



road test:

MERCEDES - BENZ 190-SL

Despite a pair of enormous dual Solex carburetors, the 190 SL recorded 31 mpg at 70 mph.



Very few new sports cars have been so eagerly awaited or so long in coming as the moderately priced SL version of the Mercedes-Benz. A first description of the 190 SL appeared in R & T as far back as April, 1954, but many modifications have been incorporated since that time. Changes made in the production cars just now arriving in quantity include a redesigned frontal aspect (similar to the 300 SL), and numerous changes in mechanical details brought about as a result of very intensive testing and development work by the Stuttgart engineers.

The net result is a car which is slightly more expensive and a little heavier than was originally planned, but certainly it should be durable, dependable and without "bugs". Furthermore, this machine shows genuine quality in every detail, from the external finish to the smallest bolt and nut.

The car tested was handed over to us with 973 miles on the odometer by Mr. Harold F. Coole, General Manager for Mercedes-Benz in Los Angeles. We were also accompanied by Mr. Victor R. Gross, the factory export service engineer who proved to be a most enjoyable companion, making no complaint as to our driving methods—so long as we did not exceed 6000 rpm.

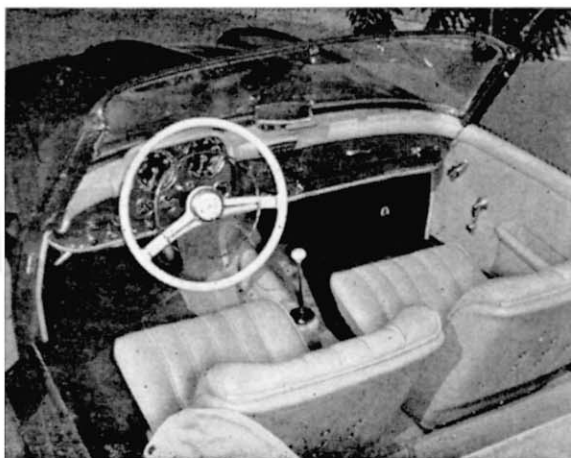
The outstanding achievement of the 190 SL is without a doubt its quality in design and workmanship. But a close second is the general feeling of solidity which it immediately conveys. It weighs exactly 2500 lbs with a full tank, and it feels like a 4000 lb car on the road. The ride is very difficult to describe; at times there is a slow easy motion, especially on long, rolling undulations. At other times, particularly on choppy surfaces, there is a feeling of firmness which indicates that the shock absorbers really "snub" the car.

Like all Mercedes cars, the steering is a little heavy, even at high speeds. The car understeers slightly, but the force required to round a fast bend tends to cause one to oversteer a bit until more experienced. The car is at its best at high speeds, one of the easiest cars to cruise at 80 plus mph we have ever encountered. Fast bends cause absolutely no anxiety but sharp, right-angle corners taken vigorously in 2nd gear are not this car's forte. True, it adheres firmly to the road and the low-pivot swing axles at the rear "stick" very well over bumpy corners, but the tire squeal in this type of test is appalling, and there is considerable roll. Most sports car people would prefer something a little less noisy in tire choice.



Three special suitcases are available for the trunk, two for behind the seats.

Traditional Mercedes horn-ring also acts as a direction signal control.



Mr. Cross, the factory engineer was frankly disappointed over the results of the performance tests. Possibly the acceleration figures could be improved upon slightly, and certainly the top speed should be better, with more miles on the engine. The odometer read only 1175 miles at the start of the tests and only two high speed runs were made, in deference to the low mileage. The factory states that "the top speed, with sports car windscreen, is about 180 km/hr (111.8 mph)" but we, of course, test in full touring trim. Wind noise is moderate up to 80 mph, above that, noticeable, and at over 90 mph there is a shrill whistle, with windows closed tightly.

During the acceleration tests we used a rev limit of 6000 rpm in each gear, with one exception. Strictly as a "not recommended" procedure we hit an actual 60 mph (63 mph indicated) in 2nd gear, during one standing start test. The time recorded was 12.1 seconds, but this required 6500 rpm and though the engine did not object, Mr. Cross did.

Obviously the 190 SL is not a "bomb" in acceleration: nor is it "Super-Leicht," but the acceleration times are very good for a 2-litre car of this weight. It is easy to overlook the fact that this engine is very small, by U.S. standards, for 1897 cc is only 115.7 cu. in. Yet at no time is there any impression of being underpowered, and despite the fact that over one horsepower per cu. in. is developed, there is no temperament. With engine idling there is a little "cam-clatter" but inside the car there is no noticeable engine noise. In fact this is one of the smoothest and quietest four-cylinder cars on the market, and it is absolutely impossible to tell the number of cylinders from driving the car. The only criticism which might be made by the non-enthusiast is that the car feels "high-geared" in 4th, and 3rd is necessary for rapid ascents of long steep grades. About 20 mph is the minimum speed in 4th gear, and we used 3rd gear at all times below 35 mph. The transmission is, incidentally, one of the best. It is nearly dead silent in all ratios and the synchronizers (on all four forward speeds) work perfectly—at no time is there a "crunch" when shifting, even during the most energetic use.

Seated at the wheel the driving position is ideal, the controls are well placed and visibility is excellent. The seat cushions are quite firm and far less tiring after several hours of driving than the super-soft types which "sell" cars in the showroom. Two semi-bucket seats are standard equipment but a bench seat is optional. In addition a third seat can be ordered which sits transversely behind the two front ones.

A built-in heater is standard equipment and has adjustments for fresh air on each side of the dash panel in lieu of vent panes in the side windows. This is of course a true convertible coupe rather than a roadster. Mercedes describe the 190 SL as a "touring-sports" model but a racing screen and lighter, cut-away doors can be supplied, which the factory states "make it possible to participate with success in sporting events on a modest scale."

As far as Class E competition is concerned, "modest" is probably the right word, but for a rally-type event, we could hardly think of a more suitable car than the 190 SL.

ROAD & TRACK TEST NO. F-12-55

MERCEDES-BENZ 190SL



SPECIFICATIONS

List price (N.Y.C.)	\$3998
Wheelbase	94.5 in.
Tread, front	56.3 in.
rear	58.3 in.
Tire size	6.40-13
Curb weight	2500 lbs
distribution	54/46
Test weight	2820 lbs
Engine	4 cyl.
Valves	sohc
Bore & stroke	3.35 x 3.29 in.
Displacement	1897 cc
Compression ratio	8.50
Horsepower	120
peaking speed	5700
equivalent mph	104
Torque, ft/lbs	101
peaking speed	3800
equivalent mph	68.1
Mph per 1000 rpm	18.2
Mph at 2500 rpm	82.9
Gear ratios (overall)	
4th	3.89
3rd	5.01
2nd	7.78
1st	13.2
R & T performance factor	39.6

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (avg.)	99.8
best run	102.6
Max. speeds in gears—	
3rd (6000)	85
2nd (6000)	55
1st (6000)	32
Shift points from—	
same as above (see text)	
Mileage	26/31 mpg

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph	4.4 secs
0-40 mph	7.1 secs
0-50 mph	9.3 secs
0-60 mph	13.0 secs
0-70 mph	18.1 secs
0-80 mph	24.0 secs
0-90 mph	33.8 secs
Standing ¼ mile—	
average	19.3
best	19.1

TAPLEY READINGS

Gear	Lbs/ton	Mph	Grade
1st	520	at 21	27%
2nd	370	at 34	19%
3rd	240	at 50	12%
4th	170	at 65	9%
Total drag at 60 mph, 109 lbs.			

SPEEDO ERROR

Indicated	Actual
30 mph	28.2
40 mph	38.0
50 mph	47.6
60 mph	57.4
70 mph	67.0
80 mph	77.0
90 mph	87.0
107 mph	102.6

