimum suspension stiffness for the road conditions and driving; the algorithms stored also allows predictive damper settings. ABC reacts so fast that it effectively provides a simultaneous correction, Mercedes said at the time. The R230's roll angles were 48 per cent less than the R129's, it was also claimed. And a specific refinement for the R230 was ABC's ability to factor in vehicle weight changes, for example if suitcases were removed from the boot, or the passenger got out.

The R230 SL driver does have some input, with Comfort and Sport modes, the latter reducing roll angles further, not that this setting is needed to



Above Press a button on the centre console and the SL goes from roadster to coupe.



Left R170 SLK the first Benz to have a folding metal roof.

Far left The many components of the R230's vario-roof.

experience the seemingly magical way of ABC. Ironically, the R230 has a sufficiently well honed chassis not to actually need ABC – just ask any owner of an R230 SL350 that has the standard steel springing if they miss it. They probably don't.

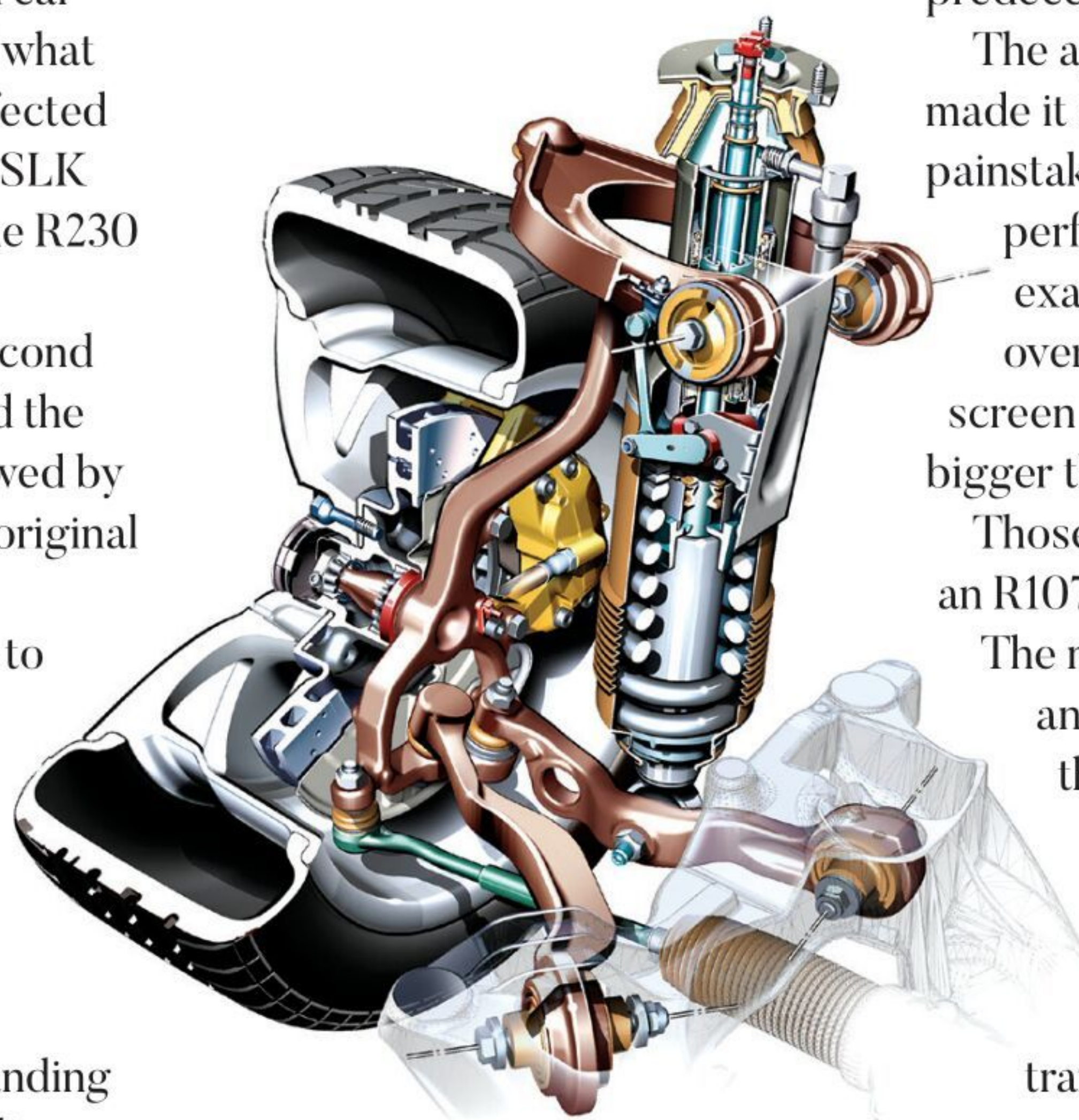
Vario-roof

It is impossible to be certain about who was first to offer a metal folding roof on a car, although Peugeot's 1934 402 Éclipse allows the French car manufacturer a credible claim on the title. Of what there is no doubt is that Mercedes-Benz perfected the concept in the modern era with the R170 SLK launched in 1996, the same system seen on the R230 SL five years later.

Even over 20 years on, watching the 25-second process of an SLK roof pivoting upwards and the metal cover disappearing into the boot, followed by the roof itself, the cover then returning to its original position to cover the folded and stored componentry is still entrancing, and a tribute to the engineers involved. What's more, the complex vario-roof has proved to be pretty trouble free, with most early SLK roofs still working faultlessly.

But an industry had to be created to make the roof possible. In the early 1990s, Mercedes-Benz and Porsche were both expanding their convertible ranges and needed a specialist supply of hoods and roofs, therefore jointly established a company to manufacture them, CTS GmbH (Car Top Systems) in Stuttgart. Initially producing the SLK roof and Boxster hood, but from an early stage also making Saab 900 hoods, the firm quickly became the leader in the field, and a large and successful company in its own right. In September 2003, by which time CTS was employing over 1,000 people and generating a €250m (about £170m at the time) annual turnover, Mercedes sold its 50 per cent to Porsche, which two years later

“The appearance of the vario-roof on the SLK made it an essential fitment for the SL, but it was a painstaking task to ensure that it looked good”



Above Plunger system acts on the road spring.

Right A superb ride and flat cornering with ABC suspension.


sold the company to Canadian based automotive supplier giant, Magna International Inc. The company still operates predominantly in Europe.

The vario-roof essentially consists of three parts, the dual shell top section, the two C-pillars with inner and outer shells, and the rear screen, and is operated by 11 cylinders and one high pressure pump. A switch on the centre console activates it, with nothing to undo.

For the R230, it was honed, the lowering/raising time reduced by nine seconds to 16, and the assembly made more compact to allow extra boot space (with the roof erected capacity was 317 litres, dropping to 235 when lowered). A new feature was the Easy Pack, by which the pressing of a button inside the boot raised the folded roof to allow better access to stowed luggage. Mercedes said the entire roof system, now available with a glass top panel, weighed 100kg, slightly less than that of the R129's hardtop and canvas hood together, and quoted the R230's drag factor at 0.29Cd compared to its predecessor's 0.32.

The appearance of the vario-roof on the SLK made it an essential fitment for the SL, but it was a painstaking task to ensure that it looked good, and perfect detailing was needed to achieve this. For example, triangular black glass panels extended over the roof metalwork either side of the rear screen to give the impression that the glass area is bigger than it actually is.

Those coming to an R230 from an R129, or indeed an R107, would have been amazed at the difference.

The metal roofs on the older cars were well made and sturdy, but took at least two people to lift them clear of the car without damaging the bodywork, while in both cases the hoods made do with a plastic glass screen which could get scratched and go milky. The R230 removed these hassles – and transformed al fresco SL motoring. 



R230 SL:
AMGs



THE AMG YEARS

FROM SL55 TO BLACK SERIES,
THE HISTORY OF THE HOT R230 IS
BULGING WITH AMG MUSCLE

WORDS DAN TRENT

PHOTOGRAPHS DAN TRENT & DAIMLER AG



Left 6.2-litre V8 replaced 5.4-litre V8 Kompressor in 2008.



If the R230 SL was a big car for Mercedes, then it was an absolutely huge one for AMG. The SL55 that followed DaimlerChrysler taking a controlling stake in 1999 was a dramatic statement of intent, AMG now a platform from which Mercedes-Benz could compete with Porsche and other purebred performance brands.

Hot-rodding regular Mercedes with large and powerful V8s was AMG's established *modus operandi*, but it was the supercharger between the 5.4-litre motor's cylinder banks that really made the SL55 fly. Originally revealed in 2001 with 469bhp and quickly upgraded to 493bhp, if anything the figures felt conservative at the wheel. Near two-tonne kerb weight or not, 0-62mph came up in just 4.7 seconds and the SL55 thundered into its 155mph limiter with such force many speculated it would carry on to 200mph given half the chance. Suddenly 911 Turbo owners had something to worry about, the coupe-to-roadster dual personality of the R230 given supercar chasing performance and credibility by AMG's overhaul.

Other influential innovations included wheel mounted shift buttons for manual control of the five-speed automatic. An F1 Safety Car inspired Performance Package later added a new front bumper with additional oil cooler and vents, bigger brakes, 19-inch wheels, chunky aluminium shifter paddles and a mechanical limited-slip differential. This remains a desirable choice in the used market.

In 2004, the SL55 was joined by its even more formidable brother, the SL65. AMG had built a V12 SL before in the form of the highly exclusive SL73. But even that had to play second fiddle to the SL65's twin-turbo engine, this six-litre monster a relative of the 5.5-litre motor developed for the Maybach. With 604bhp and 737lb ft of torque, the SL65's V12 boasted outrageous amounts of power, its



“In 2004, the SL55 was joined by its even more formidable brother, the SL65”

smooth but cultured growl and sledgehammer torque offering a very different driving experience. At over two tonnes, the five-speed auto equipped SL65 was a heavy car, but its massive reserves meant it could hit 0-62mph in just 4.2 seconds.

In 2006 the SL range received an update, the considerably faster 5.5-litre SL500 prompting an increase in power for the SL55 to 510bhp and 531lb ft, the 0-62mph time reduced by a couple of tenths to 4.5 seconds as a result. The more dramatic change came in 2008 with the arrival of the heavily revised R230 range with a bold new look.

Now it gets serious

The SL65 carried on more or less unchanged but the new SL63 was a very different car. The new 518bhp, 6.2-litre M156 V8 dropped the supercharger and adopted a racier, revvier, naturally aspirated character. There was less torque (465lb ft), but the SL63 was a much more advanced car, introducing AMG's new seven-speed MCT gearbox with its snappier wet-clutch in place of the torque converter. Driver modes were also added, the AMG Drive Unit enabling fast changes between four settings and addition of new features like the Race Start launch control and a three-stage ESP system.

While perhaps not as graceful in appearance as the original R230, this update meant the AMG SLs were able to keep pace with rivals and offer a very different driving experience to their predecessors. The facelift also unleashed AMG's most spectacular R230 variant, the SL65 Black Series. While the standard SL65 was hardly lacking in straight line performance, the Black Series was a much more



potent car, its wider track (increased by 97mm front, 85mm rear) contained within dramatically widened arches, its power output raised to an astounding 661bhp, and the folding roof replaced with a fixed carbon item as part of a 250kg weight saving over the SL65. Torque was capped at 737lb ft, AMG boasting without restriction it would run to 885lb ft.

Performance was as unapologetic as the looks, but given a high tech twist with features like a pop up rear spoiler and race style, manually adjustable suspension. 0-62mph in just 3.8 seconds and a top speed limited to 199mph were only half the story of this extraordinary car's performance though, the V12 biturbo taking on an angrier and more aggressive character than any previous SL and creating a truly spectacular car in the process.

Above SL65 AMG Black Series packed a 661bhp V12 unit.

Below Pre and post facelift interiors; 63 AMG with sports ABC suspension.



R230 SL

Market view

“It’s the number for sale, not the prices, that seems extraordinary”

Brimming with power and technology, the R230 SL is cheaper to buy than you might think, with AMG and special edition cars potential long term investments

WORDS DAVID SUTHERLAND PHOTOGRAPHS SILVERSTONE AUCTIONS, AVANTGARDE, CHARLES IRONSIDE & MERCEDES-BENZ OF NEWBURY



Facelifted SL350 at M-B of Newbury offered for £18,000.

For a long time now the R129 has been regarded as the bargain SL, available for just a few thousand pounds. But we think the model that replaced it, the R230 of 2001, could soon steal its title as the SL you can afford. R129s have bottomed out in depreciation and are now rising in value, while R230s are rapidly on their way down to meet them. In the past, when you browsed say, Auto Trader, and chose ‘lowest price first’, the first few pages would be R129s – R230s not appearing for a few pages. Now though, R230s from 2003 or 2004, priced from £6,000 to £7,000, are likely to lead the section.

But for us, it’s the number for sale, not the prices, that seems extraordinary. Despite this once so exclusive Mercedes roadster costing a minimum of £60,000 new when launched, we counted nearly 140 for sale for under £10,000 on Auto Trader alone, two thirds of them SL350s. Sub £10,000 R230s from that time will be the original, five-litre V8 engined SL500 and the SL350 with its 3.7-litre V6. This pair offered a distinct choice: the SL500 was the smooth, effortlessly torquey performer with the wonderful but complex Active Body Roll (ABC) active suspension, the SL350 not quite on the same pace, but with better

fuel consumption, and not fitted with ABC as standard.

Beyond the scope of price guides, early examples of these two models probably make similar prices as buyers weight up the added desirability of the V8 against the lesser costs of the V6. Progress to the first R230 facelift, in early 2006, and price expert Glass’s values the SL350 at a £9,540 ‘trade’ or buying-in price, while the ‘retail’ or forecourt price of a fully prepped example is a little under £13,000.

And you will of course see low mileage, above average condition examples offered for higher prices – and now sometimes at established classic Mercedes

specialists, too. Warwickshire based SL Shop, better known for its R107 business, had just sold a 2003 SL500 priced at £15,995 and in silver over red leather, and with just 42,000 miles covered. It would be covered by a two-year mechanical warranty. In Hampshire, Charles Ironside displayed a 2002 SL500 in silver with grey leather and with 33,000 miles, for £14,950.

Even at that price R230s are a lot of Mercedes engineering for the money, with their amazing metal roof and a chassis so much sportier than what went before. And not too much more money will get a model from later in the R230 life cycle from an Official



Left SL55 sold by Silverstone for £36,563.



Left Charles Ironside's £14,950 SL500.



Left Jonathan Aucott's £50,000 SL55 AMG.



Left SL65 AMG V12 for sale at Avantgarde.



Mercedes-Benz Retailer. For example, Mercedes-Benz of Newbury had the dealer network's cheapest SL, an Obsidian Black SL350 with an of course warranted 47,000 miles and full Mercedes warranty cover for £18,000 (with perhaps a little wriggle room).

"They're great cars and are very usable," says Jonathan Aucott of Avantgarde Classic in Tamworth. "You do hear stories about the suspension failing, but they're otherwise pretty reliable, and the non-AMG models are still great bargains."

Jonathan's mention of AMGs neatly introduces us to the other half of the R230 story, which could hardly be in greater contrast. Anything with the Affalterbach badge is fast becoming classic gold, he tells us. The first out the box was the SL55 AMG with its supercharged 5.4-litre V8, which delivered its muscular performance accompanied by a vibrant, snarling soundtrack, attributes which have no doubt assisted its ascent in value of late.


"We're certainly paying more for them, they cost 10 grand more than they did six months ago," Jonathan reveals. "You used to be able to buy a good SL55 AMG for £15,000, but I don't think a £15,000 car would necessarily be a good one now. You would probably have to pay at least £20,000 to get that nowadays."

In summer 2017, auctioneer Histories at Brooklands sold a 55,123-

mile 2005 SL55 AMG for £18,200, towards the higher end of its pre sale estimate. But exceptionally low mileage and pristine condition clearly count for a lot, as the 12,400-mile, one-owner 2004 SL55 AMG sold for £36,563 in Silverstone Auctions' late 2017 sale at the NEC in Birmingham proved.

Affalterbach specials

However, Jonathan believes the model collectors are already prepared to fight over is that best known as the SL55 AMG F1, a normal SL55 but with uprated suspension, brakes and wheels, and based on the 2001 F1 Safety Car spec. "I would say you could add £20,000 to £30,000 for these cars," said Jonathan, who was offering a silver, 2004 example with 20,900 miles for £49,950.

While regular SL55s were built in numbers sufficient (over 19,000) to allow a market price of sorts to emerge, the same is not true of the SL65 AMG, the six-litre twin-turbo rocket producing over 600bhp and made in small numbers. A common opinion of the car that cost £150,000 when introduced in 2004 is that although super fast, it lacks not only the 55's character, but its fine chassis/performance balance. But Jonathan, who had a 21,000-mile example for sale alongside his SL55 AMG, for £59,950, said, "Collectors always want the halo car, the flagship. And it's got a massive grin factor." 

Watch out for...

- Engine catalysts can break up, so listen for rattles.
- Ensure the Sensotronic Brake Control (SBC) recall work has been carried out by a Mercedes-Benz dealership.
- Suspension dampers on cars equipped with Mercedes' trick Active Body Control (ABC) system can leak.
- The pump regulating the ABC suspension pressure may fail, showing a warning light.
- Water leaks in the boot can affect central locking pump.
- Body corrosion most commonly affects the front and rear wheelarches, so check these areas carefully.

PRODUCTION FIGURES

| W198 300SL | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Year | 1954 | 1955 | 1956 | 1957 | 1958 | 1959 | 1960 | 1961 | 1962 | 1963 | Total |
| Coupe | 146 | 867 | 311 | 76 | | | | | | | 1,400 |
| *alloy body | 24 | 5 | | | | | | | | | |
| Roadster | | | | 554 | 324 | 211 | 249 | 250 | 244 | 26 | 1,858 |
| Production | | | | | | | | | | | 3,258 |

| W121 190SL | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|--------|
| Year | 1955 | 1956 | 1957 | 1958 | 1959 | 1960 | 1961 | 1962 | 1963 | Total |
| Coupe | 20 | 1,367 | 1,521 | 1,340 | 1,998 | 2,565 | 2,564 | 1,560 | 72 | 13,007 |
| Roadster | 1,707 | 2,665 | 1,811 | 1,382 | 1,951 | 1,412 | 1,228 | 686 | 32 | 12,874 |
| Production | | | | | | | | | | 25,881 |

| W113 SL | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|--------|
| Year | 1963 | 1964 | 1965 | 1966 | 1967 | 1968 | 1969 | 1970 | 1971 | Total |
| 230SL | 1,465 | 6,911 | 6,325 | 4,945 | 185 | | | | | 19,831 |
| 250SL | | | | 17 | 5,177 | 2 | | | | 5,196 |
| 280SL | | | | | 143 | 6,930 | 8,047 | 7,935 | 830 | 23,885 |
| Production | | | | | | | | | | 48,912 |



| R107 SL | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|------|---------|
| Year | 1970 | 1971 | 1972 | 1973 | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 | 1981 | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 | Total |
| 280SL | | | | | 297 | 1,020 | 1,099 | 1,347 | 1,536 | 2,155 | 2,429 | 2,628 | 3,165 | 3,393 | 3,529 | 2,838 | | | | | 25,436 |
| 350SL | 3 | 4,802 | 4,778 | 1,647 | 574 | 390 | 540 | 650 | 743 | 934 | 243 | | | | | | | | | | 15,304 |
| 450SL | | 2,131 | 7,473 | 8,654 | 6,093 | 6,011 | 6,625 | 8,110 | 7,434 | 8,184 | 5,583 | | | | | | | | | | 66,298 |
| 380SL | | | | | | | | | | | 3,347 | 9,470 | 9,926 | 11,198 | 11,115 | 8,144 | | | | | 53,200 |
| 500SL | | | | | | | | | | | 501 | 899 | 1,297 | 1,563 | 1,793 | 2,719 | 1,192 | 768 | 739 | 341 | 11,812 |
| 300SL | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1,356 | 4,331 | 3,261 | 2,746 | 2,048 | | 13,742 |
| 420SL | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 215 | 1,003 | 479 | 325 | 126 | | 2,148 |
| 560SL | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 3,907 | 13,788 | 14,770 | 11,531 | 5,351 | | 49,347 |
| Production | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 237,287 |



| R129 SL | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| Year | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | Total |
| 300SL | 27 | 407 | 2,236 | 3,115 | 4,543 | 1,692 | | | | | | | | | 12,020 |
| SL280 | | | | | 3 | 1,927 | 2,961 | 2,178 | 1,556 | 1,316 | 378 | | | | 10,319 |
| SL280 V6 | | | | | | | | | | 3 | 594 | 647 | 302 | 158 | 1,704 |
| 300SL-24 | 28 | 1,507 | 7,902 | 7,833 | 7,417 | 2,297 | | | | | | | | | 26,984 |
| SL320 | | | | 3 | 4,688 | 6,795 | 7,497 | 6,872 | 4,832 | 1,536 | | | | | 32,223 |
| SL320 (M112) | | | | | | | | | 3 | 2,317 | 2,297 | 1,657 | 796 | | 7,070 |
| 500SL | 31 | 3,413 | 10,649 | 15,053 | 9,483 | | | | | | | | | | 38,629 |
| 500SL/SL500 | | | | | 2,682 | 6,090 | 6,172 | 7,538 | 6,097 | 8,118 | 4,501 | | | | 41,198 |
| SL500 (M113) | | | | | | | | | | 2 | 5,619 | 8,864 | 5,755 | 3,464 | 23,704 |
| 600SL/SL600 | | | | 3 | 2,107 | 2,066 | 1,526 | 1,112 | 1,249 | 1,164 | 821 | 557 | 286 | 198 | 11,089 |
| Production | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 204,940 |



| R230 SL | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| Year | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | Total |
| SL280/SL300 | | | | | | | | 29 | 574 | 421 | 435 | 455 | 1,914 |
| SL350 | 7 | 18 | 1,542 | 9,002 | 6,988 | 3,669 | 317 | | | | | | 21,543 |
| SL350 | | | | | | 42 | 3,088 | 2,668 | 338 | | | | 6,136 |
| SL350 | | | | | | | | 54 | 3,047 | 1,820 | 1,065 | 712 | 6,698 |
| SL500 | 51 | 8,036 | 24,035 | 17,059 | 12,893 | 10,210 | 494 | | | | | | 72,778 |
| SL500/SL550 | | | | | | 62 | 8,439 | 5,571 | 7,783 | 1,156 | 2,604 | 1,163 | 26,778 |
| SL600 | | | 30 | 1,453 | 1,106 | 493 | 4 | | | | | | 3,086 |
| SL600 | | | | | | 29 | 379 | 223 | 216 | 50 | 25 | 8 | 930 |
| SL55 AMG | | 54 | 6,350 | 6,684 | 3,921 | 1,972 | 41 | | | | | | 19,022 |
| SL55 AMG | | | | | | 23 | 1,575 | 948 | 7 | | | | 2,553 |
| SL63 AMG | | | | | | | | 51 | 3,044 | 807 | 680 | 358 | 4,940 |
| SL65 AMG | | | | | 860 | 857 | 263 | 273 | 392 | 355 | 55 | | 3,055 |
| Production | | | | | | | | | | | | | 169,433 |



Data from the book Mercedes-Benz SL: Faszination seit sechs Jahrzehnten

Nothing to Hide

Since 1984

Hjeltness
RESTORATION

+1 760.746.9966

630 Alpine Way
Escondido, California USA
info@hjeltnessrestoration.com

