



## Mercedes-Benz 230/250/280 SL

A LONG history of sports car production by Daimler-Benz had culminated in the post-war 190 and 300SLs, setting the trend towards very expensive and fast two-seaters offering a high degree of comfort and refinement. The announcement of a successor, the 230SL, at the 1963 Geneva Show took the image further towards comfort and refinement, and although it still promised high performance there was no successor for the fabulously fast 300SL.

In important matters of road-holding, comfort and accommodation, however, the newcomer was way ahead of both its predecessors. It also introduced a bodystyle of delightful simplicity and elegance which has stood the test of time and still looks impressive on the road today. It is well balanced, the wide looks being offset by body swage lines which give length and a flowing look to its shape.

Mechanically, the 230SL was based on chassis components similar to those of the 220S and SE saloons, with the same rear track of 4ft 10.5in, but the wheelbase was reduced from 9ft to 7ft 10in. The suspension was the same, with double wishbones at the front, and with the single-joint low-pivot swing axles for the independent rear end which at the time were

standard Daimler-Benz practice. The wheel size was increased from 13 to 14in., giving an increase in gearing (in conjunction with a higher axle ratio) to raise the mph/1,000 rpm figure from 18.6 to 19.6 in top.

A 2mm increase in bore diameter of the 220SE engine stretched the capacity to 2,306 c.c., and the fuel injection was revised with a six-plunger injection pump feeding nozzles mounted in the cylinder head ports. The compression ratio was raised from 8.7 to 9.3-to-1 — a high figure for those days — and the engine's gross power was given as 170 bhp. Against the more realistic DIN standard its true value was probably in the region of 150 bhp. As for the 220SE, it was a six-cylinder unit with only four main bearings, and the overhead valves were operated by a single chain-driven overhead camshaft, by means of "finger" tappets.

It is interesting to turn back to our description of the car, published in the 15 March, 1963 issue, and see the comment: "Upon special request, the Daimler-Benz four-speed automatic transmission unit can be supplied". It sounded almost as though it came separately in a cardboard box and gave no indication of what turned out to be the case, namely that the majority

of these cars, especially in the latter years, were ordered in automatic form, and manual examples are comparatively rare.

In keeping with the new car's appeal to a more discerning and affluent market, power-assisted steering was available as an option; this was about the first true sports car ever to be so equipped, and it is recalled that when we tested a basic model first, and then an automatic version with power steering, the better-equipped car was liked far more. Partly this was because the standard gearbox tended to be a little notchy and had an awkwardly low first gear ratio, but mainly it was because the unassisted steering was decidedly heavy and cumbersome at low speeds. Disc brakes were fitted at the front only.

In dearest form, the 230SL was a true Coupé/Convertible, having both a removable hardtop and a folding hood. To take the hardtop off is very definitely a job for two people, since it is a terrific weight; when removed, it makes the car look even longer and sleeker. The hood is concealed in a spacious well with a forward-hinged lid.

Hood raising procedure is first to release the lid lock by means of a lever on the side of the rear well, lift the cover forward, and then pull up

the hood and attach the front end to the windscreen. The hood cover is then closed, and the rear part of the hood containing the folded back window then unfurls and — with a good slam — a single fixing point at the back is engaged. Finally, the windscreen attachment levers are turned to seal the front tight against the top of the screen surround.

### Evolution

There is not much of a story to the body evolution of the 230SL since the original shape continued with scarcely any change for a lot of eight years; but there were two changes of engine. The first of these was the 250SL, launched again at the Geneva Show four years after the initial launch. It was fitted with the new six-cylinder seven-main bearing engine, and its stroke was increased from the original 72.8 mm to 78.8 mm, and capacity went up to 2,496 c.c. The Coupé became a 2+ and disc brakes were fitted all round.

Anyone who purchased one of these was very cross when, on nine months after its announcement, it was out-dated by the change to 2,778 c.c. as part of the major rearrangement of engine sizes which took place with intr-