

MERCEDES

E N T H U S I A S T

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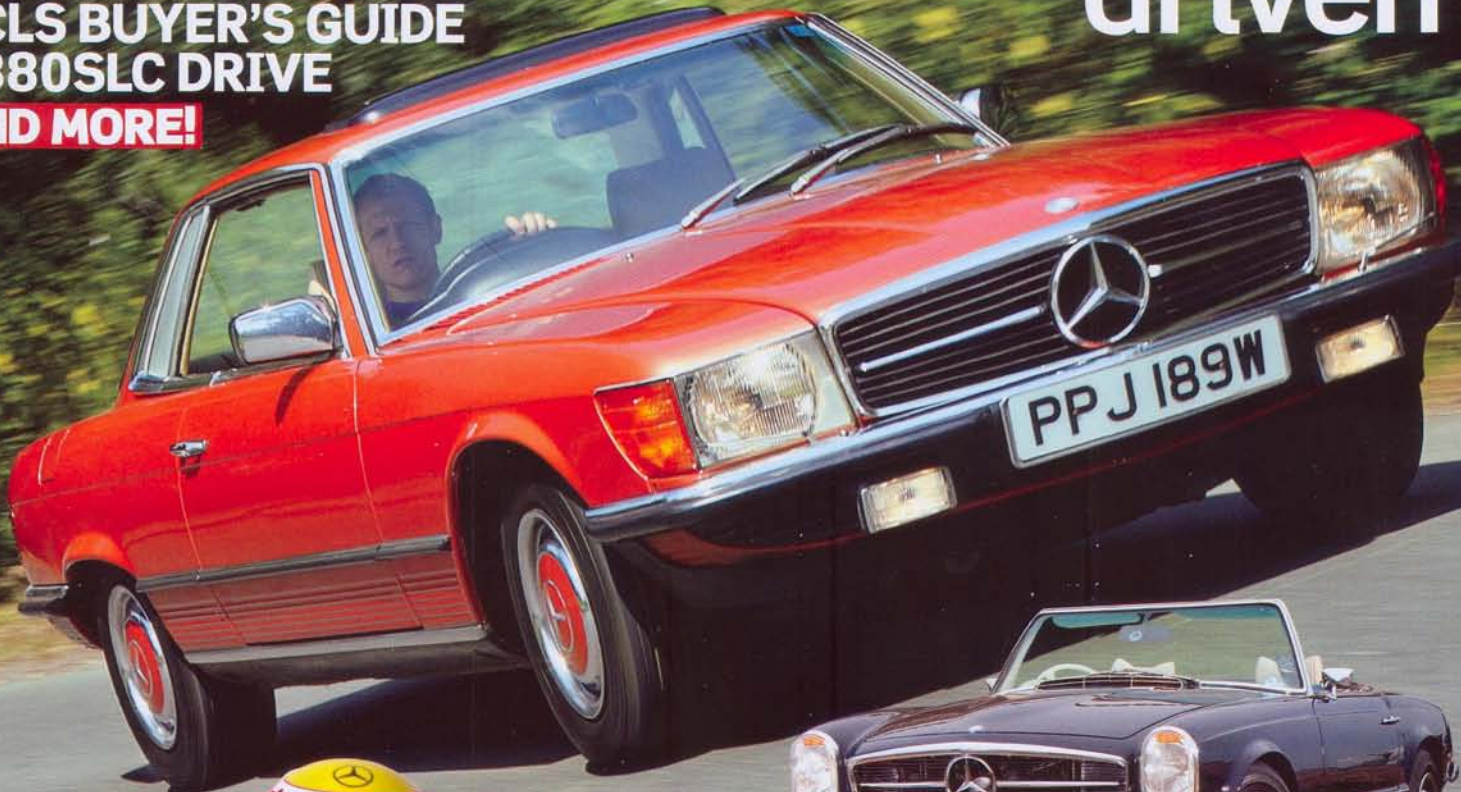
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I have owned over 60 cars in total, but the Mercedes are the ones closest to my heart

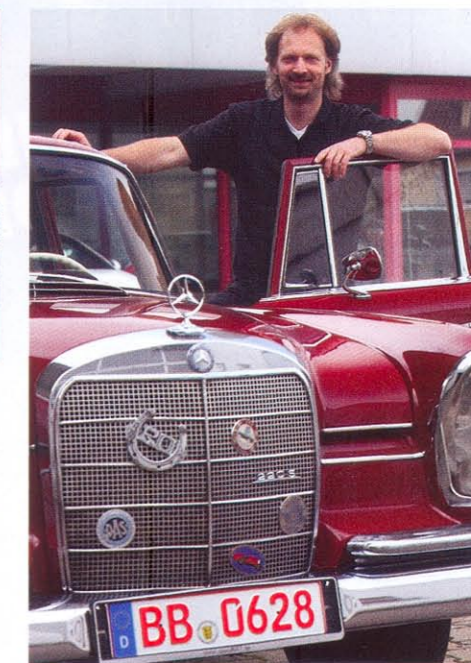


△ The W111 is kept in a good but useable condition.



◁ Commemorative badges are a sign of his enthusiasm.

▷ Björn Striening has owned over 30 classic Mercedes.



This 1964 W111 220Sb was bought with new paintwork and leather interior trim.

STUTTGART'S FINEST

While owning a Porsche tuning company undoubtedly has its perks, this enthusiast still turns to classic three-pointed stars for his ultimate motoring heaven **WORDS & IMAGES IAN KUAH**

IT IS NO SURPRISE THAT many Porsche enthusiasts use Mercedes as their practical daily cars. Both marques are built in Stuttgart and have illustrious histories with both their road and race cars. They are also not direct competitors in the main – and have even worked together on joint ventures.

Ruf and Gemballa have been in these pages before, and on a recent visit to SpeedArt in Rutesheim, we discovered that Björn Striening,

the founder of the third Porsche tuner in the Leonberg area of Stuttgart after Gemballa and TechArt, was also a Mercedes fan.

Björn formed his SpeedArt Porsche tuning company after leaving the sales department of Gemballa. However, while Uwe Gemballa uses a CLS500 as his daily driver (*Mercedes Enthusiast* May 2006) and Alois Ruf drives a 500E occasionally (*Mercedes Enthusiast* September 2006), SpeedArt's Björn Striening is

rather different – he is a classic Mercedes-Benz junkie.

"Driving classic Mercedes is a hobby that began as soon as I got my licence at 18," he explained. "I always loved the look and quality of classic Mercedes from the 1960s and 70s. The Fintail look was part of the attraction, as it reminded me of the wings of American cars from the late 60s. But American cars were not well built compared to Mercedes and most did not handle or stop either!"

"Unlike most young men who had just got their licence and wanted a sports car, I liked the big four-door limousines with lots of space inside and big engines," said Björn, continuing his story. "They are cool cars for just pleasure driving and cruising along. It is a completely different style of driving from a Porsche.

"In fact I did not get my first Porsche until the 90s just before I joined Gemballa," he explained. "It was an old 1976 911 Carrera

3.0, and I found that it and the Golf GTi Mk1 I had in the 80s were the totally opposite driving experience from the big Mercedes limousines. The Mercedes V8s had a great soundtrack, and although the insurance was not cheap for a young driver, it was not crippling either compared to a sports car because they were just old saloons. Back then they were really cheap to buy, but now that these cars have become classics sought after by collectors, they are becoming more valuable."

One thing the old Mercedes and Porsches share is bulletproof build quality. "If you compare them to other makes, especially French cars, they are built like tanks. French cars just fall apart with age, and their technical aspects are

often not very well thought through either. I even had a Datsun 240Z once and while it drove well, it was rather crude in engineering terms compared to the Mercedes of the same era."

One of the aspects that Björn finds most impressive is the support from Mercedes-Benz Classic. "You can still get all the spare parts for these old Mercedes, totally original or remanufactured, and in their correct packaging from the factory," he enthused. "This is really amazing and shows that the company takes its heritage very seriously."

Most enthusiasts in their 40s would be lucky to have had half a dozen classic Mercedes pass through their hands since they got their driving licence. But Björn is

something of an addict and his tally currently stands at over 30 cars. "I have bought and sold these cars over the years, but not as a business," he explained. "It was and always will be a hobby, and was simply a question of trading up to better examples of the same cars, while enjoying the ownership and driving experience."

"I currently have three W116s – a silver 350SE, a blue 450SE and a metallic green 6.9 – plus the red W111 220Sb," said Björn. "I have a friend who is a Mercedes dealer and restores classic cars too. Two of my cars are exhibited in his showroom, while the other two are here in my workshop."

The red W111 seen here is a 1964 220Sb. "When I bought this car, it had just been completely

restored with new paint and leather trim. It is in very good but not concours condition. I would not dare to drive a concours car!" The blue W116 450SE is one of the first from 1972. "I restored this one myself, stripping the car out for a complete repaint," Björn explained. "Luckily the trim was OK, so it was just refreshed. I think that the patina of age and original leather smell adds to the car's value."

We noted earlier that Björn had owned over 30 classic Mercedes since he started driving. "I have a book with all the information on the cars I have owned over the years," he said. "In fact, I have owned over 60 cars in total, but the Mercedes-Benzes are the ones closest to my heart."