

***The fourth edition.
Introducing the SLK, the
car you've already met***

Mercedes-Benz SLK GUIDE

Harvey Yates

“ . . . There’s nothing quite like it in the world. ”

Road and Track’s view of the SLK

Hi!

Thank you for buying the SLK Guide. I obviously hope you enjoy reading it, and hope even more that you will spread the word. Any links on forums and such to www.writewheel.uk would be gratefully received.

There are mistakes in this edition. If you’d like me to send any updates, please email me at slkg@btinternet.com, including the date of purchase, with the subject line of Update. Just like any author, I’d be pathetically grateful if you could send any comments, advice, criticisms, and nice words to the same address.

PLEASE READ

The contents of this book are my opinion. I have checked as many of the facts as I can but I must have made mistakes. So do not treat the contents as verbatim. Check everything first. My intent is to suggest, not direct.



Given the fact that the design had to incorporate the mechanical and space requirements of the folding roof we might have expected a somewhat compromised design. Instead, we got clean uncluttered lines that have lasted well.

A design of some quality.

Picture previous page: the new SLC. Or perhaps the old SLK with some changes.

The fourth edition

The launch of the 172 mid-term upgrade is the generator of the fourth edition. It is hard to feel overwhelmed by the changes. There's the nose job, a revamped interior and, most heralded, a change of name. So is the SLC the biggest thing to happen to the SLK?

No is probably the answer.

The flagship AMG model, now SLC 43 AMG, drops the V8 for a twin turbocharged V6. It is powerful but less so than the car it replaced. Gone also is the 172 I liked the best, the 350, to be replaced by, well nothing actually.

The diesel remains and there is a choice of outputs from the petrol-engined 4-cylinder 1786 cc turbocharged models, the 200 staying as is and the 250 being renamed 300, possibly so as not to confuse it with the 250 d.

The 43 AMG is a powerful car but it bucks the trend of steady increases in power when a model is replaced. A shame but hardly unexpected in today's climate. One wonders what the M-B marketing unit thought when OPEC all but disappeared.



Below: a 172 from the very enjoyable SLK Day at Brooklands. Below, left: a CLK. Read all about it in this Guide.



Due to the progressive increase in file size of the pdf and the fact that many email service providers limit the size of attachments to 20 meg I've split the book into two parts. The heavily illustrated Guide and a statistics book.

I've had no requests for the printable version so that's now gone.

As ever, if you have any ideas for improvement, criticisms or have noticed any errors or literals, I'll be happy to have them pointed out via slkg@btinternet.com

Derek

Introduction

A Mercedes Benz publicity photograph from the launch of the SLK in Britain. It is a pre facelift 170. The nomenclature is explained later in the book.



When it came time to replace my TVR Chimaera I had to go for an automatic.

The first car I considered was the Porsche Boxster. I'd already driven a couple of manual ones and was quite impressed. I went online, bought a couple books, and in no time I was an expert on the car.

I probably would have bought a Boxster had the automatic gearbox been a little bit smoother. There was a distinct delay between changes. Not much but enough to irritate on the test drives, so likely to be even more of a problem as an owner.

I had all but ignored the SLK as there was a scarcity of books and information to show the

benefits of buying one. Despite being a bit of a sports car nerd, I had no idea of the range.

There was very little with regards to the pluses and minuses of particular models, or the much more useful comparisons between them. I wanted to know what to look for when buying and how much ownership was likely to cost.

The intention of this book is to remedy this gap, to provide a potential purchaser with enough information to make an informed choice regarding the SLK. There is nothing worse than buying a particular model of a car only to discover that the next one up, or even down, would have suited you a lot better.



Despite being a 171 owner, I have to say I reckon the original 170 is the most attractive, perhaps prettiest, looking SLK. It doesn't have the 'corporate' features of the later cars, and doesn't leach its nose design off of any other product in the Mercedes-Benz line-up. The two strokes on the bonnet are reminiscent of the 300SL, but that's about it. It stands entirely on its own and is all the better for it.

Mind you, the 171 and 172 are very attractive too.

The book starts with the gestation of the SLK model range and then goes on to describe the original 170, giving technical details, performance levels and the differences between the specific types of 170. The modifications in the mid-term upgrades are described.

It then goes on to do the same for the 171 model, and includes the differences between it and the preceding model. It ends with a description of the current SLK, the 172.

Given that it is built on the same floorpan as the 170, I feel I must mention the Chrysler Crossfire. There, I've mentioned it.

Descriptions are all very well but they do not cover subjective opinions. Mechanics, sales staff and owners give their thoughts on the SLK from their specific points of view.

The book compares various types of SLK, particularly focusing on the drivers they were aimed at. Readers are not told which one is best as there can be no best with such a wide range of cars. However the advantages and disadvantages of each model are pointed out in

order to allow the potential purchaser to make an informed decision.

Whilst prices change month to month, the book will point out the price ranges and the numbers of cars available to help you choose a model. There is a supporting website, www.writewheel.uk

There is an extended explanation of what you should look for in general when buying a second-hand car and what you should look for specifically in a second-hand SLK.

Whilst the vehicle has few designed-in problems, given the cost of Mercedes parts and service you really want to avoid as much expense as possible.

The balance shaft sprocket failure scandal is covered and the specific models under threat are listed.

One last plea: please consider putting a link to www.writewheel.uk on a forum/blog related to cars. It all helps with Google rankings.

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Many of those with a widescreen VDU opt for a double-page display. Go to View, page display and click on Two Page View.

For easy navigating, regardless of screen format, go to View, Show/Hide, Navigation Panes, and click on Bookmarks. A column on the left will show quick links, a sort of index. Click on them to be taken to the page or article given.

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What's in it for me?



Mercedes-Benz has a long tradition of open topped sports cars. If you go back to the 190 SL, introduced in 1955, you will see a precursor of the SLK. The two have a lot in common, not least being derived from mid-range saloon cars.

With the rise in popularity of the two-seater sports car in the '90s, accepted wisdom suggesting it was started by the MX5, the board of Mercedes-Benz must have had a short deliberation before deciding to commit to production of a smaller version of the SL. They would have known that Audi, BMW, Fiat and

The SLK is not a direct descendent of the 190SL, example above, but the premise behind the two cars was more or less the same, even down to an identical wheelbase. The 105bhp that the 1.9 engine put out, now viewed as leisurely, was at the time decidedly sporty.

Porsche would soon be producing their own versions and if anything this made a Mercedes-Benz entry a necessity.

What's in it for me - continued

Each of these cars would have something going for it, little design features or specific targets that the publicity departments could hang their adverts on and Mercedes-Benz followed suit. Or rather didn't follow suit: it led the field and by a long way.

The folding metal roof was hardly unique, or even new. However it wasn't until the first reviews of the car were published that I discovered that Peugeot had stolen a lead some

from a coupe to a convertible in just 20 seconds or so.

I knew I had picked the correct car when, parked in Brighton, I lowered the roof. A chap deep into middle age standing nearby caught my eye once the procedure was over. He was staring so intently at me that I felt forced to smile at him. He sort of snarled in reply, shook his head and turned away dismissively.

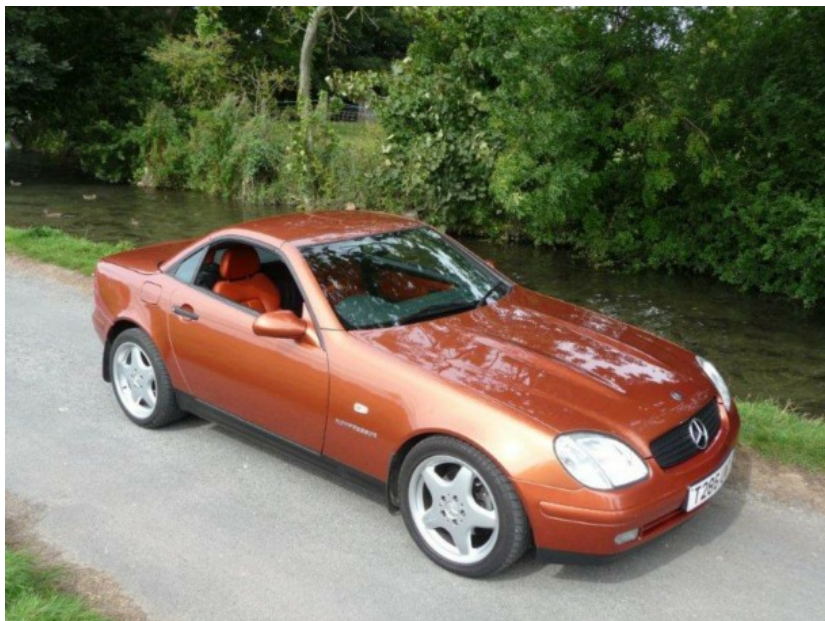


An ad-man's dream. Two cars in one is no catch phrase. It is the reasoning behind the SLK. In 25 seconds it goes from a coupe to a totally open car, the hood hidden. Even then, the boot is still reasonably sized.

It is no grand tourer but it is a car that can be used all the year round.

61 years previously with their Eclipse model. That said, it wasn't an overwhelming success story with just 21 vehicles being produced. What the Peugeot did was demonstrate the main problem of a folding metal roof. In its case, when retracted it occupied the boot completely so it is probably remarkable that even 21 were sold.

I consider myself to be a motoring enthusiast, one who will pick a car on its dynamic abilities rather than fall for the PR hype. However there is something really cool about being able to change the SLK



What's in it for me - continued

What better response could anyone have wanted from a 55-year-old bloke carrying three bags of shopping? I'd got it right.

The SLK is more than just a roof. Once you have owned the car for a month or so it is just another feature, like the built-in sat nav, the Airscarf or the silk cloth that came with the car. The heart of the SLK is in the driving.

When I went from a V8 TVR, about as archetypal a British sports-car as you could get, to an SLK 350, I expected a significant drop in performance. I was soon put right. Point to point, the SLK was the faster of the two. They are both enthusiasts' cars.

One thing of particular note for me was that in wet conditions I could accelerate without

crossing my fingers. The Chimaera's skittishness in the damp was a welcomed loss.

There can be little doubt that the original, 170-series, model was a very attractive car. It lacked the awkwardness of the BMW Z of the time. The Boxster's design, a photocopy of the 911, was a disappointment although one that was expected of Porsche. The 170 was a completely new design owing nothing, apart from the wheelbase, to previous models, and was all the better for it. It would have been so easy for the designers to come up with a pastiche of the Pagoda.

So Mercedes-Benz had everything going for them with their new car. It was fun to drive, good-looking, luxurious and it possessed that

Sometime you instinctively know when the damage won't polish out.

Thanks to Smarin530, SLK World, for permission to use these pictures of his rolled 171. Copyright remains with him.



If you have any doubts about the safety of the car with the roof in the boot . . . Mercedes-Benz tested it in controlled conditions, but there is nothing like giving a car to a member of the public to really find out what could happen.

Smarin530, to use his forum name on the [SLK World website](#), took testing to the extreme and rolled his 171. The roof was in the boot at the time. Despite the considerable damage, he walked away from the accident more or less unharmed and the hood mechanism still worked after a fashion.

Don't try this at home.



Living with the roof

The biggest selling point of the SLK is the wonderful roof mechanism. Its opening dance is a fascinating process, worth savouring every time you do it. It really is quite remarkable. However, once the car gets a bit long in the tooth, it is the main reason given for people being wary of buying an SLK. Reliability is the main concern.

If the roof requires extensive repairs then it will be expensive. Anything else pales into insignificance. The main frame can be damaged in a rear-end shunt and this will almost certainly make a 170 too costly to repair. The frame itself is not cheap and refitting it is a skilled, hence expensive, task.

The roof is complex, of that there can be no argument. Nine micro-switches, five hydraulic rams, one hydraulic pump, a roof control unit, four window switches and four 'Bowden' cables (these replaced in later models) are required for activation.

First the good news: apart from the bit above about the main frame, there is precious little bad news. It would seem that the major cause of a faulty roof mechanism is nothing worse than a specific faulty micro-switch. This is located at the top of the A-post and is triggered when the roof is in position.

The switch has a little flexible rubber cover, the intent being to stop water ingress. If the roof is not used for some time this can harden and stop the switch being activated. No signal gets

Below and over the page: The roof, despite being a common sight, still attracts attention when in operation. It is difficult looking cool when activating it as you always end up with a stupid smile on your face.



Living with the roof - continued

through so the roof is shown as faulty. Replacement is cheap and easy.

I've been told that it is sensible to replace this every five years or so, even if the roof is used regularly. An engineer said that it generated 'about 90% of the roof complaints'. Probably an overestimate, but then he works in a garage, so it goes with the job.

The next most common fault (and probably more than 10% I bet) is a little relay on the side of the pump, which is situated in the boot, on the right-hand side (offside for the UK). It is a temperature sensor. Its life expectancy is not quite as long as the car so the advice here is to replace after five years. They are inexpensive (a little over £7 at the time of writing), easy to get to and easy to remove and replace.

The next most popular fault is cracking insulation on the cables running from the roof, caused by the cables flexing. They can also wear against one-another.

Rust in various places can be a bit of a problem and it is best to check everything regularly. This is easy enough to do, despite the complexity.

You can leave the roof in the position top right for seven minutes before the auto response sets it going again. Before doing so there is a warning beep. Check everything you can see and also lubricate all the joints. The favoured method seems to be spray on grease but little and regular is the better option to a self indulgent fest as it leaves less residue and there is little chance of stains.

For the rubber seals, there are many propriety gubbins available, each with its own adherents. I prefer a cream as it is easier to apply than a spray, but the choice is yours of course.

Check the rubbers for chaffing or signs of alignment problems. None of us want our rubbers to suddenly spring a leak. If the roof is misaligned then it is a specialist task to solve. The sooner the cheaper though.

Should the roof malfunction then the most likely candidate is a faulty sensor or relay. Regular replacement can negate the likelihood of this. An hydraulic leak is a possibility and



Living with the roof - continued

this will be at a joint or else through chaffing. There are good points and bad points to the fact that this is often easy to see and source as fluid stains will be obvious.

Replacement of the pump is not cheap. For the 170 I am informed the pipes come included whereas for later models they are separate.

So the roof mechanism is inherently reliable, certainly more so than even the most generous of commentators suggested when it was first produced. Regular use is good and simple maintenance makes it even better.

However, as you might expect, simple it is not. There are all sorts of gubbins, wires, pipes, cables, switches, pumps and things, all of which could go wrong. If you want to have a go

yourself repairing it then some form of specialised help, either mechanical or medical, is essential I'd say.

The M-B Club, www.mercedes-benz-club.co.uk in the UK, has experts whose knowledge on the roof mechanism is impressive. I've been to one of their lectures on the subject and I have to say it was clear and, unfortunately, made one want to have a go. That might be dangerous.



Above: Rarely, if ever, has the phrase 'it's complicated' been more apt. In a lecture on the roof the advice was 'mark everything you take off.'

Gestation of the 170

Mercedes, in conjunction with Porsche, set up a company to design and develop the new roof mechanism. The investment was high but, given its reception, and the fact that at the time it stole a march on its competitors, it was worth it. However, you don't know the SLK until you drive it.

Mercedes Benz produced two design studies in 1994, showing one at the Turin motor show and the second at Paris. The cars differed in one important aspect: the former was more in line with what eventually became the production version while the latter dripped in luxury. Given

that pricing would have to be very carefully controlled, the multi-coloured suede interior shown in Paris was never going to make it into the showrooms.

There had been 15 x 1/5 scale models of potential production SLKs produced in 1992 from which a shortlist of eight survived. A Michael Mauer design won out and what many feel is the prettiest SLK so far made it into production. Reports suggest that the project generated considerable enthusiasm among the production team, despite the limited time to



This early 230 could almost be a traditional British sports car, here in a typical British setting.



The interior, here with delightful contrasting trim, is a lovely place to spend the day. The one problem is space. It is at a premium. Whilst there is room for a 6'3" driver to sort a comfortable driving position, there is precious little space for any additional items, even a top coat, when carrying a passenger .

Note the proper handbrake. No awkward foot operated contraption for the SLK, thankfully.

produce prototypes for the shows in 1994 and then for full production two years later.

The car was based on a much modified W202 C-Class floorpan and had a wheelbase of 2400mm, which, whether by design or happenstance, was identical to that of the 190SL.

There was an impressively long bonnet, with a short overhang at the front and, remarkably so given the space requirements for the folding roof, short overhang at the rear as well. The design looked sporty without being pretentious. There was a usefully sized boot with a maximum of 348 litres.

Modern cars have to go through a whole series of tests, not only for better production but for NCAP ratings etc. Further, even 20 years ago fuel consumption was a vitally important factor to be considered when designing a car. The drag coefficient of 0.33 was excellent and only beaten in its class of car by the Porsche Boxster, which had the unfair advantage of a mid engine.

Safety was a high priority of course and the clever design of bulkhead, described as ellipsoidal, helped the SLK sail through the impact tests. It distributes any forces through to the side skirts and connecting members.

On top of that the A-posts provide a difficult technical problem given that the car needed rollover protection, especially when the roof



The SLK is more than a roof but there is no escaping the fact that it is its most significant feature, and all but unique at the time. For the marketing men it must have seemed like Christmas and for the other manufacturers coming into the sports car field at the time, it probably felt as if the roof had fallen in. No matter how long you have owned the car, it is still fun to lower it.

Gestation of the 170 - continued

was in the boot, hopefully for the majority of its life, and as a result these were strengthened considerably. On a previous page you can see the results of a roll over accident with the roof down which shows the inherent strength of the system, and how it protects occupants. During tests the SLK proved to be the safest open top car yet tested and so set a standard that others had to reach.

Mercedes-Benz had everything going for it with the new car. It was good-looking, it was luxurious and it had that really clever roof. But sports car buyers are fickle and there must have been concern as to whether the massive investment would be worthwhile. History shows us that it was an instant hit, its vario-roof providing copywriters with lots of column inches.

Below: the lovely looking engine bay of a 230K. It looks complicated because, of course, it is. The supercharger is hidden away but as anyone who has seen the Wheeler Dealers programme on the SLK repairs, it is not that difficult to remove, just time consuming.



The factory had its way with the ride of the original 170. Comfort had a higher priority than most of its competitors. You were unlikely to lose any fillings from your teeth, even on badly maintained roads, and the steering, recirculating ball in the 170, lacked feedback. M-B eventually joined the rest and used rack and pinion for the 171 and later models. If you could ignore the comments from the press, you would probably be happy with the very sophisticated and comfortable, dual purpose two-seater.



170 production



The 170 was launched to a largely enraptured press. All were blown away by the vario-roof and it took up most of the content of the early reports. Photos of the roof in various positions were common. Eventually, when they finally

started to discuss the car itself, it seemed as if the euphoria had carried over.

Very little was criticised on the car. There was occasional mention of clunkiness of the manual

170 introduction - continued

five-speed box and some had the temerity to suggest that the cockpit was a little cramped. For the real nit-pickers the mock carbon-fibre dashboard gave cause for a moan but once underway all the complaints ended.

Well almost all. The vague steering, recirculating ball straight from the C202, was criticised by all testers. Some suggested that the suspension was a little soft for their tastes. And that was about it.

The handling and road holding were universally praised, one particular piece of hyperbole suggested that the rear tyres seemed superglued to the road. Another road tester, famous for his dislike of open topped cars, was really quite taken by the SLK, saving particular praise for the structural robustness.

Many complimented the comfort and said that the interior was a nice place to be. Almost all found the car to be good-looking. Indeed a Road and Track comparison between the Z3 2.8, the 2.5 Boxster and the 230K SLK praised Mercedes-Benz for its 'understated' looks, highlighting the fact they were complimented by a minimum of adornment, giving lie to the racial stereotyping of Americans as being suckers for a bit of chrome.



Above: From any angle the car looks good. It would have been easy to raise the haunches to give that little bit extra space but that would have made the car look heavy with the roof down. All car design is about compromise, a balancing act between practicality, looks, production costs, legislation, driving pleasure and so much more. The 170 is one that few cars to get it so right first time out. The SLK will not startle you but it is not so inoffensive that it will melt into the background. Just about everything was spot on.

Some interiors were criticised for being a bit on the dull side but there was a large range of trim options which allowed for something with a certain drama and, perhaps, showroom appeal. The seats were deeply padded and this restricted headroom for those over 6'3". The years have wearied the squabs and those cars with a few miles on the clock have become more generous with headroom.



SLK guide



The use of a supercharger was felt to be a positive in a sports car. Some road test reports suggested they could feel it coming on line, something disputed by others.

As the 230K weighed in at over 200lb more at curb weight, the comparative performance against the Boxster was bound to suffer. The respective power outputs were SLK 193 bhp, Boxster 201 bhp. But despite pulling more weight and with less power the 0-60 times were respectively 6.6 and 6.1 seconds.

Given that the SLK had an automatic gearbox, a hindrance with regards to 0-60 times, perhaps the standing start quarter-mile was more indicative of the relative performances. Here things are much closer with the SLK managing 15 seconds, just shy of the Boxster's 14.7.

For the first four years the only model imported into this country (UK) was the 230K, most of

which were five-speed automatics. The 190 bhp provided ample performance for the style of car.

The logic behind the distribution of the various sizes of engine seems quite straightforward. It was felt, no doubt, that the naturally aspirated 200 would come slap bang into the MGF/MX-5 market and that the extra cost, even with basic equipment including steel wheels, would keep sales low. The supercharged 200K was perfect for the countries, mainly around the Mediterranean, where there was a tax incentive for under 2-litre engines.

The car was an instant success, to the extent that Mercedes-Benz felt capable of publishing an advert extolling the benefits of waiting for a new car rather than paying a premium for a second-hand one. Whilst it was obviously a clever marketing ploy, it had more than a grain of truth in it. M-B were caught out the little by the demand.

170 Road Tests

No car is perfect for everyone. The first 170 received a number of criticisms from road testers, as indeed all cars do. Some were design faults, some were aesthetic considerations whilst others were purely personal.

Rather oddly the looks of the car were often criticised. It was compared to Noddy's car, or that it looked like a kiddy car and even that it was too pretty. This last criticism must have hurt a bit as that was one of the plus points of the MX-5 according to the same testers.

The steering, recirculating ball taken straight from the C202 chassis, came in for its fair share of comment, and its fair share was quite large. If you could put up with it the car was superb.



Everything costs and all car design is a compromise. The boot is a bit on the small side when the roof is lowered - the picture above shows the loading flap in place. If you are going shopping then the boot space with the roof raised, left, is bigger than most two-seater sports cars of the time. Importantly, you have the choice.

Road tests - continued

For the UK there was just a one state of tune: the 230K. The performance was very good, comfortably too powerful for the hairdressers many of the road testers said the car was aimed at.

Some testers commented on the lack of boot space whilst others said how clever the vario-roof was to give such a large luggage area when it was down. Being praised and criticised for the same feature gives little help to designers wanting to improve the model.

The manual gearbox was picked on for its clunkiness and the autobox for changing up or down mid corner, although this was a little unfair as most auto boxes function that way. It is easy enough to overcome with the manual override or sensitive use of the throttle. However, it can be a bit disconcerting when you are not expecting it.

An unfounded criticism as it turned out was of the complexity of the roof folding mechanism, the suggestion being it would be unreliable. The years have shown it to be a very reliable device, especially if it is used regularly.

However it is true to say that if you are offered a car where the roof fails to open or close then, unless the fault is apparent and you can price it accurately, most informed people would suggest it is perhaps best to move on to another one.

Quote, unquote

“Overall, it’s a splendid place for a driver and passenger to stay on a quick run to the coast - any coast.

“Such road-trip spontaneity cuts close to the heart of the sports-car experience - defines it even - and the SLK has it in spades. What makes the car so desirable, though, is that it’s not as one-dimensional as many other sorts cars. And the magic comes from that remarkably engineered retractable hardtop and the 5-speed manual transmission.

“This is a true gentleman’s express, as capable of a cleansing blast down a twisty two-lane, or a 100-mph dash to the next city for dinner and back, as it is taking your to work, or you and a significant other for a night on the town. And there’s nothing else like it in the world.”

(Road and Track Special Test of a manual 230K)

R&T had an SLK under long term, 50,678 miles, test. Their concluding paragraph was:

“We will certainly miss this roadster. It definitely lives up to its SLK name - Sportlich for sport, Leicht for light and Kompakt for compact. It’s the perfect 2-seater for the sun worshippers seeing a little more luxury and cachet than the Z3 or the Boxster, especially for those who live in rainy climates.”



From an R&T tester who doesn't know his Lewis Carroll:

“The SLK has the ability to paste a Cheshire-like grin on a driver’s face as he charges along a back road.”

Who would not grin, Cheshire-, or any county-like, when sitting in an SLK, roof down, with the twists of an empty road in front?

Technical specifications

170: 1996 - 2000

	200*	200k*	230K*
Engine size	1998 cc	1998 cc	2295 cc
Cylinders	4 in line	4 in line	4 in line
Induction	Naturally aspirated	Compressor	Compressor
BHP	136	161	193
Torque	140 lb/ft 190 Nm	199 lb/ft 270 Nm	206 lb/ft 280 Nm
Gears auto	5-sp	5-sp	5-sp
Manual	5-sp	5-sp	5-sp
Insurance	Not available	34	34
MPG	Not available	30	31
0-60	9.2 sec	7.6 sec	7.3 sec
Top speed	129 mph	143 mph	142 mph
Wheelbase	2400 mm	2400 mm	2400 mm
Weight	1325 kg	1325 kg	1325 kg
Length	3995 mm	3995 mm	3995 mm
Width	1947 mm	1947 mm	1947 mm
Height	1289 mm	1289 mm	1289 mm
Fuel capacity	53 ltr	53 ltr	53 ltr

The performance data has been obtained from various sources so might not be strictly comparable. O-60 times are notoriously unreliable as testers compete amongst themselves to post the best times.

The 230K was the only model imported into the UK before the mid-term facelift models were produced. That said, a quick surf of the Autotrader ads shows that there are a number of RHD 200 and 200K models available. Their scarcity does not appear to invest them with any premium advantage over the 230K.

170 Mid Term Update

There were considerable changes to the 170 for the 2001 model year. The updated car came out in 2000 although care should be taken as some of the pre-upgrade ones will be classed as 2000.

The exterior of the car underwent a number of changes, presumably to make the fact that it was an upgrade more obvious. Most noticeable was the lowered ride height, 'nose-job', the restyled front bumper and new front fog lights. The modifications at the rear were more minor with the back bumper being remodelled. These were so subtle that they are easily missed.

The boot lid latch was repositioned to the middle of the boot lid above the index plate, there were stainless steel additions to the exhaust pipe and subtle changes to the rear light cluster.

The easiest way to identify the upgrade is by the indicator repeaters which were moved from the front wings to the door mirrors. In addition the door handles were now in body colour and not black as before. Just to confuse matters a little, the new 320 model had a subtle difference to the front panel below the bumper.

From the side the most obvious change is the side skirts running from the front wheel arch to the rear. Whether this is better looking or not is purely subjective.

Inside, more supportive seats were a definite improvement but whether the replacement of the carbon fibre dash with turned aluminium

was an upgrade or not depends entirely on your view of aesthetics. One wonders if Mercedes-Benz took too much notice of the testers.

Significantly there was a new, and despite some criticisms from testers, very slick in my experience, six-speed manual box to replace the rather clunky original five-speed. Cruise control became standard. The small change to the gear lever knob, for both manual and automatic, was significantly less significant. A more useful upgrade was the increase in fuel tank size by about 1½ gallons., To 7 litres.

On a more technical front, an Electronic Stability Program (ESP) was fitted. The suspension was revised with stiffer anti-roll bars, retuned shock absorbers, reduced spring travel and a new stabiliser bar at the rear. TouchShift, not universally praised, became standard.

There was considerable strengthening of various structural panels, including a new subframe. A major change, though, was the addition of the 6-cylinder engine. The size required the steering box, still recirculating ball, to be moved and this location was standardised across the range.

Anyone new to the SLK range at this time would be a little confused by the 230K and the 320 being offered due to their very similar power outputs.

Whilst the official figures showed nearly half a second difference in the 0 to 100 time, in practice it was very difficult to notice once on the road. I've driven the two models almost back to back and the impression one gets from the 320 is of lack of effort and a certain sophistication. It is a different car to drive, especially around 50 - 70 (ish) mph. Overtaking is considerably faster. This performance anomaly would be avoided when the 171 was produced.

There was the new front apron, new seven spoke wheels and nice new V6 kick panels on top of the sill, but apart from that the two cars looked identical.

There were minor increases in power output with the upgrade and the UK got official imports of the 200K, this model becoming the most popular in the range in this country.

The upgraded car was well received by road testers, especially the 320. On the next couple of pages we cover the SLK32 AMG, a much modified from standard car with a supercharged 3.2 litre V6 engine. This received rave reviews.

There were more critical comments, only to be expected after a car had been in production for four years. The small increases in power output, the bhp of the 320 rather limiting the options for the 230, were picked on and the steering was described as vague, at least in European countries. The SLK was falling behind its major competitor, the Boxster.



I've never been too sure why door handles the same colour as the car body is such a big thing. It keeps the advertisers happy. Above: facelift model. Right: early.



Above: top: early 230K, middle: facelift 230K, bottom 320.





Left: the wing looks cleaner with the relocation of the repeater to the wing mirror. It is much more obvious as well when indicating.

Right: early 170 with repeater located on the front wings above the Kompressor sign.



Significantly, there was little change to the outward looks of the car, the most obvious being the plastic sill covering, left, which was carried through to the front bumper moulding.



The rear of the car was rather cleaner than the original 170, but the redesign carried with it a certain cost. The lock to the boot was placed between the boot handle and the index plate light, right, below. No matter how you cut it, this was extremely awkward. Don't think that you don't need the lock as there is a 'double lock' feature, available only with the key, so that you can leave the roof down with valuables in the boot locked away. Note the rust just by the boot handle. This is typical of 170s. It is not difficult to eradicate, but it does take time. Paint is not cheap.

There was a welcomed increase in fuel capacity, up from 53 litres to a still rather small for touring 60 litres.



AMG



Left: just in case you missed the other more subtle pointers, the badge on the side says V6 Kompressor. The wheels are particularly delightful.

AMG, a company dedicated to engine production and development, was started in 1967 by ex Mercedes-Benz engineer Hans Werner Aufrecht and Erhard Melcher. The third letter comes from Großaspach, Aufrecht's birthplace. By 1990 the company had established itself as the major modifier of Mercedes-Benz cars. Eleven years later Mercedes-Benz acquired control of the company and it was renamed Mercedes AMG GmbH. It is now a wholly owned subsidiary of Mercedes-Benz. Over the years they produced a

series of modified cars based on standard production models and these earned the cachet of being rather extreme. It is unfortunate that these cars are outside the remit of this book.

It would be wrong to think of AMG in the same way as you would the Cooper badge on the boot of the current Mini: nothing more than a notification of it being slightly modified. AMG do their own thing. Since 2001, the facelift of the 170 range, there has been an AMG version of the SLK, starting with the 32.

AMG - continued

This was more than a bit of minor tuning with a body kit stuck on. The output of the the individually hand-built engine with uprated internal components tells its own story. The SLK320 put out 218 bhp, giving a 0-60 time of 6.6 seconds (manual and auto) and a top speed, in the UK of 151 mph. The AMG figures were, respectively: 354 bhp - 4.8 seconds (2/10s slower than the 5.5 litre V8 AMG 55 SLK 171 - 193 mph (USA figures quoted.) Torque went up from 229 lb/ft to 332. This was a seriously powerful car.

The drop, some 30%, in the time to 60 mph is the most remarkable. More than just a badge on a boot.

Other modifications included bigger brakes and 5-spoke AMG wheels, 7.5 inch at the front and 8.5 inch at the rear. The standard fitment tyres were 225/45 R 17 at the front and 245/40 R 17 the back.

The car had uprated AMG designed suspension with a thicker anti-roll bar. There was the addition of a boot spoiler, often added more for appearance than effectiveness, although this one gave reduction of around 50% in lift.

There was a new nose job and the rear bumper was modified as well. The interior was fitted with deeply-bolstered AMG sports seats, silver faced

It must have been tempting to make the AMG version outlandish to look at, something that Mercedes-Benz have not been able to resist in the past. This time, however, they made the differences subtle, although obvious to those who know the car.



Above: we might turn our noses up at bling as we think we are sophisticated but who wouldn't want to step over that nameplate before driving off? Or the more subtle evidence below?



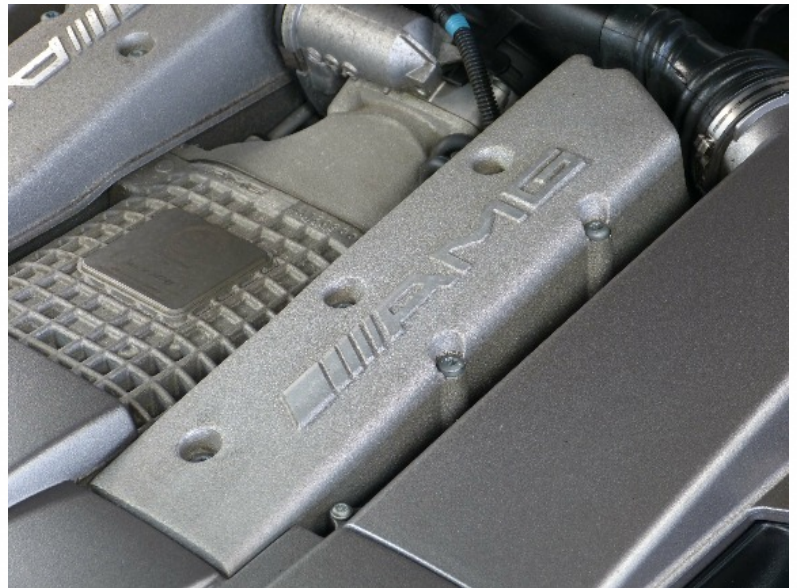
SLK guide

AMG - continued

AMG instruments with a 180 mph speedometer and a thicker-rimmed AMG steering wheel.

With a little bit of bling here and there that was virtually it.

With so few made, 4333 in total with just 263 exported to the UK and 2065 to the USA depreciation is likely to be very low and therefore reduce ownership costs. Go on - you know you want one. I do.



*Pictures previous
and this page,
courtesy of the
Performance Car
Company, Hants.
Images©Writewheel*



Something special



In July 2002, in an attempt to prove its critics correct, Mercedes-Benz indulged in a little bit of cynical marketing to increase sales of the 170 as it was coming to the end of its life. It was an attempt to sell off what might well become old stock.

They came up with the 170 Special Edition. The changes were minor: some badging, a new grill, a bit of bling around the A-post, that sort of thing. The cars came, I am assured, 'fully loaded', all extras thrown in.

The question most people ask is whether the Special Edition is special enough to make it a collector's item. If you want my opinion, and if you don't then why are you reading my book, I'd suggest not.

The changes were to appearance in the main. Take the grill: I quite like the stainless steel design, mainly because, I think, the difference from the original one is surprisingly noticeable. The bit of matching bling up the A-post is quite nice as well and the wheels are rather tasty. But a collector's car?

If you like what the Special Edition brings together, and many do - which includes me - then I'd say go for it. It is distinctive without being outrageous. And it is unlikely to cost you more than a standard 170.

My advice is to buy on condition. Ignore bling. It soon becomes transparent.

That said, the Special Edition is special. It is different. If there are half a dozen cars that are more or less in the same condition, the same



Left: the grill is distinctive but unlikely to cause offence. It makes the car stand out in a group of SLKs.

Below top: The little bit of shiny on the A-post is rather nice.

Middle: Non-standard or unusual colours can be a risk to prices. However, isn't it great to see something other than a monochrome Merc.

mileage and otherwise identical then a nice little bit in the advert to say: Limited Edition Model, can be enough to make the sale.

Would I fall for this bit of patently crass marketing from Mercedes-Benz? Well, I have to admit that I would. I'd go for one, just for the conversations in the car park. Not only that, I'd be willing to pay just a little be more than the normal asking price.

I would suggest the same would go for a different, or unusual paint finish as well, this despite, or maybe because, I am partially colour blind. However, unlike non production modifications, the Special Edition features, especially the extras, are unlikely to put off potential purchasers.



Left: They came with these rather nice wheels.

Special Edition - continued

I quite like self expression in car ownership. Your car, you do it your way. I would not dream of criticising anyone's efforts.

However, you will have to accept that what you like might not suit others and when it comes time to sell, your taste might end up reducing the value of your car.

There seems to be this odd desire to suggest that originality is everything in classic cars. I like the SLK as much as most, but I would admit to its limitations. Some improvement should not be looked down upon or, worse in some ways, patronised.

Before the engine went in my 171 350 (I said I'd mention it again) I was looking at moving the 12v power output (cigar lighter) from the passenger footwell. One can image the designers feeling chuffed that they'd finished the new 171 and then someone saying: 'Does anyone know where the power outlet is?' As Carl leaves the building. Carl, where'd you put the power outlet?' Except in German, and with a few expletives.

But sometimes you see a modification that is dramatic and eye-catching. And tasteful.

At the 2016 M-B Club SLK meet at M-B World I saw a car that had been modified with imagination, style and a little bravery. Vinyl wrap can be removed when it's time to sell.

Jazzanova is a musical collective. See [HERE](#)



SLK guide

Technical specifications

170 2000 - 2004

	200K	230K	320	32 AMG
Engine size	1998 cc	2295 cc	3199 cc	3199 cc
Cylinders	4 in line	4 in line	V6	V6
Induction	Compressor	Compressor	Naturally aspirated	Compressor
BHP	163	197	218	354
Torque	170 lb/ft 230 Nm	207 lb/ft 280 Nm	229 lb/ft 310 Nm	332 lb/ft 450 Nm
Gears auto	5-sp	5-sp	5-sp	5-sp
Manual	5-sp	6-sp	6-sp	N/A
Insurance	32	34	36	37
MPG*	29	28	24	25
0-60*	8.3 sec	7.0 sec	6.8 sec	5.0 sec
Top speed*	136 mph	149 mph	152 mph	155 mph
Wheelbase	2400 mm	2400 mm	2400 mm	2400 mm
Weight”	1365 kg	1405 kg	1405 kg	1495 kg
Length	4010 mm	4010 mm	4010 mm	4010 mm
Width	1715 mm	1715 mm	1715 mm	1715 mm
Height	1281 mm	1281 mm	1281 mm	1281 mm
Fuel capacity	60 ltr	60 ltr	60 ltr	60 ltr

* For manual models except those equipped with only automatic boxes.

The performance data has been obtained from the same source so as to make comparisons easier. 0-60 times are notoriously unreliable as testers compete amongst themselves to post the best times.

All models now imported into the UK

171 Introduction



The 170 SLK sold around 308,000 units worldwide, making it the fastest selling convertible two seater sports car of the period after the MX-5. The MGF outsold it in the UK. This is all the more remarkable given that the SLK was priced to make a profit, not something many observers criticised Mazda for.

By 2004 other manufacturers had already produced their versions of the vario-roof, or were planning to do so. Mercedes-Benz and most potential customers must have felt they needed something to put the SLK back to the top.

171 introduction - continued

The main bone of contention with the 170 was the recirculating ball steering together with the rather soft suspension. Another, perhaps more significant, lack was a range of engines. The 320 was, presumably, meant to challenge the equivalent Boxster but this it failed to do. It was the time to change.

With six or seven years to plan the replacement for the brilliant 170, great things were expected.

The most notable change to the R171 was in its appearance. Gone was the pretty-boy image and in its place was a very aggressive front-end, taken straight from the SLR, by then familiar as the pace car for Formula One. The association did the 171 no harm whatsoever.

Whether or not the looks were an improvement is for you to decide but Mercedes-Benz, and most testers, were fairly supportive of the redesign. There was a very positive response from the public. The relocation of the radio antenna to the rear nearside wing was received with less than total enthusiasm.

The new body gave a coefficient of drag of 0.32, which allowed remarkably low fuel consumption at motorway speeds. Under the new body was a redesigned chassis.

Like the R170 before it the chassis was derived from a shortened version of the then current C-class, this time though the W203, with its three link strut type suspension at the front and a multilink setup at the rear together with, at last, rack and pinion steering. The wheelbase



Above: the underside with the protective mouldings removed. A small but persistent oil leak is being sourced.



Literally back to back, there is little difference between an early 230, left, and an early 171. The slightly extended wheelbase is surprisingly obvious.

171 Early production - continued

was slightly longer and the car was larger overall although only to a limited extent. The connection to the 170 was obvious.

There were major modifications to the roof and its mechanism, although at 300 litres, boot space with the roof up was 48 litres less than for the R170, but with the roof down the available space was up by a very useful 63 litres to 208 litres. Equally useful, the time to lower the roof was reduced to just 22 seconds. This probably is a stick Mercedes-Benz have produced to beat themselves with. Each new model will have to be faster.

One of the points most commented on by road testers was the significant increase in feel of quality of the interior trim. A certain amount of criticism had been levelled at the build quality of the earlier model and less than helpful comparisons were made with other German high-end manufacturers. This time, things were different.

Not everyone thought that the better feel was down to higher quality materials and the argument continues to this day. Many miss the aluminium dash of the facelifted 170. From an enthusiasts point of view the most significant change was in the sportiness of the drive. What is remarkable is the fact that comfort was not ignored and whilst the ride was not quite as smooth as the model it replaced it was still considerably better than the BMW Z4 and, more importantly, the Porsche Boxster. Given

the state of roads in the UK at the time of writing, the smooth ride is more important than ever.

The handling was not without its critics. When making progress there is a certain amount of initial understeer which is not apparent in the Boxster. Many drivers, including me, prefer this feature as it makes the speed apparent.

There was also more body roll. No one likes that. The fuel tank went up to 70 litres.

The steering didn't get away without some little digs. The degree of feel when driving straight ahead was felt to be insufficient for a sports car although once on the twisty bits praise was heaped on the new rack.

Where the car excelled according to all the testers was over long distances, even with the roof down. It would never be a grand tourer because of the restricted boot space, but the car could eat up miles without putting strain on the driver.

There is little engine noise, regardless of position of the roof, unless one puts one's foot down and the revs are allowed to rise. Then there is a very satisfying growl from the rear end. Drivers plan routes which include tunnels.

The R171 was a significant improvement on the car it replaced, although given the hike in price it should have been. It was voted Canadian Car of the Year in the Best Convertible Category, 2005.



With the generous heater, heated seats, the draught excluder in place and, if you are lucky, Airscarf blowing, enjoying open top motoring even in the snow, is open to all SLK owners. Modern anti-skid devices are very clever but it is best to take things easy with the right foot when it is icy.

In the background the eagle-eyed amongst you might be able to discern a TVR Griffith, notably with its roof up. Who's macho now?

171 Criticisms



The standard draught excluder is shown left. It is surprisingly effective, although it is far from transparent when viewed through the rear view mirror at night. Certain car colours seem to disappear when there are street lights. There are aftermarket clear perspex replacements which give no such problems and many suggest are worthwhile.



Left is the right hand gear switch, or paddle, behind the steering wheel. It is invisible from the driver's seat. Some, and this includes me, prefer to use the gear lever for manual changes, which is just moved left or right, as it is less likely to be fumbled. The paddles are rocker switches so it is easy, in the heat of the moment, to go the wrong way. Further, if you feed the steering wheel through your hands, the switch goes out of reach.

171 Criticisms - continued

There is no chance of perfection in the design of a car, not even with those which were designed as an improvement on a previous excellent model, and it is unfortunate that the R171 is no exception to this rule.

Sometimes the designers are limited by aerodynamics, at other times by cost and you can forgive the inevitable compromises that such demands place on the designers. However, when a bit of poor design is both irritating and unreasonable, then it begins to bewilder.

The rear view mirror is small and oddly shaped, causing a blind spot to the nearside rear. The extra cost for a larger one would be negligible and I doubt there is any aerodynamic advantage. So why?



The one thing mentioned by all testers of the 171 was something that wasn't there. None used the modifier of ample when describing the interior space of the SLK. There are a number of little cubby-holes and there is a little room between the back seats and the bulkhead, as long as you are not of above-average height. So one would have thought that every little bit was sacrosanct. But sacred cows beware. The CD multi-changer was not a cheap option so one wonders if the purchasers realised that it made the glove locker all but useless.



The indicator lever, the lower one in the pictures left and right, is out of reach to any driver who places their hands in the 10 to 2 position, see picture right. Despite the driver having large hands he has to take his left hand off the wheel. Not a good idea, and not one unique to this model of Mercedes-Benz.





Avoid any car dealer who says that ‘they all go there’. Mind you . . .

A problem with the SLK is that most people have to slide into the driver’s seat and this means twice every journey the outside edge of the driver’s seat is rubbed against. It is simple enough to cover up the wear by dyeing the leather but when buying check that the leather is not worn through. If not then this is not a reason to dismiss the car on its own.

After all, they all go there.



Left: All the keys go here as well. One mechanic blamed ‘women with fingernails’ (surely that’s all of them?) for this common damage to the key. Identical replacements are not available from M-B and owners are forced to ‘upgrade’ to new-style shiny keys at, I was told, ‘Around £250, maybe more.’ However, you can get a carcass, rather flimsy, for around £10 on eBay. Perhaps buy two as they always go there, especially if you have nails it seems.

Right: There are positives and negatives to wide doors. They make getting in and out easier, and given how low the car is, this is an essential for someone, like me, with two cracked vertebrae. They can, however, prove to be a bit of a liability in car parks and even garages. This garage is 3 metres wide internally and the car is over as far to the left as is reasonable, given the cost of scratch repairs. Overall, though, a positive.



Left: No one has ever suggested that the aerial, on the nearside rear wing, was a brilliant innovation, nor mentioned that aesthetically it was a move in the right direction. Anyone wanting to put a cover over their car might well have found it awkward to accommodate.

It is also possible to get the tip of the aerial through your watchstrap, which I discovered could be, to say the least, startling.

Airscarf



*Don't knock it until
you've tried it*

Despite knowing the reputation of the smaller-engined SLK as a bit of a 'hairstressers' car' Mercedes-Benz took a big risk in producing the Airscarf, giving meat and drink to the (jealous?) detractors of the SLK. Nothing could be more worthy of the description 'hairstresser.' The odd thing is that it is most beneficial to those who use their car with the roof down in all temperatures.

I drive topless as much as possible and heated seats are a massive benefit but after having driven a 200K with Airscarf, I have to say that I wish I had it on my 350. The jibes would have had no effect on me, or at least a lot less than the cold would.

The Mercedes-Benz press release follows.

AIRSCARF® neck-level heating: A warm feeling for occupants big and small.

Designed for all shapes and sizes: height-adjustable together with head restraint and also pivotable.

Range of temperatures: three levels for controlling the flow of warm air.

Two thirds of Mercedes SLK and Mercedes SL models are ordered with AIRSCARF®, making the neck-level heating system one of the most popular optional extras for these two model series. This patented system functions like an invisible scarf, which warms the occupants' head and neck

areas. AIRSCARF® is integrated into the backrests of the front and provides warm air through outlets in the head restraints.

AIRSCARF® can be started at the push of a button. At speeds of up to 120 km/h, a control unit calculates the ideal warm air distribution automatically – depending on the interior and exterior temperature, on whether the soft top is open or closed, and on the vehicle speed.

Above this speed, the system operates on a constant setting. Furthermore, the driver and front passenger can set the speed of the radial fan and, therefore, the heat supply, to any one of three levels, all at the push of a button on the centre console. The powerful AIRSCARF® system produces up to 27.4 kilograms of warm air per hour.

Shots taken using the thermography camera show how effectively the patented AIRSCARF® system operates at low outside temperatures in winter. Costing some € 50,000, the special camera enables people to see that which usually remains invisible: the heat radiated by persons or objects.

The principle at work here is as follows: at temperatures above absolute zero (i.e. minus 273 degrees Celsius), all objects essentially radiate heat – even ice cubes or snowballs. This thermal energy is infrared

light with a wavelength that the human eye cannot perceive. The higher the temperature of the object, the more intense its infrared radiation.

The AIRSCARF® tests conducted by the Mercedes engineers using the thermography camera are based on this fundamental physical principle. The camera's highly sensitive lens scans the driver, the seat backrest and parts of the interior, making heat visible.

In addition, testers wear special measuring shirts during the tests. These garments are equipped with a total of 14 measuring points distributed around the throat, neck and shoulder areas, which can measure the various temperatures individually, allowing the distribution of warm air to be analysed.

When developing the AIRSCARF® components, the Mercedes engineers naturally placed great emphasis on occupant protection. This is why the outlet in the head restraint is slightly recessed and only clips into place. In the event of a crash, the outlet can disengage and move out of the way so as not to pose an injury risk for the occupants' heads. Furthermore, the fact that the outlet is recessed prevents the head from coming into contact with the hard components when the occupant leans back against the head restraint as normal.

Some felt going for a corporate image redesign for the 171 was a step backwards. However, choosing the SLR, then a feature at every F1 race as the pace car, was inspired. Here one is under test at the Top Gear track. They decided the Ce'd would be better as the 'reasonably priced car'.



171 Early Technical Specifications

	200K	280K	350	AMG
Engine size	1796 cc	2996 cc	3498 cc	5439 cc
Cylinders	4 in line	V6	V6	V8
Induction	Compressor	Normally aspirated	Normally aspirated	Normally aspirated
BHP	160	227	268	354
Torque	177 lb/ft 240 Nm	221 lb/ft 300 Nm	258 lb/ft 350 Nm	376 lb/ft 510 Nm
Gears auto	5-sp	7-sp	7-sp	7-sp
Manual	6-sp	6-sp	6-sp	N/A
Insurance	37	42	43	47
MPG*	32	29	26	23
0-60*	7.6 sec	6.1 sec	5.4 sec	4.7 sec
Top speed*	143 mph	155 mph	155 mph	155 mph
Wheelbase	2430 mm	2430 mm	2430 mm	2430 mm
Weight"	1390 kg	1440 kg	1465 kg	1540 kg
Length	4082 mm	4082 mm	4082 mm	4082 mm
Width	1969 mm	1969 mm	1969 mm	1969 mm
Height	1296 mm	1296 mm	1296 mm	1296 mm
Fuel capacity	70 ltr	70 ltr	70 ltr	70 ltr

* For manual vehicles unless auto only.

The performance data has been obtained from the same source so as to make comparisons easier. 0-60 times are notoriously unreliable as testers compete amongst themselves to post the best times.

171 Update



*Tempting, or what?
The SLK has
tremendous
forecourt appeal.
The engineers made
subtle but significant
changes to the
cockpit, making it all
the more desirable.
So take care out on
the forecourt.*

There wasn't an awful lot wrong with the original 171 and that gave Mercedes-Benz a bit of a problem. Other manufacturers had improved their models that were in competition with the SLK so it was no longer the leader in the field of small premium sports cars. The roof has lost its ability to fascinate.

Mercedes-Benz did not, evidently, want to spend money and time on pointless modifications, although they did slightly modify the front. Instead they went for those

changes which would appeal to sophisticated buyers.

The main difference was to the output of the engines, or at least two of them. The brake horsepower of the SLK 200 went up from 163 to 184, an increase of comfortably over 10%. This meant that the extra performance was obvious to even casual drivers.

There were considerable changes to the V6 350. Again there was a significant increase in brake horsepower, again over 10%, going up by 33 to

305. Maximum revs increased to 7200. There was a minor increase in peak torque value. CO2 readings came in for particular attention, giving a lower tax cost per annum in the UK.

The changes to the internals of the engine included a higher compression ratio, up from 10.7:1 to 11.7:1, changes to the cam timing, the rather clever little torque enhancing two-stage variable intake manifold was unfortunately dumped and replaced by a fixed one. A byproduct of this, probably intentional, was a louder and more exciting exhaust note. There were lighter valves and lighter pistons as well.

The engine became a lot more free revving and the throttle response more immediate.

What this meant for an owner was that the fuel consumption improved and the power went up considerably, so a double whammy.

The 280 saw no changes to the engine. It was renamed the 300 a couple of years later. There were no mechanical changes to the SLK55 AMG. See [page 46](#).

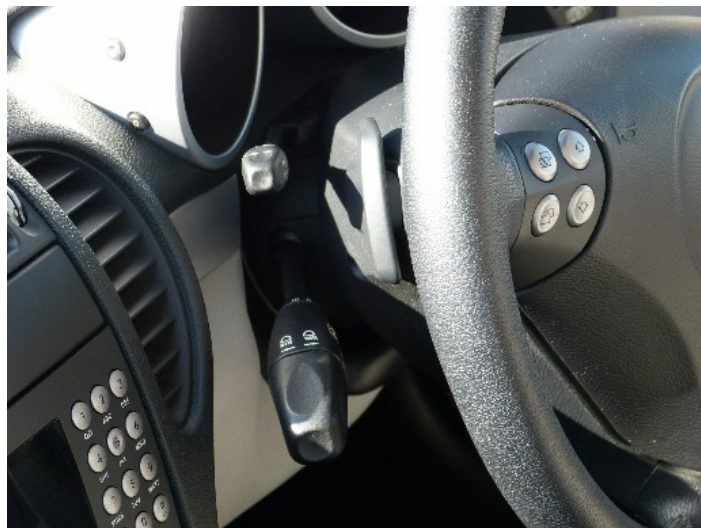
The steering was upgraded. The existing variable assistance was enhanced with a variable ratio rack. Put simply, the more you turn the steering wheel the faster it reacts. This can feel a little odd when you first confront it but after a short distance along twisty roads it almost becomes a must have. I'm sold on it.

There were minor changes to the front bumper and the interior was breathed on. There were equipment upgrades and a selection of extras.

Other than the improvement of engine internals the modifications were minor, more of a tweak than a significant change to the model.



Above: there were minor changes to the dash. You had to look carefully for the them but they were generally regarded as an improvement.



Above: Few, probably none, mourned the loss of the little rocker switches of the early 171 hidden away behind the bulk of the driver's airbag. The replacement by the more substantial levers, and the redesigned steering wheel, was not without its critics but was generally felt to be a big improvement. As can be seen, things get a bit cluttered for the left hand, with cruise control and wipers in the same area.



Above: If you have been concentrating you should be able to see the changes to the front of the face-lifted 171. For some people it is a little too little. I like subtle and, in the case of the 171, the original design was rather good so why change it?



I'm no big fan of plastic engine covers. I like to see the metal bits but I fear the Mercedes-Benz designers are of an entirely different opinion. Where do you fry an egg? It is, I suppose, easy to clean.



Left: Leather looks nice, there's no doubt about that. It is delightfully tactile as well. However, before you make it an essential, see below.

Right: There is an acceptance that leather is best but if you drive your car in all weathers, material seats can be more comfortable: warmer when cold, less sticky when hot. These non-leather ones, right, look enticing.



Below: The changes to the dash and controls were subtle. The buttons on the steering wheel are, perhaps, a little fiddly.



171 Update Technical Specifications

	200K	280/300	350	SLK55 AMG
Engine size	1796 cc	2996 cc	3498 cc	5439 cc
Cylinders	4 in line	V6	V6	V8
Induction	Compressor	Normally aspirated	Normally aspirated	Normally aspirated
BHP	181	227	300	354
Torque	847 lb/ft 250 Nm	221 lb/ft 300 Nm	266 lb/ft 360 Nm	376 lb/ft 510 Nm
Gears auto	5-sp	7-sp	7-sp	7-sp
Manual	6-sp	6-sp	6-sp	N/A
Insurance	40	42	45	47
MPG"	32	29	29	23
0-60"	7.4 sec	6.1 sec	5.2 sec	4.7 sec
Top speed"	147 mph	155 mph	155 mph	155 mph
Wheelbase	2430 mm	2430 mm	2430 mm	2430 mm
Weight"	1390 kg	1440 kg	1485 kg	1540 kg
Length	4082 mm	4082 mm	4082 mm	4082 mm
Width	1969 mm	1969 mm	1969 mm	1969 mm
Height	1296 mm	1296 mm	1296 mm	1296 mm
Fuel capacity	70 ltr	70 ltr	70 ltr	70 ltr

The performance data has been obtained from the same source so as to make comparisons easier. 0-60 times are notoriously unreliable as testers compete amongst themselves to post the best times.

The SLK55 AMG



An SLK 55 AMG showing the different front-end treatment. Again, there was nothing overt about the AMG. You had to know about SLKs to be able to pick one out.

Enter the dragon.

One trick in marketing is to find a niche where there is no specific competitor, and then fill the gap. This is what Mercedes-Benz did with the SLK55 AMG version of the R171.

Putting a much larger engine into a chassis designed for a smaller one is hardly unique in the motor manufacturing world. If you are after a flagship model then this is the simple way of making one if you already have a large engine in production. Mercedes-Benz transformed the little SLK when they crammed their big V8 into it.

It is fair to say that it is not a car for everyone and this makes it special.

At the time there was no real competitor for the 55 AMG. The only roadsters around the same price and same performance were the TVR Tamora and the Chevrolet Corvette. Both lacked a certain something when it came to quality materials. That said if you haven't driven the Tamora then don't dismiss it until you have. It is one of the most delightful cars to drive that TVR ever produced. Shame about the looks. With regards to the Corvette, shame about the design.

No such reservations with the 55 AMG. It had the market to itself as there was no direct competitor from the other quality German manufacturers. BMW were unwilling to put a more powerful engine into the Z4 and Porsche

The SLK55 AMG continued

unwilling to allow the Boxster to become the better option to the 911.

The V8 engine lacks a certain sophistication with its single camshaft per bank and just three valves per cylinder. The output of 354 bhp is not exactly pushing the bounds of bmep and indeed is more or less identical to that of the 32 AMG. Where it does put everyone else in the shade is with its 376 lbft of torque.

0-60 times are not a massive improvement from that of the car replaced but once underway it is dramatically faster in acceleration. Mercedes-Benz felt that necessary modifications to the already excellent chassis needed only to be minor and consisted of a revised front suspension and modifications to antiroll bars, dampers and bushings. There were the obligatory larger wheels and wider tyres.

Contemporary road test reports suggest that the added weight does not adversely affect the handling and there is no suggestion of increased understeer. Indeed the steering was praised.

The car wasn't particularly cheap, as one would expect, but it was cheap for the performance. Top speed is limited to 155 mph.

There was a special version, the SLK55 AMG Black which had a limited run of 100. It had an additional 40 bhp and a minor increase in torque.

As can be seen from the pictures, the SLK55 AMG is not in your face. You have to know what you are looking for to recognise the different wheels and lovely callipers. From the rear the only hint of the four exhausts and the somewhat muted badging. The air intake at the front has been changed as well.

If you can afford the fuel consumption then this is a car that will stir the blood of anyone. If you were one of the few who felt the 171 55 AMG not quite powerful enough then the introduction of the 172 version of the SLK55 AMG might well change your mind.



Above: A rather reassuring feature of all SLKs is the ability to stop. Below: They all look delicious as well. Black suits the car.



The SLK55 AMG continued

There was a new engine for the 172: still a 5.5 V8 but this time with four valves per cylinder and other modifications. The output was a remarkable 421 bhp allied to a mind blowing 540 lbft of torque. This gave a 0-62 time of 4.6 seconds.

Even more remarkable were the fuel consumption figures. The urban was 23.5 mpg, the combined 33.6 and the extra urban was a stunning, and probably unachievable, 45.6 mpg. Mercedes-Benz had worked its eco-magic on the car.

Whether you would have enough restraint when sitting behind this engine to get anywhere near these figures is open to doubt.



All pictures on this page and the previous two with kind permission of Snippersgate of Tyne and Wear, which retains the copyright.

When produced, the SLK55 was the least powerful AMG on the market, the 354 bhp (32AMG level of power) a bit wimpish compared to the 605 bhp and more that was available in other products. Such comparisons are not that useful as experience has shown that no matter how much power you have, you always want more. Further, the SLK55 weighed in at nearly 200 lb more. That said, performance improved, largely due to the introduction of the 7-speed automatic transmission. The 32 took around 2/10ths longer to hit 60 if the road testers were to be believed and the SLK55 took 7/10ths less to get to 100 mph.

Whilst this was beaten by what many would suggest was its main competitor, the Boxster S, what is also true is that it was repeatable by anyone, me and you for instance, due to the fact that all you had to do was put your foot to the floor and keep it there. Anyone with mechanical sympathy, or who had to pay for repairs, would probably find the auto SLK was the faster car in day to day driving.

The main criticism from road testers was the ride. It has been described as a 'disappointment' for those who live in areas with less than perfect roads, which takes in the whole of the UK.

172 Introduction



For musicians, it is said, the third album is the most difficult. For car manufacturers it would seem that the second upgrade is often a problem. Do you give them more of the same or do you try something radical?

Mercedes-Benz enjoyed tremendous success with both the 170 and the 171. In the UK there are around 60,000 of the first two model SLKs taxed or on SORN. For a two seater sports car this is a success story.

Its replacement just had to be great.

So is it?



Launched in 2011 at the Geneva Motor Show, as of March 2013, the R172 range was both bewilderingly complicated and deceptively simple. Better start with the easy bit first.

The bodywork more or less is identical for all vehicles. The 172 is slightly bigger overall than the 171 but, model for model, weighs about the same. Something else that is identical is that the front end of the 172 is based on the current SLS, the gull winged pace car used at Formula One grand prix.

There are five engine options: a four-cylinder 2.2 diesel engine giving 204hp, a four-cylinder 1.8 petrol engine giving 184hp, a four-cylinder 1.8 petrol engine giving 204hp, a six-cylinder 3.5 petrol engine giving 306hp and, top of the range, an eight-cylinder 5.5 petrol engine giving 421hp.

The power outputs are interesting. The diesel and the more powerful 1.8 petrol engine have identical power outputs. The 3.5 has half as much power again and there is the same the gap between the 3.5 and the 5.5. So there are no concerns about competition between the models.

There are an awful lot of buttons. One wonders if the designers of specific sub systems are in some sort of competition to see who can design the most number of switches for just one function.

Then things start to get a little bit complicated. For all four-cylinder engine models there is an AMG sport option which includes 18 inch five spoke alloys, new front and rear aprons, different side skirts, slightly different lights front and rear, more powerful disc brakes, so-called sports suspension, meaning lowered by 10 mm, AMG front mats, little bits of bling in the side including nappa leather here and there and paddle shifts behind the steering wheel on automatic models.

The AMG sport option is included in the 350 and the 55. All this sportiness costs an extra £4000, as of March 2013.

Standard equipment is fairly generous although most will choose at least a smattering of extras. There is a Dynamic Handling package which includes electronically controlled fully automatic damping, a Direct-Steer system which is a clever device which means very light steering when the vehicle is stationary or going very slowly but allowing feel once the car is under way. Further, the steering ratio increases at certain times. Whilst this sounds bewildering it soon becomes second nature.

If you want to know what Torque Vectoring Brakes do precisely it is best to read the literature, but in essence each individual wheel can be retarded when cornering.

There are all sorts of interior upgrades, different colours, different electronics and comfort features, this last including the must have of the



airscarf, which means that very few SLKs will be identical.

Standard equipment includes:

- Electrically adjustable and heated door mirrors,
- Vario-roof of course,
- LED front running and tail lights,
- Remote boot release,
- Spare wheel (space saver) steel,
- Green tinted glass,
- Automatic air conditioning,
- Door sill panels, lettered Mercedes-Benz,
- Electric windows,
- External temperature gauge,
- Adjustable seat height,
- Service indicator,
- Stainless steel pedals,
- Fabric wind deflector,
- Adaptive brake lights,
- Adaptive brake system with hold function,
- ABS and brake assist, attention assist,
- Automatic child seat recognition,
- Electric parking brake,
- Electronic stability program, including acceleration skid control,
- First aid kit and warning triangle,
- Locking wheel nuts,
- Active head restraints,
- Free safe anticipatory safety system,
- Remote central locking,
- Seat belts pretensioners,
- Tyre pressure loss warning system,



Bluetooth interface for mobile phones,
USB port.

There is a fabulous range of extras although care needs to be exercised as what you consider to be a must have must be paid for.

There is deep dynamic handling package. This includes a button for selection of sport driving mode, continuously variable damping, direct

Above and below: the 172 has some exquisite design features. The front lights are particularly impressive. With restrictions on car design for safety reasons, let alone aerodynamics, lights, especially at the front of a car, have become a significant way of showing a car is different.

There are those who don't much like side vents, but I would have to say that those on the 172 SLK are pretty special.



steering and torque vector braking. Sounds good, and so it should at £1205.

I like the idea of the intelligent light system. It uses bi-xenon headlamps active light system, adaptive high beam assist, cornering light function and headlamp wash. This is slightly cheaper at £1150.

Metallic paint, surely a must have, comes in at £645.

Full leather, which includes seats and door centre panel in nappa leather with contrasting top stitching, perforations in the seat shoulder area, upper section of dashboard and beltline in black nappa leather with black top stitching, armrests and hand rest in, you've guessed it, black nappa leather and the gearshift and gaiter in the same stuff. It is, according to those who have forked out the £2295, £1300 for the AMG, well worth it just for the looks.

One major change for the roof is the glass top panel with switchable transparency. Handy if, when you are told the price of £2000, you look to the heavens.

The COMAND system comes in at £2000 and, I am assured, it is seen as very desirable by second-hand car dealers.

It is all too easy to let the extras run away with you. If you are buying the car with your own money then I would suggest you take someone with you who has your best interests at heart. That said, you can find a reason to splash out on all of them if you try hard enough. They look delicious.

One change which was all but ignored by many testers is that the supercharger gave way to turbocharging on the four pot petrol engine. Mercedes-Benz were not fully forthcoming on the reasons for this, although emissions and fuel consumption are almost certainly the drivers for most such changes. The diesel engine has twin turbochargers.

Whether the replacement of the supercharger (compressor) by a turbocharger is a good or bad thing is really down to the individual. There are power losses with a supercharger as it is directly driven by the engine. This is not a problem with the turbocharger as it is driven by exhaust gases. I am assured that a turbocharger does cause a certain loss of efficiency but this is minimal especially when compared to that of the supercharger.

Where the turbocharger loses out is at low speed. It only comes on song when there is a power demand on the engine. Just revving it before pulling away is not good enough, it needs to be doing work before the turbocharger starts to increase power to any measurable extent.

There is in any turbocharging setup a certain degree of turbo lag, that hesitation before the power is produced. With clever electronics the lag can be all but eliminated. This is only a problem with supercharging if an intercooler is fitted, otherwise power is available at all times.

Turbocharging can nowadays be the more fuel efficient and one would assume that this is the reason it was chosen. Once underway and motoring the difference is not noticeable.



Above: The clever draft excluders, reportedly quite efficient. Note the more substantial seat belt guides.



Left: One thing which must have concerned Mercedes-Benz was the fact that, with so many SLKs on the road, the design was becoming familiar. Given the limitations imposed by the roof mechanism, there was little the design team could do apart from mess with the nose and the light fittings. Gone was the subtle charm of the 170. That's the problem that goes with getting it so right first time.

Below: The front end is a pastiche of that of the SLS, the car used as the Formula 1 pace car at the time of launch. Some compare it unfavourably with the front of the 171 which was, in its turn, a somewhat controversial change from the 170. It soon became accepted and history has repeated itself for the 172. Why, though, if you are going to block it off, make it look like a grill?





Left: From the rear it is a 170/171 SLK to all but those in the know. The only obvious distinguishing characteristic for those not that well up on the 172 is the bit at the front. A problem for Mercedes-Benz I think.

Below: The boot is larger with the roof in either position but the problem of the 'letter box' slot for luggage with the roof down is one that won't go away. In practice the easy way is to raise the roof, only 20 seconds after all, load the luggage and then lower it. A transparent roof panel, even one dripping in electronics so spooky that they make it all go dark, on a convertible car is more or less the definition of a sales inspired stunt as it is possible to get.



In general the 172 was well received by the press. The ride, which had been substantially improved, was both praised and, in an oblique way, criticised. Some suggested that the 172 had moved away from the sporting handling of the 171 and had become something of a boulevard cruiser.

This was a little unfair. Regardless of engine size, or engine type come to that, there were two main types of car: the standard suspension setup and the AMG versions. The latter had improved grip and handling and was the sporting version. The former was more of a grand tourer.

That said, others praised the handling of the non-AMG cars, suggesting they were predictable with high grip limits. Some testers preferred the standard setup to the AMG ones. So overall Mercedes-Benz seemed to have designed the car to be something for everyone.

However there was one feature which everyone commented on: the 250 CDI diesel engine.

As with the vario-roof of the original 170, Mercedes-Benz were not the first try this although they were the first to make it a plus point for an enthusiastic sports car driver. Forums were full of praise for the CDI by those who had bought one.

One thing which Mercedes-Benz focused on was power output. The diesel produces 20 bhp more than the base 200 petrol engined 172, and, rather cleverly, has exactly the same output as the 250 petrol version. Whilst performance was by no means identical, the 250 CDI was by no means a sluggard.

Much play was made of the savings in fuel costs. Many felt the diesel was aimed at the wrong people. If you could afford approaching £40,000, plus an exciting range of extras, for a two seater car then you could probably afford the extra fuel costs.

But then what do I know? According to official statistics, there are 1300 250 CDIs registered in the UK, only just beaten to second place by the 250 petrol. The 200 petrol is the most popular.

Model	engine	power	G/box	CO ²	Price
SLK250 CDI BlueEFFICIENCY Diesel	4 cyl in-line 2143cc	204hp 150kW	7-speed automatic	132	32280
SLK200 BlueEFFICIENCY Petrol	4 cyl in-line 1796cc	184hp 135kW	6-speed manual/ 7-speed automatic	158 manual 151 automatic	£30,010 manual £31,530 automatic
SLK250 BlueEFFICIENCY Petrol	4 cyl in-line 1796cc	204hp 150kW	6-speed manual/ 7-speed automatic	169 manual 153 automatic	£34,335 manual £35,750 automatic
SLK350 BlueEFFICIENCY Petrol	V6 3498cc	306hp 225kW	7-speed automatic	167	44260
SLK55 AMG BlueEFFICIENCY Petrol	V8 5461cc	421hp 310kW	7-speed automatic	195	54990

* On the road price includes tax, delivery, new vehicle registration, index plates, fuel., As given by Mercedes-Benz March 2013.

172 Technical Specifications

	250 CDI	200	250	350	55 AMG
Engine	In line 4, 2143 cc	In line 4, 1796 cc	In line 4, 1796 cc	V6, 2498 cc	V8, 5461 cc
Fuel, delivery	Diesel, twin turbocharger	Petrol, turbocharger	Petrol, turbocharger	Petrol, normally aspirated	Petrol, normally aspirated
Power, hp/revs	204, 4200	184, 5250	204, 5500	306, 6500	421, 6800
Maximum torque, revs	500, 1600-1800	250, 1800-4600	310, 2000-4300	370, 3500-5250	540, 4500
Transmission	7-speed auto	6-speed manual	6-speed manual	7-speed auto	7-speed auto
0-62 mph secs	6.7 auto	7.3 man, 7.0 auto	6.5 man, 6.6 auto	5.6 auto	4.6 auto
Top speed	151 auto	149 man, 147 auto	152 man, 151 auto	155 electronically limited	155 electronically limited
Fuel consumption					
Urban	45.6 auto	30.4 man, 32.8 auto	28.8 mn, 32.5 auto	28.5 auto	23.5 auto
Extra urban	65.7 auto	53.3 man, 53.3 auto	53.3 man, 52.3 auto	51.4 auto	45.6 auto
Combined	56.5 auto	41.5 man, 43.5 auto	40.9 man, 42.8 auto	39.8 auto	33.6 auto

The fuel consumption figures are not meant to be real world. They are there as a comparison. If you drive gently you will get better consumption figures and conversely if you are aggressive then the consumption goes up. However the idea is that the consumption will go up and down across the whole range of cars subject to these standard EU tests.

172 Technical Specifications - continued

A feature of the 172 SLK is the option of the AMG sports package for the 200 and both 250s, the 350 and the 55 having it fitted as standard. The standard suspension package is set up as a softer compromise between ride and handling. The AMG package includes 18 inch wheels with 35 instead of the standard 40 section tyres, a bit of body styling which includes slightly different headlamps, lowered 'sports' suspension and minor brake upgrades to the front.

There is the added bonus of a differential lock, a significant piece of kit if the road surface is a little under par. The upgraded steering wheel with nappa leather, included in the AMG package, can be had separately for around £415. Whether it deserves the accolade of 'Performance' is another matter. It does look very nice though.



Above: Detail is important. Detail with the words V8 and AMG is even better.

BlueEFFICIENCY

What's that all about then?

The lowercase blue and the all capitals for efficiency shows that marketing has something to do with it. The title is delightfully vague but it suggests some form of economy.

In essence Mercedes are making it obvious that they are after making their cars more frugal. Rather than just publish fuel consumption figures, largely ignored by the general public it has to be said, it has included the phrase to encourage potential buyers to ask for an explanation of the sales staff.

Cynicism aside, the changes would appear to be very worthwhile. Fuel consumption figures are much lower for the new model for equivalent sized engines. Part of the reason is that all cars have fitted a device which switches off the engine when the vehicle is stationary. This makes perfect sense. Once you have driven a car with such a system you find yourself switching off the engine on your own car when you are caught in traffic.

Other changes include a lower coefficient of drag across the SLK range and, vitally, attention to minor details all intended to reduce fuel consumption and emissions.



Left: An SLK 55AMG, this one with just 1,700 miles on the clock after two years. A tragedy.

In side view it is difficult to differentiate it from lesser SLKs, and that is part of its charm, although not the best bit obviously. It is, I'm told, docile around town. All the more reason not to drive it around town.

So much power is seductive. Once tasted, nothing else will do.

Picture courtesy of Performance Car Company, Hants.

SLC© - a 172 by another name



New Wine, Old Bottle?

Let's be clear on this point: the SLC is an SLK 172 mid-term upgrade. I have no idea of the reasoning behind the new name with very limited change but it smells of a marketing ploy. Does it fool anyone? Evidently it didn't fool the M-B blurb writers as it is described as 'facelifted'.

Here is the official, pre launch advertising.

Image on this and next page courtesy of Mercedes-Benz ©

Announced: December 2015

Release date: April 2016

The new Mercedes-Benz SLC arrives in showrooms in April 2016 with sharpened styling, significantly optimised technology and an exciting new model line-up.

Following on from the hugely successful SLK, the latest generation of our compact roadster takes on a

172 upgrade (SLC if we must)

new name to underscore its connection with the C-Class – with which it shares much of the same technology.

A more masculine appearance distinguishes the new SLC from its predecessor. The powerful front end is dominated by a steeply raked diamond radiator grille, which elongates the appearance of the arrow shaped bonnet. The new front bumper reinforces the SLC's bold look with striking air intakes, chrome trim and dynamically modelled contours.

At the side, the dynamic silhouette is defined by a gently rising beltline and the sweeping curve of the roof. This flows into a muscular rear, which shows off a striking new bumper with integrated tailpipes.

Inside, the face-lifted SLC offers a combination of high quality finishes and advanced tech – among the highlights a redesigned instrument cluster with stylish black dials, a larger, 4.5-inch multifunction, colour TFT display and a larger, 7-inch media display.

Comfort is enhanced too, with a new vario-roof that can now be operated while moving at speeds of up to 25 mph. The new automatic boot separator included in KEYLESS-GO means that the roof can be opened without any need to leave the car. And optional features such as the AIRSCARF neck-level heating system ensure your cabin is always cosy.

New additions to the model line-up include the range-topping Mercedes-AMG SLC 43. The efficiency champion remains the

SLC 250 d, with CO2 emissions of just 114 g/km.

Whichever model you choose, there are options to tailor your driving experience at the touch of a button with the innovative DYNAMIC SELECT drive system (standard with automatic transmission). And with advanced multimedia tech including the optional COMAND Online infotainment system, you'll experience new and extended features that make driving more connected than ever before.



All credit to M-B for saying it like it is, with the possible exception of the 'muscular rear'.

The main differences to the coachwork boil down to a nose-job, a bit of difference at the back and, er, that's virtually it.

The interior is modified, as one would expect, and the roof can now be opened at speeds up to 25mph. The two screens - a 4.5-inch function display, and a 7-inch TFT for 'media' - look good.

It would be churlish to criticise an improvement for it being delayed, but I will. The automatic boot separator should have been in the original 172 at least, and probably the 171. It is here now so let us rejoice.

Much ado about little perhaps, and the renaming doesn't help, but all things taken into consideration, it is an improvement.

172 upgrade (SLC if we must)



The revamped interior. Not a massive change from the 172 original but that's no bad thing. The upgrades are subtle. I like it.

Images courtesy Mercedes-Benz

Whilst I think the new name is rather pointless, the changes to the outside were an essential. The car was becoming familiar and sales staff need something to hang their pitch on. Five years in long enough for a car to remain the same.

The interior changes might not be seen as enough by some. I like subtle, as long as they are improvements, and there can be little doubt the cockpit is a nicer place to be, and it was pretty cool before. The seats appear to be better upholstered, but we await the reports of testers.

One fact that Mercedes-Benz has had to face up to is that the vario roof, whilst by no means old hat, is now not the differentiator it used to be. I mean, I'm told there's even a Peugeot with something similar. That they agree is probably shown by their relegation of the vario roof into fourth place in the list of features for the Sport range, behind 17" alloy wheels and cruise control.

The literature now concentrates on the sophisticated extras, something that features in all M-B advertising, together with the sound system.

Comfort is mentioned a number of times, which given the demographic it is aimed at is no bad thing. It seems the days of taking on Porsche are passed.

Hyped a bit is that you can open the roof at speeds up to 25 mph. What is not mentioned is that you have to start the process at standstill. So not all what it might have seemed.

To be mourned is the loss of the V8 engine. Whilst this is not a particular surprise in the current climate, the replacement by a twin turbocharged 3-litre V6, albeit twin turbocharged, is a fundamental change.

0-62 time does not suffer too greatly, dropping from 4.6 secs to 4.7, one wonders what will happen to in the 50-70 range. The 17032AMG was hardly slower.

But then, I'm not likely to be in the mob buying at the windows of the M-B dealerships to lay my hands on one so one assumes the model is aimed with some precision at those likely to buy.



172 upgrade (SLC if we must)

The rest of the range consists of the SLC 250 d, which has a 2143 cc in line 4-cylinder, twin turbocharged diesel, giving a 0-62 time of 6.6 seconds courtesy of 550 ft/lb of torque. Whilst oil-burners are not to everyone’s taste, particularly legislators at the moment, the combined fuel consumption of 70.6 mpg is remarkable and could change some minds.

Of similar performance is the SLC 200, with its 1991 cc in line 4-cylinder single turbocharger engine giving a 0-62 time of 6.9 seconds in auto form. The fuel consumption of 47.9 mpg is unlikely to put anyone off buying one.

The biggest threat to the 200 is the SLC 300. This is not a smaller engined V6 but a chipped engine otherwise identical to the 200. It benefits from a fair increase in power, from the 184 of the 200 to a more comfortable 245 bhp an increase of about a third. The 0-62 time is reduced from a slovenly 6.9 seconds to a more sprightly 5.8

With the combined fuel consumption of 47.1 mpg, the only thing holding you back from choosing this over the 200 is the price differential. You are, no doubt, convinced it can’t be all that much for what is, in essence, a different CPU, but look again.

UK prices at launch of the SLC are for the 9G-Tronic AMG line models:

SLC 250 d	£36,995
SLC 200	£35,980
SLC 300	£39,385

So quite a hike from the 200.

The SLC 43 AMG comes in at £46,360

As always with Mercedes-Benz, check prices of extras before you tick away.

There will probably be a selection of offers for a while, maybe including cheap leasing opportunities. Some of these for the 172 SLK gave massive savings so the prices above should be viewed as a starting point.

I get the feeling that the SLC is a signal that the smallest of Mercedes-Benz sports cars has found its niche in the model line-up. Sub 400 bhp is seen as a way to stop it competing with the SL



172 upgrade (SLC if we must)

Sticking to the 43 AMG, and continuing with the light criticisms, it would appear that some things which were standard on the SLK 55 are now options. It is rather complex working out costs, but it is clear that the trumpeted reduction of £9000 of the 43 over the 55 is not all it might seem.

For instance the 43 gets Aircarf, Garmin SD card navigation, mirror pack, lighting and ambient light packs, alloy roll hoop covers and more minor stuff such as analogue clock.

Not included includes Airguide, Parktronic reversing camera, rain sensing wipers (not mourned by many evidently), cup holders (quite the opposite), COMMAND and electric memory seats.



I've mentioned before that I'm no big fan of engine covers. Here is a picture of the SLC43 AMG engine cover, obscuring the twin turbocharged V6.

The SLC range can be reduced into manageable proportions.

The engines

There are three:

a 4-in-line, 1991cc, turbocharged petrol engine with two outputs, 184 bhp (SLC 200) and 245 bhp (SLC 300),

a 4-in-line, 2143cc, twin turbocharged diesel engine (SLC 250 d) giving out 204 bhp, and

A V6, 2996cc, twin turbocharged petrol engine (SLC 43 AMG).

The lines

There are two:

Sport line,

AMG Line.

The lack of capitalisation for line after Sport is deliberate. It is the way M-B do it. In other words, there is Sport and AMG Line, but both are lines. I glad I've been able to clear that up for you.

Sport line is available for the SLC 250 d and SLC 200.

AMG Line is available for the SLC 250 d and SLC 200 and is standard on the SLC 300.

The SLC43 AMG has no line.

Sport line

17" alloy 5-spoke wheels

Active Brake Assist

Cruise control

Electro-hydraulic vario-roof

Halogen headlamps, LED daytime lamps

Air conditioning

Bluetooth radio with 7-inch colour display and two USB ports in centre armrest

DAB digital radio tuner

Dynamic Select giving a choice of five driving modes for auto only

Various interface ports for various electronics prefixed by i

Pre-wiring for Garmin map pilot sat nav

Black roof lining

Sports seats

Flat bottomed three-spoke, nappa trimmed steering wheel with buttons on it

Flappy paddles behind the steering wheel for automatic transmission only)

Fabric wind deflector

Light carbon aluminium trim

Black cloth upholstery.

172 upgrade (SLC if we must)

AMG Line

For a mere £4000, including VAT, you get in addition to or replacement of Sport line:

18" alloy multi-spoke wheels

AMG front and rear aprons, side skirts

Much flashier grill

Better brakes with perforated front discs

'Mercedes-Benz' lettering on brake callipers

Suspension lowered by 10 mm

AMG velour floor mats

Different design of instrument cluster

Steering wheel has perforated leather in grip area, galvanised silver-chrome

paddle shifters (automatic only) and red contrasting top stitching

Various interior trim differences.



There was no queue of people wanting to examine the SLC at the Goodwood Festival of Speed in 2016.

AMG

18" AMG alloy 10-spoke design wheels

Different front and rear aprons, front splitter in silver chrome plus wheelhouse covers integrated in rear wheel arch linings

Mechanical Limited-slip differential

Larger brake discs perforated all round

Speed-sensitive steering

Spoiler on boot lid

Two chrome-plated tailpipes

'BITURBO' lettering on front wings



It says in the AMG description 'Different grill'. However, it is the same as other Mercedes-Benz cars of other ranges. This is the AMG grill. It looks rather spectacular at night.

AMG - continued

Different grill

Black door mirrors

Red brake callipers

Side air outlets

AMG everywhere it seems. On the door panels (brushed stainless steel), in the instrument cluster, on the start up display, and probably lots more

Different instrument cluster with 175 mph speedo and Racetimer

Analogue clock

3-Spoke nappa leather/microfibrearking

Black/red piping nappa leather/microfibre upholstery



Muscular rump? Don't try this at home as a compliment.

172 upgrade (SLC if we must)

The Interior

There can be little argument: the cockpit is a very nice place to be, with subtle improvement and more dramatic ones. Fittings are of a high standards and there is a feeling of 'Mercedes of Old' about it, while still feeling modern.

The seats are especially comfortable despite being tight fitting. The dash is the M-B norm and a little sombre. The switchgear feels nice and solid, and the only criticism I'd make is that they are a little small, especially for someone with big hands like me. I struggled a little with the seat adjustment, this despite it being visible, up on the door by the handle, unlike in my 170.

There is more switchgear on the door pull that is more or less intuitive.

The interior is a highlight of the SLC.



Internal stowage is limited, as always, but even if you have no particular place to go, the journey will be pleasant.



The switchgear for windows and door mirrors is in the normal place and it is like lots of other cars. No bad thing I reckon. I don't like having to remember which car I'm in.



Lots of fiddly little switches all in the same place. It's not ideal. Further, the seat adjustment buttons are too small and are awkward to use for a big fat bloke like me. Great range though and everyone must be able to find the perfect arrangement of variables.



A pet hate of mine: too many damn switches. Count them, and then realise there are umpteen more. There's a certain irony in the fact that the roof can be raised or lowered on the move but if you want to work out which button to press for whatever purpose, it will be best to stop in a layby. It's not as if I bemoan the lack of a starting handle. I like progress and techy stuff, but this is overwhelming, but hardly limited to M-B.

Rant over.

172 upgrade (SLC if we must)



So what is the impression of someone who is keen on the SLK, has owned two and thinks they are great?

It is fair to say that when I heard of the renaming of the car I thought there might be something radical in the offing. So there is a certain disappointment. It is a mid term facelift, with minor improvements, particularly with the interior, but nothing dramatic. It is, in essence, a nose and bum job.

The dropping of the V8 is a downer for some, but that was always on the cards. The car no longer competes with the SL.

The V6 fitted to previous SLKs have been lovely to drive behind - balance shaft gear notwithstanding - and I know I'll love it if I ever get to drive one. It is not the big downer that the forums would lead us to believe.

I think, however, M-B have problems with competition. There are some lovely, and exciting to look at, sports cars coming online now and the SLC is becoming a bit old hat, almost literally and the vario roof is almost disregarded.

It is a lovely car. Would I have one? For sure. Would I buy one new? Now that depends.

I've had a few Mercs: W124, CLK and two SLKs, but I've got little brand loyalty. If I had £50,000 to spend on a second car, I'd be bewildered by the choice.

The Z4 is out of course, let's accept that right away, but there are others.

The SLK/C has always been more than a roof, which is just as well. It now seems to have found its niche and the days of the SLK, in 32AMG format, or with one of the V8s, being faster than the SL would appear to have gone.

M-B need to come up with something a bit more than a new nose and tail, and a name change for the next one.



It looks good, but could be any number of cars in the M-B range.

Below: You'd be hard pressed to know that this is a 173 SLC rather than a 172 SLK from the side. Black does the car no favours.



SLK guide

172 upgrade (SLC if we must)

173 Update (SLC) Technical Specifications

	SLC 250 d	SLC 200	SLC 300	SLC 43 AMG
Engine	In line 4, 2143 cc	In line 4, 1991 cc	In line 4, 1991 cc	V6, 2996 cc
Fuel, delivery	Diesel, twin turbocharger	Petrol, turbocharger	Petrol, turbocharger	Petrol, twin turbocharger
Power, hp/revs	204, 3800	184, 5500	245, 5500	367, 5500-6000
Maximum torque, revs	500, 1600-1800	300, 1200-5500	370, 1300-4000	520, 2000-4200
Transmission	9-speed auto	6-speed manual, 9-speed auto	9-speed auto	9-speed auto
0-62 mph secs	6.6	7.0 man, 6.9 auto	5.8	4.7
Top speed	152	149 man, 147 auto	155 electronically limited	155 electronically limited
Fuel consumption				
Urban	54.3	32.8 man, 36.7 auto	36.7	26.4
Extra urban	72.4	54.3 man, 57.7 auto	57.7	45.6
Combined	70.6	41.5 man, 47.9 auto	47.1	36.2

The fuel consumption figures are not meant to be real world. They are there as a comparison. If you drive gently you will get better consumption figures and conversely if you are aggressive then the consumption goes up. However the idea is that the consumption will go up and down across the whole range of cars subject to these standard EU tests.

Taxation rates - UK

(not a road fund licence, no matter what anyone says)

** The sharp increase in the tax liability of the 280 and 350 was due to a change in the method of rating, based on CO2 emissions. In the case of the 280 the bit over the threshold was microscopic, literally. There are reports of some 280s attracting Band L, £460 pa, but I've not seen any and I would assume those with this benefit are reluctant to publicise it.*

Check before you buy.

Type	Model	From	To	Band	6 mths	Year
170						
	200K	Feb 00	Mar 01		121	220
	200K	Mar 01	Mar 04	K	148.5	270
	230K	Oct 96	Mar 01		121	220
	230K	Mar 01	Mar 04	K	148.5	270
	320	Feb 00	Mar 01		121	220
	320	Mar 01	Mar 04	K	148.5	270
171						
	200K	Jul 04	16 Apr 08	K	148.5	270
	200K	17 Apr 08	Jun 11	J	137.5	250
	280	Jun 05	22 Mar 06	K	148.5	270
*	280	23 Mar 06	Jun 09	L	253	460
	300	Jun 09	Jun 11	K	148.5	270
	350	Jul 04	22 Mar 06	K	148.5	270
*	350	23 Mar 06	Jun 11	L	253	460
	55AMG	Jul 04	22 Mar 06	K	148.5	270
	55AMG	23 Mar 06	Sep 10	M	261.25	475
172						
	200	Jun 11		G	93.5	170
	250	Jun 11		H	107.25	195
	250CDi	Jun 11		E	66	120
	350	Jun 11		H	107.25	195

Which SLK for You?



Whether to go for the 170, above left, the 171, above right, or the 172, left, is just the first question, and even then the answer might well be: It depends. There is considerable overlap in prices so budget doesn't dictate which model is on your shopping list. The next few pages are a bit wordy, but follow them through and you should have some idea what would be best cars for you.

The decision has to be yours though. If you really fancy a 32 AMG then go for it. Just pick a good one for the money you have.

Which SLK for you? - continued

The range of road-worthy Mercedes-Benz SLKs runs from around £1500 to over £40,000 and from around 160 bhp to over 400. It is a cliché to say that there is a car in the range for everyone but there is little doubt that if you're looking for a two seater convertible then there will be an SLK specific to you.

There are naturally aspirated four-cylinder cars, forced induction four-cylinder and six cylinder cars, and naturally aspirated six cylinder and V8 cars. There are petrol powered ones and there is a diesel. In addition there are cars that are pristine, those that require a little bit of work and others that need an awful lot of money spent on them. Which one you should go for is the exciting thing about buying a sports car.

Despite all more or less looking the same the variations are large enough to make a significant difference to the degree of enjoyment you will get from the car. There are those which are comfortable to travel long distances in. Others have a harsher ride which might become a little tiresome after a couple of hundred miles on French back roads.

Out and out performance could be your thing or, as is more common nowadays I suppose, economy might be an essential given that you can barely afford the car.

There's one out there to suit your tastes and with all the bits you want.



Another choice you will have to make is where to buy your car. You could pay the premium for a Mercedes-Benz dealer vehicle, opt for one from a general car showroom or go privately. M-B dealers have a choice of the newer models and they are generally pricier. Specialists are generally cheaper where as general dealer prices are all over the place.

It is impossible to be able to tell you which car will be perfect for you, or the best place to buy it. Most people have their own view on what is the best option but the next few pages will describe the differences in the various models, the costs, what they are like to drive and the advantages and disadvantages of the various routes to ownership.

The only bit of advice I will give is to take someone knowledgeable with you when you go to buy. Failing that, take someone who will not be overcome by the glamour of the car. Mind you, these are rarer.

It is all too easy to get in the car, take the roof down and drive away. Whichever SLK you are in, it will be an enjoyable experience. You return thinking that this is the model for you. It can be handy to have someone tell you that perhaps you need to see if a smaller engine size, or perhaps a bigger one, might be better or that given the cost of fuel, having a drive in a diesel 250 could do no harm.



Spoiled for choice

As pointed out before, it is wrong to think of the SLK as one car. The strength of the model is the vast range. From, at least in the UK, a 163 bhp 1.8 L to a 5.5 L V8 pushing out a very laid-back 440 bhp: these two extremes are entirely different cars that look similar on the outside. A perfectly reasonable 170 can be had for £2500 or you might have £50,000 to spend.

So let's sort them out, basics first.

Boot sizes

	Roof up litres	Roof lowered litres
170	340	145
171	300	208
172	335	225

For comparison, the boot of the current MX5 is 150 litres, roof up or down. The Boxster's is 280 litres. The 350Z - well, just don't ask.

Do you need a new garage?

	Width	Length
170	1712mm, 5'7"	4014mm, 13'2"
171	1795mm, 5'10"	4087mm, 13'5"
172	1810mm, 5'11"	4134mm, 13'6"

The doors are quite long and you need to open them wide for ease of access for the less than agile. A 10' wide garage is more or less an essential for an elegant exit.



Don't get sidetracked. There will be plenty of time to study the stock when you are waiting for some problem with you SLK to be rectified.

Engine types and sizes:

There are three main configurations of engines: an in-line four, the V6 and V8. But that is not the whole story.

In-line four:

The range starts with the 170 200, the base 2 litre normally aspirated engine. This was available in a restricted number of markets, one of which is thankfully not the UK. There are one or two advertised in papers such as Autotrader but the 136 bhp it gives out does not allow spirited driving.

The next one 'up' is the 171 1.8 litre supercharged engine of the 200. Sorry for all the figures, and here come a lot more. This gives out 163 bhp and is all the better for it.

There is the 170 2 litre supercharged engine which gives out a maximum of 192 bhp.

The most popular 170 was the 230 with its 2.3 litre supercharged engine giving a not unreasonable 197 bhp.

The current 172 has three four-cylinder engines on offer. There is the 200, which has a 1.8 turbocharged unit giving 184 bhp. The same engine comes in a different state of tune giving 204 bhp and being renamed, bewilderingly, the 250. Both of these are petrol engines.

That leaves the 2.2 litre surprise of the twin turbocharged diesel engine. This also, and not coincidentally, gives 204 bhp although the real difference is in its masses of torque, going up from the 310 of the 250 to mind blowing 500.

The V6:

Despite the increase in the number of cylinders, the selection of engines is somewhat less complicated.

The range starts with the 3.2 litre normally aspirated one fitted to the 170. This delivers 218 bhp. This was given a supercharger in the 32 AMG and this pushed the output up to 354 bhp.

The V6 in the 171 gave a choice of engine sizes. There was the 280, which was a 3 litre, and gave out 227 bhp or you could opt for the 3.5 litre with a more impressive 272 bhp.

Which SLK for you? - continued

The 280 had a name change to 300 a couple of years after the introduction of the 171 but the power output stayed the same. The post facelift 350 had a considerable boost in output to 305 bhp.

The 350 in 172 guise drops the power output imperceptibly to 304.

55 AMG

The SLK55 AMG engine is a 5.5 litre V8 putting out a subdued 360 bhp at its lowest output. The later, 172 version gave out 421 bhp with an alternative of 440 bhp.

What engine to go for:

The number of engines and varying power outputs is vast. It is tempting to go for the most powerful engine especially as, as any sports car driver will tell you, no matter how fast your car is when you bought it and how much it terrified

you, after a few months you will be looking for more performance.

The power output is not the only factor you should consider with engines. The 6-cylinder 320 has only a little more power than the 4-pot 230K but that does not mean that there is just as little difference in the driving experience. It is remarkably different to drive.

Nor does it mean that the V6 is a cruiser, because that would be far from the truth. All SLKs are impressive when used on motorways and fast A and B roads. The bigger engines are less stressed and might well confer the same feeling on you at the end of a long continental journey.

Drive a number of SLKs in your price range. That is the only way you can tell which engine will suit you.

Model	BHP	Top speed	0-60	MPG	Gearbox	Ins group*
170 200K 00-04 manual	163	138	7.9	28	6-speed	32
170 200K 00-04 automatic	163	136	8.3	29	5-speed	32
170 230K 96-00	193	142	7.3	31	5-speed	34
170 230K 00-04	193	149	7	28	6-speed	34
170 320 00-04 manual	218	152	6.8	24	6-speed	36
170 320 00-04 automatic	218	150	6.7	26	5-speed	36
170 32 AMG	354	155	5	25	5-speed	37
171 200K 04-11 manual	160	143	7.6	32	6-speed	37
171 200K 04-11 automatic	160	143	8	32	5-speed	37
171 280 04-08 manual	227	155	6.1	30	6-speed	42
171 280 04-08 automatic	227	155	6	31	7-speed	42
171 300 08-11 manual	227	155	6.1	29	6-speed	42
171 300 08-11 automatic	227	155	6	31	7-speed	42
171 350 04-08 manual	268	155	5.4	26	6-speed	43
171 350 04-08 automatic	268	155	5.3	28	7-speed	43
171 350 08-11 manual	300	155	5.2	29	6-speed	45
171 350 08-11 automatic	300	155	5.2	31	7-speed	45
171 AMG 04-11	354	155	4.7	23	7-speed	47

* Insurance groups and prices depends a great deal on the specific insurance company. So this is a guideline only.

Ownership costs:

A person who buys a sports car new has different priorities to the rest of us who buy them second-hand. For those in the enviable position of being able to turn up at a Mercedes-Benz dealership and spec a car to their individual taste, the choice is remarkably easy.

If fuel economy is important to you then the obvious choice is the diesel engine. If you can't quite cope with the rattle on start-up then there is the 200 and 250 to choose from.

If performance is high up on your list of must haves then there is the 350, with enough power for anybody with any sense, and for those with exquisite taste there is the 55 AMG.

From then on it is an à la carte choice. Performance extras, safety extras, comfort extras and a little bits of bling: wouldn't we all like to be ticking those boxes.

At the time of writing there were some exquisite finance deals on offer from M-B dealers. As mentioned later, if you are willing to put down a fair sized deposit then the monthly charge for a leasing deal can be less than depreciation.

If you prefer to buy outright then there is a range of offers available from M-B, some of which appear to give value for money.

For those on a more restrained budget the choice is less simple.

If you want really cheap, then the 230K is your only option as it was the only option in the early years. That said it is an excellent compromise between performance and economy. It is not for nothing that it is the best selling SLK so far.

The 320 is a little bit more juicy, and can cost a little bit more to insure although check before dismissing it for this reason. The thing is though, performance wise it again is only a little bit more as well.

The 32 AMG is a step up in performance without a significant increase in fuel consumption if the vehicle is driven steadily.

What you have to ask yourself is whether you have the degree of self control necessary to drive the car sensibly for the majority of time and just use the extra power every now and again.

The 32 AMG has held its price relatively well and the possibility is that depreciation might well be lower than any of the other cars in the 170 range. There were very few imported into this country, and even fewer remaining, and this can add a premium.

With rust being a significant problem on the 170, it is probable that for low mileage examples kept in garages prices might stabilise.

The 170 200K is seen as the choice for the economy minded, but take care. If you choose to drive in a spirited manner, fuel consumption might well be a little higher than with the 230K.

The 171 range is somewhat more simple. If you want low running costs and drive in town for the majority of your time then the 200K would appear to be the obvious choice.

That said, if you yearn for a bit more performance, in fact a fair bit more, then feel relieved that the 350 does not give a massive increase in fuel consumption unless the extra power is used excessively (if one can use power excessively).

If you drive fairly long distance on mixed roads then you will be relieved to know that 30-35 mpg is well within expectations. On a 200 mile journey with an evenly distributed mixture of motorway, dual carriageway and open A roads, which necessitated a few overtaking manoeuvres, my 350 returned 32.1 mpg, and that was with no real consideration for economy.

It drops to 23 mpg when driving in town and in traffic, going up to 27-28 mpg as the norm in mixed driving without motorways. This will be beaten by the 200K but not by a massive amount.

My 350 runs better with premium petrol, so that is an increase in costs you should consider, and us of so called super fuels such as Optimax give me an increase in performance as well.

Which SLK for you? - continued

Tax changes in the UK means that a pre face-lift 171 350 registered around April 2006 onwards costs over £400 for a year, a big increase over the £270 for the same engine size before that.

Servicing costs are a bit higher for the 350 but not massively so. Check with your preferred servicing agent before committing yourself either way. It is a bit more than the cost of two extra spark plugs.

Other costs to consider are spare parts. Mercedes-Benz have a reputation for high parts prices. They have dedicated their lives to earning this reputation and seem reluctant to abandon it. However, and it is a big however, if you don't have to buy that many items then how much they cost is of limited interest.

There is a burgeoning second-hand market for parts and if you are happy to have someone else's castoffs then this can give a significant reduction in the cost of ownership.

Extras:

A study of the prices in the likes of Autotrader show that a high spec. SLK does not have a significantly higher asking price. A specialist dealer said that COMAND was an essential and the car without satnav might well stay on his forecourt for a considerable length of time.

If you are quite happy to do without what many feel they must have, look to reduce the price asked by substantial amount.

A leather interior adds to the secondhand price, as you would expect. Some of the designs are a little outside many people's acceptable level and if a dealer's website fails to show the nature of the seats, phone and ask them what he's hiding before setting out. If it is extreme then expect a reduction in costs, even if you love it.

One of the extras from the 171 onwards that would appear to add to the cost of the second-hand car is Airscarf. Given the ridicule that its introduction was met with, this is rather ironic.

I've seen two all but identical models on a forecourt with the one sans Airscarf being some £350 cheaper than the one next to it on the

forecourt which was all but identical but had this magic extra.

If you can do without it then expect this to be taken into consideration in the final price. Remember though that there will be a reduction in your selling price when it comes time to part.

There are enough cars out there for you to be able to have your choice of extras together with your choice of interior colours. Do not be rushed into buying one if it doesn't quite fit your requirements.

Condition:

It is a truism to say that when buying a second-hand car you should buy on condition above all else. I have to say that I agree. However if you are handy with spanners then a car suffering from a mechanical problem, one that is repairable and within your skills level, could be an option for you. Do not, though, underestimate the costs of refurbishing of an interior that looks shabby.

Before diving off in a vehicle which requires work do check on how much parts will cost, how difficult they are to fit and how long it will take you.

Replacement superchargers from Mercedes-Benz will bring tears to your eyes although if you're willing to opt for a second-hand unit that has been tested and is guaranteed then it is more reasonable. If you don't intend to do a high mileage then second-hand parts are a sensible option.

Rusty bodywork is not the massive no-no that some commentators suggest. If the problems are limited to the return under a wheel arch then these are quite easy, if not particularly cheap, to repair. What such a patch should do though is to make you concerned about the overall state of the rest of the car, particularly the chassis.

Welding is surprisingly easy to learn to a level which will allow you to repair the occasional patch but for that extensive area you need extensive experience or extensive funds.

If you do find a small patch of rust then it could be due to, for instance, a minor bit of impact

Which SLK for you? - continued

damage cracking the paint or underseal. If that is all it is then by all means buy the car and give it to your local friendly welder.

Paintwork that is damaged is also expensive to repair. You are looking at £hundreds for a 'quarter' after a wing respray. You can get it cheaper but not if you want it to match.

Enjoyment:

The point of a sports car is that it should be fun, and exciting, to drive. Out and out performance is not an essential for this although it is fair to say that it doesn't hurt.

For the 170 the difference in road behaviour of a 200K and a 230K might not look that much on paper but if you drive them back to back you notice it. Again on paper, the differential between the 230K and the 320 is fairly similar but, once you drive the pair, the difference is more obvious.

You have to ask yourself if you could live with the lower performance. For just a little bit extra on the price, insurance and servicing you could have a little bit more power.

I know of no one who has ever said that they wish they'd bought a less powerful car. The reverse is certainly not true.

The difference between the 171 200K and the 350 is massive. They are virtually different cars purely on the performance of the engine. One would assume that the driver who enthuses over a 350 would find the 200K a bit of a drudge to drive. But this misses what a sports car is.

The 200K is fun to drive, to own and just to be in. It would probably be wrong to suggest that each journey is an event but it is true that every journey can be made into an event. If you set up the car for a corner and you do it well, then the thrill is just the same whether you are behind 163 bhp or 305. However:

Differences between 170 and 171:

After having to get rid of my my loved, and well regarded by me, 350 171, at a not inconsiderable loss, I spent a year or so with a CLK, which I liked immensely, but then wanted to come back in the fold. Or do I mean folding?

With around £6,000 (2016) ready to splash out on another SLK I looked at 17 cars and drove a dozen or so, and four extensively. These were 230 and 320 170s and I opted for one of the latter some six months after I started looking. That's about normal for me.

Whilst I preferred the 320, I would have happily settled for a 230 after seeing so much rubbish. As luck would have it I saw a 51,000 mile 230K on one morning, and a 48,000 320 in the afternoon and the difference was remarkable. More remarkable was the differences between the 171 350 and the 170 320. The following is my personal views and opinions. You might disagree.

Performance:

The difference in horsepower is obvious from the start. The 320 is considerably slower in acceleration, especially the higher the speed you are travelling. That said, all that is required for 95% of the time is for a bit more throttle to be used.

Gearbox:

Both the 170 and 171 were autos and the loss of the sublime 7-speed of the 350 was a hard pill to take. There's nothing wrong in the 5-speed fitted to the 320 - it is not for nothing that Mercedes have the reputation of producing the best auto boxes - but it suffers in comparison.

Electronic bits:

The 170 has fewer gizmos and if that's a loss to you, then be aware that when things go wrong with the electronic bits, things go wrong with your savings. It is a Mercedes-Benz after all. The only one I miss is the steering wheel moving away when switching off the ignition as it is more difficult to exit and enter the 170 with the roof up for those of us who have aged enough to grunt when bending over.

Finish:

The interior of my 170 has lasted well. There are few blemishes despite being 12 years old. However, many others that I looked at showed their age somewhat. I prefer the turned aluminium dash but that is a purely personal opinion.

Which SLK for you? - continued

Driving:

The only difference is the steering. Whilst words such as 'vague' and 'imprecise' are used for the reticulating ball box of the 170-series, it isn't that bad. It is precise enough for spirited driving although it is not brilliant when holding the car straight ahead. But then neither is the 171.

That said, there is much more feedback with the rack and pinion and I preferred it. But even so, it is no TVR. I considered a 200K 171 but for what I could afford, the cars were very high mileage and looked it. And sounded it in one case.

Costs:

I tend to drive my 320 as fast as I drove my 350 and the greater throttle openings mean it uses more fuel, quite a bit more in fact, than the 350. I live in dread of OPEC rearing out of the desert again. I have lost around 15 miles per tankful. I reckon I could get that back if I drove mainly on motorways and ignored A and B roads, or took it a bit slower. But I'll never know.

Looks:

Even when I had my 171 I preferred the style of the 170. It is obvious it was designed as a whole. It was, and remains, one of the best designs of the last 40 years. But if the 171 does it for you, then so be it.

Classic status:

Some classic cars increase in value over the years. Generally speaking, apart from a few exotics, the best an owner can hope for is to have his costs paid for by a car's price inflation. Depressing, but all too true.

With sports cars things are slightly different. The tendency is for the price to drop in line with the depreciation of other vehicles. The older the car, the cheaper it is. However sports cars tend to reach a low price, stabilise, and then have a slight but steady increase in value over the years.

What tends to happen is that the cars end up in the hands of the impecunious and before long

they become too expensive to repair. Those cars which have been well looked after, regularly serviced and the perhaps garaged over their lives gradually become more desirable.

What happens is a rather odd situation where an older version of a car has an average price the same as or even higher than the model that replaced it. This goes on until the later model goes through the same process and its price will gradually rise.

Mercedes-Benz sports cars have, historically, gained classic status almost by right. It is not so long ago that you could have bought a 280 107 SL for a song. Nowadays to get one in excellent condition you would have to get Madonna to sing for it.

It is unlikely that the SLK range will increase in value significantly in years to come although no one can say for certain. There is every chance that depreciation will be minimal if you choose the right car at the right time. The consistent advice from all people involved in classic cars is to buy a car that you want to drive rather than by one just for the increase in value. This is something I agree with wholeheartedly.

A lasting relationship:

This leads on to the question of how long an SLK will last. There is a burgeoning industry around classic cars with spare parts being remanufactured almost as a matter of course.

With my last sports car, a TVR Chimera, there were a number of companies seemingly dedicated to supplying new parts, repairing the cars and modifying them to maintain their performance edge. All this on a stock of some 4000 Chimeras and near identical Griffiths. One would assume it would be a commercially viable proposition to specialise in keeping SLKs on the road.

One recent change has been to MOT tests. Now we have electronic driver aids included and there is a possibility that these might be more difficult to repair in years to come. In the past such fears have proved groundless as if the demand is there, so will be the supplier.

Which SLK for you? - continued

The great unknown is legislation. There have been a number of moves to keep older cars away from town centres, and indeed to scrap them. There is little doubt that there will be an increase in the restrictive legislation that pro-classic car lobbying groups have campaigned against. Their success has been mixed. If you are buying a car as a long-term proposition it would probably be best to seek one out for its support.

As I said, the answer to the ultimate question: Which SLK you should buy? is impossible to give. Only you can say which one which suits your way of life, your car usage and come high enough in fun factor. You now have sufficient information to come to your own conclusion and are at less risk of being confused by the person trying to sell you the car.

Looked at logically the best way of deciding which SLK you should go for is to make a series of decisions on a range of specific features. For instance, to start with the most obvious, you might feel that you have a price range between £8000 and £10,000. It is not quite that simple though. If you are buying privately you might want to keep a certain percentage back in case the car you pick has a problem that you missed.

So the price range would vary slightly. You might feel that for a private sale the maximum should be £9000 with £1000 put by for eventualities. If it turns out you chose well, then you could buy something special for it. Or you.

A dealer’s guarantee means that you have some peace of mind. It can be of benefit if you put the newly bought car through an MOT with a request to the tester to keep an eye open for any problems. Some garages will provide an examination service but these are not cheap.

My suggestion is that if your maximum budget is £10,000 then stick to it. It is very tempting to go just that little bit more at one dealer, say perhaps £10,500 and this then becomes the maximum price. Before you know it at the next dealer you are looking at an £11,000 car.

The same goes for the next range of features, such as engine size. Unless the extra power is of vital importance to you then if you are after a four pot 170, include the 200 in with a 230K. The same goes for a 171 350 and the 300.

As can be seen from the table, below, unless you go for one of the rather unusual and less numerous models there is no excuse for not waiting for the specific vehicle of your choice. With 4000 171s out there, nearly 8000 if you include all the V6s, there will be one along sooner or later (probably later I’m afraid) which will be everything you want.

There are over 60,000 SLKs on the road in Great Britain with a further 1300 off-road under SORN*. The most popular, at around 30,000, is the 230, with the 200 coming in around 20,000. The four cylinder is by far the most popular, with 50,000 to the V6 of all types at 11,000.

From any point of view this is a success story of considerable proportions. It would be churlish to compare this to its competitors.

** Statutory off-road notification. The vehicle is registered but not for road use.*

Model	Gearbox	Taxed	SORN *
200	Manual	5800	170
200	Automatic	14000	166
200	Unspecified	139	7
230	Manual	17000	93
230	Automatic	13000	657
280	Manual	382	6
280	Automatic	2971	41
300	Manual	39	0
300	Automatic	310	0
320	Manual	791	40
320	Automatic	2100	85
350	Manual	566	9
350	Automatic	3900	65

Buying experiences

In the Autumn of 2015 I sold my CLK - great car but I no longer needed the extra seats - and started to look round for an SLK. I finally bought one in March 2016. I normally take a month or two. I had £6000 to spend, with an additional £1000 if I really wanted the car, more than I wanted a new DSLR.

Whilst I knew exactly what I was after there was a fair range. I could go for a top quality 170 or an early 171. The 350 was out given my experiences with balance shaft gears. As I like a bit of power the 200K 170 was out but the 230K and the 320 were in the frame.

I might have gone for a 32AMG but ride was terrible on the UK roads.

I looked at 17 cars, riding in 14 and driving a dozen. Here are my conclusions.

Don't believe private adverts

I've an ex police officer and am used to being lied to and talking to private sellers on the phone was like having a warrant card again. Even direct questions were twisted.

Ask dealers 'what is wrong with the car'

I felt that I got honest answers. I bought my car from a dealer and he pointed out all the obvious faults. There was damage to the wall of one of the front tyres, not an MoT failure, but that was the only thing he missed.

A 'very good condition for year' 51,000 miler deposited rust on my head as I opened the

bonnet. The bottom of the doors were rusted through and rust had been poorly repaired on the wheel arches.

Dearer the better

170 320s tended to be in better condition than 230Ks everything else being equal. I've no idea why this is but that's my evidenced findings.

Newer the better

For 170s, there appeared to be a cut-off point of 2002 for rust. Most cars before that date had some rust on them, enough to mean a few hundred pounds for it to be rectified. There were two early ones in great condition bodywise but both had other faults, bad enough to make me ditch them. Overspray was a great giveaway of poor quality repair. One tyre had a patch of silver about 3" long. A glance at the boot catch area showed two cars with paint spray over the lock. Running my finger around wheel arches showed blocks of Isopon-type filler, not even waterproofed.

Ask lots of questions

Chat to the seller if private. They often give away secrets as most people are honest and if they have misrepresented the car in any way they will probably be nervous or might actually tell the truth. Don't try this with dealers.

Buying experiences - continued

Beware of the confession

If they tell you that a specific thing is wrong, it can mean that they are trying to take your attention from something else. It was pointed out that the exhaust was blowing when the supercharger was rumbling.

Wait

I almost despaired of finding the right car for me. 17 cars I looked at and 3 were so bad that I didn't even look them over. But eventually there was this Cubanite Silver, 48,000 mile, well looked after, rust free 320 with just the accessories I wanted.

Be reasonable

After a few cars were examined it became obvious that some faults should be just accepted and ignored. For instance, the rust around the boot catch on face-lifted 170s was endemic. If there was none apparent, it was normally, universally in fact, that it had been already repaired.

It is easy enough to repair rust for a sale so I eventually favoured the idea of knowing how bad the rust around the boot catch was.

Be thorough

Examine everything you can. Don't make any assumptions. If the spare wheel looks unused, still examine the boot floor under it.

Check each securing point for such things as the inspection panel in the boot. It is, apparently, difficult to get such things back into place. If the seller has stated that they have had no problems in the boot and it is obvious that an inspection panel has been removed and badly replaced, you have to accept that you can believe nothing they have said.

Driving test

Go out in the passenger seat for the test drive. With the roof down, listen for any odd noises. Then do so again with the roof up. If the seller suddenly becomes voluble ask them to be

Quiet just in case they are trying to cover up some odd sound.

Be a pain

You are going to spend a lot of money to take your time. Try all the controls. Go through the system by, for instance, trying to change the time on the clock. Ensure all the dash lights work. I missed one, the heater fan speed dial because it was out of my line of sight. That's slack.

Look like a nerd

Make notes. Have a diagram of the car on a clip board and mark any faults. Take a car stethoscope and listen to the supercharger and generator. This is why you should look at a number of cars so you can tell when something is out of the ordinary.

Look at one out of your price range

If you are not buying at the top end of the range, have a look at one that's well above (so as you are not tempted) what you can afford. Something like that is what you should aim for.

Know things

Discover everything you can about the car. Buying this book is a good move, but go onto SLK World forums and ask on there for ideas. Everyone likes to help and to display their knowledge (thankfully).

Below: Mine. Well worth the wait to find.



SLK guide

Price and cost

Whilst most people suggest that you should have a budget when going out to buy a car and should stick with it, if your budget is £10,000 and the sales person will not drop below £10,250 for the car of your dreams, do not abandon it immediately. £250 is less than four tanks of fuel and discuss your problems with the dealer. You should take into consideration the cost of time and travelling you would save if you bought it. Also consider that the sales staff might well give in if you walk away, leaving your phone number.

As mentioned before, in your budget you should include extras which you might feel are essentials such as an extended warranty or, if you are buying privately, a little bit put by in case you missed something on the initial viewing.

It can be better to buy a car when the tyres are on their last legs as you can take off the complete price of a new set of covers whereas if they are part worn you, and the vendor unfortunately, tend to ignore the amount of wear.

Be honest with yourself. If you can't afford to run a 55 AMG then admit it at an early stage and go for something cheaper to fuel and insure. The converse is true as well: if you want the power of, for instance, a 350 then don't mess around looking at 200Ks and being dissatisfied by them all.

There are a number of sources of second-hand prices for cars available. Parkers is particularly good in my opinion although larger type might be an advantage. There are others out there and they all seem to suggest more or less the same prices.

One thing which they do tend to avoid is regional variations. There is something similar to a North/South divide in the UK, although this is a simplistic description.

I would suggest reading up on the prices of cars on the forecourts of the years and specialists in your area. This is, after all, just what the dealer would do.

	200K 00-04 manual	200k 00-04 automatic	230K 96-00 automatic	230K 00-04 automatic	320 00-04 manual	320 00-04 automatic	32 AMG 00-04 automatic
Insurance	32	32	34	34	36	36	37
MPG	28	29	31	28	24	26	25
CO2	237	230	220	241	274	254	268

As can be seen above on the comparative costs table, there is little difference between the ratings for insurance, and probably not that much in practice for the overall costs.

Price - continued

One thing which does adversely affect the price of second-hand cars is mileage. This has one specific advantage for those who are doing just to 3000 miles a year. You can buy a car with a bit over average mileage and, by the time you come to sell it a few years later, it will probably still have some value.

I went through an online car sales magazine in February 2013 and examined over 1000 adverts for SLKs. The most remarkable thing is that mileage is not the differentiator for SLKs as it is for cars in general. It would appear that if the mileage is fairly low then condition is more likely to dictate the price. Service history is also seen as important. It would be a very brave person who bought one at market price without the book having all the required stamps.

It can be difficult to assess what the condition of the car is by an advert alone. It is advisable to phone dealers and specialists before attending as they tend to be honest, within limits.

Experience over the years, including when buying my SLK, is that the same cannot be said of private vendors. I've discussed a car's condition at length before attending and found a vehicle whose condition bore no relationship to that described.

There is little, or rather no, point in including current second-hand prices in a book. You could download all the statistics from Autotrader or similar, put them into a spreadsheet and play with the figures but then why bother? For a few pounds there is Parker's Guide.

However, good as Parker's is, and it is very good, care needs to be exercised in relation to these prices. There are regional variations to prices, at least asking prices. However, Autotrader-style online search engines will show if you are in an area where the prices are higher or lower.

Do not forget that the prices displayed are what is being asked and not necessarily what is being paid by purchasers. Whilst dealers will enter into negotiations with regards price they prefer to add extras, such as extended warranties, rather than drop the price. Private sellers are, accepted wisdom says, much more likely to drop from what they said in the advert.

This has been my experience. However, I have also found that good examples of a model being sold privately would go very quickly and you have to be sharply off the mark.

Buying via a private sale has got a rather bad name and probably for a good reason. The



A clean engine bay is a marker for a well kept car. A pristine one is a sign the owner has too much time on their hands.

Price - continued

specialist forums abound with people who have bought lemons. It is fair to say that this is a low percentage of the total, but it is a worrying feature of privates sales.

Whilst no one would suggest using one's view of the vendor as a good reason to buy a car, the reverse is more dependable. If, for some reason, you find yourself being a bit wary of them, then I would walk away from the deal.

No matter how many checks you make, and HPI is a must, you will be taking some things on trust. If you discover the vendor has lied, even over something of little import, go find some other car. It is not, in my experience, worth the risk. One 'trick' is to ask the vendor on the phone for an accurate description of the car's faults, such as paint chips. If, when you see the car, you find out he has been less than honest then consider what else he might be hiding.

What you should not forget though is that private sales prices are generally much lower than those for traders. Let's show you how much.

All figures were calculated from those on a well-known forum based website over April and May 2013. The figures differ a little from those published by Parkers but not by an amount which makes the calculations way off.

The 170 has reached the stage where condition is more important than age and mileage. A 2002, sub 50,000 mile 230K described as in 'excellent condition for year' had an asking price of £7000 but for those with a budget of £3000 would have a very wide choice and if willing to opt for a 1996 model then they would receive change and a car that has 'no problems and in very useable condition', including a new MoT.

Once onto the 171 things tend to become a bit more stable with year of manufacture and mileage being the most important factors. One surprising thing is that there is little difference in second hand prices between the various engine sizes for earlier cars although the 350 becomes more expensive for the newer cars. Even then the difference is never substantial.

Conversely, there is a significant difference between auto and manual prices, running at around 5.5% for a 2004 171 and going up to 6% for newer cars in favour of the automatic.

To demonstrate this, a 2005 350 auto car would be offered for around £9000, the current price at the time of going to press. A manual would go for £8500. Similarly, but not identically, a 2011 350 auto would be around £21,300 and a manual around £20,020.

Do not make the assumption that the newer is, necessarily, the better. There are significant differences between the individual models and what road testers criticise might not be that important to you. Whilst the 170's steering had lots of critics, drive one to see if it is such a big thing for you. Many say that the rack and pinion of the 171 and 172 gives much better 'feel' but if you feel the 170's steering is fine, then go for it. The car will be cheaper if in identical condition. A 32AMG for instance might well prove to be a cheap car to own as depreciation for those kept in top condition is likely (no promises though) to be very low. And many say the 170 seats (see right) were more comfortable than those in the subsequent models.

It is your money so do your own thing.



Price - continued

Using the same examples it is easy to demonstrate the most obvious differences: main dealer prices, specialist dealers and private sales.

For older cars, specialists are around 4% cheaper and private around 11% than main dealers. For the £9000 auto 350 for sale at a main dealer would, at a specialist, be offered for around £8640 and privately for £8000 or so.

For reason which are obscure to say the least, for newer cars the differences are respectively 3% and 5.5%. For our £21,300 auto 350 in a main dealers we would expect it to be around £20,660 at a specialist, dropping to £20,130 for a private deal.

My figures are for asking prices and, although without evidence, I would assume that private sellers might well drop their price more than dealers but the latter might well include extended warranties.

There are other things to consider. Main dealers say that they offer more support and expertise than specialists. How much will be down to you to discover. There are many examples quoted on the internet where main dealers have gone that extra mile, or few yards perhaps, when things have gone wrong but, maybe equally, there are a number of comments from dissatisfied customers. The same goes for specialists.

When it comes to a private sale there are considerably more stories of problems, together with questions such as 'I've bought a pup: what do I do now?'

You can buy a warranty, an insurance in fact, against failures of main parts. This will eat up a considerable proportion of the saved money. However, it is not unknown for the warranties to exclude claims when a part was faulty when the car was bought. Check the small print.

With both examples above, the 'saved' £1000 or so with the private sale over that for a main dealer might be usefully invested somewhere for the first year.

Just in case.



There are a number of different wheels available for the SLK from both M-B and after-market specialist. However, you might want to experience the ride of some of the larger wheels which require very low profile tyres. They are expensive to shod and the ride can suffer considerably.



SLK guide

Price - continued

Further, as your car ages there will be a drop in the difference. But then many would suggest that buying a car for what you can get when you sell it is silly.

The mid-term upgrade can add a fair bit to the asking price of a 171. There is a significant difference between the pre- and post-facelift 200K. The 350 power increase is substantial. Further, the vagaries of the British tax system mean that the April 2006 cars tax increased to £400 which dropped by over £125 for the update because of its lower emissions.

However, the prices tend to reflect this and if you intend keeping the car for no longer than 2 years you might not consider the extra price of the later car a bargain. As the cars get older the difference in price will get smaller (please don't sue if this suggestion of mine is wrong).

Always haggle. Dealers will drop prices or include extras despite what they suggest. You have the whip hand to an extent. You can always walk away.

On the other hand, if you really like a car, and you have already signalled this to the sales staff, you might well have to expect to pay the full asking price.

Finally, be careful of 'making do'. If there is something about the car you are not too happy with, remember that you are going to have to live with it for a number of years in all probability. The startling finish shown right might look cool now (and then again, it might not) but consider whether comments about non-stick frying pans might, after the first few hundred times you hear it, become a little wearing.

Interiors cost a fortune to refurbish. Unless you have skills to do it yourself, it is best to opt for something that has a few years use left in it.



Above: Fashion is fickle. Clothes you would have died for a couple of years ago you would not be seen dead in now. The matt black finish of the Merc above is quite startling and cool and will get talked about down the pub. In three years' time if you arrive in the car park driving something painted similarly, they'll be talking about you.

If you like it then by all means buy it. But if you want it 'cause it's unusual or currently cool, then think carefully.



SLK guide

Known Issues



Rust

The years have not been kind to the bodywork of the R170. Rust is the major consideration when looking at the cars with intent to buy. We will come to specifics later but first of all a bit of an overview.

The problem lies with the manufacture of the car. For reasons unexplained, but probably cost savings, many panels which did not show were left in primer. This included rust traps and places where water might congregate or flow over.

The picture above is a front offside wing from an 8-year old, 80,000 mile pre-face lift 170. You can see that the majority of the inside of the wing was not sprayed with topcoat.

Rust mainly comes at the 170 from the inside so any rust showing on the outside, or probably any signs of a quick repair, will normally indicate more serious problems.

As far as the front wing is concerned, it is not as bad it is might at first seem. For starters, and as can be seen in the image above, it is bolted to the rest of the car. The downside is that the bolts are probably seriously rusted. Add vast quantities of Plus-Gas to the cost of any repair.

A replacement wing can be sprayed quite cheaply and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that it has been sprayed inside, with the additional benefit of having rust proofer liberally applied as well. If you have an sense that is.

Whilst the cost of a wing replacement can be taken off the asking price of the car, you would do well to wonder whether you want to buy a car from an owner who did nothing about it.

Known Issues - continued

As an example of the problem look at the images below. You see the few bubbles on the white car where the front wing meets the bumper. This is typical. It is not easy to cure as it has rusted from the inside.



The picture of a front wing below shows the rust trap that is the cause.



It has been suggested that it can be useful to remove the front indicators and examine the inside of the front of the wings if you think there might have been repairs or rust damage. Should the vendor object, make it a condition of the purchase.

Temporary repairs are easy enough to do, although if you drive in the rain or have a damp garage, it will return soon enough. However, I always think that owner of the below car is at least starting to work on it. Good on him.

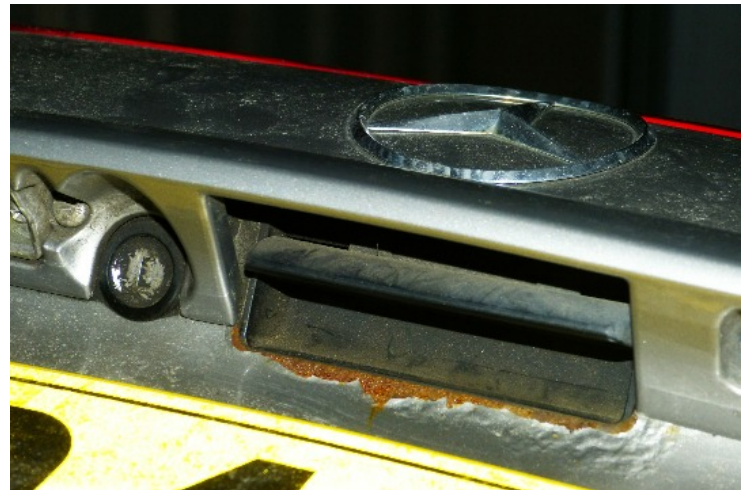


Another particular rust spot is the front underside of the bonnet. Again there is no top coat protection. If you find a car with no problems in that area then apply something like Dinitrol as a first action.

The top of the rear screen surround is another known spot for rust, as are the undersides of the doors. If the alloy sill covers are buckled it probably means that there is rust in the sills.

The rear boot suffers from the normal rusting but in particular in the number plate recess, both behind the number plate and along the catch area. In early 170s, the rear boot keyhole can rust. This was moved in the facelift but the problem remains.

Repair of structural rust is an expensive undertaking and not one to be costed by a guess. I would suggest a professional opinion is essential if any underside rust is present. If the vendor refuses you the facility to do so then I would assume the worst.



Even simple rust removal can be difficult and take a long time. The example above is surface rust and caught early enough. However, to eradicate it completely takes time and spanners. That's about 15 hours work to clear.

Many would suggest that it is essential that you raise any older SLK on lifts for examination of the underside. If the facilities are not available then you will have to accept that you are taking a risk.

Known Issues - continued

Now for the good news: there are just one or two major issues with SLKs. The list following is intimidating when first seen but what has to be taken into consideration is the number of cars that have been sold and further, that many of the reports refer to the base C class models that the SLKs are based on.

The List

The 170, especially the early pre facelift model, can have a problem with oil leaking onto the mass airflow sensor. There have been problems with oil leaks onto the cam magnet as well. Repairs can run into the hundreds.

Pedal box failure, caused by fatigue is not unknown in the 170.

There have been numerous reports that the intercooler water pump on the 32AMG can last for as little as 30,000 miles. Not a particularly expensive problem. Some recommend non OE pumps as replacements.

Failed lights behind the speedo cluster is a cheap fix if you are willing to have a go yourself. It has been described as a fiddly exercise. Given that it is a costly fix at dealers you might feel the effort worthwhile.

Oddly enough it is fairly easy to remove the steering wheel (disconnect the battery first) so problems with indicator switches etc are within a home mechanic's remit.

Problems with automatic gearboxes across the range are not uncommon. The early seven speed autobox had a known issue with selection. This had a number of symptoms which included failure to select a gear, failure to select neutral, refusing to change up from third or fourth, starting in third or fourth and just throwing in the towel and refusing to work. The fix is fairly simple although not cheap, and consists of replacement of the 'valve plate' I was told. My specialist garage needed to take the vehicle to a main dealer. It costs up to £2000.

On any test drive thoroughly warm any automatic gearbox and play with the manual change. However this is an intermittent fault. You can go 300 miles without a problem and then have a couple of days when it is persistent.

In the early stages you can clear the fault by merely switching off the engine and restarting.

Be aware that the gearbox is not at its smoothest when starting from cold. The first few changes can be a little abrupt. Advice from forums and such is that you should change automatic transmission fluid between 30 to 50,000 miles.

A wet passenger footwell is probably indicative of the drain hole of the battery box being blocked. It is a simple and cheap fix: remove the battery, clean hole, dry the water, wipe away mud and replace battery. The problem is however that the water might well have got onto the heater motor and caused it to rust.

Replacement is neither simple nor cheap. Run the heater motor and listen for any graunching sounds.

Mass airflow sensor failure is not uncommon. Symptoms include poor starting, stalling, erratic tickover, poor drivability, hesitant under load and erratic behaviour when the accelerator is depressed. None of these are specific of course but if they are present it would be advisable to check the full codes.

Again not a cheap replacement but a quick clean can work wonders. Further, an air filter contaminated with oil might be the cause.



There are no known issues with the brakes of any SLK. They can feel a little 'dead' at low speeds but this is hardly a fault. So no reason to show this picture of these AMG brakes apart from looking cool.

Known Issues - continued

Noise from the engine when started is always a worry and belt tensioners can go and at fairly low mileage. It is an easy fix that you might wonder why the vendor hasn't bothered with it.

The roof is generally reliable. Check inside the pump compartment in the boot - right hand side - for dampness as this can give problems. If the roof is hesitant or slow this can mean fairly expensive repair although it is normally something like switches. Check that all hinges are well lubricated.

The rubbers on the roof seals deteriorate. They are not cheap to replace. Wear marks can be a sign of poor alignment.

The car creaks quite a bit, especially when the roof is up. This can be the seals moving against each other, which can be cured by application of a silicon based lubricant. The tyres generate quite a bit of noise which is increased by under-inflation.

Heater fans can throw a wobbly as can the regulator, the latter cheap enough, the former not so. Also the relays for the lights are incorporated in the light switch. If one goes it is a new switch unit, for me nearly £400,

One creak not to ignore is from the seat base. You might even be able to feel it move a bit. This progressive failure is a persistent fault and one that is, evidently, difficult to eradicate. Some suggest that Mercedes-Benz merely replace one faulty item with an identical part which will fail again later. There are various fixes suggested on forums although none appear to be 100% successful.

All in all the 170 and, with the exception mentioned on the following page, 171 would appear to be reliable given their respective ages and the sort of use it is likely to have suffered. A full service main dealer service history is worth a lot. Do not go overboard though. A specialist can be just as good or better.

If you find a repairable fault then that alone should not put you off buying the car. You can take the cost of parts and repairs off the price but ask yourself whether you should buy from an owner who could not be bothered to maintain the vehicle effectively.



Check that the heated seats work, switch above indicates if fitted, in a 171 as they are a frequent source of failure. Go to [SLK World](#) for a full briefing but here is an overview.

Some heating elements fail. This is normally in the seat base. Here there are three elements, two on the sides bits, which can be replaced, and one in the middle, where the whole squab has to be replaced. This is not a cheap fix. In fact, from what has been said, this is an expensive fix.

There has been a report of a fire in the seat base. There seems to have been just the one occurrence, but one can seem a lot if it is your bum in the seat. Check that the element is working and do not kneel on the seat squab if you own a car with the feature fitted.

The list might seem long, but certainly no longer than other cars of the age. Don't think the car is unreliable. Do think that parts are expensive.

I bought my first SLK for £12,000 from a reputable garage with a warranty. A warning light came on, indicating a cam sensor problem. A visit to a Merc specialist revealed a problem that reduced the value of my car by some £5000. The warranty refused to pay out as it was a fault on the car when it was bought - read the small print - and the garage had closed after nearly 40 years. They saw me coming.

More details over.

The following is a summary of information I've gleaned from websites, forums, Facebook and in particular email conversations on the balance shaft sprocket problems with early M272 engines. I cannot justify everything I've included but I can say that the research for these two pages has taken some time and that everything I've included has a supporting source, and normally considerably more than one, other than the origin. Before believing everything I've written, search online for Mercedes-Benz balance shaft problems and read on. I wish I had done so before buying my 2006 SLK 350.

HY

Problems with early 350 M272 engines

Right: Be afraid, be very afraid.

A worn balance shaft sprocket. The problem is rather obvious but see the next page for how it should look. The problem is that a worn sprocket is difficult to diagnose before failure. The engine fault codes come a little before replacement is a must.

There are reports on-line that those who bought their cars from non-franchised M-B dealers are on their own.



There would appear to be a problem with the quality of balance shaft sprockets for the M272 V6 engines as fitted to the SLK350 as well as other Mercedes cars of the period. This is particular to M272 engines up to engine number (272.942) 30468993. If your M272-equipped car was manufactured in 2007 or before then you should be concerned because, reports suggest, your engine could be affected.

The engine number is on the front of the left-hand cam cover.

The V6 banks are set at 90-degrees. This is inherently unbalanced (unlike a 60-degree V6 as the later M276 engine) so Mercedes followed established practice and opted to install a balance shaft. It works wonderfully well and the engine is turbine smooth.

The shaft is chain driven and naturally the chain runs on sprockets. M-B sourced their parts from

far and wide and it seems that they might not have been up to scratch.

The problem, for an owner of an M272 of the period, is that to fix a worn sprocket M-B recommend that the engine is removed. This takes time and therefore it costs. When asked how much, an independent Mercedes dealer said:

"We are talking big money. As cars get older and with higher mileages, the tipping point into uneconomic repair looms."

In effect the front end has to be rebuilt and the sprocket, repair kit A2720300013, has to be fitted. Engine removal is an expensive task, and reports vary as to how many hours can be charged for this, some quoting 'a bit over 50'

Known Issues - continued

whilst others put the number up to around 100 and more. 'Big money' seems to be an accurate assessment.

Some suggest that the problem appears to afflict all M272 engines within the range to an extent. There have been reports of it occurring at 40K whilst others have used their M272-equipped M-B for over 107,000 miles without the necessity for major repair.

There are some suggestions online that M-B repair said failures as a goodwill gesture, but many more dispute this is normal procedure. The consensus seems that if you bought you M272-equipped car from an official Mercedes-Benz dealer then some compensation is likely. This does not always, it seems, cover the total cost.

Search the internet under 'Mercedes-Benz balance shaft problems' or, better still, go to one of the specialist websites, such as SLK World. There is, as there has to be nowadays, a Facebook page, which is very informative:

www.facebook.com/groups/BalanceShaftMB/

The reason for the page: *This group is to help organize all of us in one place, share information, and keep up to date on current events regarding the balance shaft issue.*

Applicable to models with M272 engine up to Serial No. 2729..30 468993 or M273 engine Up to Serial No. 2739..30 088611. Not Applicable to Model 164.156, 204 or 216.386.

A page goes on to say:

This group is for Mercedes-Benz balance shaft issues that effect 2006 plus years, ML350 and other models that have the check engine light come on, giving a fault code, balance shaft is-sue. The fix is very expensive, ranging from \$4,000 to \$7,500. Mercedes-Benz has known about the problem since they issued a Technical Service Bulletin in 2007. However, currently MB is not notifying consumers or paying for the total repair of the balance shaft.

There is a German language page:

www.facebook.com/groups/MercedesbenzSkandal/

There seems no way of predicting when or if the problem will occur. The only real symptom as such seems to be when an engine fault code is displayed which is given by a camshaft sensor when the wear on the sprocket gives rise to readings outside the designed-in range. However, herein lies a problem.

M-B supply a replacement camshaft sensor with, reports suggest, a wider acceptance of readings. What this means is that the previous owner might well have had the fault code come up, had the sensors replaced and then sold the car on, possibly to you.

One thing which might be of concern is that the bits flying off the sprocket are of sintered metal. This means that the sprocket was not ground out of solid metal but is made from a metal powder and heated to below melting point where the powder all joins together. If done properly it is very strong and wears well. If it is done properly.

It is suggested that an extended warranty is the best bet with these engines. Again, though, there are possible problems. Check what is covered and whether you would be required to make a contribution. Further, it is recommended by some that the oil pump be replaced regardless of a fault showing. Does your insurance company cover such charges?



SLK guide

Where to Look

There are five main ways to buy a second-hand car. Each has points in its favour and each its pitfalls. As with which model SLK, there is no best way. All one can do is pick what is apparently the best way for you.

Times have changed and the fast talking chap who appears from a caravan in a burst of gaudy tie, sheepskin jacket and hackneyed clichés has all but disappeared.

Car dealers are now subject to stringent legislation and if you pick one with a reputation to protect then, if there is a problem with your car, they will feel it is at risk. If not there is always trading standards whose day is made if you tell them of a dodgy dealer.

Main dealers have a problem maintaining their main dealership and selling faulty second-hand cars is not the way to endear themselves to their supplier.

So let's look at the five options:

From a mate

If you know the car and know your friend this is often the cheapest way to buy a car you can depend on. One would assume, one would hope, that you would not try and knock the price down to below its value so accept that you won't get a bargain. Mind you a reasonably priced car that you can depend on is a bargain.

Take care if you value your friendship. Neither a buyer nor a seller be if you wish to stay on speaking terms.

Buying privately

You have to ask yourself why a person is selling a car. There are few who sell it when it is in perfect condition. Whilst a brand new MOT is a good selling point, if the mechanic pointed out a problem that would require considerable expenditure within a year or so then their reason for selling would be reasonable to them.

A few years ago there was every chance to grab a bargain. Nowadays, most people know the value of their cars. The 'We will buy your heap' type companies will have already given them a valuation and they will price their car above that.

There are ways to cut the risks. Some vendors will allow you to, for instance, take the car to a (probably only local) specialist garage for a check-over. Prices vary but I have paid £150 recently to be told to leave the car alone. Money well spent.

Take someone knowledgeable about cars, in the trade themselves perhaps, with you. You need to be able to trust them and trust that they will do their best. If they miss something then it is down to you and not them.

A non-franchised dealer

A non-franchised dealer with a reputation to protect, the only one of its type you should go to, will price their car to its maximum they can get for it. Dealers will not let you have a bargain, at least not successful ones. They will know how much they can get for it to a penny.

Where to Look - continued

Conversely, they tend not to overprice their cars as, with access to the internet being all but universal, most buyers, including you, know how much they will have to pay, to a penny.

Whilst some dealers will throw in additional items to get you to buy, such as six months tax or extended warranty, they won't go silly.

Be aware though that you are dealing with a professional. He will often know just how much he can get from you as soon as you walk through the door. You might think you are playing it cool but all you are doing is sending signals to him.

There is the sub-group of a specialist dealer. Their stock will probably consist of high quality makes of cars, some sticking to German companies for instance. You will frequently have a choice of models and prices at these specialists, although most tend to stay within a range: not the cheapest and not the dearest. They might even try and source a specific model for you, although this can incur a premium.

The specialist dealer prices are often a bit higher than the non-specialist but you will

normally get a better warranty. Further they might do their own maintenance so the 'service' that all dealers will tell you their car has just had might be a bit more than just an oil change.

Such specialists are often well-known locally and will have been in place for years. If they do sell you something faulty then they have a great deal of pressure on them.

A Mercedes-Benz dealership

You have to ask yourself what you will get for paying a premium price for your second-hand SLK. Or better still ask the sales man or woman what you will get for the price. This would, one assumes, include a generous warranty, the promise of high quality and a vehicle that has been checked over by experienced mechanics. There is also the chance of a bit of good faith if

The attractions of a specialist dealer are shown in the picture below. These were reasonable prices, compared to, for instance, Mercedes-Benz main dealers, but there was a fair selection of SLKs on the forecourt.

Interiors could be compared, different models driven, and there can be no better way of seeing what a little bit extra money, or indeed a little bit less, could give you.



Where to Look - continued

you experience a problem not covered by the warranty.

Main dealers will carefully check over cars they buy in or take in part exchange and if they are not up to their standards they send them to auction. They also know the problems the cars suffer from, although they might be reluctant to share this knowledge with you.

Most main dealers seek out repeat buyers for that is the gold standard. With the advent of the internet instant feedback can cost sales.

Many main dealers work to cycles, say perhaps three months. The sales staff are required to sell so many vehicles in that time and if they fail to do so there are problems from head office. Whilst they will not say how long their cycle is, you can often get a good idea by their stock change dates. If you wander in at the time when things are slow then there is every chance of a few extra extras or some money off.

The main advantage of a main dealer is stock. If you are after a specific vehicle then they will not be limited to the cars at their specific showroom. They will be able to trawl around other branches. You will have the specific colour scheme you want, the extras that are a must have and the mileage you feel appropriate.

Further, they tend to have steady stock movement. If they haven't got what you want at

the moment, they will probably be able to find it, possibly for a consideration.

Whilst nothing is certain in this world, especially second hand cars, the threat of penalty and litigation has changed the habits of second hand dealers.

If you are about to spend £15,000 or more for a second-hand SLK then I should think very carefully before trusting yourself to the vagaries of private sellers. There are many, perhaps most of them, honest ones out there. The problem is that you have very little legislation supporting you should you miss a fault which requires repairing.

If all you can afford is £5000 or so then that amount of money is just as important to you as the £15,000 to those that can afford that amount. However, few reputable dealers will deal in such cars because if they offer a guarantee then they might well be out of pocket if, for instance, the engine gives up the ghost within the period of the guarantee.

Auctions

I've never bought a car from an auction. However, I've been to three, or rather I've helped three friends buy from auctions, so I've been to seven all told. The maths will be explained.



The most important thing is not to get sidetracked. Work out what you want the car for, and what you can afford. Once you get to a car dealer you might well see something that, whilst it is stunning and very desirable, is not suitable for the daily commute to work.

My advice is not to even sit in it. But that is a case of do as I say, not as I do. However, time spent dreaming is not time spent checking over your potential purchase.

Where to buy - continued

You can make big savings at an auction, but only if you compare the prices with those on forecourts.

A car advertised for, say, £10,500 at a non-specialist dealer might well go for £7,500 at an auction, a considerable saving. If you include the buyers' fee, which might well be over £300, you get a saving of around 15% on dealer prices.

On top of that you will have a choice of cars if you pick your auctioneers with care. So cheap cars and a choice. They are the upsides. Now for the negatives.

The 15% saving is probably less than 10% if you compare the price to that of a private sale. With a private sale you will get to drive the car and, if price negotiations are not resolved on the first visit you can leave your name and address and phone back later.

You should go to an auction just to see how things are run. Buy on your second or subsequent visit and stick to your budget. Price is the main reason for going to an auction so it is daft to pay over the odds.

Accept that you might have to pay three visits or more before buying the car you want. The auctions normally occur during the working week so include that in your costings. Insurance might cost a bit more to drive the vehicle away.

I won't say don't buy at auction but do add up the pros and cons. Now for a little story.

I bought my SLK from a non-franchised dealer who specialised in Mercedes, Porsche and other quality cars. In the first three months my car went back for a new heater motor, a common fault I have been told, and, a big one here, a new plate for my seven-speed automatic gearbox.

The dealer's profit had gone. It is a risk of the trade. However, had these faults come to light after buying the vehicle from a private vendor I would have been £000s out of pocket.

So good news in a way. However, I then got the dreaded fault logs on my ECU showing that the

balance shaft sprocket was worn and getting near the end of its life. Indeed, my suspicion was that this was not the first time the fault logs had come up.

There can be little doubt that the company, a specialist in Mercedes, knew about the problem. Indeed, when I mentioned the fault to the firm's mechanic he said that it was a fault with the camshaft sensors, when he must have known what was really going on.

When I discovered what had happened I returned to the dealers only to find that they had sold out to a big second hand car dealers.

So not even the satisfaction of putting my dissatisfaction on one of the many Mercedes-Benz forums.

Mind you, all might not be as it seems on these forums. Do not believe everything you read on them without checking.

I was editor of a car club magazine and read on a well-known forum that one of our main advertisers had cost the writer £7500 after botching a service. It caused a bit of a stir and I went to see the company to see if I could find out what the problem was.

The reality was somewhat different from that on the forum thread. The company had documents to prove the fact that they had not done anything that could have caused the failure and that they had offered the chap a 'goodwill gesture' of half the cost of manpower to rectify it, a matter of many hundreds of pounds, so a generous gesture. The customer had said that this showed a guilty conscience.

According to the dealer, this showed their vulnerability even against an unfounded complaint.

When I asked why they hadn't posted something to that effect they said that it was often not cost effective to do so. They just kept quiet and it soon blew over.

There are two sides to every story.

170 An Owner's View



Living with a 32 AMG

In early 2004, I traded in my much-loved Honda Prelude 2.2 VTEC for my first Mercedes-Benz. This was an SLK 320, my intention being to assess whether it was a practical everyday transport, before perhaps buying the forthcoming R171 SLK350. However, having later been rather disappointed by the R171 when I went to the launch event, I decided instead to keep my eyes open for an SLK32 AMG.

Eventually, in August 2005, I found the ideal car. A 2003 SLK32 AMG in brilliant silver

with less than 8000 miles on the clock was for sale at Mercedes-Benz, Redhill; moreover, it had a designo 'Bordeaux' interior. I e-mailed the dealer and asked for details of the car; eventually they called me whilst I was at Birmingham airport on my way to Germany and by use of the then relatively new technology of sending digital images by internet, half an hour later I received some photos.

I immediately decided that I would buy the car, subject to viewing. So, whilst queuing to board my flight, I called the dealer and told them that I'd put down a £1000 holding deposit there and

170 An Owner's View - continued

then and would be down to confirm the deal once I'd returned from my business trip. A few days later I drove down and sealed the deal, then had an impatient week waiting to collect the car.

M-B Redhill gave me a very good deal for my SLK 320 and told me that I'd made lots of people very unhappy - they'd had several expressions of interest whilst I'd been away, but had honoured my deposit. They also gave me a bottle of Champagne to sweeten the dealer experience, but for me the drive home to British West Oxfordshire removed any doubt that I'd made the right decision.

Although at around £45K the SLK32 AMG was a vastly more expensive car than other R170s when new, it came with virtually all the options available on other models fitted as standard. The only additional option on mine was the designo interior, which included seats, door panels, steering wheel and gear lever knob in 'Bordeaux', plus designo floor mats edged in 'Bordeaux' trim.

My colleagues ribbed me about my 'hairstresser's car with pink seats', but really they're red wine in colour. One disappointment was the Bose stereo; although this has 6 speakers, there is no front/rear fader control and sourcing an alternative proved impossible due to the non-standard speaker impedance used by Bose. I also had a hands-free kit for my Nokia 6310i cellphone fitted; this too required a degree of modification before it worked satisfactorily with the Bose system.

My first few weeks with the car found no unexpected problems, apart from the driver's side seat belt retaining loop which I managed to pull off. This loop has identical looking fasteners at each end; however, only one can be released and I'd tried the other. But some superglue and poking the retaining lug carefully back through the seat leather



solved matters and it has been fine ever since. I also did some fuel consumption tests over my first four months of use; whereas my SLK 320 had averaged 27.7 mpg, the AMG recorded 23.2. But this was mainly on country roads and around town, with very little in the way of motorway cruising.

My first impressions with the car confirmed the blistering performance, although I found the AMG 'speedshift' transmission rather fidgety and abrupt at times. If I'd been the AMG transmission guru, I'd have retained the non-

AMG automatic transmission program for 'W' mode and only applied the 'speedshift' program in 'S' mode. Also, the suspension was clearly intended for roads rather better surfaced than the potholes of British roads and I have to admit that ride comfort isn't really the AMG's strongest suit.

In 2008, the opportunity arose for a 1500 mile road trip to Southern Germany immediately after Easter. To meet various European regulations I fitted a small fire extinguisher between the back of the passenger seat and the centre console where it was unobtrusive but readily accessible. I also installed a Garmin nüvi 660 GPS on an automotive mount:



Having visions of cruising through Germany with the top down in early spring sunshine, I treated myself to a set of Roadsterbags, two of which fit neatly under the luggage blind and the third fits in the boot well. At 348 litre, as compared with 300 litre for the R171 and 335 litre for the R172, with the top up the R170 has the largest and most practical boot space of any SLK and these bags optimise the available space with the top down very nicely:

However, Easter 2008 gave some of the worst weather in Europe for many years, so I didn't get many chances for any top-down cruising. The grip of Michelin Pilot Sport PS2 tyres on ice and slush was 'interesting' to say the least. I made two further trips the following year in much better weather, recording an overall fuel consumption figure of 26.7 mpg for the three trips. This included top up, top down, air conditioning on and off, country roads, low speed town crawls and a few glorious high speed autobahn blasts. Due to traffic, autobahn reconstruction, weather and a degree of caution, I was only able to cruise at 140 mph for a few brief moments, but the car felt rock solid and purred along as if glad to be back in its natural environment. On my way north on my last trip,



170 An Owner's View - continued

I took a detour to the AMG factory at Affalterbach, although unfortunately it was closed for the weekend and the weather had once again turned unseasonably wet and windy.

During my ownership, the car has been very reliable, although I had a rear three-quarter window regulator fail, the front ball joints needed replacement under warranty and also had the usual SLK32 AMG faults:

- the driver's heated seat base has failed, although I don't often use the seat heaters.
- the supercharger intercooler pump failed at around 30,000 miles and was replaced under warranty.
- the crankshaft position sensor failed and was replaced under warranty after a 'discussion' with my dealer who had considered the problem to be a transient glitch. When I first took the car in, I was charged for a diagnostic test; however, when it failed again at Didcot station and I missed an important meeting, the charge was refunded and as a goodwill gesture, they reimbursed me for my wasted journey. The MobiloLife technician who came to my assistance found the fault immediately saying the dealer hadn't initially changed the sensor.

Apart from a couple of broken windscreens thanks to road flints, the only other significant issue has been corrosion. It has taken three attempts to cure rust around the boot handle aperture; last year I also had to have both rear wheel arches treated and now I've spotted corrosion on the edge of both front wings where they meet the front bumper. All four alloys are also showing signs of paint blistering, so I'll need to get that sorted at some stage as well.

Dealer servicing costs haven't been too bad; the front brake pads were replaced at 52,500 miles and Michelin Pilot Sport PS2/PS3 tyres need changing roughly every 15,000 miles at about £600 per set. My local tyre dealer noted that the



front tyre wear was rather higher than expected when I had the last set of tyres changed and consequently checked the tracking, only to find it a long way out. Maybe this was caused by British pot holes, but I rather suspect that the tracking wasn't checked when the front ball joints were replaced.

Overall I'm well pleased with my SLK32 AMG and have no idea with what I will eventually replace it. I'm not a great fan of the current overstyled Mercedes-Benz models which, with their disharmonious mishmash of fussy angular lines, collagen curves and more creases, nips and tucks than an ageing Hollywood starlet, lack the timeless elegance of their forebears. A 2005-ish SL500 or SL600 would be nice, apart from the fuel and maintenance bills. But regarding the SLK32 AMG, I'd certainly recommend one to any prospective owner in a heartbeat; only 271 were officially imported into the UK, so they are quite rare and have very probably been cherished. Keep an eye out for rust though - and don't forget that you'll need to chew a lemon every few miles to take that silly AMG smile off your face!

I think I'll be keeping mine for a while longer yet!

Nick Wilcock

April 2013

171 Views of an experienced owner



The number plate is perfect for the car. The obsidian black sets the lines of the car off to perfection and makes a change from the more common silver.

If you are wondering whether to upgrade to a more powerful SLK the most sensible thing to do is to ask somebody who has done precisely that for their experiences. To save you the trouble of throwing yourself in front of the next SLK AMG you see here are the views of an experienced Mercedes-Benz owner kind enough to share his experiences.

Rob Burrell has owned three SLKs, a 230K bought in 1999, then a 350 new in 2005, and finally and currently a 55 AMG in 2007. All cars were bought new and supplied by Mercedes-Benz of Winchester.

In his own words:

At the time I bought my first SLK the only model available was the SLK 230 Kompressor auto. A great car, good performance and a brilliant roof, it was a 4th car so not used every day, it replaced a BMW Z3, I later replaced the SLK with a Porsche Boxster S. I only kept that SLK for 2 years and about 1500 miles, and vowed to have a more powerful model in the future.

The second was an SLK 350 purchased new in September 2005, just in time for the “55” number plate, a brilliant car with every option including COMAND, a full AMG bodykit and AMG wheels. I was very happy with this car, until I changed my business car for a C55



AMG, I then wanted an SLK with the same V8 engine!

So, in June 2007 I took delivery of a new SLK 55 AMG, again obsidian black and I transferred the KB 55 SLK registration number. Despite having two extra exhausts and sounding very different, only the sharp eyed realised it was a totally different car

My 55 AMG has only done 14,100 miles. In January I looked at the latest R172 model SLK with a view to changing in March. I really don't like the new square front end and much prefer the overall looks of the R171 model. I also wasn't impressed with the part exchange offered so will keep it for the foreseeable future.

The SLK is a truly great car, the 55 AMG is very fast yet fun and easy to drive. I have not experienced any problems with any SLK, and have owned several other Mercedes-Benz





including a C32 AMG, a C55 AMG, a C63 AMG, a CLS63 AMG, plus 2 x A Class

The 55 AMG is the ultimate SLK. I ordered it new so it is to my exact specification. The fully loaded SLK 350 cost £46,569.02 in September 2005, the fully loaded 55 AMG cost £52,733 in June 2007.

As for servicing: not expensive as the car is very low mileage. All my SLKs have only needed an annual service always carried out at Mercedes-Benz of Winchester. I can't comment on tyre costs as I have never replaced a tyre on any SLK. My current 14,100 mile car is still on the original tyres. I will probably need to replace them next year, assuming I keep it.

I am very happy with Mercedes-Benz build quality and main dealer servicing, having owned several cars I am known and well looked after. Would I buy another SLK? No, as I think the new model has lost the plot. If I had to change the car today I would probably buy the

latest Boxster S. The best thing about the SLK is without doubt the roof, the ability to drive it as a convertible then close the roof and have the security of a saloon is amazing. The best model is the 55 AMG, the performance is stunning accompanied by a wonderful V8 soundtrack

I am a huge fan of V8 engines and currently own three V8 cars, the SLK 55 AMG, my current business car a CLS63 AMG, and a Porsche 928 GT that I purchased new in March 1990. The 928 GT will be 23 years old this coming Saturday 9 March, current mileage just 34,500."

Rod Burrell

All pictures on this page and the previous two: copyright Rob Burrell

171 Views of an Owner

A 171 350

I have a 2005 350 SLK. Here are my views on a year's ownership.

I've owned a number of sports cars in my time, an MGTC, a couple of kitcars, a Reliant Scimitar, an MGB, a Ginetta G32 (a very underrated sports car, except by those who have owned one) and, until recently, a TVR Chimaera. I've enjoyed every one but parting from the Chimera was the most difficult of all. A back injury meant I could no longer declutch so I had to have an automatic.

Much as I liked a Boxster S, the autobox seemed a little hesitant on the two models I drove so it was as a second choice that I went for the SLK. I had owned a W124 2.8 and thoroughly enjoyed that and I expected the same level of quality.

The seven speed automatic box is a joy to drive with. The only thing I could criticised for is a tendency to change up mid corner when you are on a steady throttle opening. That said, the car is stable when doing so but it remains a little disconcerting.

It is an easy changeover to clutchless manual change but the car revs so quickly that if you are in a progressive mood you seem to be forever changing



gear. My car has little switches behind the steering wheel but I prefer the lever when going manual. I'm relieved there is a proper handbrake, and not that silly foot operated rubbish of my CLK and W124.

These are mild criticisms. The autobox, especially as allied to the 350 engine, is all but impeccable. If you want an automatic sports car then look no further.

Remarkably, the petrol consumption stays up around the mid/upper 20s despite me using the car as my daily driver. I've probably driven half my time in towns or semi-rural areas so I feel the car is frugal. On a 200 mile trip on mixed motorway and fast A roads, including a fair stretch of single carriageway, my car returned 32.1 mpg. On a similar trip my TVR would have been around 22.

A sports car is all about handling, grip and being fun to drive. On all of these three aspects the 350 excels. You can place it to an inch, just clipping the cat's eyes on a fast corner. It is an easy car to exceed the speed limit in without realising.

Accommodation for the driver and passenger is adequate. I'm a fraction over six-foot two inches and I can see through the windscreen comfortably without having to stoop. That's with and without the top up. Visibility to the front and sides is adequate although to the rear it is a little restricted, not helped by the ridiculously shaped interior mirror.

I would have liked a little more noise from the exhaust, especially after the raucous TVR, but on a full throttle there is a welcome growl. No one though is ever going to ask the driver of an SLK "rev it up, mister", a common request for TVR owners.

Reliability has not been 100%. A water leak into the passenger foot well, a new heater motor, two new camshaft sensors and a major repair to the gearbox all came within the first two months of ownership and were repaired under warranty. It's not the sort of thing to add shine to ownership. At the time of writing I'm still waiting for oil leaks from the cam covers to be repaired.

I have to say I am concerned about how much the car is going to cost me.

Once behind the wheel though all worries end. The acceleration is more than ample and, with the automatic gearbox, it comes online at any time. Just press the throttle and you are away.

The brakes are very good at stopping the car although for gentle braking they lack feel. I have owned ABS fitted cars for years and have never used it. However, recently I was in a situation where it saved me from an accident. Without fuss or drama my SLK stopped, albeit with just a couple of inches to spare.

The steering gives ample feedback to the driver once the car is going at a fair speed. It is an easy car to drive with precision. At night the headlamps and spotlights illuminate the road well.

I am in my mid-60s yet the vario-roof is still fun to raise or lower. The only problem is that I feel the urge to do it where there are spectators. It is, as the adverts say, a coupe or a convertible at the touch of a button.

The instruments are not particularly easy to read and the surrounds trying to suggest that they are canted towards the driver are pointless. There is precious little storage space inside the cockpit and this is not helped as my car has a five disc multi-changer. This occupies the majority of the glove locker and I am looking to have it removed.

I have one complaint though: COMAND. The satnav is poor in a number of ways. Is there any advantage to not taking the full postcode? I fail to see the logic behind it. After many years of using TomTom I expected a bit of difficulty in the changeover but even after some 6000 miles I still don't like the Mercedes-Benz version. I now use my TomTom.

Finding a specific item to display, such as water temperature, can take ages. The concentration required means that I can't try it when driving as it takes more effort than a mobile phone call. In any case I will probably end up increasing the volume on the radio.



I would give the COMAND very generous 5 out of 10.

Would I recommend the car to others? I already have.

Day to day ownership of the car is a joy. I take mine everywhere when I need less than three seats. I tend to leave the boot cover in place at all times as I try to have the roof down as often as possible and you soon get used to the narrow opening. It takes a little planning when loading but that is all.

The car is easy enough to clean with few nooks and crannies. The front, as with so many cars, is a little involved and requires a brush to get at all the bits. The wheels have grooves in them, again common to many cars, and these too require a brush, for me I use an old medium toothbrush. It works perfectly.

I liked the old style Mercedes badge on the bonnet on my 124 and am not too sure of the quality and lack of subtlety of the one on the 171.



Car parks can be a bit of a nightmare due to the length of the doors. The normal sized bays in supermarkets are too narrow and one has to pick those bays on the end of lines.

The biggest negative for me has been the necessity to widen my garage, or rather knock it down and buy another. Whilst I could get my SLK through the 7 foot wide opening there was

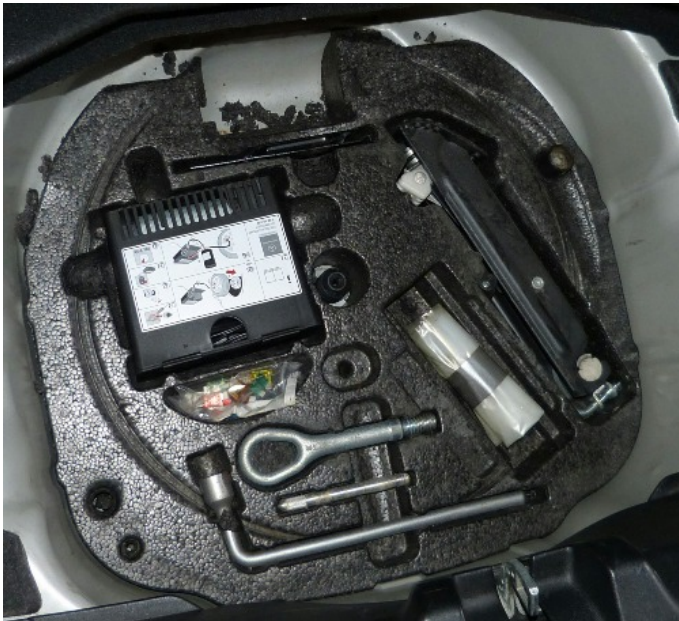
171 Views of an Owner - continued

insufficient room in my 9' wide (external measurement) garage to open the door wide enough for me to be able to exit.

Mind you, when I decided to put my Focus in the garage it was all but impossible to exit with any degree of decorum so this is not something unique to SLK. If you want to park your car undercover be aware of the difficulties.

tempting. I'm not blown away by the 172's looks but they might have grown on me by then. From all reports the diesel engined 250CDi is not the non-starter I thought it might be.

I'd buy another SLK though, that's for certain. It is perfect for my needs, and I need something that is fun to own.



Above left: The spare wheel, if included, is flat as standard. If you get a puncture you have to replace it with the deflated spare tyre and then pump it up. To assist in this there is an electric air pump included in the comprehensive tool kit, see above right. The walls of the tyre are, necessarily, thin and once you have seen them, the recommended speed limit of 50mph, 80kph, doesn't seem too low at all.

The big question is whether, when it comes time to replace my car, would I go for another SLK? At the moment there is no doubt in my mind that I will. Whether I would opt for a 172 or later 171 remains to be seen. Overall it is the best sports cars I have ever owned.

I have a warranty which runs out in 23 months and I'm not too keen to take risks so I will probably replace it then. I've been tempted by the SLK55 AMG but as I use my SLK as my daily driver the extra costs in fuel might be a bit too much for me. The later 171 350 has a significant increase in power and that is

Right: a rather silly place for a power outlet. Further, if the drain hole in the battery tray blocks up, water will come down over it.



172 Owners' Views



I was more than a little surprised when Mercedes-Benz chose a small diesel engine as an option in the SLK. I mean, a small two-seater sports car is not the obvious place to fit a diesel, even one with twin turbochargers. The prices, especially the offers on leasing, were tempting and after seeing the performance figures I thought there could be no harm in a test drive. A few minutes in the car allayed any concerns.

It turns out that the 250cdi is pretty noisy on start up. The phrase: 'bag of spanners' springs to mind. I settles down soon enough once it warms through. The potential for embarrassment is diminished to a great extent by the 'eco' setting. The electronics switch the engine off in stop/start traffic and at lights. It makes you wonder if it was developed for that purpose.

We had high expectations of the car in use and it has lived up to them. All my family love the little SLK. The quality is what you would expect of a Mercedes Benz but, remarkably, I have a lease deal that costs me less than depreciation over the term of the agreement. My partner uses the car more than me and she enjoys the performance, especially as it works in the main as a school run car.

One thing which is a bit on the negative side is that, being a lease car, it is poverty spec, and the one thing that I wish it had come with is 'Air-Scarf'. We drive 80% plus with the roof down and from all the reports it is not the gimmick that was suggested by some of the reporters. If we're on a long motorway journey we'll even have the roof down in the rain as long as we can maintain 50mph+. At that speed we keep dry. We get a few looks, but why worry? We often wear furry hats with the roof down so perhaps 'Air-Scarf' would make them redundant?

Overall, it is a great car. Remarkably for such a quality car, it is cheap as chips: the service plan with Mercedes – fixed cost over 2 years – amounts to pennies. Build quality is high, bar the cheap plastic coverings on the (manual) seat adjustment controls which have come off once in 6 months; the girlfriend and I swap over often and have to manually change the driving position with all three controls, often a few times a day.

The flappy paddles are pretty rubbish as the car doesn't rev enough to enjoy them. I guess this would not be an issue with petrol engines, and the bigger engine sizes.

It costs me £254 per month over two years at 10k miles per year. It currently costs £80 to fill



Don is hardly inexperienced when it comes to sports cars. He previously owned a TVR Cerbera and currently has an Ariel Atom. So varied is the best way to describe his taste in cars.

up on the expensive diesel (Optimax) and I get 350-550 miles from a tank depending on whether it's me or her driving. The difference is that I find the sport mode is very rewarding.

Don



Above: The interior improves with each model. The seats have considerably more padding than those in the 171. But in general the layout is the same and if you know your way around the 170 or 172 you'll feel right at home with the 172. As soon, that is, as you've found that the electric seat controls are on the door.

Below: A 200 SLK 172 in a Waitrose car park, part of its natural habitat. It can be used as an everyday car, for shopping as well as blasting along country roads.



A New 172 Owner's View

An owner's thoughts after 600 miles in a 250 Cdi.

Ride and handing:

The 18" wheels ride over the broken up and potholed roads much better than I expected them to. Hardly much worse than the 16" on my Civic.

The steering feels nicely weighted, but not too heavy. The steering wheel self-centres quite slowly, which is quite different to other Mercedes I've driven. It's quite nice to be involved throughout the whole steering process.

The car takes quick corners with little body roll, but with minimal feel through the steering wheel it would be hard for me to judge the limit, so I doubt I'll try much harder.

The brakes are nice and progressive making it smooth to move in stop-start traffic and also giving confidence when braking from higher speeds.

Vario roof

With the roof up the car is every bit the coupe it looks like. There's minimal wind noise even at 70 mph. However the rear tyre noise at motorway speed becomes more noticeable due to the near silent engine. I suspect there are also

quieter options available to the current 245/45/18 Bridgestone Potenza RE050.

Relative to previous convertibles, the cabin noise is well insulated and a very comfortable place to be. The stereo sounds quite basic but not budget, just in line with an entry level Audi and Honda I've driven.

Roof down there is quite a bit of wind blowing on to my face and down on to my legs. I am 6'2" though and rather annoyingly the fabric wind deflector was not present, which may reduce this affect. The stereo sound quality doesn't drop off by much, which was impressive.

Engine:

The 250CDI engine is the quietest 4 cylinder diesel on idle I've heard so far. At higher revs it gives off a decent diesel noise, but definitely not as nice as a petrol engine would. At motorway speed the engine is very quiet indeed, i.e. 1400rpm at 60mph. Stop-start makes the engine silent when stationary. The engine is one of the highlights of the car so far.

Gearbox:

The last automatic I drove was my W208 CLK, so it's been a while. This 7-speed feels excellent: smooth, natural and intuitive.



The transparent/opaque roof, here fitted to an SLK 200 without the electrics necessary to activate it. One wonders if there is a possible opening for someone to come up with a retro-fit switch.

A New 172 Owner's View - continued

Economy:

After 600 miles I've averaged 48mpg (49 mpg indicated). On a long motorway run I average 55mpg. On my daily commute of 80% motorway 20% B-roads I get 50mpg. Along hilly country lanes gives 40mpg. I'd like a bit more mpg when motorway cruising, but it's near enough for me to be happy.

The car has lots of ways of displaying the economy. Only the trip average makes sense to me. The instantaneous average only goes up to 40mpg, which is quite an oversight since this is a +55mpg car. The 1 minute rolling mpg average has a scale up to 80mpg yet never shows over 50mpg despite me averaging, according to the trip average, 55mpg on the motorway.

Performance:

It has more than enough for UK roads. 204bhp/500Nm offers ample mid-range acceleration.

The book says 0-62mph in 6.7s, it feels every bit that, if not more.

Interior:

The interior is simply but nicely layout. The switches look and feel high quality.

Buttons, dials and screen interfaces feel logical and well laid out.

The seats are nice and low but still give excellent visibility front and rear, though the steering wheel is slightly offset which distracted slightly at first.

The speed and rpm dials look as if sourced from a hot hatch. Not my taste. I much prefer the W211 style.

The seats can be adjusted like most other cars, but even though they are sport seats there is no lumbar adjustment, which is a pity. Despite this they are still comfortable on long journeys.

There is no full automatic mode for the climate control, you need to manually adjust the fan speed.

Boot space with the roof down is still quite decent, though the access hole is restricted

allowing only small/medium soft bags to be taken out.

Airscarf and heated seats:

Heated seats have made the car a very decent all season convertible. They're highly recommended.

However I'm yet to feel or understand the full benefits of Airscarf. If it's a cold day I wear a coat with a collar, so I don't feel the hot air against my neck. If it's warm enough to not wear a coat I don't really need Airscarf. Maybe this feature is more about the clothes you choose to wear?

Miscellaneous:

It's not until you wash the car that I realised quite how big it is. The bonnet and doors feel especially large, it's also quite wide.

Despite not selecting the panoramic roof, it has one fitted but with a solid headlining. This should be a nice mod for the next owner.

Likes:

The engine and gearbox are a great combination.

The performance and economy balance.

All season usability.

The style of the interior.

The low running costs.

Dislikes:

The manual book makes the simple complex. It also doesn't state what functions are standard and what are optional, so you end up reading unnecessary items.

The roof only retracts if the boot interior cover is closed. So even if the boot is empty the roof may not retract. You have to get out of the car, open the boot, close the cover, then get back in the car and try again. That doesn't feel Mercedes like to me.

The front bumper fascia is a very fussy design, plus the large Mercedes emblem looks and feels cheap.

Rear tyre noise.

The view of sales staff

Sales staff, particularly those engaged in selling second-hand cars, spend day after day assessing potential customers on what to anyone else would be very little information. Successful sales staff become very good at this and the devil takes the hindmost.

As mentioned elsewhere, legislation has increased over the years with regards to sales of goods, the benefits of which is that established second-hand car dealers have become, of necessity, more trustworthy, albeit from a very low level. Their main aim now, I was told, is to get a purchaser to return.

If you go into a showroom confident of your ability to outwit the sales staff then my advice is to take somebody sensible with you. These are the professionals and, whilst most would admit to being unable to assess a person immediately, they will know what they can get from you with little delay.

I asked a number of salesmen, all men for no other reason than there were no women available, for advice and this is a composite of their replies.

The SLK, unlike other convertible sports cars, has no defining season so there is little point in waiting until September to buy in the hope that prices will be lower. The hardtop tends to convince people that it will not be a waste of time buying it just before the end of autumn. However, as with all second-hand cars, there is a falloff in sales over the winter.

It is easy for a purchaser to become overwhelmed by the performance of the bigger engined SLKs so if a 200K will suit your lifestyle precisely then it can be unhelpful perhaps to sit in the 350 when the salesman offers you back-to-back comparison of the two types. That will not stop them pushing you that way as the bigger engine often has a higher mark-up.

One thing which all salesmen I asked said was that the norm is for purchasers drive just the one car, presumably because they don't want to make much of a fuss. The sellers say they will let you drive every car on the forecourt if it is likely that you will buy one of the more expensive models.

As mentioned earlier in the book, sales staff know the value of the car to the pound. So should you, as Parker's Guides and similar will provide you with a well-researched ball-park figure. Whilst you might be able to pressure a private vendor into slashing the asking price, the dealer would know what they would get for the car in an auction and there is little or no chance they will drop the price below that.

One salesman said that it is like a supermarket nowadays. The asking price is what the dealer expects although they might add a few goodies to keep the purchaser happy. Much depends on what is for sale locally. If there's another identical car within 20 miles then if you argue the toss and you might well get them to drop the price a bit.

The view of sales staff - continued

One way of putting pressure on a dealer is to walk away from the car. If the dealer thinks you will buy it then he will in some way enter into a negotiation about the price. An SLK is not a metallic green Maestro. This is a car that will sell so do not expect swingeing cuts.

Make it clear to the dealer what faults you wish rectified, or indeed any modifications. Do not depend on what you said during the test drive. Make a list and give it to the dealer, reinforcing it with an email. I'm not suggesting a dealer would ignore some of your requirements, but perhaps it is just as well to ensure that he doesn't miss any by mistake.

Confirm type of guarantee that the dealer offers. For a certain period, normally from one month to three depending on price paid, you would expect every fault to be rectified, which includes from something as mundane as a faulty bulb to a new engine. You will not expect any consideration for mileage.

Most dealers will offer some form of extended warranty. This is an insurance and can be for months or up to three years, and perhaps should be the latter if you are paying £12,000. Read the literature carefully. There are extended warranties and there are other extended warranties. If you are paying a decent price then get a decent warranty.

These warranties cost the dealer so be prepared for a little struggle if you have not paid a vast amount of money for the car. The full, gold-plated, extended warranty will apply normally to fairly low mileage cars, perhaps <60,000 miles. Dealers have a working relationship with these insurance companies so if the car you are buying has 62,000 on the clock then expect the warranty to be gold-plated.

What surprises some dealers is that people will buy cars despite not liking a particular feature. With the SLK there is always another one around the corner. You might have to wait a week or two, perhaps drive a fair distance, but the specific one for you will eventually be on offer.

The internet has changed things to an extent. Dealers might not be terrified of the occasional negative comment on a forum or trade website but they will not want lots of them. They will try and come to some arrangement if you have a problem. The best idea is to negotiate in the first instance. It is normally cheaper for you and better for the dealer. Do not threaten as dealers have methods in place to deal with such problems. Even if you win with litigation, you often end up with less money than if you had a chat with the dealer.



The vario-roof means that the season does not define when an SLK can be used. However, there's little doubt that summer's best for an SLK. The fact that prices don't drop in the winter means that you can justify buying one anytime.

Can't you hear the open road, with its twists and turns, calling to you?

A Mechanic's view



I'm not a big fan of plastic covers over engines. The bonnet is there for those who don't like looking at them. I like to see the bits, the oily bits in my case. However, modern engines are complex and it is difficult to get all that enthusiastic about pipes, wires and ancillaries.

A 171 350 engine bay, plastic cover removed.

I took my car into Woods of Shoreham to source a small oil leak and spoke with Kevin, my mechanic, about the SLK. I asked him for his view of what it is like to work on SLKs.

"I can't say we do that much on them apart from servicing. They are very reliable. The vast majority of work is just general wear and tear. Like other cars with complex electronics they give problems although generally they're not exactly difficult to source.

"We have the occasional oil leak of course [at least he had the decency to smile when he said it] and every so often complaints of creaking roofs or other problems with it. If it is serious we normally have to put it into [the local Mercedes dealer] for them to sort, but this is unusual. Normally a bit of silicon lubricant works wonders."

I asked him how he would improve the 170 and 171 models.

A mechanic's view - continued

"It's very difficult to say. They are very nice looking, good to drive, and the best thing about them is that there is a model to suit everyone. The 200K is the most popular and for very good reasons. It's got sufficient performance for a sports car, the roof is excellent, it is an easy car to drive well and very reliable.

"If you want a bit of performance there is the V6 and if you want a bit more there is always the choice of AMG. The 55 is understressed."

I asked him what one he would go for if he was in the market for an SLK.

"I think it would have to be a 320 or a 350.

Whilst the 200K is a lovely car I think I would

always want a little bit extra power.

Unfortunately I think the only way we would get one in the family is if it was my wife's. So I reckon a 200K is very possible and would be no problem to live with. Rather nice in fact."

I asked him which Mercedes-Benz he would opt for.

"That's quite a choice. I like the CLS although possibly it's a bit on the big side. I wouldn't mind an SL but I would not like its costs. The about to be replaced E-Class, now there's a car. That's probably the one I'd go for. If I had the money that is."



Above: don't let your heart rule your head. If the car is not for you then move on, even if someone important says it's perfect for you. Sometimes you just know when it won't suit your lifestyle.

The CLK - Why?



Picture, courtesy of Will Aron

My domestic situation changed and I needed my second car to have four seats so it did not fall too badly. And, to make things less painful, I really like my CLK.

Let's start at the basics. The CLK was in the tradition of Mercedes-Benz coupés, a two-door version of a four-door mainstream model. The wheelbase stayed the same, the roof was altered a bit and there were massive doors, and fewer of them.

The suspension was modified a little to make the car feel a bit sportier but in essence, that was all they did. That is, apart from the underbonnet bit.

The range of engines in the CLK is remarkable. I've said earlier in this book that there is an SLK to suit everyone, but when it comes to the CLK, there's a car to suit everyone, with options for when your mood changes.

It was a surprisingly popular model, surprising because the end of the coupe had been predicted for some time and the last rights had already been read on some other quality coupes. However, in the UK in 2009, the final year of manufacture, there were over 70,000 registered on UK roads, and in the ensuing 5 years this has dropped by 10,000, with a further 300+ registered off-road.

The C208 CLK was first less loose on the public in 1997, selling under 1000 in the UK in its first year. This went up to over 3000 in 1998 and from then on it sold around 6-8000 annually, right up until its demise. So the CLK turned into a very popular model. It's replacement, now based on the E-Class, has not been so well received in this country.

It did not occur to me to include the CLK in an SLK book when I started this project. The cars, whilst they share a lot, are aimed, I thought, at a different market. It seems I was wrong. I have had a number of emails asking about commonality and three suggestions to include an overview in the book.

Then my 350 SLK started to misbehave. The sintered metal balance gear decided enough was enough and the bill looked like being in the region of £6000 given the damage caused to the rest of the engine. A garage gave me a good price for what was, in essence, a car without an engine, as long as I bought from them a CLK. All in all, it was something of a bargain.

I then came to realise just how similar the cars were.

The CLK - continued

C208 model range: 97 - 03 Coupe and 98 - 03 Cabriolet.

Size and capacities:

Length: 4567mm, width: 1969mm, height: 1371mm, weight: coupe - 1375kg - 1620kg, cabriolet - 1615kg - 1755kg.

Wheelbase: 2690mm. Tank: 62 litres. Turning circle: 10m.

Engine	Sup'ch	BHP	0-60	MPG	Man	Auto	Trip	Sport	Avant	Eleg
200/4	No	136	10.6	30	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
200K/4	Yes	163	8.8	29	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
230K/4	Yes	197	7.6	28	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
320/V6	No	218	7.2	28	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
430/V8	No	279	6.2	24	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
55/V8	No	347	5.2	23	No	No	Tip	AMG spec only		

Notes: 0-60 times and fuel consumption figures for the coupe. Cabriolet times somewhat lower, e.g. 430 V8 time for 0-60 = 7.2 secs and fuel consumption 22mpg. The differences due to extra weight in the main.

Cabriolet not available in normally aspirated 200 form.

Avant = Avantgarde. Eleg = Elegance.

Right: The headlight and grill treatment of the C209.

Below: An early, C208, CLK cabriolet side by side with a contemporary SLK, R170. The separate headlights, the easiest way to distinguish between the C208 and the C209, can be seen quite clearly.



The CLK - continued

The 2002 upgrade to the CLK, the C209, was more than just a nose job.

The chassis was taken from the then current C-Class, and the car was all the better for it. The rack and pinion steering was a step in the right direction from the recirculating ball of the C208. The car was slightly higher, slightly longer and slightly narrower. Or, to put it another way, about the same overall size.

The main difference for drivers was an overall improvement in the driving experience, at least according to road testers, as well as a loss of B-posts, making the coupe much airier with all the windows lowered. The boot was slightly larger.

Purchasers had a problem of choice. There were three trim levels, four originally with a basic

Classic that few bought and was dropped in 2005, coupe and cabriolet and a bewildering range of engines were bad enough but then there was a vast range of extra. Very expensive extras.

Rather unusually for a car with sporting pretensions there was a range of diesel engines. You have to wonder if the marketing team at Mercedes-Benz were already considering putting a diesel engine in the more performance oriented SLK and wanted to see what the response would be for the CLK first.

If so then they would have been reassured by the sales figures, if not a little confused.

Right: the cabriolet looks absolutely superb with the hood down and the cover on it. Rather tasty.



C209 model range: 03 - 09 Coupe and 04 - 09 Cabriolet.

Size and capacities:

Length: 4652mm, width: 1991mm, height: 1413mm, weight: coupe - 1375kg - 1620kg, cabriolet - 1615kg - 1755kg.

Wheelbase: 2715mm. Tank: 62 litres. Turning circle: 10m.

Engine	Sup'ch	BHP	0-60	MPG	Man	Auto	Trip	Sport	Avant	Eleg
200k/4	Yes	163/160	9	33	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
240/V6	No	170	8.9	26	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
280/V6	No	227	7.2	29	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
320/V6	No	218	7.6	27	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
350/V6	No	268	6.2	28	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
500/V8	No	306/301	5.7	24	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
500/V8	No	388	5	24	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
220/4	Turbo diesel	147	9.9	40	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
270/5	Turbo diesel	170	8.9	40	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
320/V6	Turbo diesel	220	6.7	36	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The CLK - continued

AMG

And there’s even more engines. The AMG range was enlarged and performance increased.

Model	Years	Engine	BHP	0-60	MPG	Weight
CLK55, coupe and cabriolet	02-05	5439/V8	367	5	23	1715/1820
CLK55, coupe and cabriolet	03-05	5439/V8	361	5	23	1715/1820
CLK63 coupe and cabriolet	06-10	6208/V8	474	4.5	22	1770/1875
CLK Black Series coupe	07-09	6208/V8	499	4.2	18	NA

Right: The proportions of the CLK are rather eye-catching. They are a delight to drive, especially the C209. Wind noise has been described as remarkably muted at speed.



Left: a C209, image courtesy of Will Aron.

Below: The looks of the CLK were universally praised. Some convertibles appear uncomfortable with the hood raised, but not the CLK. The 'C pillar' was very slim, hardly greater than that of the coupe. Whilst it was based on a stock saloon car, there were few body panels that were common to bogy vehicles.





I am 6'3". I am more than a little overweight. I have a back problem which limits flexibility. I wear size 11 boots, although a size 12 feels much more comfortable. I fit in the rear seat of a CLK as long as the driver/passenger in front of me is no taller than 6'.

So don't take notice of anyone who reckons that you can't buy one because it is only a 2+2. The CLK is a full four seater. It might look cramped, see picture above, but it is roomy.

It is not so easy getting in the cabriolet as it is the coupe, but the difficulties are relieved by the rather clever automatic lowering of the headrest to get it to go under the header rail.

The rear seats are nicely contoured, fixing you well if the driving is spirited. The only negatives for the cabriolet are the reduced boot volume and the considerable increase in weight.



Left. The 1998 CLK GTR AMG racer, as driven by Bernd Schneider and Mark Webber. There is no real excuse for including the picture in here as it had little in common with the road car. Still, it's my book and I'll include what I like. And I like the GTR.



Concourse

One way of enjoying the ownership of your car is to enter it in competitions, one of which is concourse events. You prepare your car as well as you can and your efforts are judged, not only against the other entrants, but to a set standard. This means you can win, but still return home with criticisms burning in your mind.

Such events are not for everyone. Many feel that they are not for many people, and I have to say that, whilst I can admire the preparation that goes into the vehicle, after helping a friend prepare his car - which won - I felt that it was a lot of effort for nothing.

One of my jobs was to clean the inside of the exhaust pipes. This was not a simple case of stuffing a rag on a stick down the end and then twisting. The chap had three special tools. Yes, three. I was told to ensure that one was not only rotated, but pushed in and out at the same time.

So it is a bit like country dancing: you can enjoy the final result without wanting to take part.

Chatting to one chap, whose car looked absolutely lovely, at the Mercedes-Benz Club Concourse Day in 2014, I was told that he felt he stood no chance at winning. I made a supporting noise, of which I have many, but he was not convinced. When I asked him what was needed for him to win in the classification he'd entered, he said: "A car that is 30 years older."

There does seem to be a certain truth in this. Judges seem to feel that a car that has just come

off the production line needs to be in a better condition than one which dodged bullets during the Battle of Britain.

Entrants I spoke with were in agreement that the first thing you needed to do if you want to be a serious competitor was to buy a car specifically for such events. Having your car in the office car park on Friday and then driving to the event on the Saturday is a way to fail.

It needs to be kept in a garage, under cover. Preparation takes weeks (I was told) and you need a plan so that work is not duplicated. Surprisingly, for me, was that I was told that you don't necessarily need to buy a car in excellent condition as you will take everything off to clean and polish regardless.

If it is something you fancy doing, then by all means try it, but I'd suggest you offer your services to a competitor just the once before deciding.



SLK guide

Clubs

Model and marque specific motoring clubs are in a state of change. Gone are the days when, if you wanted to associate with similar minded enthusiasts the only option was to join a club with magazines, areas and committees.

Nowadays we have websites, forums, Twitter and Facebook where enthusiasts can make their own arrangements and discuss matters with others and get immediate responses.

For those happiest with more traditional, and in this case well-run, marque clubs, there is the Mercedes-Benz Club, www.mercedes-benz-club.co.uk, suggested as the oldest M-B-specific club in the world and the only UK one recognised by M-B.

It has a forum, technical help (excellent for the SLK) and an award winning monthly printed magazine. There are various regional branches across the UK. Membership fees are remarkably low and there is a range of benefits.

Not to be confused with Mercedes-Benz Owners, www.mercedesclub.org.uk which is internet based, has a forum and an e-magazine, published monthly.

Neither of the above two clubs are model-specific. The Owners Club has an SLK-specific forum and a specified person to collate details of the SLK.

The biggest SLK-specific website is www.slkworld.com where the main feature is a well-used forum with a considerable number of sub-forums, including ones for all four types of SLK. There are others for the various SL models as well. It is free to join and post although there are two higher levels of membership which are charged for.

Don't be put off by SLK World being based in the USA and perhaps dominated by them. Whilst you might have to grit your teeth when they attempt to spell grey, there is a considerable number of UK users and they organise events all over this country. There is no magazine.

There is a number of foreign language SLK and M-B websites and clubs. For the former the availability of translating software, both free and for modest outlay, make such sites accessible to those of us who did not pay sufficient attention during language lessons at school.

<http://mercedes-benz-clubs.com/Brand+Clubs/Clubs+Germany/153/en/001?PHPSESSID=0faef25d3f2160fb72bdc45011961de0>

Other Links:

A source for manuals and quite a lot more:

http://www.mbusa.com/mercedes/only_mercedes_benz/owners_support

Mercedes-Benz recognised clubs:

<http://mercedes-benz-clubs.com/>

The Mercedes-Benz official site is well worth a general browse. Lots of interesting stuff is there. For instance:

<http://cinema.mercedes-benz-classic.com>

Mercedes-Benz Classic Portal

<http://www.mercedes-benz.com/classic>

If you have an hour or so to while away, YouTube has an incredible number of SLK videos, as well as some which are Mercedes-Benz oriented.

The SLK Guide has a supporting website.

www.writewheel.uk

It contains details of new editions.

M-B World

Mercedes-Benz World is in Weybridge, Surrey, adjacent to the Brooklands museum. The post code is given at KT13 0SL. Rather apt. Unfortunately, it was not accepted by my Mercedes satnav. However, if you turn off the M25 and onto the London-bound A3, there are ample signs.

Go to:

www.mercedes-benzbrooklands.co.uk



Architecture aside, the exhibits are varied, although all car based of course. Well worth a visit.



Not only do authors have to be dedicated but so do their books.

It is not that difficult to plan and write a book. This is my third and the process in each case has been, at the very least, fun. One thing is true though: I could not have produced this without help.

Thanks to all those who gave me their views on ownership, with a special, and grateful, acknowledgement to Nick Wilcock for all his help.

Don, of Wizemail, an email marketing software company, gave unstinting help.

I'd like to thank PistonHeads for their contribution, together with those who frequent their excellent forums.

Mercedes-Benz Owner's Club was a source of information.

A special thank-you to SLK World (www.slkworld.com). The members proved very generous with their help and were willing to share their knowledge freely.

Mercedes-Benz of Portslade were helpful.



A later 171. It looks quite dramatic in black but it makes the car difficult to photograph. Very attractive, though.

It is common to read of an author's gratitude to their partner for unstinting help and, most importantly, faith in their ability. You might think this is added merely to ensure domestic bliss but I can assure you that without such support and assistance most books would not get written.

Thanks, Carol, with all my heart.

There is no real justification for a picture of a 300SL to be included in this book, apart from it looking nice and me falling in love with its design when I was a kid. Dennis Jenkinson's article on Moss' drive in the SLR in the Mille Miglia was my inspiration to be a writer. Some forty years later I mentioned this to an editor of a non car related magazine who had just asked me for an article. He said it was his inspiration as well.



Who's Harvey Yates?

I'm a nobody really, just someone who likes cars, and has done so for most of his life.

I've owned enough rubbish to be grateful when driving something rather nice, and have driven enough sports cars to know when I'm driving quality.

I've written for years, mainly about cars, motorsport and the law relating to the former. I've had articles published in various magazines, one in the second biggest imported magazine to New Zealand.

For four years I edited the 7000+ circulation TVR Car Club magazine, *Sprint*, and this gave me the opportunity to drive every road model TVR from the Wedges onward. I really like the Speed 6 engine but did not buy one due to their reputation, not wholly deserved, of unreliability. All rather ironic given the problems I've had with gearbox and engine on my 350 SLK.

I've also owned a Mercedes-Benz W124 2.8 which gave 17 mpg on a trip from the Gower to Brighton one early morning in February. I owned a CLK coupe for a year or so but have returned to the fold with a 170 320.

I've produced a series of books on the Rover V8 engine, specifically as fitted to TVRs.

I've also written a book about my first few years in the City of London police force, this at a time of rampant corruption in both London forces. See *Both Sides of the Force* on Kindle. 4.5 stars at the time of writing.

Or you could go to my website:
www.writewheel.uk

I have two main hobbies: F1 and rugby union.

Always ready for a chat via email on either subject or about cars in general.

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