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[Big Benz: Our pick of the S-Class generations](#)

Lead

As the marque's long-standing flagship, the S-Class has always been a productionised test bed, conjuring world-firsts with each generation of the car. Here we choose our favourites from its eminent lineage...

W108/109: The 'old S-Class'





With the W111/112 and their ‘fintails’ looking dated, 1965 saw Mercedes launch the W108/109 generation. They were S-Classes in all but name: thick carpets, solid walnut trim and plenty of velour imparted luxury, but it was the pioneering technology that made the model so popular – a characteristic which continues today. For the first time, disc brakes were used all round, while the W109 introduced self-levelling air suspension.

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Arriving in 1972, the W116 was the first Mercedes to be official labelled 'S-Class'; the baptism brought with it further technological advances, particularly those centring on safety. Now with a strengthened body structure, it was also the first car to boast ABS braking, and employed padded materials inside to protect passengers. In addition, it had wraparound indicators to make the driver's intentions clearer to other road users.

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W126: Relaxation station





Again, much emphasis was put on safety (airbags, traction control and seatbelt pre-tensioners all made their production debut), but extreme comfort was also considered: courtesy lights, heated seats and climate control served to relax passengers. To a lesser degree, cruise control allowed the driver to unwind a little, too.

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W140: Big Daddy



Seen by some as 'the best car in the world' and others as 'overengineered', the W140 certainly made a big statement – 'big' being the operative word in its physical dimensions, too, supposedly stemming from the 6'3" chief engineer's insistence on accommodating passengers of his stature. This time around, self-closing doors, double-glazed windows and the use of Mercedes' first mass-produced V12 engine headlined the features list.

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