

CLASSIC DRIVER

Gullwing: The Mercedes-Benz 300 SL Coupé



The Mercedes-Benz 300 SL Coupé (Gullwing) is one of the most beautiful cars ever designed. It was built in 1937 and is now a classic. It is a very rare car and is highly valued. It is a very beautiful car and is highly valued. It is a very beautiful car and is highly valued.

Palawan Press will need little introduction to Classic Driver readers. When a subject is covered by the London-based publisher, you just *know* it will be done superbly. The latest volume on the iconic ‘Gullwing’ is no exception.

Keeping to the familiar no-expense-spared formula, the 318-page book tells the story of the fabulously expensive GT cars from their inception as racing cars in the early post-War period, to the fortuitous decision by Mercedes’ American agent, Max Hoffman, to order 1000 roadgoing examples of what would have been the company’s 1953 competition machine. The timing of this was perfect as Mercedes had also developed the more everyday 190 SL; so the similarly styled - but outrageously expensive - 300 SL was the perfect ‘older brother’ for what marketing departments now refer to as ‘halo sales’.

Just 1400-or-so 300 SL Coupés were built in the period 1954 – 1957. The story, in essence, is a relatively simple one and author Anthony Pritchard gives a well-measured account of the car’s racing antecedents, the contemporary activities of the famous *Rennabteilung* under Alfred Neubauer, and the car’s technical development.



I particularly liked the extensive section on customer racing 300 SLs on the Mille Miglia, Tour de France and other minor races and rallies, as well as the wonderful listing of available colour schemes (with all paint finish and interior colour ‘DB’ references) and the year-by-year improvements made to the hand-built cars. ‘F55 00853’? That must be 1955 and the ‘Protective cover on intake manifold fastened with 12 instead of eight screws’ modification, then.

A large part of the book is given over to reprints of contemporary road tests and driving stories such as that of the legendary correspondent Denis Jenkinson’s Swedish journey with future World Champion Graf Berghe von Trips, northwards (in a racing 300 SL, complete with numbers...), “hoping to see such things as reindeer, Eskimos, Polar bears, or even icebergs”. There’s also a complete reprint of the ‘Gullwing’ Instruction Manual.



The photographs are, as you'd expect, well up to the usual standard for high-quality, full-colour shots of restored cars in beautiful locations, mixed in with rare, very cleverly reproduced contemporary monotone and colour.

The chances are that, if you're buying this book, you may well drive a 300 SL Coupé and Pritchard gives some useful buying and restoring tips. However, such collectors may wish to upgrade their purchase to the 'Owners' Edition', a two-volume set that includes the 'Book of Cars', a listing of known chassis numbers and their owners.



Its successor (in production terms, if not hard-edged performance) was, of course, the 300 SL Roadster. The open car is covered but it's the ground-breaking 'Gullwing' that takes centre-stage.

Futuristic styling, a 140mph top speed, a fuel-injected engine in common with contemporary Grand Prix cars, ferocious acceleration and handling best left to the experts - the 300 SL was ultra-desirable in period and its values now are commensurately high.

This book truly does it justice.

Text: Steve Wakefield
Photos: Palawan Press



The Gullwing: The Mercedes-Benz 300 SL Coupé book is available in two editions:

Standard Edition

A limited edition of 500 copies, numbered 1-500, bound in silver grey buckram with a 1-colour silkscreen print on front, spine and back, and foil blocked. The book is encased in a buckram slipcase, also foil blocked. £400 + postage (£12 in the UK, £30 in the EU, rest of the world by application).

Owners' Edition

A limited edition of 500 copies, numbered 1-500, comprising a two-book set, the Gullwing book bound in black buckram with a 1-colour silkscreen print on front, spine and back, foil blocked plus the Gullwing Book of Cars, bound in grey buckram with a 1-colour silkscreen print on front, spine and back, foil blocked. Both books are encased in a red buckram slipcase, with a 1-colour silkscreen print on front, spine and back, foil blocked and featuring a Mercedes badge replicating the Gullwing bodyplate, which can be engraved with your Gullwing's chassis number. £600 including postage.

For further information, see www.palawan.co.uk

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