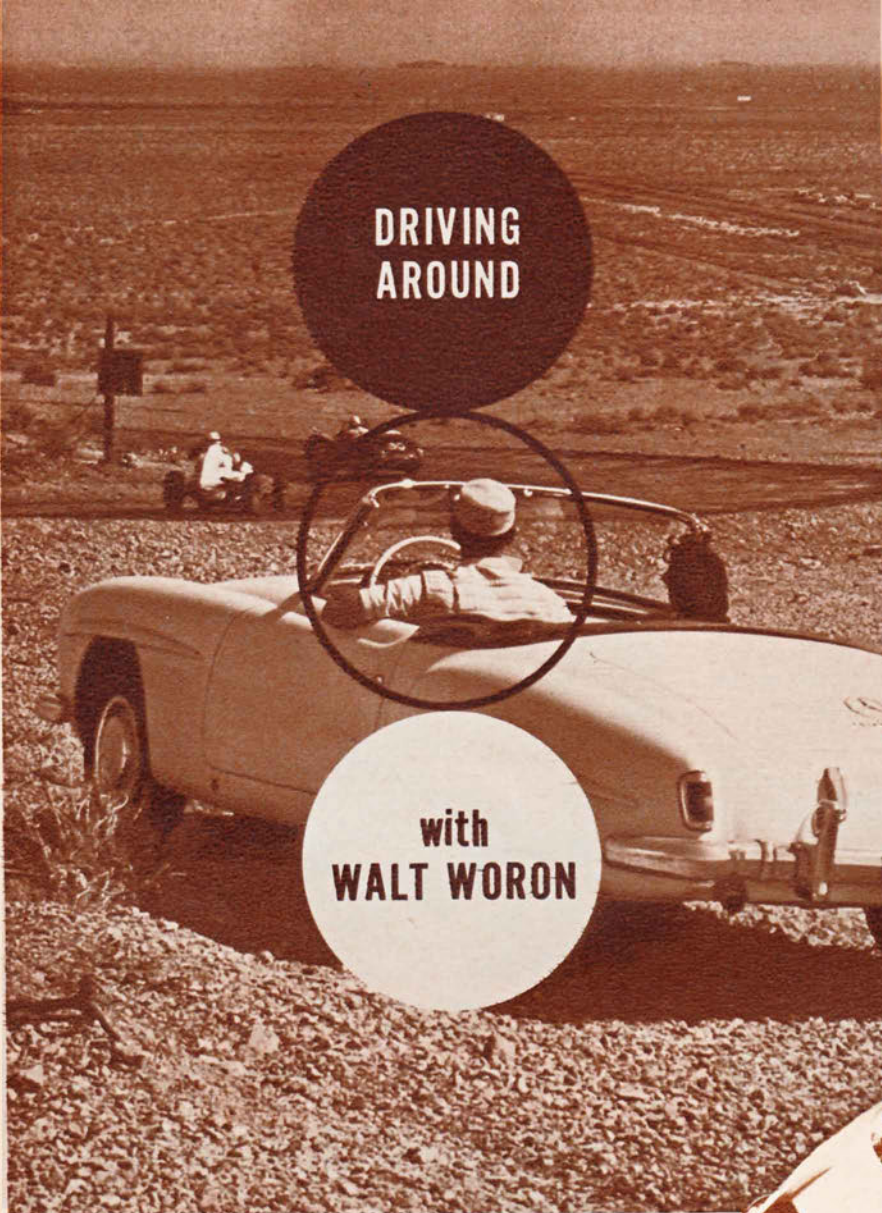


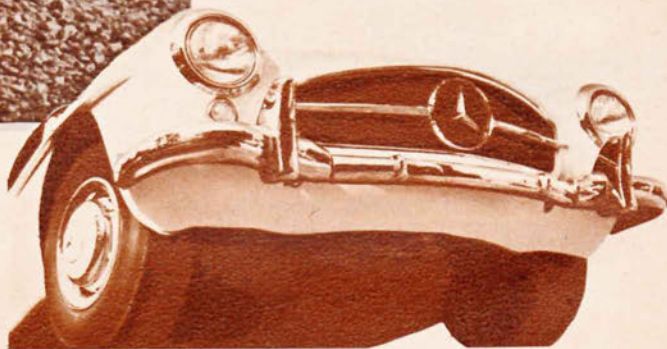
DRIVING
AROUND

with
WALT WORON

Cooling of brakes is assisted by the fins.
Shock mounting is rugged, makes service easy



Putting up the convertible top is absolutely no chore for the owner, even from the driver's seat. Top stows away neatly behind the 2 bucket seats. Altho the factory designates the other version of 190-SL a coupe, in reality it's a convertible with removable metal hardtop and added chrome trim



MERCEDES-BENZ 190-SL

MERCEDES-BENZ has long been a magic name among automotive-minded people, with its mere mention enough to cause goose pimples. Why? The name has always stood for quality, performance, dependability, and a certain aura not to be found in any other car—even for twice the price. It's little wonder then, isn't it, that I've been anxiously awaiting the opportunity to test the new Mercedes-Benz 190-SL?

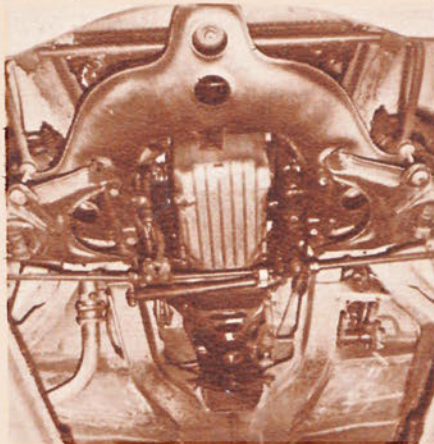
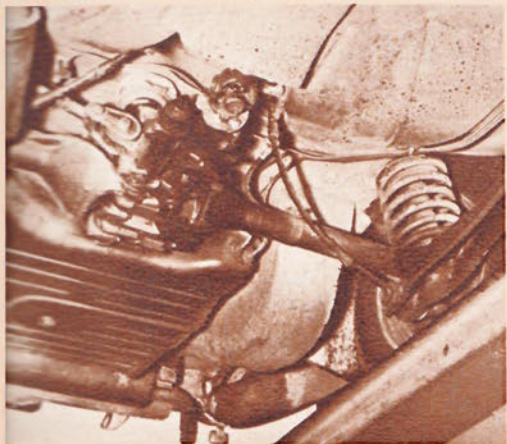
And just how does this descendant of the long line of Mercedes wonder cars stack up? In a nutshell—more than adequately. Quality is decidedly one of its fortes, while you must, on the other hand, come to the conclusion that the 190-SL is not a sports car in the strictest sense of the word—particularly if you are to thoroughly understand and enjoy the car. It is better that you approach it with the reservation that here is a fine quality, sports-touring car capable of giving you lots of driving pleasure but not many wins in 2-liter competition.



Note single-U-joint swing axle. Suspending rear end in frame keeps unsprung weight low

Shock absorber between frame and pitman arm helps ease steering, smooth out handling

Performance of small engine indicates effectiveness of overhead cam, dual carburetors

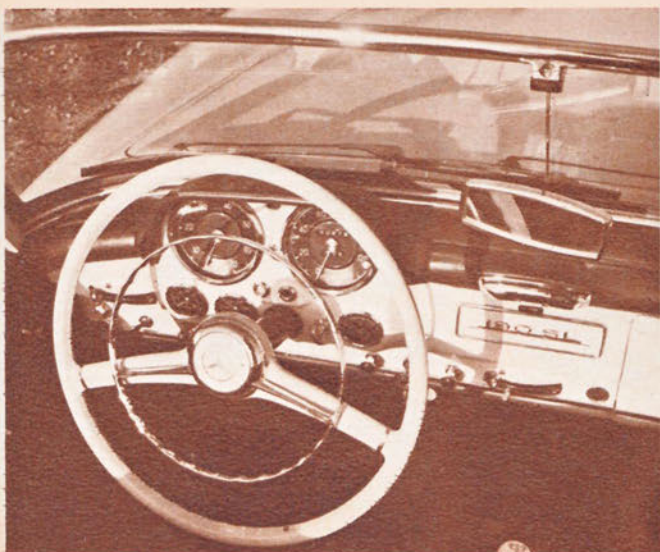


photos by Joe Moore

Don't let the horsepower figure of the 116-cubic-inch, 4-cylinder engine fool you, for tho it's a fairly high 120, the overall weight of 2643 pounds (our test car) results in a weight/power ratio of 22 to 1. This is higher (meaning less performance) than the majority of American stock cars. On the other hand, there's no American stock car engine that extracts nearly as much as the 190-SL's one-horsepower-plus for every cubic inch of displacement. It does this by using a highly efficient overhead camshaft arrangement, 8.5 to 1 compression ratio, twin Solex carbs, and by revving high (5700 for peak, 6000 maximum). If you could trim the weight more than is possible now (doors replaced with lighter ones, removing the windshield and bumpers) or up the horsepower with higher compression, you might well go along with the factory's claim of a car in which it is "absolutely possible to participate successfully in automobile racing contests." It *is* possible, but hardly practical.

Now that the contest-minded readers are no longer with us, just what are the 190-SL's attributes? As I said previously, quality is one of the outstanding features. You get the feeling that craftsmen were hard at work, that the artisans who assembled this car are proud of their handiwork. The panels all fit, the finish is good (tho not very inspiring), the bumpers are well made and unusually adequate for such a car. In fact, everything is so well done up that when you come to something like the flimsy decklid and lock, you find it entirely out of keeping with the Mercedes-Benz nameplate. Equally incongruous is the fact that the back of your hand hits the armrest as you crank the window. You're certainly hard put to find any faults

In the driver's seat you are greeted by an array of instruments and controls from an oil pressure gauge always on 90 to a hot engine primer



with the workmanship, tho. It's about as good as you'll see.

Performance-wise you'll show your stop-lights to most of last year's stock cars in the low- and medium-priced fields. Here's what we racked up in standing-start acceleration checks:

0-30 mph, 3.9 secs. (1st gear only)

0-60 mph, 11.6 secs. (1st, 2nd & 3rd)

¼-mile (76 mph), 18.7 secs. (1st, 2nd, & 3rd)

To get maximum acceleration, you wind it up real tight to 6000 rpm in each gear, snapshifting in between. The best times we got in the highway passing ranges were also made by revving up as tight as possible in each gear, for example:

30-50 mph, 4.7 secs. (2nd gear only)

50-80 mph, 13.2 secs. (2nd and 3rd)

I even tried it up a 32 per cent grade, steeper than any you'll find except in Los Angeles and San Francisco. The 1st time I shifted out of 1st gear at 4000 rpm, but it wouldn't take it in 2nd. I repeated the climb, but this time kept it in 1st, cresting the top at 30 mph and 5000 rpm, with plenty of throttle to spare.

You'll have to use the gears a lot in traffic, since you don't get best performance without revving up the engine. You can't go much lower than 40 mph in 3rd gear without bucking or at least lugging the engine; I therefore found it best to use 3rd gear around town. It's easy to whip around in traffic, since the car is small and vision is good; there's no problem in parking.

On the open road, you'll cruise along effortlessly and stably right on up to top speed, which in our case was 103.4 mph (the factory claims 111.8 mph). You won't have to use any corrective action, since the 190-SL keeps a straight-line course, even on crowned roads. There's absolutely no wind wander, nor is the car affected by sharp gusts. The only wheel vibration is over rough roads.

When the road begins to wind you get the general feeling that the 190-SL will handle like a superb sports car, but don't let this lead you to a wrong assumption. As you speed up and begin to push it into the corners, you get a sort of sloshing around (the tires seem to roll under and the car appears to shift sidewise). On a real sharp (90-degree) turn taken fast (30 mph) for its radius, the back end will break, but the steering is so positive you can easily correct without even changing the throttle opening. On faster (40 mph and up) turns, you can take it thru in an easily controlled 4-wheel drift. Body lean is noticeable but not objectionable to the driver, requiring the passenger to hold on.

Coming out of dips or over bumps there's no wallowing. It's no problem keeping control of the car even when you leave the asphalt. Car tracks seem the same as a smooth road, and washboards don't affect it adversely. The ride is a strange combination of soft and firm—it takes dips and bumps in stride, but you do feel the tarstrips. (Continued on page 67)

Driving Around

With the 190-SL, you have to be familiar with the somewhat more difficult task of getting in and out of a sports car. There isn't a lot of room between the doorsill and seat, or between the seat and wheel, so you have to wrap yourself in and watch your feet (the column doesn't telescope). You also have to watch your head when the top's up. What a no-concern job putting up the top is! To put it down, you loosen 3 clamps at the windshield, and from the driver's seat push the top to its folded position; reverse the procedure and it's up.

The seats are extremely comfortable; well-padded, contoured to your body, almost wrapping you in place. They adjust back and forth on their track quite easily, and can also be lifted forward to allow access to the rear area. This area takes fitted luggage, or with the removal of a floor covering and addition of a seat cushion can be made usable for an emergency passenger.

The steering wheel is down fairly low, but not quite in your lap. The tach and speedometer are directly in front of the driver, with the other instruments grouped below them. The 190-SL has almost as many controls as a light plane.

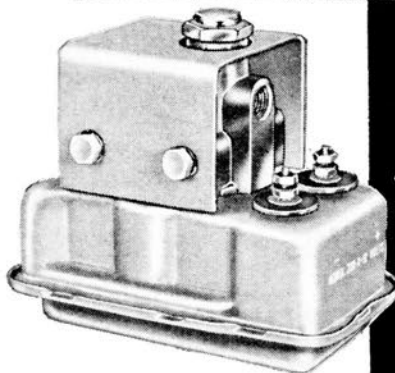
There's good room around the foot controls—there's no danger of stepping on your own foot or on the clutch instead of the brake. You can rest your left foot to the left of the clutch pedal, and your right leg against the transmission housing. Your shoulders won't feel cramped, unless your name happens to be Les Bingaman. Headroom is just adequate with top up.

There is some distortion in the sharply radiused corners of the windshield, but vision is otherwise great. The hood slopes forward quite radically and both front fenders are visible. There is no glare and no reflection at night from instruments. The lights themselves are soft.

The electrically operated windshield wipers have an overlapping sweep, but still don't wrap into the upper corners of the windshield. The heat controls are in the center of the panel, accessible to both driver and passenger and altho they are not lit, the map light throws an adequate glow if you get confused. Individual vent controls are on both sides of the panel. You have to grope somewhat for the emergency brake (below the panel) but it's easy to pull on and to release.

It's my feeling that the Mercedes-Benz 190-SL, at its delivered price of around \$4000 (plus tax, license, and extras, of course) is a competitor in the personal or luxury car field. You can get such nice extras as a radio with an automatic antenna (for \$250) and a removable hard-top that makes it even more weathertight. If you want something different that's dependable to the utmost, the 190-SL could be just your *poisson*.

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