

CLASSIC DRIVER

1957 Mercedes-Benz 300 SL

- Lot sold
USD 0
- **Year of manufacture** 1957
- **Lot number** 160
- **Drive** LHD
- **Condition** Used
- **Location** 
- **Exterior colour** Other
- **Car type** Other
-

Description

PROVENANCE

Bill and Catherine Vasileff, Birmingham, Michigan
Patricia Caravella, Birmingham, Michigan
Frank Spellman, Chevy Chase, Maryland
Frank Pritt, Corona del Mar, California (acquired in 1995)
Current Owner

THIS CAR

By 1951, Mercedes-Benz had produced its first postwar luxury model, the 300 series, which was the fastest car available in Germany. Successful within its home country, the 300 series also attracted marquee international clients such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Gary Cooper, and the Shah of Iran.

Mercedes-Benz then sought to increase sales further through international racing efforts. Engineers were asked to create a competition car using available passenger car parts, and the W194 300 SL race car was born. The W194 used the 300 series' inline six-cylinder engine but with three carburetors, a freer-flowing intake and exhaust, and a more aggressive cam to increase horsepower from 125 to 175. Most important, design was based around an advanced tubular space frame, yielding a very light weight and prompting the initials SL, for Sport Leicht. This design also necessitated the use of the now-iconic Gullwing doors.

The W194 made its racing debut at the 1952 Mille Miglia, with one car finishing 2nd with Karl Kling and another finishing 4th with Rudolf Caracciola. Later that year, the 300 SLs came in 1st and 2nd at Le Mans and swept the first four positions at the Nürburgring. At the Carrera Panamericana that year, only 39 of the 91 cars that entered would complete the race, but all three Mercedes-Benz teams finished, with the 300 SLs of Karl Kling and Hermann Lang coming in 1st and 2nd.

Developed from these racing cars, the production 300 SL Coupe debuted at the 1954 New York Auto Show to widespread acclaim. In mid-1957, as Gullwing production wound down, sales of the comprehensively refined 300 SL Roadster commenced. The roadsters were extensively re-engineered compared to their closed

predecessor, with handling improved by rear-suspension upgrades. Compensating for the Roadster's additional weight, its three-liter engine received a competition (NSL) camshaft and increased compression.

This 300 SL Roadster was constructed at the Mercedes-Benz factory in Stuttgart during August 1957, according to a copy of the factory data card, and was finished in the attractive color combination of Silbergrau (Silver Gray) over red upholstery. Notably, it was equipped with the highly desirable Rudge knock-off wheels option that was fitted only to about 27 Roadsters.

A report in the car's history file says that this Roadster was purchased by noted collector Frank Pritt of Corona del Mar, California, in 1995 from Classic MB, who had restored the car. Mr. Pritt, who also owned a silver Gullwing fitted new with Rudge wheels, had made his fortune in software and his outstanding collection included the Rimoldi Alfa 8C 2.3, a very original D-Type Jaguar, and a wonderfully restored Ferrari 275 GTB/C. Previous owners of the Roadster are reported to include Bill and Catherine Vasileff and Patricia Caravella, both of Birmingham, Michigan, and noted 300 SL collector and historian Frank Spellman of Chevy Chase, Maryland.

In 2004, Mr. Pritt had some mechanical servicing performed, including the rebuild of its wheel cylinders and the reseal of the rear-axle bearings by Mercedes-Benz specialist Peter Krausert. By 2015, the Roadster was under its current ownership, and in 2016, it was sent to 300 SL authority Hjeltness Restoration Inc. of Escondido, California, for servicing. The valves and timing were adjusted, and work was performed on the auxiliary fuel pump, distributor, brakes, and fuel system.

This 300 SL Roadster's specifications will draw the eye of knowledgeable Mercedes-Benz enthusiasts. A Roadster with Rudge wheels on its build sheet is extremely rare, with about 27 said to have been produced (the wheels are date-coded 1955 on this example). This Roadster's desirable color combination distinguishes it further, and its older restoration and lightly patinated cosmetics mean it could be used more freely than a perfect show car fresh from restoration. The Roadster's usability has long been praised by 300 SL owners. As a period advertisement put it, "With its impressive performance, the 300 SL is the ruggedest and swiftest German production car, which in its new roadster version, not only had success in competitions but is also one of the smartest and most obedient business cars... with the soul of a celebrated racing car." Factory Rudge-wheel Roadsters seldom come to market, so Mercedes-Benz connoisseurs should take note of this rare and special opportunity.

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