



Mercedes-Benz Classic

Press Information

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Mercedes-Benz 500 E: A high-performance wolf in sheep's clothing

- **Thirty years ago, in 1990, Mercedes-Benz launched the 500 E at the Paris Motor Show**
- **This was the sporty top-of-the-range model of the successful mid-sized 124 model series**
- **Porsche was involved as a project partner in its development and assembly**

Stuttgart. "500 E" – Merely mentioning this model name is enough to make many people's eyes light up. This is because the high-performance 124 model series saloon still outshines all the other members of this generation of Mercedes-Benz mid-sized saloons. Of the total of more than two million cars produced in the 124 model series, the 500 E accounts only for the relatively small number of 10,479 units (including the E 500 and E 60 AMG). A glance at the technical specifications of the E-Class predecessor explains why this car triggers so much fascination: Eight-cylinder, 5-litre V-engine, 240 kW (326 hp) output, top speed limited to 250 km/h. With specifications like that, this saloon belonged up among the fastest sports cars when it was unveiled at the Paris Motor Show in 1990.

One great distinguishing feature in comparison with its competitors was the very discreet outward appearance of the 500 E: At first glance, the four-door saloon appeared extremely restrained. Only the initiated could distinguish this high-speed car from its less powerful brothers at a glance. This was very much in keeping with the style of many owners because, while they valued superior driving performance, they preferred a less glamorous outward appearance. And if they could leave many a sports car behind them without making a fuss, all the better! The car's classic potential was at a very high level right from the start: Soon after production ceased, the 500 E became a coveted collector's item.

When the Mercedes-Benz 500 E in brilliant silver was presented on a turntable at the Paris Motor Show from 4 to 14 October 1990, the 124 model series had already been on the market for six years. It was a gently shimmering star in the background, whose appearance did not initially arouse much interest – until a closer look revealed the details: The wings were flared outwards slightly at both the front and rear to make room for the size 225/55 R 16 tyres. The body, which had been lowered by 23 millimetres, and a modified front spoiler with integrated fog lamps were also discreet characteristics of the top model. The published performance figures were even more exciting for visitors to the motor show: With the standard automatic transmission, it achieved the 100 km/h mark in just 5.9 seconds. The actual top speed that could be reached was kept a secret, but the engine was electronically limited to 250 km/h.

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* Further information on the official fuel consumption and the official, specific CO₂ emissions for new passenger cars can be found in the publication entitled "Leitfaden über den Kraftstoffverbrauch, die CO₂-Emissionen und den Stromverbrauch neuer Personenkraftwagen" ["Guidelines on the fuel consumption, CO₂ emissions and electricity consumption of new passenger cars"], available free of charge from all showrooms and from Deutsche Automobil Treuhand GmbH at www.dat.de.



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The 500 E was powered by a sophisticated engine, the main features of which had been carried over from the 500 SL of the R 129 model series. The V8 engine internally designated the M 119, with four valves per cylinder and a displacement of 4,973 cubic centimetres, differed from the 500 SL engine due to the electronically controlled Bosch LH-Jetronic intake-manifold petrol injection system with a heated wire mass air flow sensor, which was deployed here for the first time at Mercedes-Benz. The engine block was also slightly lower and was now the same height as the 4.2-litre version of the M 119. The brake system was likewise carried over from the R 129 model series to cope with the high speeds. The ASR traction control system that was fitted as standard prevented the drive wheels from spinning in the event of high slip on smooth road surfaces. One of the many enhancement details of the 500 E was that the battery was moved to the boot to optimise weight distribution.

The installation of a powerful engine in the next smallest vehicle category was something that was not completely new at Mercedes-Benz. The best example was the use of the 6.3-litre, eight-cylinder M 100 from the representative limousine model 600 (W 100) in the luxury model series W 109 in 1966/1967. In doing so, test engineer Erich Waxenberger paved the way for the 300 SEL 6.3 (W 109) saloon, which continues to attract a great deal of attention today. The early design drafts of the W 124 model series around 1980 were forward-looking enough to envisage the possible installation of an eight-cylinder engine.

When the idea was taken up again at the end of the 1980s, it became clear that some changes to the front-end assembly were necessary and that the cooling air flow would have to be redesigned. However, the development capacities at Mercedes-Benz in those years were, to a considerable extent, taken up by work on the SL of the 129 model series and the S-Class of the W 140 model series. This was why, in December 1987, Porsche was awarded a development contract for the design and experimental series development of the base W 124 saloon with the eight-cylinder M 119 engine. This was the same M 119 that Mercedes-Benz used in the Sauber-Mercedes C9 – equipped in that case with two turbochargers – to win the 1989 World Sports Car Championship and the 24 Hours of Le Mans.

Porsche was also responsible for the assembly of the 500 E. The body parts were supplied to the sports car manufacturer from Sindelfingen. The body was then assembled at the Porsche facility, painted at the Sindelfingen plant and returned to Zuffenhausen. Final assembly, including the drivetrain supplied in its entirety by Mercedes-Benz, was carried out at Porsche, while delivery to customers and sales partners was handled by the Mercedes-Benz plant in Sindelfingen.

By April 1995, 10,479 units of the high-powered saloon had been built. In the production statistics, the 500 E is included together with the E 500, as the top model in the 124 model series was called, designated from June 1993 as the E-Class, and the E 60 AMG, which was launched in 1993. In the latter model, which was built until 1994, the 6-litre version of the M 119 engine even generated 280 kW (381 hp). In 1991, yet another eight-cylinder model joined the W 124 family – the 400 E, whose engine produced 205 kW (279 hp). This model did not attract anything like as much media attention as the 500 E but, in terms of sales figures, the 400 E/E 420 sold 22,802 units, which put them ahead of the more powerful cars in the model series.

The 500 E initially cost DM 134,510, which was more than twice as much as the less opulently equipped 300 E with an output of 132 kW (180 hp) with a catalytic converter. At the Geneva Motor Show in March 1994, Mercedes-Benz showcased the special E 500 Limited model, which, as the name suggests, was limited to 500 units and was sold with exclusive trim and the special paint finish was either sapphire black or brilliant silver. As production of the 124 model series saloons ended in 1995, the E 500 was phased out as

well. The tradition of sports saloon cars embodying the highest standards of performance and driving experience was then continued by the AMG models made by Mercedes-Benz.

Trade magazine “auto motor und sport” had this to say of the 500 E in its 15/1990 issue: “As good-natured as a fairy-tale uncle, as agile as a nimble sports car and, to top it all, comfortable as well? Indeed, that’s the most surprising feature of this chassis. In spite of the performance tuning, the springs and shock absorbers soak up uneven road surfaces in such a well-mannered way that even the more spoiled customers will have little reason to bellyache.” “Road & Track”, issue 5/1992, enthused: “The 500 E is a magnificent high-performance saloon that’s heavy on the visceral. It looks right (low slung, intimidating, but not showy, like the AMG Hammer or Mercedes’ own 600 SEL). It sounds great (nothing beats the thunder of a big V-8). It goes sinfully fast for a family 4-door (155 mph, electronically limited). It has everything you’d expect in a Mercedes. And a few things you wouldn’t. Mostly, gobs of horsepower and an attitude that says ... well, you know the word.”

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Captions

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Mercedes-Benz 500 E (W 124), exterior, side view from left. Photo from 1990.

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Mercedes-Benz 500 E (W 124), exterior. Photo from 1990.

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Mercedes-Benz 500 E (W 124), detailed view of the front left wheel arch. Photo from 1990.

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Mercedes-Benz 500 E (W 124), detailed view of the model designation on the boot lid. Photo from 1990.

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A93F1230

Mercedes-Benz E 500 (W 124), exterior. Photo from 1993.

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Mercedes-Benz E 500 (W 124), exterior, model designation on boot lid. Photo from 1993.

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Mercedes-Benz E 500 Limited (W 124), exterior. Photo from 1994.

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Mercedes-Benz E 500 Limited (W 124), interior. Photo from 1994.

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Mercedes-Benz E 60 AMG (W 124). This high-performance saloon is one of the great rarities in AMG's history. The E 60 AMG was built from 1993 to 1994 and distributed through the official Mercedes-Benz sales network. Photo from 1993.