

CLASSIC DRIVER

Healing Wings: Resurrection of the 'Lisbon SL'



The history of this Mercedes-Benz 300 SL Gullwing is exceptional. Formerly shipped to Lisbon, and boasting a competition history, it is now being completely restored. *Classic Driver* has been given an exclusive preview.

A tranquil backyard in the Stuttgart commuter belt of Markgröningen houses M&W Classic's inconspicuous premises with its hidden entrance. This low-key environment is a good thing: if the works of automotive art that are restored here were parked on display, they would create far too much attention.

Behind the unassuming workshop walls sit ageing automotive icons: 300 SL Gullwings and Roadsters from the legendary Mercedes-Benz W198 series. Car connoisseurs Miguel Morais and Mathieu Woehrle founded the company with the aim of meticulously restoring these Stuttgart sports cars back to fighting fitness.





Around 20 of these vehicles are parked in the various workshop areas of M&W Classic, with a very special example currently stripped down to its bare aluminum shell. “This 300 SL is a recent find from Portugal,” said Woehrlé. “As well as being aluminium-bodied, it is an even rarer ‘NSL’ version – one of those Gullwings that received factory-approved performance enhancements.”

Mercedes referred to the NSL performance kit as consisting of “special engine parts for sporty driving.” The dated phraseology conceals classic mechanical engine-tuning with sports-tuned exhaust systems and engine parts, which made the brilliant fuel-injected three-litre six-cylinder engine even more responsive. With more than 200bhp in a 1000kg body, the SL Gullwing was the fastest production car of its time.



The original sales invoice from Mercedes-Benz is also intact. With serial number 198040-6500045, and specified in black paint with red leather, the car was delivered on 5 March 1956 to the North German Shipping Company in Hamburg. The buyer, a C. Santos, is mentioned as awaiting delivery of the car in Lisbon, Portugal.

The speedometer had recorded a delivery mileage of just 118km and the serial number also appears on the Portuguese import documents of 7 April that year.

“Such complete documentation of a classic Gullwing is just phenomenal,” says Morais. A verifiable history clearly adds to the car’s value – and also makes it far easier to undertake a full restoration. For instance all the optional equipment on this particular model is recorded, such as: ‘Disc wheels with Rudge hubs 985-198’, or an ‘extended steering column SA 944-198’ as well as the ‘Radio-Becker Le Mans with Reims adapter SA 55 041 / 1 with Hirschmann antenna’. A sample of the original paint colour was also supplied.



“This 300 SL was used for racing in Portugal, as we know from in-period race reports and photos,” says Mathieu Woehrle. This makes the car’s history even more colourful although, for the race track, the car was painted in a different, light ivory colour. Since there is such complete documentation on the race specifications of the car, including additional air-cooling to the front brakes, M&W can apply strict standards to the accurate restoration of the engine, transmission, steering, chassis and axles – even the thickness of the body shell is known, and can be maintained.



“This is all of utmost importance,” the restorers agree – and Moraes and Woehrle know their stuff. Though the restoration could take up to two years, eventually this Gullwing will fly again.

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