

## 3 Living with a W107 SL or SLC

– will you get along together?



These cars are grand tourers rather than out-and-out sports cars – perfectly capable of taking you on long journeys, comfortably and reliably. They all have a good turn of speed and their roadholding, while not as good as later SLs, is adequate and predictable. The brakes are excellent, with ABS on the cars produced at the end of the model's run.

The earliest cars (350s and 450s) were fast and rugged, but a little prone to rattles and shakes. Their steering might feel vague by today's standards and they have quite a lot of body roll. They have relatively high levels of engine noise and the automatic transmission in the earliest 350 versions was a little harsh in operation and prone to failure.

Because of their longer wheelbase and more rigid structure, SLCs are generally accepted to have better road holding and handling than SLs.

The 280s, SL and SLC, were introduced during a fuel crisis and do offer marginally better fuel economy, while still having good performance – but you need to make use of their engines' ability to rev to experience the latter.

The later 107s, 1976 on, are more refined – smoother and quieter. They have better trim, sound-deadening and rust-proofing. Their minor controls are simple to use and reliable. Their heating and ventilation systems are excellent.

The final models, from 1986, were improved still



**280s were a gesture toward economy – you need to use their ability to rev to deliver lively performance.**

**The later models incorporated many improvements.**



Smoke is not unheard of from any of the engines fitted to W107s and is not necessarily a major problem. Too much oil in the sump can cause it, and if it happens after tick over or after the car has been standing for a period it might be failed valve stem seals.

## **Gearboxes**

Most W107s were ordered with whichever automatic transmission was available – indeed, for the later models there was no manual option in some markets (such as the UK). The four-speed auto with fluid coupling fitted to 350SLs and SLCs is not as quiet or smooth as modern autos, but it should pull away with some alacrity (in second unless ‘2’ is selected), change quickly without excessive ‘flaring’, and react promptly when ‘kicked down’. The selector on the transmission tunnel should be easy to use for changes between 2, 3 and Drive. The three-speed auto with torque converter fitted to 450SLs and SLCs is quieter and smoother, and the four-speed ‘switchable’ version fitted to the later cars better still. If these boxes are anything other than smooth, responsive and relatively quiet, adjustment or overhaul will be required.

Mercedes’ manual gearboxes have often been criticised over the years but those fitted to W107s should be fairly light to use with good synchromesh. 350s and early 280s had four-speed manuals but later 280s had a five-speed option.

## **Wheels and tyres**

All W107s were offered with either steel wheels with trims or alloy wheels. There were two patterns of alloy, the later flat-face, 15-hole variety being introduced with the 300SL. Most cars were ordered with alloys and their condition needs to be checked – they are easily damaged and their refurbishment or replacement is expensive. Even the trims for steel wheels are not cheap.

Poor or aged tyres might not be a reason to reject a car but they can be a useful negotiating point. If they show uneven wear they can be an indicator of worn steering and/or suspension, or poorly executed chassis repairs.

## **Decisions**

So how original is it? How sound is it? If parts need to be replaced or work undertaken, referring to chapter two, is it feasible within your budget and preferable to looking further for a better example? Can you use any faults you have identified to negotiate the price?



**This 300SL engine bay is exactly as it left the factory – with all its stickers present and still clean. This car had covered only a few hundred miles when this photo was taken.**

## 9 Serious evaluation

– 60 minutes for years of enjoyment



Circle the Excellent, Good, Average or Poor box of each section as you go along. The totting up procedure is detailed at the end of the chapter. Be realistic in your marking!

### Exterior

#### Paint

W107s were mostly built to customer order. Quite a wide variety of colours were offered, and the choice of body, interior and hardtop finishes was left to the buyer. As a result some unexpected combinations can turn up. The original paint finishes were to a high standard but, of course, many cars have been partially or totally resprayed. The original colour code should be on the data plate on the bonnet landing panel. The correct colour can be identified and made up from the three-number code given there, but paint specialists tend to be more helpful in this regard than Mercedes-Benz dealers. The letter after the three numbers indicates the paint manufacturer, e.g. H for Herbert.

Ex **4** Gd **3** Av **2** Po **1**



A very wide range of colours was offered on W107s over the years.



#### Panels

With the exception of the bonnets and boots on some later models (which are aluminium), all the panels on W107s are steel. When new, their rust protection was good for their day, and it improved markedly during these cars' long production life. Inevitably though, by now rust can be a problem – particularly around the wheelarches, in the sills and jacking points, and around the headlamps. These problems can be even worse in cars that have been subject to poorly made repairs. Try to check that the panels in these vulnerable areas have the right profile – if possible, familiarise yourself with a sound, original example. If the sills have been repaired, check that the jack supplied still fits the jacking points.

Ex **4** Gd **3** Av **2** Po **1**



**The front chassis legs have plastic bungs ...**



**... which, when removed, can release trapped water.**



**Make sure the exhaust system is complete and as it should be – this is definitely not original equipment; there should be a centre box.**

### Operation of switches

The switchgear on early cars was not as robust as that used in later versions, which should give the 'hewn from the solid' build quality feel for which Mercedes-Benz is famed.

Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1

### Ramp check

Most exhaust and tyre centres will allow you to put a car on a ramp for a few minutes if they are not busy, a pre-MoT (annual safety check) inspection with a qualified examiner is even better if it can be arranged.

Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1

### Chassis frame

Inspect the front and rear chassis members for any signs of rust, poorly made repairs or underseal that is disguising problems beneath. The front chassis legs can trap water, and if the vendor doesn't mind it is worth removing the plastic bungs in them to see if anything comes out.

Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1

### Sills

These are prone to rust and if they have been repaired it is important to check that it has been done well.

Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1

### Floor pans

These have proven to be not too vulnerable to corrosion, even on the earlier cars before rust-proofing was improved, but if there is any sign of rot mark the car down; if repairs have been made ensure they are sound.

Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1

### Exhaust system

Original pattern mild steel units are still available, but many cars have stainless steel replacements. Check the condition of the former and the fitting of the latter. The systems used are quite complicated and so expensive, especially on the V8 engined cars. The rear boxes are frequently corroded where the pipes enter the silencer as a result of condensation build up.

Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1

The last 300SLs and 500SLs had catalytic converters, which add even more to the cost of replacement. Usually the life of these is determined by the way the car is used, but it is worth checking that they haven't suffered damage from speed humps or other obstructions.

# 14 Paint problems

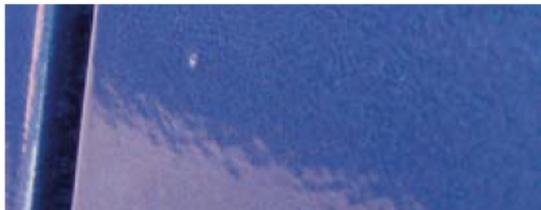
– bad complexion, including dimples, pimples and bubbles



Paint faults generally occur due to lack of protection/maintenance, or poor preparation prior to a respray or touch-up. Some of the following conditions may be present in the car you're looking at:

## Orange peel

This is as an uneven paint surface looking like a dimpled orange skin, caused by atomized paint droplets not flowing into each other on the painted surface. It's sometimes possible to polish out with paint cutting compound or very fine abrasive paper on a soft block. A respray is necessary in severe cases, so consult a bodywork repairer/paint shop for advice.



Orange peel.

## Cracking

Severe cases are likely to have been caused by too heavy an application of paint (or filler beneath). Also, insufficient stirring of the paint before application can lead to the components being improperly mixed, resulting in cracking. Incompatibility with the paint already on the panel can have a similar effect. Rectification requires rubbing down to a smooth, sound finish before respraying.



Cracking.

## Crazing

Sometimes the paint takes on a crazed rather than a cracked appearance when the problems mentioned under 'Cracking' are present. This problem can also be caused by a reaction between the underlying surface and the paint. Paint removal and respraying the problem area is usually the only solution.



## Blistering

Almost always caused by corrosion of the metal beneath the paint. Usually

When does cracking become crazing?  
Presumably, somebody paid good money  
for this terrible paint job.