

Macho man

If you thought the R129 SL a touch effete, *Tim Slade* finds one more manly than a Yorkie bar made with ball bearings and old sump oil



Mercedes SL60 AMG
 ENGINE 5,956cc V8
 POWER 376bhp@5,500rpm
 TORQUE 428lb/ft@3,750rpm
 TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto
 WEIGHT 1,800kg
 0-62MPH 5.6sec
 TOP SPEED 155mph (limited)

It's all the fault of a certain Mrs Windsor. The minor scandal concerning Lady Di's preference for the R129 SL over the home grown Jaguar XJS managed to seal its fate as a ladies' car. Which is strange, for a powerful, heavy, lantern jawed sports car.

Unfortunately for the R129s, like many other Mercedes, they have an image problem that has far more to do with how good the cars are than any deficiencies. These cars offered just about the last word in fresh air luxury, or indeed coupé

luxury, as the aluminium lift-off hardtop came as standard.

Those luxuries included everything needed to make the SL a car that any woman would want to drive. All the V8s were fitted with automatic gearboxes, there was power everything including the seats, and a very clever top requiring nothing more than the touch of a button to put it up or down. Modern refinements such as traction control and ABS meant that nobody needed to get themselves in trouble despite having all that power, and

if they did then the legendary Mercedes-Benz safety and strength would look after them.

Get it really wrong and a roll bar would pop up in a third of a second to prevent untimely contact between coiffure and black top. It shouldn't have taken Lady Di's little tantrum to upset the good people of Coventry. The SL was in a different league from the XJS and should have upset them all on its own, even taking into account the XJS's age and lower price tag.

It's not even as if the standard 500SL was slow. It might have been heavy but it needed a limiter to keep it to 155mph, and with no more than a firm push on the right hand pedal it could get you to 62mph in 6.5 seconds. This was only a couple of tenths shy of a contemporary Ferrari 348, so why the girlie image?

Road testers loved it. Bruno Sacco's lines may

now be seen as rather heavy handed, but at the time they were felt to be crisp and modern. There were very few criticisms, and *Road & Track* summed up the 500SL

saying, "The 500SL's about all a body needs." But of course, as we all know, plenty is never enough.

By 1995 Hans Werner Aufrecht and had been assisting those for whom the best wasn't good enough for quite a while.

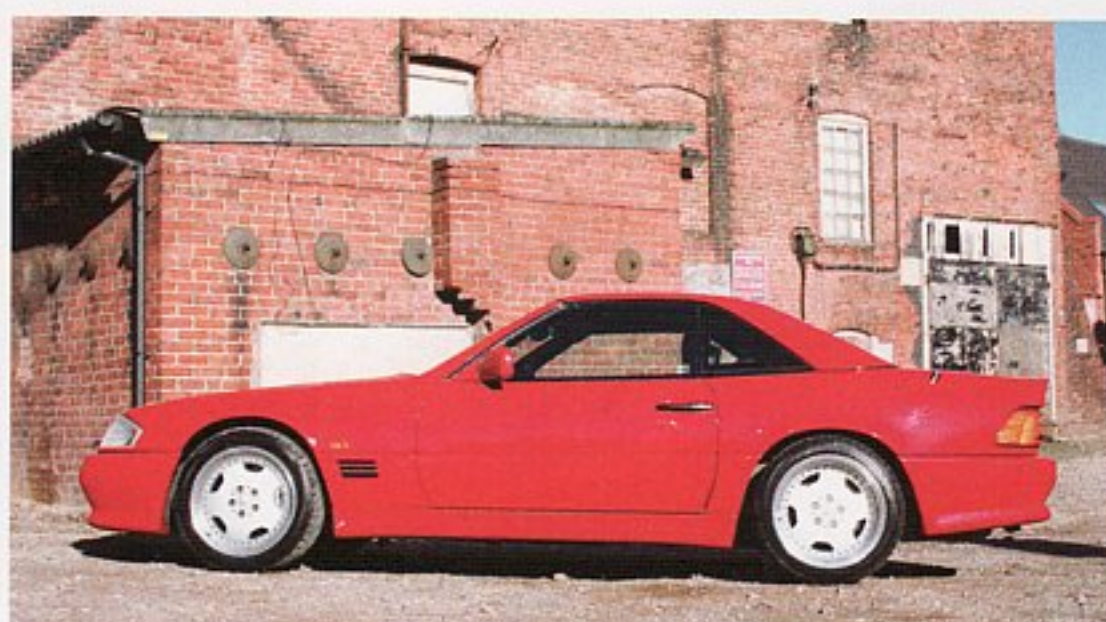
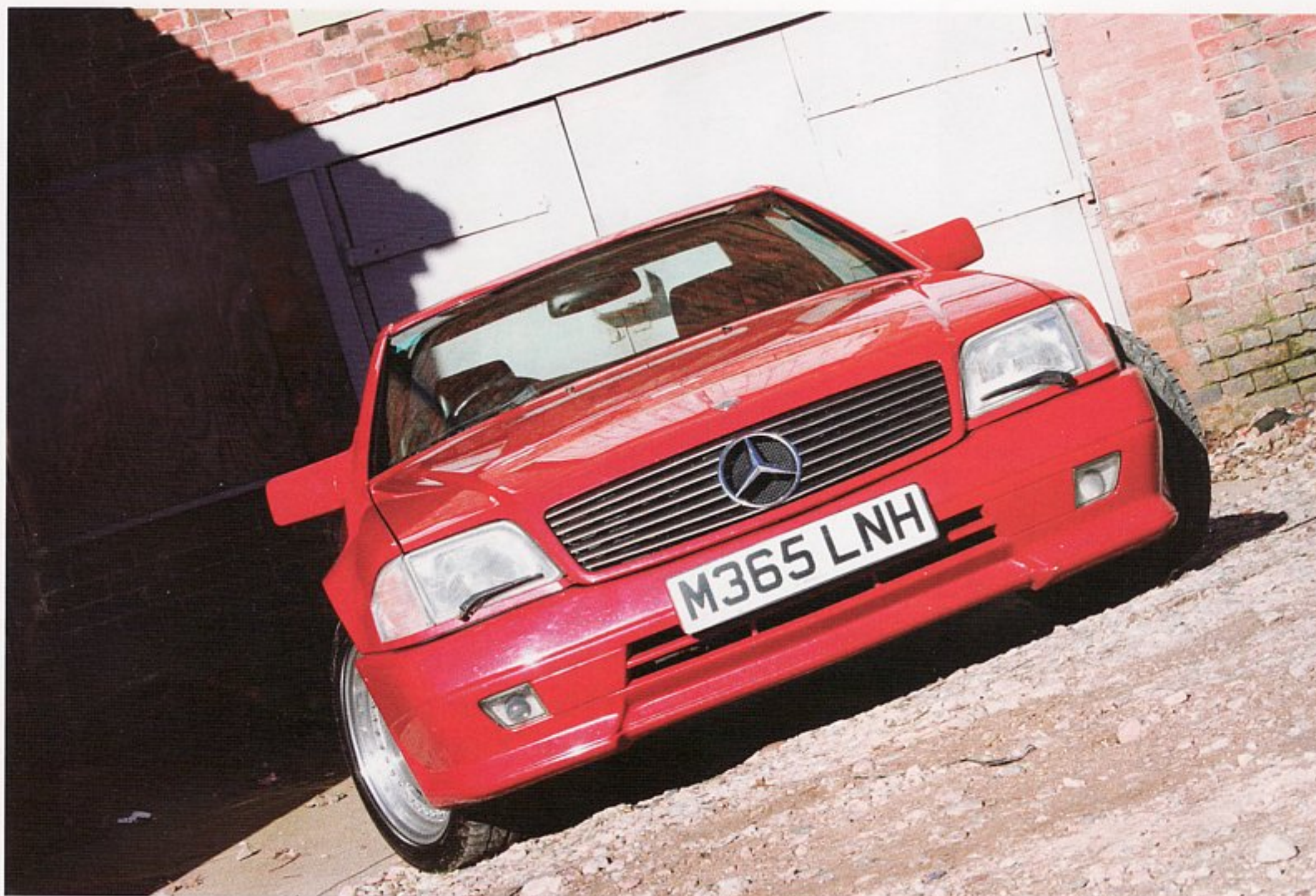
"IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN HEAVY BUT IT NEEDED A LIMITER TO KEEP IT TO 155MPH"

Lady in red - but the full-on AMG SL is no girlie excuse for a car.

He had left the employ of the engine testing department at Daimler-Benz way back in 1967. With partner Erhard Melcher he set up a small company called AMG. Based in an old mill, they turned their attention to improving on the Stuttgart product, never being tempted to dilute their efforts by working on other marques.

CIRCUIT TRAINING

Back then racing was AMG's business, and in 1971 it achieved some much needed recognition with a class win in the



24-hour touring car event at Spa. The car was a 300SEL fitted with a 6.8-litre engine, and quite apart from its class win it took second overall. The winner was Dieter Glemser in a Capri RS on his way to taking the European Touring Car Championship, but few people remember that.

Much more success on the track was to follow, and of course people started to ask for this sort of performance for the road. Offering their race developed technology to the paying public proved popular, and the company was set on the path that led to its current status as a vital element in the DaimlerChrysler portfolio. These days it's hard to imagine Mercedes being able to compete at the top of the market without the cars wearing the AMG badge. Life is never simple, and the oil crisis of 1973 predictably hit AMG hard. There were 18 orders on the books, and every

Clockwise from top: AMG's deep front bumper is hardly subtle; sill extensions give a hunkered-down racer look; 376bhp claimed from Affalterbach's V8.

single one was cancelled. These problems were plainly temporary, as by the time this SL60 AMG was built in 1995, AMG was on to its third DTM title. Not only that, but it had expanded to the point that it was now in its third premises, with a workforce in the region of 400 employees.

By 1990 the relationship between AMG and Daimler-Benz was a close one, and it was formalised in a co-operation agreement that was to see AMG products sold through Mercedes-Benz dealers. In 1993 AMG unveiled its first car co-developed with Mercedes-Benz, the C36 AMG. It was a little later, in 1999, that AMG became fully incorporated into DaimlerChrysler, and assumed the role that has become so familiar to anyone with even a passing interest in fast cars.

There was no way that AMG would have been able to keep its hands off the R129 SL.

It left the six-cylinder cars alone, building its own versions of the V8, and then later the V12 cars. The SL500 morphed into the SL60 AMG. The SL600 became the mighty SL73 AMG, a story in its own right and one featured previously in *Mercedes Enthusiast* (January 2006).

V8 POWER

The SL60 should be enough. In fact five litres in the SL500 should be enough, but AMG took the M119 four-valve 4,973cc V8 and pulled it out to 5,956cc. The M119 was a twin-cam development of the old M117 SOHC two-valve engine. The largest capacity version of that was in the 560SEL/SEC/SL, at 5,547cc. Apparently the SL60's 94.8mm stroke was achieved by fitting the crank from the 5.6-litre M117.

The M119 engine is not to be confused with the four-valve AMG V8 units that



"SOME RECKON A TOUCH OVER THE MAGIC 400BHP MIGHT BE NEARER THE MARK"

motivated the E300 5.0 AMG and E300 5.6 AMG cars from the 80s. American fans gave these cars the name 'The Hammer', their M117 V8s fitted with AMG's own four-valve cylinder heads.

There is a story that Daimler-Benz had a small problem with the SL60 AMG. Although it fulfilled a very different brief from the range topping SL600, Mercedes felt that it shouldn't be allowed to steal its thunder. The V12 car was rated at 389bhp, and apparently it was thought that a lower power output from the 6-litre AMG car would be diplomatic. The SL60 AMG's official 376 ponies do seem implausibly modest.

The AMG car was a touch heavier than the SL500 at 1,800kg, and it has to be said that the V12 carried quite a weight penalty at 1,980kg. The SL600 got to 62mph in 6.1 seconds, but the

SL60 AMG stomped to 62mph in a considerably quicker 5.6. It might be wishful thinking, but some people reckon that a touch over the magic 400bhp might be nearer the mark.

From the driving seat it certainly feels like 400bhp. As with any heavy car with an automatic gearbox, 0-62mph does not give a true reflection of the car's power. It's when you're up towards illegal speeds that

Despite being a hefty 1,800kg, it's still a monster on the road.

the SL60's true pace starts to show. With the auto switched to sport mode the four-speed is willing to kick down a couple of gears at the request of your right toe.

As a 1995 car this was built a few months before the introduction of the five-speed. Power dominates the experience. Overtaking is bike quick, and if you leave your foot down it only takes a moment to get scary. Along with the power comes a fabulous V8 soundtrack. It isn't quite NASCAR, but then this is a Mercedes. With gentle use of the throttle it is perhaps a little too quiet for the average performance junkie but when you're pushing on the note is addictive.

The heavy footed are looked after with traction control, but smoky burnouts and tail out drifts are available at the touch of a button. Of course the ASR button helps protect your wallet as well as the



AMG's official ties with Mercedes were becoming closer.



environment. Part of the AMG package was a set of very handsome three-piece split rims, and the 265/40ZR17s that are wrapped around the back ones might make a bit of a dent in your credit card if you keep wearing them out.

The AMG suspension shares its intent with the engine. It's set up to help make this a very capable machine indeed, with a ride that's firm enough to let you know what's happening underneath you, without creating business for osteopaths. Much of the considerable weight of the R129s went into engineering a really stiff shell and even the harder, lower suspension cannot upset its composure.

The seats are also on your side when it comes to keeping away from the osteopath's table.

They are the usual R129 ones, and are perhaps a little wide for more modestly built frames. The fully powered adjustments should get you sorted, and with a steering column that goes up and down as well as in and out you would have to be of an extremely unconventional shape not to be able to get comfy.

This car has an interior option that must have taken some justifying. What did it cost to have every surface covered in stitched leather? There simply isn't any plastic on show. In fact the first owner didn't have to make excuses to the wife because it was Mercedes-Benz UK. This was the press car, and it must have impressed a goodly number of the well-heeled as, according to our sources, 48 right hand drive SL60 AMGs went to British owners.

"IT'S SET UP TO HELP MAKE THIS A VERY CAPABLE MACHINE INDEED"



The SL60 AMGs could come with or without a bodykit, depending on the flamboyance of the first owner. As an early car this one carries the first generation of styling. A softer, rounder, more modern looking kit replaced it. In fact the sill extensions, front

and rear bumpers and spoilers are discreet enough to fool the casual observer, though the boot spoiler is not. Extending down to

Clockwise from main: Full stitched leather looks great, if excessive; earlier bodykit was the more extreme; split rim 3-piece wheels the final touch.

SL60 AMG's roof lowered easily at the touch of a button.



the top of the lights it is very much early AMG in style. It's actually quite subtle and really rather elegant.

With the hard top in place you have a coupé that is sophisticated enough to mask its towering performance. Out in the open air it's easier to feel what's going on, and of course you get to enjoy that glorious V8 bellow.

HARD HIT

Those 48 original buyers were lucky people although they paid handsomely for the privilege. Back in 1995 the price of a SL500 was a whopping £82,000. Add to that the engineering and options on the SL60 AMG and you'd have to be looking at a six-figure sum. With the R129s in that awkward second hand limbo, stuck between being new and trendy and still a few years away from classic status, values today have very little to do with the cars themselves. 11 years old, with full Mercedes-Benz history and 59,000 on the clock, this car has shed well over £80,000 of its value. Read it slowly – £80,000! To recap, this is an exceptionally rare supercar at Mondeo money. Buy now, keep it for five years and the value might drop a few thousand more. Keep it for ten, and you would be very unlikely not to get your money back.

Of course you can't expect to run these cars on a shoe string, so some of us will have to continue getting our manly fix from Yorkie bars. I think I'll go for a valve spring and brake fluid one this time.

☛ This SL60 is for sale. Contact **Jon Aucott TEL** 07968 694448 **EMAIL** jnthauact@aol.com