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# MERCEDES

ENTHUSIAST



Issue 154  
August 2014

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

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**Tel** 020 7429 4000

**Repro** Design & Printing Solutions Ltd, The Studio, 11 Millstream Green, Willesborough, Ashford, Kent, TN24 0SU.

**Printing** Garnett Dickinson Print Ltd, Brookfields Way, Manvers, Wath-upon-Deane, Rotherham, South Yorks, S63 5DL.

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Registered in England no. 4134490.

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What struck me was how far interior design has come since the SLK32 AMG hit the road in 2001

**T**HE UK LAUNCH EVENT FOR THE W205 C-CLASS (READ OUR FULL ROADTEST from page 36) provided an opportunity to see how Mercedes' compact executive saloon has evolved through the ages, with each of the five generations positioned side by side. The jump from the original and incredibly handsome W201 190 to the W202 C-Class was a measured one, the latter car gently honed with softer edges and a wider, slightly more imposing road stance. The W203 was surprisingly anonymous in this company, with a diminutive grille and peanut shaped headlamps that cried revolution rather than evolution, but they were abandoned when the W204 came to town, a sharp eyed, big grilled four-door that looked far more comfortable in its own skin. The W205 is the biggest and plushiest C-Class yet, and looking back at the W201, it's amazing to see how far the saloon has come in the last 32 years, not just in terms of exterior design, but inside the car too. What the C-Class could look like in another 30 years boggles the mind.

This month's AMG SLK feature, starting on page 42, provides another example of rapid model evolution, particularly in the cabin department. There to lend a hand on the day of the photoshoot, what struck me more than anything else was how far interior design has come since the SLK32 AMG hit the road in 2001 - the latest SLK55 shares much with its SL



big brother, including its gorgeously detailed cabin. Mercedes' design boss Gordon Wagener recently won an award for the company's latest interior creations, and rightly so. Mercedes-Benz has pushed technological boundaries since the dawn of the motorcar, and its renewed emphasis on exterior and interior design is clear to see.

Kyle Molyneux  
Editor

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



## Guy Baker

"The R170 SLK32 AMG has always held a special place in my heart," says Guy Baker. "But with such fond memories still fresh in my mind, the opportunity to pit it

against the very latest, high tech R172 SLK55 AMG filled me with some trepidation - would the gloss be forever knocked off the SLK32? After all, 13 years is a long time in terms of automotive design, and its successor has two extra cylinders under its bulging bonnet." But Guy needn't have worried, as you'll soon discover from page 42.



## David Sutherland

You expect a 10-year old car to feel somewhere between well preserved and downright leggy. But when David Sutherland arrived at a

prestige used car dealer in Essex to try a 2004 S500 L (see page 72), he found something that could almost have been built yesterday. "It had done under 6,000 miles, and I couldn't find a mark on it inside or out, and even the steering wheel leather had not yet turned shiny," he says. "It was virtually a new car at a very used price."



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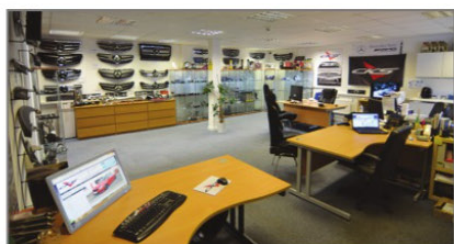
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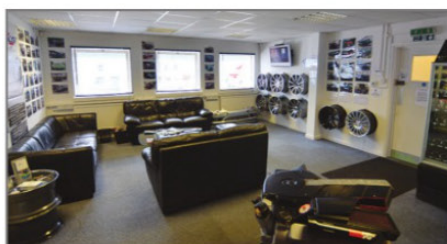
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The latest Mercedes launches, news and motorsport

# NEWS

**“Mercedes-Benz’s new 9G-Tronic automatic gearbox is used in the 254bhp CLS350 Bluetec”**

## NEW CLS-CLASS

Mercedes-Benz gives its stylish four-door a significant overhaul – and you can order yours very soon



New lights, new bumpers and new tech for the CLS, which also gets new helm designs and an eight-inch dash screen.



**T**AKE YOUR FIRST LOOK AT the facelifted CLS coupe and shooting brake, available to order from this month (July) before deliveries begin in September.

In true Mercedes fashion, the upgrade is extensive and introduces new technology. The facelift brings a new, diamond pattern grille, a new front bumper with larger intakes, a revised rear bumper and darkened tail light lenses.

The biggest changes inside include an eight-inch display on the beautifully trimmed dashboard, plus a restyled, three-spoke steering wheel and subtly tweaked switchgear on the centre console.

Trick new headlamps with Multibeam LEDs make their debut and are standard in the UK, providing unparalleled illumination of the road ahead and automatically adapting to almost any traffic situation to avoid dazzling other road users.

Also new to the CLS is Mercedes’ nine-speed 9G-Tronic automatic gearbox, which is

used in the 254bhp CLS350 Bluetec V6 diesel, priced from £49,950 in coupe form, and £51,400 as a shooting brake. The new entry level model is the 175bhp CLS220 Bluetec, available from £46,500 in coupe form, and £48,080 as a shooting brake. This four-cylinder model hits 56.5mpg on the combined cycle, with CO2 emissions as low as 129g/km for the coupe, and 132g/km for the shooting brake.

Another new addition to the range is the 328bhp CLS400, which has a three-litre V6 biturbo petrol engine, this model only available as a coupe and starting at £55,850. Both the CLS400 and CLS220 Bluetec use the tried and tested 7G-Tronic Plus automatic, while the CLS63 AMG S model employs an AMG MCT seven-speed transmission, the 577bhp V8 biturbo yours for £86,500 in coupe form, and £87,000 as a shooting brake.

In the UK, AMG Line is the standard spec, bringing Comand Online, heated front seats and an interior ambient lighting system, saving buyers £5,695 over the old CLS. The CLS63’s equipment level is even more impressive – an electric sunroof, Keyless-Go, a Harmon Kardon sound system, a reversing camera and powered tailgate all included.



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# MB CONCOURS AT MBUK

On Saturday June 21, Mercedes of all ages and types descended on the UK headquarters of Mercedes-Benz in Milton Keynes to battle for class and overall honours at the Mercedes-Benz Club's National Concours event.

With 110 cars competing across the three main classes (Enthusiast, Concours d'Elegance and Master), the standards were very high.

With a requirement that all cars be driven to the event, rather than transported, it was even more remarkable that the



The R107's popularity was clear to see at the Milton Keynes event.



△ David Briggs with his award winning R107 SL.

best in show award went to the sublime, R107 420SL of David Briggs (pictured left), who had travelled over 200 miles from Darlington to compete in the event for the fourth time. "It feels brilliant to win," he told *Mercedes Enthusiast*.

## NEW LOOK FOR E55 AMG

Already a very rare Mercedes-Benz, Bulgarian design studio Vilner has given this 210-series E55 AMG 4Matic an exclusive new appearance.

The 2001 saloon's interior has gained high quality leather in various shades of brown, plus complementing Alcantara trim. The car's V8 engine is recalled in the V-pattern of the seat upholstery, while

the original wood veneer has made way for carbon fibre finished in an unusual pale brown.

The remaining plastic parts of the cabin have also received a brown finish, and the boot area has not gone untouched either, topping off an interior Vilner likens to a "library where gentlemen have a cigar and after-dinner drink". Very nice!



## C-CLASS ESTATE UK PRICES

UK prices have been announced for the new C-Class estate, which arrives in September.

Kicking

off the range is the C200 petrol, producing 181bhp and hitting 51.4mpg (NEDC combined). Priced at £28,055 (a £1,200 premium over

the saloon), the C200 is available with a six-speed manual or seven-speed automatic. As is the 168bhp C220 Bluetec diesel, which starts from £30,565 and achieves 65.7mpg. The 201bhp, auto only C250 Bluetec hits 62.8mpg and is priced from £33,220. Note that this latter model is only offered with the seven-speed 7G-Tronic Plus automatic.

Two more four-cylinder models – a C200 Bluetec diesel and the C300 Bluetec Hybrid – will join the present range later in the year.



# NEWS IN BRIEF



### △ LOW MILE 560SEC

A 14,000-mile 560SEC is expected to achieve between £17,000 to £22,000 when it goes under the hammer at Silverstone Auctions' Classic Sale on July 26. We have driven the car, so make sure you come back next month!

### ■ NEW G-WAGEN?

Rumours are rife that a new, lighter G-Wagen could appear in 2016, bringing a raft of improvements to one of the oldest formulas in Mercedes' book. The new model could inspire smaller derivatives with a similar off-road theme.

### ■ TUSCALOOSA

Mercedes' Tuscaloosa factory in North America has started production of the W205 C-Class saloon, which is being built alongside the M-, R- and GL-Class. Mercedes-Benz's factory in Beijing, China will also start work on the new C-Class soon, meaning it is the first three-pointed star to be built on four continents.



### △ VOLTAGE COUPE

Voltage Design, based in Goldbach, Germany, has offered its take on the new S63 AMG Coupe, adding various carbon components including a new front spoiler, air inlets on the bonnet, side skirts and rear diffuser, plus a new grille. A 22-inch Vossen wheel sits at each corner, and the V8's power is up to 789bhp and torque to 848lb ft.

### ▽ WAGENER WINS

Mercedes-Benz's Head of Design, Gorden Wagener, won the best interior designer award at June's Automotive Interiors Expo. Wagener has held his position since 2008 and is responsible for cars such as the new S-Class and C-Class, and GLA.



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# MOTORSPORT NEWS

The SLS AMG GT3 survives 24 hours of the Nürburgring, and Mercedes scores wins in F1 and the DTM

## SLS AMG GT3



The Nürburgring hosted the ADAC 24-hour race in mid June, and Mercedes' SLS AMG GT3 was right in the thick of the action. No less than four teams brought six Mercedes racers, and three made the finish - two of them on the podium. Top honours went to the number 1 Black Falcon car, driven by Jeroen Bleekemolen, Andreas Simonsen, Christian Menzel and Lance David Arnold, who crossed the line in second place.

Meanwhile, HTP Motorsport SLSs came second and third at Paul Ricard in the Blancpain Endurance Series.

## DTM



This season has been tough for Mercedes-AMG in the DTM, but its teams and drivers keep pulling results out the bag. Canadian Robert Wickens (pictured above) dominated qualifying at the Norisring and went on to claim an impressive victory in mixed conditions. The win is Mercedes-Benz's 12th consecutive victory at the fast and punishing German street circuit.

## V8 SUPERCARS



Lee Holdsworth of Erebus Motorsport V8 flew the flag for Mercedes-Benz in June's SkyCity Triple Crown Darwin event. The Aussie finished 10th in race one and 12th in race three, making him the top driver of an E63 AMG. However, Holdsworth retired from race two.

Adam Morgan and the Wix Racing A-Class managed a best of 17th in early June's Oulton Park event. And it looked like another hard weekend at Croft, when the A-Class retired in race one. But a season best fifth followed in race three.

## BTCC



## FORMULA 1



Mercedes' Nico Rosberg continues to assert his authority in the team and at the top of the drivers' standings, with commanding wins in Canada and Austria. But the German did not have things all his own way at the latter GP, Williams-Mercedes' Felipe Massa taking pole, and team mate Valtteri Bottas third in the race.

KEITH STENHOUSE

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Replacing AMG's naturally aspirated M156 V8, the pressure is on the new M178 V8 biturbo

# NEW AMG V8

AMG allowed *Mercedes Enthusiast* behind the scenes to discuss its new four-litre V8 biturbo, set to launch in the upcoming GT sports car

WORDS KYLE FORTUNE IMAGES DAIMLER AG

**S**OUND. IT'S IMPORTANT TO AMG. IMPORTANT enough that at the start of a technical briefing on the company's new four-litre biturbo V8 – engine code M178 – we were treated to an aural experience of some AMG highlights. Naturally, there was the 300SEL 6.8, the 1980s Hammer, as well as the SL55, CLK Black Series, SLS and finally – and thankfully not outshone by its predecessors – the new V8.

That's significant, as the new engine is turbocharged, and that creates a whole different series of issues for engineers when it comes to producing the right sound. Others – notably BMW's M division – have resorted to pumping noise through the car's speakers, but Christian Enderle, Director of Engine & Powertrain Development at Mercedes-AMG, is dismissive of that, saying customers want an authentic sound.

It's not lost on me that the new engine's note is played through speakers in the briefing, but a trip to the dyno later confirms that a glowing hot V8 running up to maximum revs with turbos isn't short of aural appeal. Or power, it seems. The numbers are out and the new four-litre biturbo unit achieves 503bhp at 6,250rpm and 479lb ft of torque from 1,750rpm to 4,750rpm. And that's just the start given AMG's usual form, that performance likely to rise incrementally as the engine is dropped into new models in the range.

**A trip to the dyno room confirms that the glowing hot V8 biturbo isn't short of aural appeal**





**NEW  
TECH**

## JUST THE FACTS

### **M178 AMG V8 biturbo**

**POWER** 503bhp@6,250rpm

**TORQUE** 479lb ft@1,750-4,750rpm

**DISPLACEMENT** 3,982cc

**CYLINDER ANGLE** 90 degrees

**VALVES PER CYLINDER** 4

**BORE X STROKE** 83x92mm

**COMPRESSION RATIO** 10.5:1

**MAXIMUM ENGINE SPEED** 7,200rpm

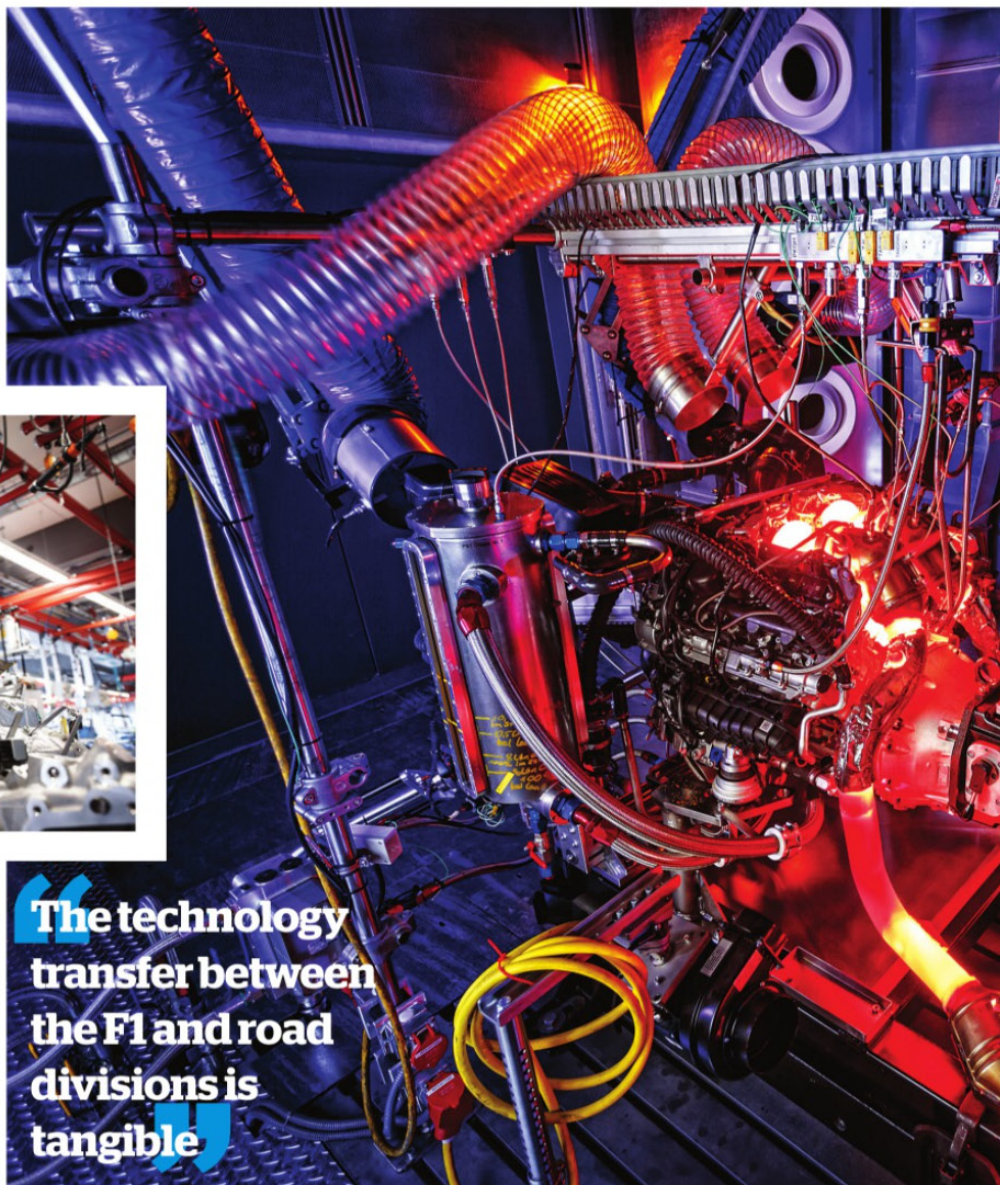
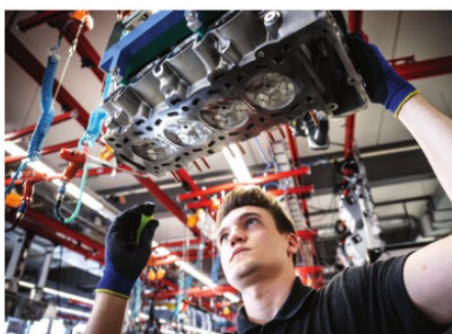
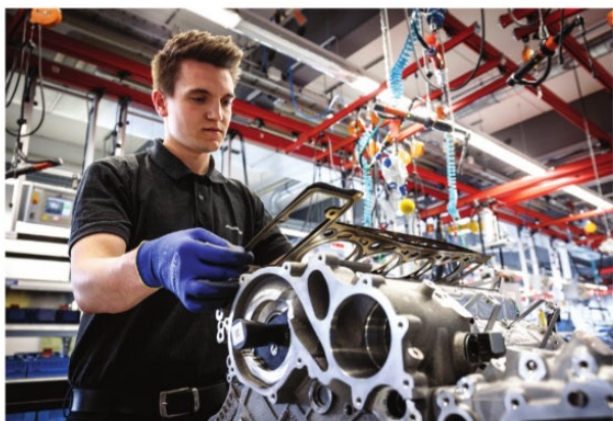
**MAXIMUM BOOST PRESSURE** 1.2bar

**ENGINE WEIGHT (DRY)** 209kg

**EMISSIONS STANDARD** EU6



Christian Enderle (left) talks our man through the intricacies of the new M178 V8, production of which is already underway at AMG's facility in Affalterbach.



**The technology transfer between the F1 and road divisions is tangible**

▷ The most significant car it will power in the near term is the Mercedes-AMG GT, the SLS replacing, Porsche 911 fighter bringing more than enough firepower to ensure it'll give the dominant class leader something to think about. This briefing is all about the engine though, and the chaps at AMG are justifiably proud of what they have achieved.

### A NEW DAWN

Given the firm's relatively staunch view on natural aspiration – the rev hungry and responsive, 6.2-litre M156 V8 was AMG's first in house developed engine – a four-litre biturbo is something of a radical departure. Blame the bureaucrats and their ever tightening regulations on emissions and economy. This, as much as anything else, is driving the downsizing trend, and when companies like AMG and even Ferrari are doing it, then you know it's necessary. Smaller engines don't necessarily mean less performance though, a combination of turbocharging and cutting edge engineering meaning power is as good, if not better than before.



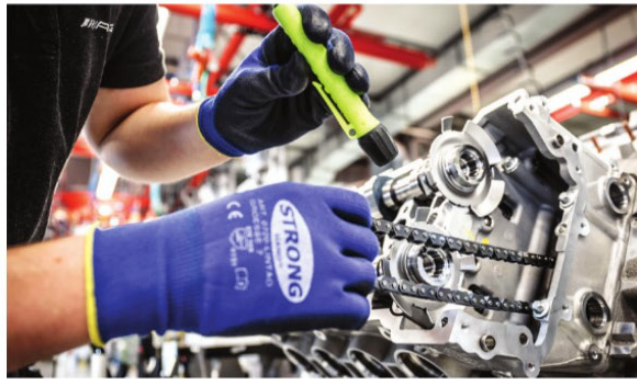
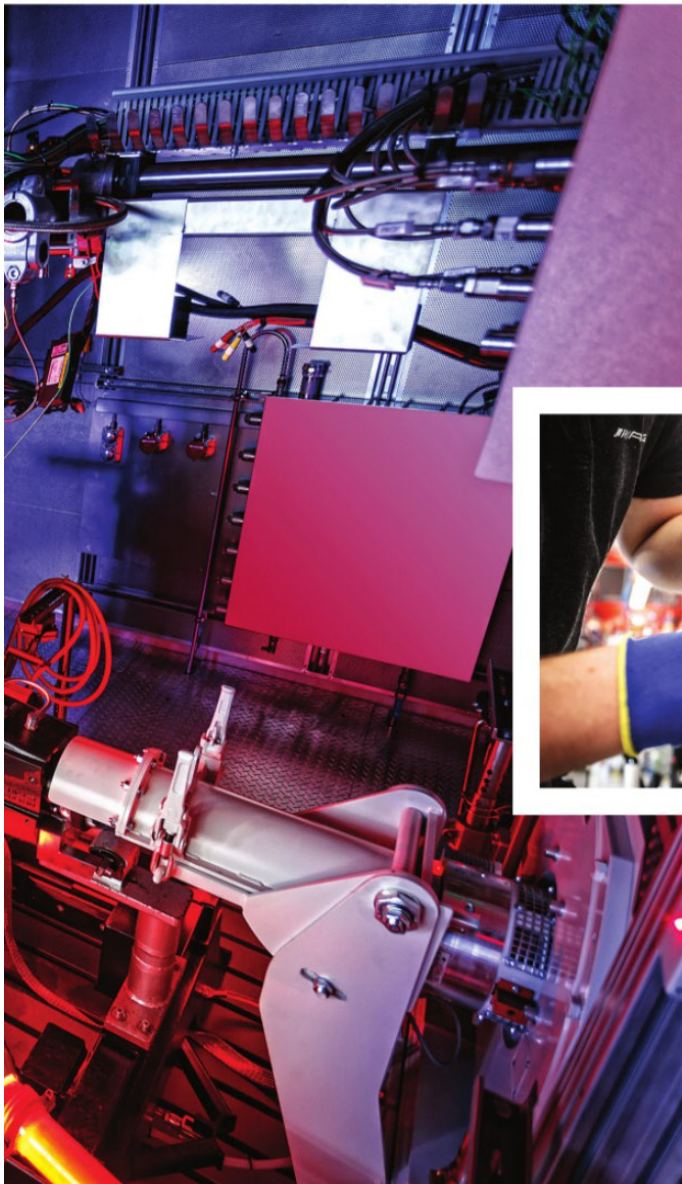
△ Somewhere in there, AMG's new baby is getting tested.



△ Nanoslide tech and zirconium lurk within the M178 V8.

Emissions and economy figures have yet to be officially announced, but Enderle says we'll be "astonished" at what they've managed. To achieve the seemingly conflicting goals of performance and economy has been a challenge, admits Enderle, but one that's been relished by his engineers. Helping are a number of technologies unique to AMG and Mercedes-Benz, Enderle saying that the piezo injectors, developed with Bosch, are unique to the firm, allowing as many as seven squirts of fuel during the combustion cycle to maximise mechanical energy from every molecule of fuel.

Friction is the enemy of economy and response, so AMG's engineers have developed a new cylinder coating that's mirror smooth yet has tiny pores to hold oil. The Nanoslide coating, already used in AMG's M133 four-cylinder motor, provides not just reduced internal friction, but is significantly lighter than more traditional steel liners thanks to its far thinner application, and has the added advantage of allowing the water jacket to be nearer the pistons for improved cooling. It's cheaper to produce too, though Enderle admits



The new four-litre V8 sticks to AMG's 'One man, one engine' philosophy, reinforcing that personal touch lost on more mainstream powerplants built on a much larger scale.



that the closed back, dry sumped sand cast blocks themselves are a touch more expensive to make, but the strength benefits outweigh any cost implications.

Necessary too, as the engine runs at 130bar, and with the turbos nestling in the V8 in a so-called 'hot V' formation (improving response and packaging), the engine runs at very high temperatures. Enderle admits that heat causes all sorts of issues, though a clever solution has been developed that sees the engine cover work as a ram air type cooler, giving what Enderle describes as a 'cold air shower' effect over the top of the engine.

That heat, combined with the immense pressures, means the cylinder head is under immense strain. To prevent cracking, AMG uses an alloy with "zirconium refinement", which gives increased strength, AMG seen as Mercedes' pilot partner on cutting edge technologies.

Indeed, if such developments work under the high demands of AMG and its customers,

the trickle-down effect for series production Mercedes-Benz models is hugely beneficial. So too is Mercedes-AMG's involvement in Formula 1, Enderle admitting that he has



regular conversations with his colleague, Managing Director of AMG High Performance Powertrains, Andy Cowell, the technology transfer between the road and F1 divisions tangible. That's also true of the F1 team's partnership with Petronas, the oil firm's products now used in the four-cylinder AMG engines, tests with its lubricants in the new M178 seeing significant benefits over rival brands – the new V8 engine complying with both EU6 emissions standards, as well as regulations on particulate emissions that do not come into force until 2016.

## FROM TRACK TO ROAD

Amazing stuff, but for the people at AMG it all comes back to that sound. Of course the numbers matter, but the emotional appeal is something that's key to the M178's development. When the engineer opens the door to the dyno room and the glowing V8 performs a thunderous simulation run around the Spanish Idiada test track, it's abundantly clear those goals have been achieved.



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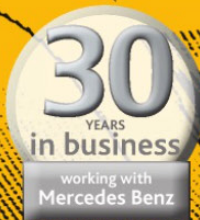
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**BRAYBROOKS**  
IN-CAR ENHANCEMENTS

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

# KEEP AN OPEN MIND



There are many common held beliefs about car dealerships, but not all of them are true, says **David Sutherland**, with recent experience to prove it

**W**hen you go shopping for a car, you will pay more for it at a franchised dealer than you would at an independent dealer.

During recent visits to both, I was given the perfect demonstration of why this is thought to be a fact of life in the used car market.

Considering the purchase of a W164 Mercedes-Benz ML320 CDI – it's for my SUV loving wife, honest – I did my research to narrow down the model/age choice, and searched the web to see where it might be found. Still undecided whether to break the bank and buy something fairly new, or go for something older and a lot less expensive, my first visit was to an official Mercedes-Benz dealership, one of the big ones with cars almost as far as the eye can see.

**I rang at short notice and was offered a test drive the same day**, even though it was only an hour until closing time. Arriving at the dealership, I did not find myself rugby tackled by staff, nor was I ignored. The sales lady had a pleasant demeanour: friendly, but while obviously keen to make a sale, not too pushy. My own Mercedes was quickly and realistically valued as a trade in.

Finance figures were produced and discussed, again in a non pressurised way, at which point I had to admit to myself (but not to her) that this two-year old vehicle, at well over £30,000, would require larger monthly payments than I would be comfortable with. I left with a handshake and a "let me mull it over", but it was a good experience and I drove off wishing I could have bought the car.

A day later, I saw a cheaper and older ML on a used car website and called about it, to be told it wasn't there yet, but "leave us your number and we'll get back to you". No one did, but eventually I got to see the ML, described as having a full service history. This turned out to be a sole bill stapled to the logbook, which was not such a surprise, but what happened next was quite ridiculous. When I asked where the service book was, I was told, "Oh, they don't have those any more". I mentioned that my present Mercedes, a year younger than this one, did have the said item, but it was wasted breath – I was already heading for the door.

These are of course two extremes. I have been to Mercedes dealers where the level of service wasn't quite as good as on this occasion, and the south-of-the river jokers certainly do not represent the standards of independent dealers, many of which offer a high level of customer care. But it did make me consider the differences between the two, and one conclusion I reached is that the opening statement of this column – that dealers charge more for used cars than independents do – might not be true in some, or even many cases.

Let's take something mid priced and rather desirable, a four- or five-year old example of the current shape E-Class coupe, in E250 CDI BlueEfficiency Sport form, which seems a popular version. The cheapest such car I could find on the Approved Used Mercedes-Benz website was a 2009/59 plate, 52,000-mile car stickered at just under £17,500, but with a '£1,000 discount' flash against it.

**Arriving at the dealership, I did not find myself rugby tackled by staff, nor was I ignored**

**I assumed it would be easy to find a comparable car significantly cheaper at an independent**, but struggled to find much. Sure, there were plenty lower priced

ones, but they had significantly higher mileages. Again, this one back-of-an-envelope exercise provides only snapshot of the market, but I think it does highlight that when you are looking for a used car, you stand to get the best deal – and best car – if you keep your options open regarding the type of place selling it. But always ask to see the service book...

In the end, my business went to neither a franchised nor independent dealer. As I alluded to at the end of last month's Merc Man, I bought from an auction, for the first time in my life. But that's a yarn for another time.



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

# THE LONG HELLO



The prolonged launch of Mercedes-AMG's new sports car gives our mystery insider time to reflect on its chances against its biggest rival from Stuttgart

**S**o the Mercedes-AMG GT is nearly upon us. It's been impossible to miss its impending arrival, the internet, magazines and newspapers drip fed tantalising glimpses of the car's shape – a shadowy profile here, a proper interior shot there. We've even heard it, AMG releasing sound file videos revealing the bellow of the menacing four-litre biturbo V8 engine – which you can read about from page 12.

Mercedes-Benz isn't alone in doing this, the teasing of a car's launch now something of an art form, building the excitement for potential buyers and dreamers alike over an extended period of time. Some, myself included, might argue it ruins the magic a bit – the days of a surprise new car being revealed for the first time at a motor show are truly over.

We already know the GT's power output, have a good idea of what the exterior looks like and know exactly what the interior will look like – assuming you specify those bright red leather seats.

**If AMG's Porsche 911 rival is to live up to that lofty ambition, then the launch will never really end**


**Before the passenger rides and roadtests,** there'll be the big reveal, the moment when it's all officially unveiled. The so called 'static' reveals are the most frustrating part of the entire build up, serving as the final flourish before we get behind the wheel.

Will it be good? I've little reason to doubt that, but if AMG's proposed Porsche 911 rival is to live up to that lofty ambition, then the launch will never really end. It's not surprising that the 911 is seen as the GT's biggest rival, the ubiquitous sports car having been around for

over 50 years, meaning the AMG has a bit of catching up to do. And looking at the plethora of 911 models on sale today, AMG has a busy few years ahead of it.

Two regular series engines with different outputs, rear- or four-wheel drive, automatic or manual, the Turbo flagship model, the even more focussed 911 GT3. If they're not extreme enough, there's a Turbo S, while a GT3 RS is being readied, too. The choice is so wide that Porsche even offers two different routes to opening your 911 up to the sun, either fully with a fabric folding roof with the cabriolet model, or with a clever folding hardtop on the Targa model. Throw in a couple of random specials, be it an anniversary, Martini liveried choice, plus power kit options and a host of other alternative choices and Porsche's 911 offers formidable choice.

**A rear-wheel drive coupe with a single engine and transmission is going to struggle to make a dent in that then,** the 911's omnipresence largely down to the fact that there is a car for all tastes. Should AMG try to replicate that business model? I don't think so. Is there space for the GT in the market? Of course there is – the 911's popularity arguably counting against it. It is perhaps inevitable that the Mercedes-AMG GT will be offered in roadster and go faster Black Series forms in time, but even if it's deemed a sales success for AMG, it will always be significantly rarer than its key rival from Stuttgart. And that alone will add to the GT's appeal.

It all makes me think Affalterbach should just let its new sports car sell itself, rather than fall into the trap of overdoing the build up. I want to be excited by the entire car, not just individual elements of it before launch. But one thing is certain: the new two-door coupe is going to be good. Very good. 

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

**Does this teaser picture of Mercedes-AMG's new GT excite or frustrate you?**



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

**O**K, STOP LAUGHING. I reckon the R-Class is one of the most overlooked and wrongly unloved machines to ever wear the Mercedes-Benz badge. Colleagues snigger when I mention it, writing off the big luxury machine as a failure, an experiment in upmarket mobility that didn't cut it in showrooms.

I'm a bit of a fan, though. Brought up with estate cars and lusting after things like Renault's

then new and clever Espace when seeing them as a kid on French summer holidays, the R-Class holds a great deal of appeal for me. I like that it doesn't fit into any traditional market segment. Once asked, "What is it?" I answered, "Good question", before adding that the R-Class doesn't fall into any recognised category, combining elements of SUV, MPV, estate and luxury car in one format. Add the short lived R63 AMG and you really have a niche gone nuts.



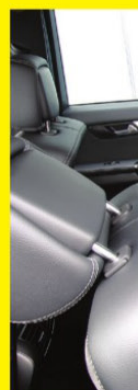
The R-Class came with two wheelbases, one measuring 2,980mm, the other 3,215mm.

## WHY I LOVE THE...

# R320 CDI 4MATIC

Most could not afford, or simply did not understand the Mercedes R-Class when it was launched - but as time rolls on and used prices continue to fall, the SUV-estate is beginning to make a whole lot more sense

WORDS KYLE FORTUNE IMAGES DAIMLER AG



### Mercedes-Benz R320 CDI LWB 4Matic (v251)

**ENGINE** OM642  
2,987cc V6  
turbocharged

**POWER**  
221bhp@3,800rpm

**TORQUE** 376lb ft  
@1,600-2,800rpm

**TRANSMISSION** 7-speed  
auto, 4WD

**WEIGHT** 2,270kg

**0-62MPH** 8.8sec

**TOP SPEED** 138mph

**FUEL CONSUMPTION** 30.4mpg

**CO2 EMISSIONS** 246g/km

**YEARS PRODUCED** 2006-2010

#### OVERVIEW

Get past the R-Class's awkward looks and average efficiency, and you will discover a luxurious, spacious and well equipped car

Figures for a pre facelift R320 CDI LWB 4Matic; fuel consumption according to NEDC combined



If you wanted 4Matic four-wheel drive outside Mercedes' SUV line up then the R-Class was your only choice. But don't expect to go traversing any ploughed fields or woodland green lanes, as the traction benefits here are strictly for on-road purposes. Me? I thought the R-Class the perfect machine to take skiing. An Alpine express that would cosset in luxury through Europe, offer four-wheel drive for snow covered resorts and, if you've optioned the

individual captain's chairs in the back, allow you to slide skis through the boot and into the cabin with ease. Niche? Without doubt, but everything about Mercedes' R-Class screamed ski car to me, and that was enough for me to really want one.

### MAKE IT A LARGE

I still do, actually, specifically an R320 CDI with its 221bhp three-litre V6 turbodiesel and seven-speed automatic. The

official figures said the R320 CDI would achieve 30.4mpg on the combined cycle, the reality likely to be high 20s at best, the R-Class a weighty thing. The V6 suits it though, and despite its rather practical pretensions the R-Class was an accomplished drive, being more agile than you'd expect for something so big. Speaking of big, if I'm specifying

**I like that the R-Class doesn't fit into traditional market segments**

my dream R, then it has to be the LWB version. It added 235mm to the wheelbase (and overall length) giving even more

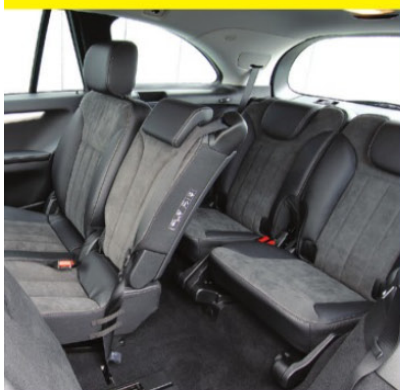
lounging space inside and taking its footprint to over five metres. Proportionally, I think the LWB model looks better, too.

Equipment levels on all models were fairly generous, including automatic climate control, the LWB not coming with any penalties in emissions or economy, and gaining parking sensors as standard. There was, of course, the opportunity to add Comand for a sizeable premium, but I wouldn't be too upset if I had to stick a TomTom on top of the ample dash for navigation duties. It all felt solidly built, the chairs in particular felt like they'd survive the apocalypse with their weighty controls and firm, but supremely comfortable stuffing.

### TIME FOR A RETHINK

For my recent pining, blame Twitter – a colleague posted an advert for an R500 (going for about £10,000) and asked if anyone would buy such a thing. It was then that I really started looking at R-Classes. I would not have a petrol model though, even if the idea of the V8 appeals. At the time of writing, there were just six advertised for sale, compared to over 80 diesels. R-Classes start at under £7,000 now, which is a ridiculously low sum for such a huge and capable, prestige machine. Indeed, looking at the classifieds again, there is one that would suit me perfectly for £3,850.

That budget would buy one of the earliest, pre facelift cars with their gawky headlights, post 2010 cars getting a more conventional set of headlights and a reprofiled grille. They are rare, most still within the dealer network and hence in the realms of unaffordable for me. But I'll be watching the prices drop as time passes and might just take the plunge sometime in the future. Perhaps when the kids are old enough to go skiing. I really cannot think of any other car better suited for the job.



△ The R-Class came as a six or seven seater.

△ A high spec and relaxed drive appeal.

▷ The short rear overhang aids parking.

▽ Usually good CDI efficiency suffers here.



▷ The 320 CDI V6 makes the most sense.

◁ LWB car has a 2,385-litre boot capacity.



Does the combination of a four-cylinder diesel engine and an electric motor beat a V6?



# THE LEANER LIMO

Capable of around 60mpg in town and on the motorway, while producing tax dodging emissions, the S300 Bluetec Hybrid could be the perfect car for chauffeurs looking to cut running costs

WORDS DAVID SUTHERLAND IMAGES DAIMLER AG

**T**HE LEVEL OF hybrid technology that Mercedes-Benz and others have developed is wondrous. We've certainly come a long way from the humble milk float, and you know, even before reading on, that Mercedes' newly launched S300 Bluetec Hybrid, with diesel-electric power, is an amazing car in its field.

But the sort of people that might actually spend the necessary £72,260 to own one, or make the equivalent monthly lease payments, are unlikely to do so just because of how clever it is. Mainly those in the high end chauffeuring business, they will want to know that it is a more cost

effective working tool than the other 222-series S-Class they will also consider, the V6 diesel powered S350 Bluetec, which in its cheapest long-wheelbase form is £6,355 less, though if equalised in spec to the sole S300 Bluetec Hybrid model offered – the L AMG Line – the difference shrinks to £1,320. So, does the hybrid make a case for itself?

## DIESEL-ELECTRIC

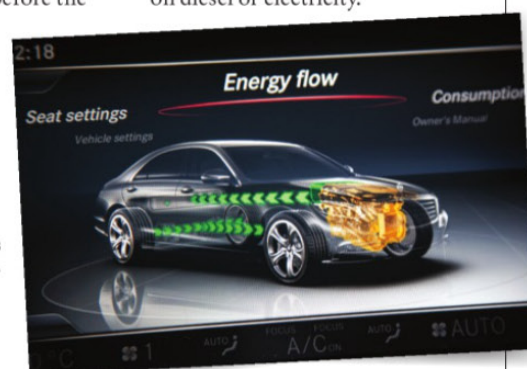
While the S350 Bluetec employs Stuttgart's staple three-litre oil burning V6, the S300 Bluetec Hybrid has the smallest engine ever seen in any of the six S-Class generations – just 2.1 litres to shift the limousine's two-tonne bulk. It's exactly the same four-cylinder

used in most other diesel Mercedes, albeit the highest output version producing 201bhp and 369lb ft torque, with the electric module placed between the diesel and the seven-speed automatic transmission adding the equivalent of 27bhp. Incidentally, UK buyers can also choose the petrol S400 Hybrid, and the recently announced S500 Plug-in Hybrid could appear before the year comes to an end, but their appeal will be stronger in the US market.

With some hybrids, you are very much aware that you

▷ The electric motor boosts power and captures energy.

are driving a car with two different forms of power, it being obvious when the electric motor is doing the work, with prominent dashboard graphics charting the zero emissions progress with pride. However, Mercedes prefers to keep the driving experience as similar as possible to other 222s, with the powertrain unobtrusive regardless of whether it's running on diesel or electricity.



## JUST THE FACTS

### Mercedes-Benz S300 Bluetec Hybrid L (V222)

ENGINE OM651 2,143cc 4-cyl biturbo

POWER 201bhp@3,800rpm + 27bhp from electric motor

TORQUE 369lb ft@1,600-1,800rpm

TRANSMISSION 7-speed auto, RWD

WEIGHT 2,035kg

0-62MPH 7.6sec

TOP SPEED 155mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 61.4mpg

CO2 EMISSIONS 120g/km

YEARS PRODUCED 2014-on

#### OVERVIEW

Its impressively engineered powertrain could see the hybrid diesel S-Class become the default model in the range

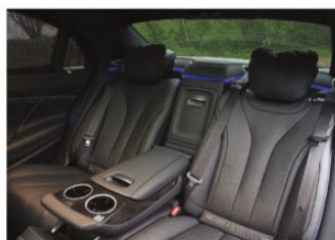
Figures for a car on 19-inch alloy wheels as pictured; fuel consumption according to NEDC combined; top speed electronically limited



△ EU6 compliant four-cylinder diesel unit.



△ The boot can hold a pleasing 510 litres.



△ Electric rear seats with massage function.



The diesel-electric S-Class makes a lot of financial sense.



This hybrid S-Class can run solely on electric power.

This impression is given even before you enter the car. Where are the bulky battery packs? Certainly not in the boot – Mercedes points out that chauffeurs, who constitute about 85 per cent of S-Class customers in the UK, would take a dim view of reduced luggage space for their clients. There's little to see under the bonnet, either, just the usual plastic shroud hiding almost everything. There are graphics giving the percentage contribution the electric motor is making, but unless the Comand Online infotainment system is running in 'Vehicle settings' mode, there is nothing to be seen except for a small green strip within the rev counter, measuring electric input.

After setting off, the first impression of the S300 Bluetec Hybrid is that it is a large Mercedes with a small engine. The sheer grunt of the S350 Bluetec's V6 – with its 457lb ft torque – is absent, hence the accelerator needs a firmer squeeze. However, after a while those familiar with the V6 would probably notice that the hybrid model delivers its power in a more linear fashion, untroubled by the slightest turbo lag felt in the other diesel car. Mercedes says the electric motor, which also recoups braking energy, is set up to fill the

**“Once their initial curiosity has been satisfied, most drivers will give the powertrain little, if any thought”**

gaps in a normal turbodiesel's performance, a justified claim.

The powertrain has various modes, including running on diesel and electric power together, or electric only, and storing up electric power for use later, but the car feels much the same in all of them, the faint hum of a distant sounding diesel evident. Indeed, once their initial curiosity has been satisfied, most drivers will give the powertrain little, if any thought, so normal does it seem.

And of course the overriding feeling is that this is a Mercedes-

Benz S-Class, with its fantastic interior quality and comfort, and nimble handling for a car so large. That said, some might prefer a non AMG Line hybrid, not just for the SE Line's lower price, but because it would run on 18- rather than this car's 19-inch wheels, which generate noticeable road noise.

#### CAPITAL GAINS

And what about the maths? The S300 Bluetec Hybrid gives 61.4mpg on the official combined test, which is 22 per cent better than the S350 Bluetec, a rough calculation suggesting a £1,000 lower fuel bill over 30,000 miles. And thanks to its 120g/km CO2 rating, it attracts zero road tax in its first year, compared to the equivalent V6 diesel model's £180, although following rule changes several years ago, its hybrid status no longer makes it exempt from London's Congestion Charge.

Mercedes-Benz also predicts that resale values of the S300 Bluetec Hybrid will be strong, which will add to its appeal in the business community. However, given that we are talking about a £72,260 limousine, we do not really feel that any of these cost factors are a clincher. But if Mercedes' marketing types get behind the hybrid S-Class, it will increasingly be seen as the way to go, and a tipping point in its take up will soon follow.

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



# LETTERS

## STAR LETTER

### COME RAIN OR SHINE

■ Am I mad, impulsive, stupid or just plain in love? She was a little past her prime, but if you looked at the body there were very few marks and dings to turn you away, and all the curves were just right. Yes she was old, with maybe slightly too many miles on the clock, but I would have her on my arm any day.

I have owned a 2007 CLK320 Coupe with 49,000 miles on the clock for three years, and have fallen for Mercedes in a big way, despite the fact I've owned Subarus for 13 years prior to the CLK. But once I felt the torque of the Mercedes V6, and sampled the C209's comfort and build quality, I was hooked on the company that brought it all together.

A Mazda MX-5 satisfied my sun seeking needs, but the comfort of the Mercedes always drew me

back. So, last week - literally by chance - I saw the advert for my new love: a silver, 2000 plate, CLK200 Cabriolet with 98,000 miles on the clock and a blue hood. After checking her out from a distance, I approached the seller. It turned out that the car was owned by the trader's wife.

For the price she was, and the trade in value of the Mazda, I think I got a good deal, and of course, I now have two Mercedes in my life - one for warm days and one for not so warm days. Despite her age, the cabriolet will cruise at 70mph with ease and, strangely, feels more comfortable than my coupe.

So back to my original question - am I mad, impulsive, stupid or just plain in love? It all comes down to the cabriolet's reliability, I suppose. But I've a feeling it will be a nice, easy relationship.

**Gordon McConnell, via email**



## OFF-ROADER

■ I own a 2006 ML500 and I'm trying to find a set of aggressive treaded tyres and wheels for the winter, as I live in Montana, USA. Is there any way to find wheels and tyres like this to fit my Mercedes-Benz SUV, and do any of your readers have pictures of their ML with this look?

**Chuck Wall, USA**

*Can you point Chuck in the right direction? If so, please email us at [info@mercedesenthusiast.co.uk](mailto:info@mercedesenthusiast.co.uk).*



Chuck Wall wants extreme off-road tyres for his ML.

## S-CLASS COUPE

■ So, a visit to the recent Goodwood Festival of Speed to answer a few important questions. Yes, the event is arguably the best organised and most satisfying motor show experience in Britain. And, most importantly, the organisers resist the temptation to oversell the tickets, which means plenty of breathing space for all.

The Mercedes-AMG pavilion was, of course, a joy. My focus was on the new AMG S-Class coupe.

Or, in old currency, the new CL. It did not disappoint. With the C215 model in mind, I once posed the question, "How can you improve perfection?" The succeeding C216 looked more brutish and performed beautifully, and the latest incarnation, the S-Class coupe, appears even more masculine. It is a high class muscle car. The front end is vertical with F1 style vents. The middle section has a high waist line with reduced glass height, and the rear end appears chopped with a diminished overhang. And yet the interior is sumptuous and enveloping, with clever lines and an intuitive instrument layout. Truly, this is a car to blow your pension on.

Returning home, I made straight for my old A180 CDI to redefine the ergonomics of the motor car. It was sublime. I slipped in effortlessly and eased out joyfully (a well trodden path, I suspect). That old, now defunct A-Class is still King of the Road.

Are you listening Mr Sutherland? Hold on to yours, please.

**Peter Page, via email**

*You can read about the 2014 Goodwood Festival of Speed in the next issue of Mercedes Enthusiast.*

## FACELIFT

■ With regards to the July 2014 issue's My Merc featuring the 124/210 hybrid, the front end conversion could have been done by Belgian company VH Global Trading (see [www.vhtuning.be](http://www.vhtuning.be)). It offers these conversions for almost every Mercedes to make the cars look younger. I personally don't like the 124 coupe's updated look, as I prefer the original face.

**Steven Vandamme, via email**



△ This 124 coupe has a 210-series front end.

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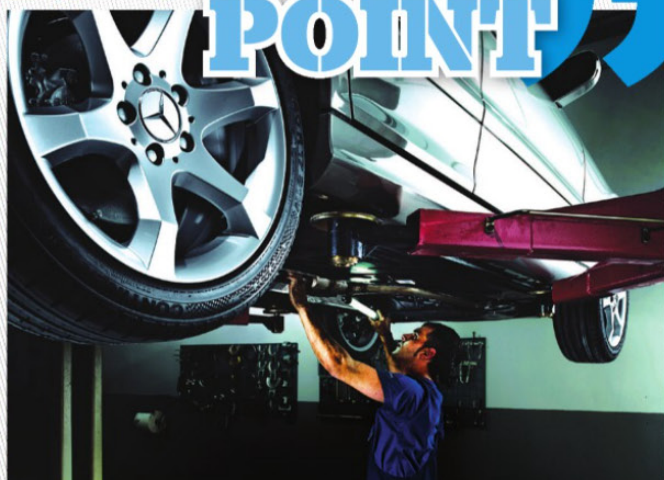
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**f** "I don't like modified cars but this is an exception." **Gabe Auch**  
- Vilner's rare W210 E55 AMG 4Matic boasts an incredible bespoke interior - see it for yourself on page 9.

**f** "It would make a nice ornament on my driveway!" **Jason MM**  
- A new SLS AMG suffered terminal water damage after it fell into the sea during transit to Argentina.

# TALKING POINT



## This month's Talking Point...

**Independent specialist or main dealer - which do you use for maintenance work?**

"If it's my daily driver, I use a dealer. There is usually a quick turnaround and I get a loan car." **Matt John**

"My car qualifies for the dealer's 7+ Value Service, which costs barely any more than what a specialist charges." **Carlos El Chacal**

"If the car is still under warranty, I go to a main dealer, otherwise it's off to the local Mercedes-Benz specialist." **Ron Yu**

"If the car is a youngtimer, I'd use an independent." **Azmi Afyouni**

"I do almost everything myself. Even the most qualified mechanic will not put in as much heart and passion as I do." **Maciej Fialkowski**

Take part in **Talking Point** every month on Facebook and Twitter. See the bottom of page 26 for our respective websites!

# MERCSPOTTER



"During our recent cruise from Hong Kong to Anchorage, we visited the remote Russian city of Petropavlovsk in the Bering Sea," reports Michael Freund. "We were pleasantly surprised to spot this 126-series S-Class in excellent condition, parked at the dockside. The owner was the captain of a local trawler, away fishing at the time."

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

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COVER  
STORY

# One for good

“  
WITH THE  
PASSING OF THE  
DECADES, CARS’  
IDIOSYNCRASIES  
TAKE ON NEW  
CHARACTER  
”



WITH A HISTORY  
OF CAREFUL  
OWNERSHIP,  
INCLUDING A  
COMPREHENSIVE  
BODYWORK  
RESTORATION, THIS  
123-SERIES 280CE IS  
A LARGER THAN  
LIFE EXAMPLE OF  
ITS VENERABLE  
BREED

WORDS **DAVID SUTHERLAND**  
IMAGES **CRAIG PUSEY**



## JUST THE FACTS

### Mercedes-Benz 280CE (C123)

ENGINE M110 2,746cc 6-cyl POWER 182bhp@5,800rpm TORQUE 177lb ft@4,500rpm

TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD WEIGHT 1,460kg 0-62MPH 10.8sec

TOP SPEED 121mph FUEL CONSUMPTION 19.1mpg YEARS PRODUCED 1977-1985

*Figures for a 1981 car as pictured; fuel consumption according to EEC urban*

### OVERVIEW

The six-cylinder version of the 123-series coupe combines elegant looks with relaxed performance, making it an excellent modern classic

ISTORICALLY, THE GERMANS HAVE A LOT TO ANSWER FOR WHEN IT COMES TO THEIR COLOUR PREFERENCES DURING THE 1970s. THAT MAY HAVE BEEN THE DECADE THAT FASHION FORGETS, BUT THOSE OF US AROUND AT THE TIME REMEMBER ALL TOO CLEARLY THE CHALLENGING SHADES THAT GERMAN CAR MAKERS IMPOSED ON THEIR OWN ROADS AND OURS TOO, BASED MAINLY AROUND ORANGES, BROWNS AND GREENS.

Things have changed though, to the extent that most Mercedes now seem to be black or silver, with a few whites to

break the monotony. Thus, whenever I set eyes on a vibrantly hued survivor from those years, I am instantly transposed to the decade that made up my formative years, when my limited and meagrely financed wardrobe tended to mirror the garish preferences of the car makers. Wherever you went, brown was king then.

By the end of the 1970s, Mercedes-Benz and its compatriot manufacturers were clearly tiring of these tones, perhaps taking into consideration that they looked very drab when the paint lost its sheen – as it did much more quickly in those days – and even shabbier once rust appeared, which also happened far sooner then than now. Reds and blues became more common in the 1980s, as did Mercedes' now classic sliver and Champagne metallics.

But with the passing of the decades, cars' idiosyncrasies take on new character, and this 280CE (resprayed two years ago), among the stock at 4 Star Classics near Guilford in Surrey, stirred up powerful memories. Actually, the colour is perhaps too bright – indeed it is almost luminous – for the Agave Green (880) the car is described to be in, but what's wrong with a little self expression? Setting aside the issue of originality, it has far more zing than the underwhelming original green, and it manages to sharpen the elegant but understated lines of the 123-series coupe.

Delivered in summer 1981 to Mercedes-Benz dealer Hughes of Beaconsfield in Buckinghamshire, this 280CE came midway through the model's life cycle. It had run alongside the 280C until that model was discontinued the previous year, the 'E' denoting Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection instead of carburation for the same 2.8-litre engine – with its characteristically huge rocker covers

“FOR 33 YEARS  
AGO, THIS 280CE'S  
EQUIPMENT  
LEVEL WAS  
LUXURIOUS”



housing the twin overhead cams – which increased power and torque by 14 and 5 per cent to 175bhp and 173lb ft. However, Mercedes ramped up the 280CE's engine compression ratio for April 1978 production onwards, this change achieving 182bhp and 177lb ft torque. Positioned below the 280CE was the 2.3-litre four-cylinder 230CE, which had replaced the 230C in 1980.

### THE FRUITS OF LABOUR

For 33 years ago, this 280CE's equipment level was luxurious. The expensive, optional air conditioning was specified, as were light alloy wheels in place of steel rims with colour matched hub caps, and also an electric sunroof. The car has cloth/MB-Tex upholstery but, as hard as it may be to imagine it now, very few 123s came with leather seats, as they simply weren't that popular then. The manual adjustment for the driver and passenger side door mirrors is another normal feature of motoring life in the early 1980s that we would find hard to accept in a modern car.

This 280CE with its solid, rust free bodywork had been with owner number four since 1988, who carried out an extensive refurbishment when the full, glass-out respray took place. The rubber seals for the front and rear screens, side windows, doors and sunroof were replaced, and that alone must have been an



△ The trusty M110 six with two overhead cams and trick Bosch fuel injection.



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“THIS 280CE, WITH ITS SOLID, RUST FREE BODYWORK, HAD BEEN WITH OWNER NUMBER FOUR SINCE 1988



▷ expensive undertaking. Additionally, a complete new rear bumper and the middle section of the front bumper were fitted, while the chrome slats for the front grille and the chrome strip running along the top of the sill on the body sides were renewed. A brand new driver's door (a genuine Mercedes part) was fitted, and the exhaust replaced. Perhaps it's as well that we don't know how the cost of all that compares to 4 Star's £14,995 asking price.

In one sense, it doesn't make a huge difference whether a C123 is a 230C or a 280CE, as they feel much the same, except that the latter has more performance. In those years, Mercedes-Benz made a virtue of every variant in a series looking the same, and with largely the same trim. The extras list was much the same on every model, too. Hence your first impression upon stepping into this 280CE is how sparsely it is trimmed. While the high volume car makers of the day, notably Ford and Vauxhall, were decking out their flagship models in deep velour trim, the Mercedes' finish was devoid of embellishment – yet it still managed, on the 'less is more' principle, to look better and it was certainly more hard wearing.

When its interior is tatty and torn, a 123 can feel much like any old car, but

when very well preserved, as this one is, you can still feel how superior it was in its day. The instrument panel is simple, but the dials with their yellow markings and needles on a black background are not only smart looking but an object lesson in clarity; they are actually easier to read than the fussily styled instruments in some current Mercedes models. And the oil pressure gauge, providing a constant engine health check, is something else you don't get on any current Mercedes.

### SITTING COMFORTABLY

Nobody made seats like Mercedes-Benz did three decades ago. They manage to be both firm and springy at the same time, which has always made them a matter of taste, but there is no doubting the excellent ergonomics and driving position. Despite the lack of an adjustable steering column, and only a crude height/angle adjustment lever for ▷



The original owner saw fit to spec a four-speed auto and Blaupunkt radio/cassette.



Light coloured upholstery for the seats; recirculating ball steering absorbs bumps well.

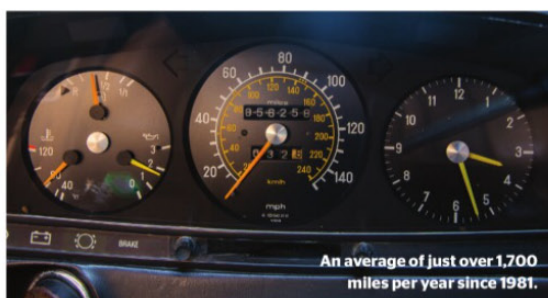


“THE SERENITY OF  
THE 280CE IS  
ENHANCED BY  
WHAT WAS VERY  
EFFECTIVE  
SUSPENSION”

▷ the driver's seat besides the normal fore/aft movement, you feel well positioned, and good about being in the car. Life is not quite as enviable for those in the rear quarters, but the two-door coupe body – 43mm lower than the four-door saloon from which it was derived, and sitting on an 85mm shorter wheelbase – offers just enough head and legroom.



Optional alloys  
really finish off  
the exterior.



Considering it has a 2,746cc engine, the 280CE does not feel quick, but it is supremely relaxed, which was always a major part of the appeal of a Mercedes from this era. A manual transmission was available, but almost all cars came with the no cost option four-speed automatic, which made a lot of sense given the lack of fluidity in the manual shift.

The serenity of the 280CE is enhanced by what was very effective suspension for its day – front double wishbones, and a semi trailing arm set up at the rear, which preceded the multi link system introduced for the W201 190 that is still in use today in modified form.

It provides a ride that is nicely firm but which, helped by the conservative 70-series tyres, absorbs bumps effectively.

But ultimately, you would buy this 280CE for its wonderful looks, improved further when all the windows are dropped to reveal a pillarless profile. And of course, as a modern classic Mercedes-Benz, it stands to appreciate in value, perhaps quicker than in the past, due to the now booming classic car market and the increasing scarcity of 123-series coupes.

### THE APPLE OF MY EYE

The C123 is a car that is, with a few allowances made, modern enough to serve as everyday transport should you wish, and while worth some money is not yet so precious that it cannot be exposed to the wear and tear of the road. The way values are going, it may not be that way for very much longer, so if – to borrow Ford's memorable 1960s advertising line – the 280CE is the car you've always promised yourself, now must be the time to act on that pledge.

► Thank you to **4Star Classics** for the loan of the car Tel 01483 274347  
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## JUST THE FACTS



### Mercedes-Benz C220 Bluetec AMG Line (W205)

ENGINE OM651 2,143cc 4-cyl biturbo

POWER 168bhp@3,000-4,200rpm

TORQUE 295lb.ft@1,400-2,800rpm

TRANSMISSION 7-speed auto, RWD

WEIGHT 1,570kg

0-62MPH 7.4sec

TOP SPEED 145mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 65.7mpg

CO2 EMISSIONS 113g/km

YEARS PRODUCED 2014-on

#### OVERVIEW

Despite its grumbly nature, the C220 Bluetec motor still delivers on the efficiency and performance fronts

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

“  
The UK's C-Class engine  
line up is as lean and  
focused as the car's  
body shell  
”



UK  
LAUNCH  
DRIVE

The C220 Bluetec is expected to be the biggest selling W205 C-Class in the UK, and in AMG Line spec it's not hard to see why

WORDS KYLE MOLYNEUX  
IMAGES CRAIG PUSEY

# The Greatest

**T**HE W205 C-Class has absorbed and then morphed the W204's form to dramatic effect, the new design positively idolising that of the 222-series S-Class. Only, in the UK at least, the new C goes

without the big saloon's 'traditional' grille in favour of a twin-louvre affair with central star. This feature certainly adds an air of perceived sportiness to the car, and with Mercedes-Benz attracting younger buyers with its A, B, CLA and GLA, it is perhaps inevitable that a degree of 'youth-ification' must take place higher up the range to keep those new customers coming back for more.

The UK's C-Class engine line up is as lean and focused as the car's body shell, which – thanks to extensive use of aluminium – is around 70kg less than its predecessor's (Mercedes says the entire car is 100kg lighter overall). The diesel range comprises two options and both employ the tried and tested, OM651, 2,143cc four-cylinder biturbo, these known as the C220 Bluetec (168bhp/295lb ft torque) and C250 Bluetec (201bhp/369lb ft). The sole petrol model is the C200 (181bhp/221lb ft) with a 1,991cc, turbocharged four-cylinder codenamed M270.

### ENGINE RANGE

A C300 Bluetec Hybrid model will shortly join the four-cylinder diesel line up, but a spokesperson for Mercedes-Benz UK confirmed six-cylinder power, in petrol or diesel form, is not expected any time soon, although that does not rule out the possibility of something appearing in the future.

The 328bhp V6 biturbo in the E400 Coupe would be a tantalising prospect in the C-Class, but given the fact the last generation V6 petrol models were killed off in the UK due to a lack of demand, it would be surprising to see that idea revived this time round, a six-cylinder diesel the more likely addition to the range, especially as the load hauling, torque demanding C-Class estate arrives in September.

Today we have played things equally safe and picked the engine most likely to become the volume seller in the UK – the C220 Bluetec, in

top AMG Line spec and equipped with a seven-speed 7G-Tronic Plus automatic, making a price tag of £34,355 before other options. For reference, the base SE model with a six-speed manual starts at £29,365, and the mid range Sport with a manual gearbox is £31,360 – the automatic transmission adding £1,500 to those figures.

Our test car is finished in classy Obsidian Black metallic, which makes the AMG Line's silver front splitter all the more visible. This goes hand in hand with the AMG side skirts and rear apron, plus the 18-inch AMG alloys finished in stunning titanium grey. AMG Line spec also equips the C-Class with 15mm lower sports suspension using selective damping, plus fast acting and speed sensitive steering, and perforated brake discs up front.

It is impossible to talk about the new C-Class without mentioning its cabin, which is without doubt the single greatest aspect of the car, a portion of squidgy rubberised trim around the glove box the only remnant of the W204. Everything else is new, and oozes tangible quality, including this car's Cranberry Red leather (optional) and high gloss black trim. Jump out of a last generation C-Class and into this new one, and it feels like you've not just passed through a development cycle, but climbed higher up Mercedes' hierarchy as well.

The W205's centre console, complete with touchpad, is trimmed in one sweeping piece of high gloss black trim, and the whole unit appears far less bulky than the W204's, adding to the cabin's spacious feel. But it is surprising to find rear headroom more restricted than before, the marginal extra legroom offering some reprieve but not quite enough for the former aspect to go unnoticed. Better news lies at the very rear of the car, however, the boot five litres bigger than before at 480 litres.

As you would expect with a big selling, brand new Mercedes-Benz, safety systems are great in number here and include the driver drowsiness detecting Attention Assist, and Collision Prevention Assist Plus, which uses the car's on board radar system to monitor traffic ahead and apply the brakes to avoid an accident if the driver fails to do so. DISTRONIC Plus cruise control returns as an option on the C-Class, but this time Mercedes has added the



◀ The OM651 diesel is now EU6 compliant and delivers even stronger efficiency figures.

Steering Assist system from the S-Class, which uses a stereo camera to read road markings and keep the car in the correct lane.

Even bigger news is the availability of Airmatic air suspension (£895) with front and rear self levelling on Sport and AMG Line C-Classes, which is a first in this sector; the W205 C-Class boasts a new four-link front axle designed specifically to accommodate Airmatic. The W204 uses a three-link design that proved harder for Mercedes' suspension gurus to fine tune than its replacement, reckons W205 chassis engineer Dirk Cruetzberger, who also revealed the C's new Airmatic parts will appear on the W213 E-Class. The suspension link count at the rear of the new C-Class remains five, but the set up is optimised for greater wheel control, improving stability.

### AIR SUSPENSION

The icing on the cake is the standard Agility Select feature. This allows the driver to tailor the responses of the engine, suspension and gearbox to their taste. There are four settings (Eco, Comfort, Sport and Sport+) to choose from, with an Individual setting allowing the user to create their perfect set up.

After getting comfortable in the sculpted and wonderfully padded driver's seat (complete with full electric adjustment thanks to the £2,795 Premium Plus Package), it is the toggle switch of the Agility Select that I find myself drawn to. This test car's Airmatic adds an even greater degree of focus to the Sport+ setting, but that doesn't seem suitable while navigating Milton Keynes' featureless roundabouts, linked by similarly featureless straight roads.

No, in this situation the Eco mode just feels right, the four-cylinder turbodiesel swiftly returning over 54mpg while averaging just under 40mph. Despite being largely unchanged for the W205 C-Class, excepting its new EU6 rating, this engine now returns 65.7mpg on the combined cycle when teamed with an automatic, which is a slight improvement over its predecessor. Meanwhile, CO2 emissions are down to between 109 and 117g/km depending on the size of the wheels fitted (this AMG Line car with 18-inch alloys emits 113g/km CO2). ▶

### A brief history of the C-Class saloon



W201 190



W202 C-Class



W203 C-Class



W204 C-Class

“

It is impossible to talk  
about the new C-Class  
without mentioning  
its cabin

”



◁ The Agility Select settings are shown on the dashboard screen.

▷ Mercedes' baby Benz has come along way in the cabin department.

▽ The new dials are a break from the norm, and look great at night.

▽▷ The W205 feels far lighter on its feet than the already agile W204.

▽▽ Agility Select allows adjustment of the engine gearbox and suspension.





The W204 C-Class is not short of dynamic flair, but the W205 feels even crisper through turns



▷ The manual equipped model is even more impressive, hitting 70.6mpg on the combined cycle with CO2 emissions of between 103 and 109g/km. As a side note, those wanting the extra performance of the automatic only C250 Bluetec will be pleased to hear it is just as efficient as the C220 Bluetec automatic.

As the test route opens up and the cruising speed increases, the diesel motor's dogged burring fades away, leaving just a hint of tyre roar and lick of wind noise around the A-pillars as the only unwelcome sounds entering the cabin. Locked in seventh gear and loping along with the Airmatic in its softest setting, the W205 feels head and shoulders above the W204, which was hardly an uncomfortable car. It's at this point an average of 63mpg appears on the trip computer, still with no real effort from me to eek out every last drop of fuel.

## CHOOSE YOUR RIDE


But then the road makes a meal out of the landscape, allowing that mystic Sport+ setting to be explored and the revised 7G-Tronic's Manual mode to be analysed. The latter feature instantly impresses, a pull on either metallic paddleshifter serving gear changes without a jolt or hesitation. I'd go as far as saying the 7G-Tronic auto has never felt better when it is you calling the shots. The fact it is just as smooth in full automatic mode vindicates Mercedes' decision to stick with a torque converter system for its bigger cars, rather than implement the inherently spiky dual-clutch automatic that debuted in the B-Class.

The handling, meanwhile, is even more revealing about the direction of Mercedes' latest C-Class. With the Agility Select's Sport+ mode engaged, the electro-mechanical steering develops new found weight through rotation, the throttle position sensor becomes much more alert, and the whole car feels like it has developed a new level of communication with the road, slightly reducing ride quality and more specifically downgrading the secondary ride, but that's something you don't really care

about when focussing on the situation that inspired you to select Sport+ in the first place.

The W204 C-Class is not short of dynamic flair, but the W205 feels even crisper through turns, that lesser body weight quite obvious as the car tightens its line with a lift of the throttle as you into a bend. Whether it was because of its new level of sophistication in the looks department, or the fact Airmatic suspension usually underpins more mature machines, I did not expect the new C-Class to be this much fun to drive. For those who think the various driving modes of the Agility Select system are a gimmick, once you've experienced how the C-Class makes the best of every situation you throw at it, you may well change your mind.

Should you consider Airmatic a superfluous option, I've got good news – a drive in a C220 Bluetec Sport with standard springs confirmed the W205 chassis is a peach, feeling very nearly as comfortable and very nearly as chuckable despite rolling on 17-inch alloy wheels.

I had very high hopes for the W205 and came away from the UK launch event struggling to find any genuine flaws in the package. If anything, the rugged diesel engine is the weakest link, but it still manages to be more efficient than the equivalent motor from Munich. Strapped to a car with a cabin as beautiful as this, that might just be all the incentive buyers need to make the switch from rival brands, or indeed trade in their W204. 



△ More room for your legs but less for your head in the rear.

◁ Fantastic looking five-spoke alloys of AMG Sport spec.

▷ There is more than a hint of S-Class in the C-Class's cabin.

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“Would those rose-tinted memories of the SLK32 be brutally dispelled in a cloud of SLK55 tyre smoke?”



V6  
OR V8?

WORDS GUY BAKER  
IMAGES CRAIG PUSEY



AMG'S FIRST GENERATION SLK IS AN  
UNDERRATED POCKET ROCKET WITH  
SUPERCHARGED PERFORMANCE THAT  
MAKES THE LATEST, NATURALLY ASPIRATED  
SLK55 AMG WORK VERY HARD TO BEAT IT

# TAKE TWO SLK32 AMG vs SLK55 AMG

## JUST THE FACTS

### Mercedes-Benz

	SLK32 AMG (R170)	SLK55 AMG (R172)
ENGINE	M112 3,199cc V6 supercharged	M152 5,461cc V8
POWER	349bhp@6,100rpm	415bhp@6,800rpm
TORQUE	332lb ft@4,400rpm	398lb ft@4,500rpm
TRANSMISSION	5-speed auto, RWD	7-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT	1,495kg	1,690kg
0-62MPH	5.2sec	4.6sec
TOP SPEED	155mph	155mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION	25.2mpg	33.6mpg
CO2 EMISSIONS	268g/km	195g/km
YEARS PRODUCED	2001-2004	2012-on

### OVERVIEW

The SLK32 is an iron fist in a velvet glove, while the SLK55 feels every inch a more focused sports car – but does that make it better?

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



◀ Recirculating ball steering for the SLK32.

▷ Black and red leather is a superb combo.

▷▷ The SLK32 claims 233bhp per tonne.

▷▷▷ Five twin-spoke, 17-inch rims for the V6.



The R170's cabin went down a treat back in the early 2000s, and has aged well since.



▷ AMG gave Merc's M112 V6 a supercharger.

▽ It's not hard to trigger the 32's ESP light.



**T**HEY SAY NEVER GO BACK. But I had to. Back in time – to savour again that early noughties embodiment of Mercedes power and glamour, the SLK32 AMG. Would the original AMG SLK still be as

good as I remembered? Or would those rose-tinted memories be brutally dispelled in a cloud of SLK55 AMG tyre smoke? Time to discover whether the current incarnation of Mercedes-AMG's 'SL for the masses' kicks the original incumbent into the weeds.

Although the R170 SLK32 AMG lacked the dynamic ability of say, a BMW Z3 M Roadster or a Porsche Boxster S, its combination of catwalk style and dragster performance made it spectacularly desirable and ensured that the original SLK AMG formula has required relatively little tweaking even 13 years on.

And despite lacking powertrain finesse or high tech turbocharger wizardry, innovation was still at the SLK's heart – when rivals made do with folding soft tops, the Mercedes-Benz boasted a brilliant metal vario-roof.

#### POWER TO THE PEOPLE

For all the hype surrounding the original SLK's styling and design, power was still the most important ingredient in the AMG

model's recipe. The aluminium block, 3.2-litre, M112 V6 was the starting point, enhanced by a helical twin-screw supercharger and a water-to-air intercooler. With two spark plugs per cylinder for maximum combustion, plus one overhead camshaft per bank and three valves per cylinder, the AMG powerplant's supercharger was, perhaps surprisingly, designed by Japanese turbocharger expert IHI. Power output was class leading at 349bhp, whilst torque peaked at 332lb ft – enough to propel the SLK32 AMG to 62mph in just 5.2 seconds and on to a potential delimited top speed in excess of 170mph. Heady stuff for the day.

Married to AMG's Speedshift five-speed automatic transmission, below 2,900rpm the supercharger actually remained pretty dormant. But as soon as you passed this rev point, or decided to floor it, the kompressor exploded into life, propelling the SLK32 forward, and you back into your seat.

Technological refinement was another key ingredient – the engine and exhaust acoustics were carefully controlled, whilst the suspension was largely bespoke. In addition to uprated springs and dampers, the SLK32 AMG also boasted a wider rear track than the SLK320, and a larger anti roll bar at the front. The brakes were upgraded with ventilated discs all round (330mm items at the front and 300mm discs at the rear), while the silver, 17-inch AMG twin-spoke alloys were a completely new design.

With rounded Tonka toy looks and a classic, 1990s interior design – all black plastic and straight edges – the R170 has lasted unbelievably well. So if you spy one today, expect trim items to still look pristine – like the AMG kickplates, 'V6 Kompressor' front wing badges, twin oval AMG exhaust pipes,

AMG alloys, honeycomb front grille, rear boot spoiler, 'SLK32 AMG' rear boot badge and heated AMG seats. Winter and Standard ▷

**“The SLK32 boasted a wider rear track than the SLK320 and a larger anti roll bar at the front”**





△ Cylinder shut-off tech makes the 415bhp SLK amazingly frugal.



△△ There is a stylish and grown up feel to the SLK55's interior.

△ The 5.5-litre V8 gives the SLK55 246bhp per tonne.



**“The SLK55 is equally at home on a race track as it is cruising along a motorway”**

△△ The SLK55 AMG's seats manage to be comfortable and incredibly supportive.

△ Finished in titanium grey, these 18-inch alloy wheels are standard on the SLK55.



▷ transmission modes were included too, as were ESP, cruise control, electric windows and mirrors and an adjustable steering wheel. The example pictured is owned by enthusiast Chris Easton of Gibbs Brand Lubrication, and claims a mere 51,000 miles on the clock with the healthy looks to back it up.

Mercedes' current, third generation R172 AMG SLK debuted at the Frankfurt Motor Show in September 2011, with the first UK deliveries in January 2012. Employing a 415bhp M152 powerplant (a naturally aspirated, 5,461cc derivative of AMG's M157 V8 biturbo), the SLK55 AMG's power output

peaks at 6,800rpm, whilst the engine's maximum torque figure of 398lb ft at 4,500rpm is exceptional for a V8 lacking any form of forced induction. Bespoke components include revised intake air ducting, new cylinder heads, a modified valve drive, an adapted oil supply system and an optimised crankcase, whilst the new sports exhausts system employs twin flaps that remain closed below 2,000rpm.

Under full acceleration, however, both flaps open to deliver the V8's full on, muscular soundtrack. Better still, this new unit can deliver 33.6mpg and emits just

195g/km CO2 as the engine mapping allows cylinders two, three, five and eight to be shut off under partial load. Clever stuff. The latest iteration of AMG's seven-speed automatic Speedshift Plus transmission delivers the power to the rear wheels, enabling the SLK55 AMG to hit 62mph in a mere 4.6 seconds.

Armed with AMG sports suspension, complete with Torque Vectoring Brakes (which pinch the inside rear wheel to tighten the car's line through a corner) and the direct steer system, the SLK55 is equally at home on a track as it is cruising along a motorway. An optional AMG Performance Package adds

▷ The M152 V8 was designed solely for AMG's small roadster.

▷ Heavy yet direct, electro-mechanical steering in the SLK55.



more stiffly tuned suspension, a rear axle differential lock, composite front brake discs, and an AMG Performance steering wheel with microfibre grip inserts.

The car's SLS inspired design includes high gloss black radiator grille slats, darkened headlamp lenses and chrome fins on the front wing mounted vents, as well as jet engine style air vents inside, with brushed aluminium on the centre console and an analogue clock above. Our stunning Diamond White metallic test car also boasts the optional Magic Sky Control roof, which allows the driver to make the glass clear or

opaque at the touch of a button. And for those intending to fully exploit the SLK's performance, there is even an optional £2,755 AMG Driver's Package which removes the 155mph speed limiter. To date, Mercedes-Benz UK has delivered 354 R172 SLK55 AMGs, while 264 UK customers bought the original SLK32 AMG.

## IT'S IN THE GENES

Despite being separated by more than a decade, the common strands of automotive DNA shared by these AMGs are clear. Times may have changed and popular styling

evolved, but the key elements remain – albeit tweaked. The SLK32's pronounced bonnet humps have become ridges on the SLK55, which also has a deeper windscreen and stretched headlights and doors. The R170's twin oval exhaust pipes have doubled on the R172, and 17-inch AMG alloys have become 18s, but the resemblance is unmistakable. From the lower purposeful stance to the deep cut, V-shaped boot lines and rear lights, these two are clearly cut from the same cloth, but have very different personalities.

As befitting its time, the SLK32 AMG claims understated styling: the bold face, ▷

## Head-to-head

### PERFORMANCE

SLK32 AMG

5/5

SLK55 AMG

5/5

### DRIVING EXPERIENCE

SLK32 AMG

4/5

SLK55 AMG

5/5

### STYLE

SLK32 AMG

3/5

SLK55 AMG

4/5

### ECONOMY

SLK32 AMG

2/5

SLK55 AMG

3/5

### PRICE

SLK32 AMG

5/5

SLK55 AMG

3/5

▷ white backed AMG dials and V6 Kompressor badges catch the eye – but little else does. The R170 likes to go about its business discreetly. The interior is functional rather than showy, with hidden cup holders and soft crinkled leather door pockets, plus a steering wheel that feels near vertical, all making the cabin feel old school.

Open the throttle in the SLK32 AMG though, and it's anything but. That low gusty growl is transformed into a metallic woofle as you are launched forward at surprising speed. The mid range torque is pretty potent – even by today's extreme standards. Wickedly quick despite its age, an SLK32 AMG can do a quarter mile in less than 13 seconds in standard trim. Almost a sleeper – the car's ability to change from luxury cruiser to high performance sports car is perhaps its greatest asset.

Don't expect razor sharp responses though, and that traction control system is frequently called into action. But on all but the wettest of surfaces, the SLK32 AMG still possesses reassuring grip and stability, and is very happy to go back into its shell at a moment's notice.

The SLK55 AMG's personality, on the other hand, is altogether more outgoing. Proper eye candy, its alluring looks seem to garner all sorts of glances – from both sexes – whilst various pops and bangs from that special AMG lump, especially on start-up, announce your presence like little else. This car is not for the shy or retiring, then. From some angles it really gets the juices going – that rear end especially takes some beating. And it looks damn near as exciting with the roof up, unlike the SLK32.

The interior styling is understandably more contemporary, yet – just like the R170 – the R172 retains an engaging small car feel. However, it's heavier than its forebear, especially where the steering is concerned, which is a blessing at higher speeds but less so around town. There is greater head and legroom than in the SLK32's cabin, and the performance is wonderfully brutal. You may find yourself struggling for rear grip on the limit, but body control is exceptional, with comparatively little chassis

shake. Your passenger may not enjoy the R172 SLK's harsher ride though, which can be a touch brittle.

Differences apart, this latest SLK55 still possesses the SLK32's Jekyll and Hyde character – and that's a very good thing. However, unlike its older relative, the younger AMG roadster makes no attempt to hide its split personality.

### A PRICE WORTH PAYING

Both incarnations boast pretty epic reliability records, and every example of the latest SLK55 AMG should still be under warranty. Online retailers are offering discounts of £10,000 off the list price, but you'll need it for the options list, which will rapidly elevate the price tag. Our Diamond White test car, for example, has nearly £10,000 worth of extras, including a panoramic roof with Magic Sky Control (£1,995), Aircarft (£395), a Harmon Kardon sound system (£645) and Bengal Red nappa leather upholstery (£940). Mercedes dealers have a few used cars for sale, with £40,000 the entry price for a typical 10,000 to 15,000-mile example.

Finding a good SLK32 AMG might take a little longer – with only 264 ever sold in the UK, it's a rare beast. But then again, there are still around 250 running today, according to howmanyleft.co.uk. How's that for reliability! Prices start at just over £6,000 and experienced Mercedes specialists will be happy to fettle your R170 for many years to come.

When they say never go back, they clearly weren't talking about the SLK32 AMG. I'm certainly very glad I did – it's even better than I remembered. Just like revisiting a place you used to live, some of the details weren't quite how I recalled them, but the brilliance of the original AMG SLK shone through even more brightly than before. And given the immense capabilities of the latest SLK55 AMG, that's all the more remarkable.

► Thank you to **Chris Easton** of **Gibbs Brand Lubricant** for the loan of his SLK32 **Tel** 01279 816049 **Web** [www.gibbsbrand.info](http://www.gibbsbrand.info) and to **Stanborough Park** in Hertfordshire for the location **Tel** 01707 276276 **Web** [www.finesseleisure.com](http://www.finesseleisure.com)

“The sheer brilliance of the SLK32 AMG shone through even more brightly than before”



# Peter Jarvis Specialising in Mercedes-Benz & Classic Cars



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



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



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



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



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



**500SL Sport**, 1987, rarest and most beautiful Ivory with superb contrasting hide interior, headrests, rear seats, over mats, cruise control, hard & soft tops, ABS, alloys, power windows, PAS, CD stereo system, alarm and immobiliser, tinted glass, non smokers car, only 56,000 miles, with impeccable SH, recent service and MOT. £29,750



**300SL Sport**, 1986, finished in Gleaming Arctic White with Navy Blue interior, hard and soft tops, auto, power, stereo system, full body kit, alloys, power windows, ABS, only 44,000 miles from new, with service history, absolutely stunning. £16,750



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



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



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



**300SL Sport**, 1986, finished in Arctic White with Black hide interior, rear seats, headrests, hard and soft tops, stereo system, CD player, alarm, alloys, power windows, power steering, auto, service history, garaged from new, superb example. £16,750



**280SL Sport**, 1985, finished in Diamond Blue with matching interior, headrests, hard and soft tops, automatic, power, alloys, stereo system, ABS, power windows, personalised registration, excellent history, superb example. £14,750

**Gildenhill Place, Gildenhill Rd, Swanley, Kent BR8 7PD**

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# Spanish acquisition

WORDS AND IMAGES RICHARD TRUESDELL

Previously owned by a member of the Spanish Royal Family, this highly original, 1957 220S Coupe now resides in California and offers its keeper a welcome change of pace





## JUST THE FACTS

### Mercedes-Benz 220S Coupe (W180)

ENGINE M180 2,195cc 6-cyl

POWER 99bhp@4,800rpm

TORQUE 119lb ft@3,500rpm

TRANSMISSION 4-speed manual, RWD

WEIGHT 1,350kg

0-62MPH 17.0sec

TOP SPEED 99mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 26.4mpg

YEARS PRODUCED 1956-1959

### OVERVIEW

Based on the 220 Ponton saloon, the 220S Coupe had few direct competitors on either side of the Atlantic Ocean

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



The then future King of Spain, Juan Carlos, was apparently gifted the car by his father as a reward for joining the armed forces



◁ Lower, shorter and narrower than the Ponton saloon car.



△ The car's original Mercedes star never made it to the US.



△ An absolutely stunning Becker Brescia MW radio.



△ Thick C-pillars one of few bold details on this dainty classic.



**I**

F THERE IS ONE ADVANTAGE TO LIVING in Southern California, it is that classic car shows run right through winter. Call it a side benefit of having to put up with bumper-to-bumper traffic and three-hour commutes. One of these shows is the Desert Classic Concours d'Elegance in Palm Springs. Each year, the event attracts a top tier field of cars wearing the three-pointed star. And at the 2013 event we encountered the car you see here, a stunning, 1957 220S Coupe owned by Kathryn and Philippe de Lespinay, residents of Orange County, California.

With a name like de Lespinay, it isn't hard to believe that Philippe, like many who live in Southern California, wasn't born here. With a French father and an English mother, Philippe was born during World War Two in San Sebastián, Spain. His family moved back to France in 1945. "My dad was a racing enthusiast and we attended auto races during my youth, but other members of the family were not that interested," he says. "By the time I was 16, I was hooked on motorcycle racing, which was more financially accessible to me, and began racing in the 50cc classes. By 1969, I had been a semi

works driver in the French national races for two manufacturers, Derbi and Kreidler. In 1970, with the economy in decline in France, I moved to the USA, building a new life and continuing my racing career. By 1976, I had built and successfully raced my own motorcycle. In 1977, I became a works rider for the world championship winning Morbidelli team, while doing engineering work for it. But in 1978, I quit the sport."

### FROM BIKES TO BENZES

By 1986, Philippe began racing vintage cars, first an Alpine-Renault, then a Brabham-Climax sports racer rescued from near oblivion. In 1991, he discovered the remains of the long disappeared, rear engined, 1961 Cooper-Climax that had revolutionised the Indy 500 establishment, and restored the car. He then managed the restoration of two Dan Gurney Eagle Indy cars and still races one to this day.

With a racing background, it's not surprising that Philippe has a long-standing relationship with Mercedes-Benz road cars. Over the years, he's owned a 1968 280SE, a 1972 280, a 1976 450SE, a 500SEC, two C36s and today owns two C43s with one a former PPG Indy pace car. His daily driver is an E55. At one

▽ There aren't many more beautiful car cabins than this one.



**I made fake numberplates for it and loaded the back seat with toys to draw the attention of the French customs officials away from the car itself**

time he owned a legendary 1971 6.3 and even a 600 limousine. That brings us to this feature car, a 220S Coupe acquired in 1982 from its previous owner in Switzerland.

When asked about the car's provenance, Phillippe had this to say: "From research, I learned that the car was first shipped by Mercedes to ENASA, the Spanish distributor that had sold the car to the Spanish Royal Family. The then future King of Spain, Juan Carlos, was apparently gifted the car by his father as a reward for joining the armed forces. It was later sold to a man in Switzerland who eventually lost his garage space. I acquired it from an antique toy dealer who had the car in consignment."

By this time, Phillippe had married Kathryn and both were heavily involved in the antique toy trade, especially tin type

vehicles of the post-war era, cars and trucks that lived a tough life in the hands of pre teen boys all over the world. This makes finding unmolested originals (just like their full size counterparts) difficult, especially before the advent of the internet and eBay. But it gave the couple the opportunity to travel the world and to amass an enviable collection of toys that would be virtually impossible to assemble today.

#### TOY STORY

Again, Phillippe shares details and how it led him to acquire the 220S Coupe. "During the early 1980s, we used to travel to the European antique toy shows circuit that took place in Geneva, then Paris and London. While attending the Geneva show in 1982, we met an antique toy dealer who also marketed old American cars in a garage located underneath a supermarket. ▷



△ Phillippe is drawn to racing and Mercedes.

▷ We not only bought a quantity of old toys from there, but also this Mercedes-Benz. It was very inexpensive then, because in 1982 few people cared about old cars.” Of the 220S models, Mercedes-Benz built 1,251 coupes and 2,178 cabriolets. And of the more powerful, fuel injected 220SE models, Mercedes-Benz built a further 830 coupes and 1,112 cabriolets.

Being a pre emissions era car produced before 1968, Phillippe didn't encounter too many difficulties when importing the car to the United States, as he recalls. “After buying the car, the dealer needed to get a few things done to it, so we left the car there awaiting repairs. I came back a few months later in the winter, and collected the car. It had not been registered for a few years, so I made fake French numberplates for it with contact paper and loaded the back seat with toys to draw the attention of the French customs officials away from the car itself. The tactic worked and I was able to go through both borders without encountering difficulties.

“I drove the car from Geneva to Dijon and it was snowing quite a bit. I was amazed because I was able to keep up with most traffic with little difficulty. I left the car at a friend's warehouse for a year, then came back and drove it to Paris where I

consigned it to a shipping company. It arrived at the Port of Long Beach where I picked it up, undamaged except for a missing bonnet star, which had been stolen.”

### PROTECTING A PIECE OF HISTORY

Phillippe commented that the car has never been restored. It was simply well kept by its three former owners and it certainly helped that it was undercoated the old fashioned way when new. The engine has been rebuilt at some stage in its 72,000km (44,700-mile) life, but Phillippe does not know when that happened. He told us that there was an internal ‘knock’ from day one when revved, but the engine ran fine once warm.

“That knocking sound was present for 25 years of ownership,” says Phillippe. “Eventually, an over tightened rod bolt snapped and broke a piston, but damage was minimal as I pushed the clutch pedal just in time. I rebuilt the six-cylinder engine properly with the help of a friend, using a Fintail cylinder head with a better valve adjustment set up. Cosmetically, it is nearly identical to original.”

When the car arrived in the US, Phillippe used the opportunity to address some minor issues, such as a bypass for

▷ Practicality was high on the agenda for the Ponton coupe.



▽ It's handy to have a spare tyre for a car that eats the miles.



▷ Out of the box, this engine uses a Solex 32 PAJTA carburettor.

