
A long-playing record: 50,000km in 201 hours in a Mercedes 190 E 2.3-16

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August 1983. Just a few weeks before Mercedes launched the high-performance version of its hewn-from-solid small saloon, it took three 190 E 2.3-16s to the Nardò test track in Italy and set several World Records.

They certainly don't make them like that any more - although Mercedes-Benz, having dipped in quality during its brief, less-than-successful marriage to Chrysler, is now back on fine form, as [our test of the latest S-Class](#) shows.

Thirty years ago the company decided to go all sporty. BMW was seen to be the 'performance brand'. Audi, Quattro apart, was yet to make mass-market fast saloons. And tuning by AMG was only available to a small number of discerning, well-heeled owners of big Mercedes. It also helped that the DTM (Germany's highly popular Touring Car Championship) was now run to stricter road car rules - and Mercedes had decided to enter it.

So, at the Frankfurt show in 1983, packing a four-valve, Cosworth-tuned 2300cc version of the 190 E's four, the 190 E 2.3-16 made its bow. Interestingly, the first series of cars' 185bhp does not sound so impressive now, and we can't help noticing the slightly mean omission of Cosworth's name from the Stuttgart company's 2013 press material.

Whatever, in August 1983 three 190 E 2.3-16s, only slightly modified for endurance running in 40deg C temperatures, successfully set three outright records over distances of 25,000km, 25,000 miles and 50,000km. The latter was despatched in 201 hours, 39 minutes and 43 seconds. They also broke nine international class (2000cc - 3000cc) records for category A (automobiles) group I (petrol engines). An impressive start for the car that even today is known for its solidity, performance and style.