

COLLIER ON THE CUNNINGHAM C-3 | EXPERT RATINGS OF 225 CARS

Keith Martin's
Sports Car Market
The Insider's Guide to Collecting, Investing, Values, and Trends

We Say \$400,000—
The Market Speaks
at **\$605k**



December 2006

\$6.00US \$8.00CAN



What's a Yenko and
Why Should You Care?

\$10/mile to Own a
Modern Ferrari

1957 Mercedes-Benz 300SL Roadster

300SLs were technologically superior to anything else, with direct port fuel injection, dry sump systems, Alfin drum or disc brakes—and they all worked

by Alex Finigan



Photos: ACME Studios

Chassis number: 1980427500146

The Mercedes Benz 300SL roadster was introduced in 1957 as a direct descendant of the famous Gullwing. It's rare in automotive history that a convertible would bring about the demise of the coupe version on which it was based, however with the 300SL it was a case of succession—the roadster replaced the Gullwing.

As the roadster was based on the Gullwing, there were many similarities between the two, the former encompassing several enhancements that were to increase the car's desirability. The roadster had styling cues that changed only slightly. Larger fenders, different headlights, a smaller grille and a chrome strip down the side distinguished it from its brother.

Since the 300SL convertible lacked the strength and rigidity offered by the Gullwing's roof, engineers had to redesign the chassis to maintain structural integrity. As a consequence, the car is slightly heavier, yet has an extra 20 horsepower to help offset the difference. Aerodynamics were not as favorable, but the roadster could still nudge 155 mph.

The 300SL presented here by RM Auctions is one of the rarest. Regarded as one of ten known to exist with

the special high-performance engine, this car was delivered with six Rudge wheels, a Becker Mexico radio with short-wave option, engine chrome dress-up kit, factory fitted hard top, and fitted luggage. The car retains all these options except the engine dress up kit, which could be reinstalled.

This car was delivered new to race driver and Mercedes-Benz enthusiast Erwin Goldschmidt. He owned the car for some time; it then passed to John Saul and Thomas Edward Carr in 1981. Carr owned the roadster until 1988, when he sold it partly restored to Mercedes-Benz specialist and Pebble Beach award-winning restorer Paul Russell, who planned to complete it to his own exacting specifications. However, pressure of work meant he never found the time, and he sold it to its present owner.

The SCM Analysis: This car sold for \$605,000 at RM's Monterey sale on August 19, 2006

Okay, since this car sold for \$80,000 above its high catalog estimate, maybe the secret's out. I've been saying this for years, but I believe 300SLs have always been undervalued compared to a lot of their period counterparts, particularly Ferraris.

The 300SLs were technologically superior to anything else produced in the '50s and early '60s. Tubular chassis, direct port fuel injection, dry sump oiling systems, Alfin drum or disc brakes—these components were generally only available on out-and-out race cars, if then. Not only did the 300SLs have these components, they all worked.

I have been working on 300SL Mercedes for over 30 years and selling them for

DETAILS

Years produced: 1957–63
 Number produced: 1,858
 Original list price: About \$11,000
 SCM Valuation: \$400,000–\$600,000
 Tune-up/major service: \$3,500–\$5,000
 Dist. cap: N/A
 Chassis #: Stamped into front cross-member, and chassis plate on firewall
 Engine #: Right front side of block, just below the head
 Club: www.gullwinggroup.org
 Alternatives: 1959–63 Aston Martin DB4, 1957–63 Ferrari 250GT, 1956–59 BMW 507
 SCM Investment Grade: A

COMPS



1959 Mercedes-Benz 300SL roadster
 Lot #1308, S/N 9500104
 Condition: 1-
 Sold at \$432,000
 Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale, AZ, 1/14/2006
 SCM ID# 40427



1958 Mercedes-Benz 300SL roadster
 Lot #105, S/N 8500101
 Condition: 1-
 Sold at \$289,419
 Bonhams, Chichester, U.K., 9/16/2005
 SCM ID# 39704



Seat Time



Archie Urciuoli, Casey Key, FL: My love affair with the 300SL roadster began almost 40 years ago, when I first saw one in the flesh sitting outside the Hotel de Paris in Monaco. It was a gleaming silver with red leather interior, and its stunning lines stopped me in my tracks. Twenty years later, after many pilgrimages to Paul Russell's shop in Essex, Massachusetts, I finally bought mine. I have now driven it for almost 20 years, the longest I have ever owned a car.

Despite being considered by many to be less "collectible" than its iconic Gullwing coupe predecessor, and typically selling for about 15% less, the roadster incorporated many improvements when it was introduced in 1957. These included superior handling, trunk space, and creature comforts. Beefy for a sports car of the day, the 300SL weighs in at about 3,000 lbs, despite its tubular "space frame," but its 215-hp, 3-liter, fuel-injected, dry-sump, straight-six will push it to an honest 145 to 160 mph (depending on rear-axle ratio), and it will cruise all day at triple digits.

300 SL roadsters have an elegant, long, low design, highlighted by their signature "eyebrow" fender flares and extended front and rear overhangs. More long-distance cruisers than stop-light racers, they are bulletproof when properly maintained, and can be driven cross country in great confidence and comfort (although you may find yourself wishing for a fifth gear at prolonged high speeds). To me, this easy-to-live-with classic defines the term "grand touring" as few others can. ♦

over 20, and I cannot for the life of me figure out why they are not much more expensive. I have driven both a Gullwing and a Roadster across the country, and the 300SL is one of the few '50s cars of any make with which I would do so without a trailer following me. You hear the argument that they made too many of them, but at 1,400 Gullwings and 1,858 Roadsters, I think that is a stretch. Porsche made 5,000 Speedsters, for example. The 300SL's reliability is evidenced by how many you see on events like the Colorado Grand, particularly among owners who have multi-car collections. Why? Because they know it will be safe, comfortable, and reliable.

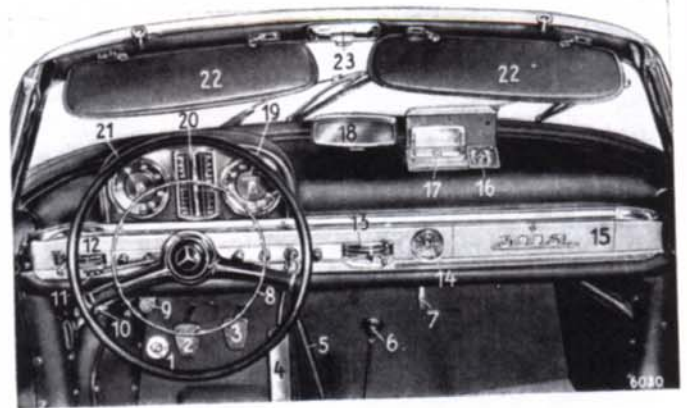
Stylistically, the Gullwing is an icon. People who don't even like cars know what a Gullwing is because it is used in so many print and TV ads as a symbol of quality. Look at an original 300SL up close, compared to almost any other '50s sports car, and there is simply no comparison in fit and finish.

So what am I missing? Its looks are sensational, its technology superior. Its build quality is second to none, and it has the reliability of a VW Beetle. If you've ever heard a Gullwing with an original exhaust system backing off in a tunnel, its note rivals anything you can compare it to.

I think this car was well bought even considering the record-breaking price. My advice to customers has always been to overpay for the best. Here is a car that was built especially for a friend of the factory and is equipped with almost every option you could get at the time: Euro lights, Rudge knock-offs, NSL engine, hard top, Becker Mexico radio, matched luggage, and a chrome engine dress-up kit that Russell wisely left off during the restoration. Only the chrome curb feelers would have made the look more complete.

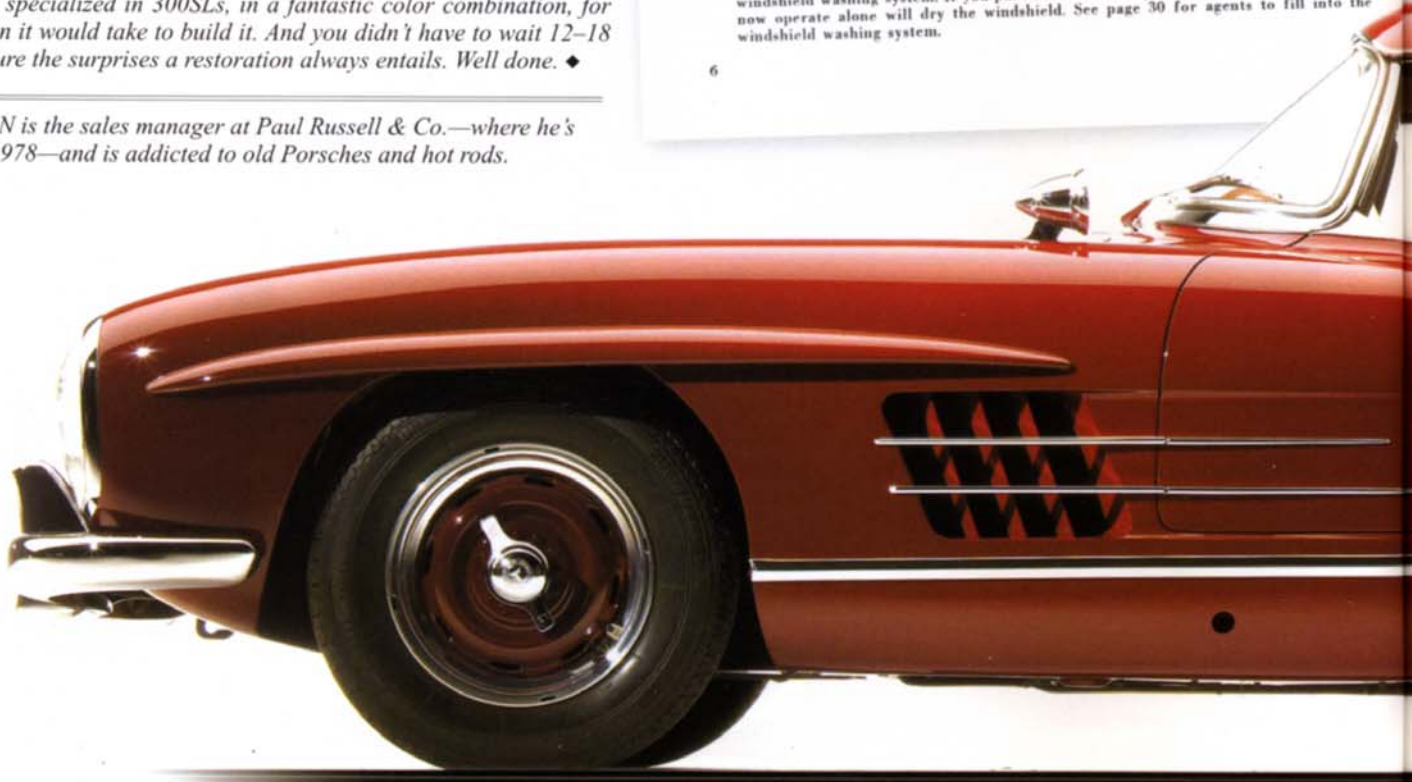
Let's look at the numbers: Professional restoration shops are around \$90 to \$125 an hour, depending on where you are in the country. A ground-up, body-off restoration takes around 3,000 hours, plus parts and subcontractors. That's roughly \$300,000 to \$350,000, not including the donor car. An original set of Roadster Rudge wheels (they only built around 25 sets for Roadsters) is going to run upwards of \$35,000. A hard top is \$7,000 to \$10,000, then requires fitting to the car. A Becker Mexico is \$1,500 to \$2,500 before being rebuilt, matched luggage is around \$7,000 to \$10,000, and Euro lights add another \$5,000. On top of that you are looking at \$200,00 to \$250,000 for a donor you hope is not too rusty. When you do the math, you look like the smart guy who bought a fully optioned 300SL Roadster, done by a shop that specialized in 300SLs, in a fantastic color combination, for less money than it would take to build it. And you didn't have to wait 12-18 months or endure the surprises a restoration always entails. Well done. ♦

ALEX FINIGAN is the sales manager at Paul Russell & Co.—where he's worked since 1978—and is addicted to old Porsches and hot rods.



Driver's seat

1. Foot dimmer switch: push down to switch from "dim" to "bright" and vice-versa. The blue warning lamp at the lower part of the combi-instrument (see p. 10) lights up when the bright light is switched on.
2. Clutch pedal.
3. Brake pedal.
4. Accelerator pedal.
5. Hand brake lever.
6. Gear shift lever: 4 forward speeds, fully-synchronized, 1 reverse gear (see p. 18).
7. Tommy handle to actuate the supplementary ventilation (see p. 11).
8. Contact ring for horn and blinkers: push down to actuate the horn. Turn to the right or left to switch on the corresponding blinkers. The red warning lamp in the combi-instrument remains lighted as long as the blinkers are switched on. The contact ring only functions when the ignition is switched on.
9. Control knob for the windshield washing system and wipers. Pushing down to a stop switches on the windshield wipers. Pushing down beyond this stop actuates the windshield washing system. If you push back to the stop, the windshield wipers which now operate alone will dry the windshield. See page 30 for agents to fill into the windshield washing system.



10. Tommy handle for engine hood lock. See p. 10 for opening and closing of the engine hood.
 11. Control lever for the overtaking signal light. This is combined with a horn. If it is pushed back beyond a stop, the horn is actuated in addition to the overtaking signal light.
 12. Ventilation and heating levers for the left side of the car (see p. 11).
 13. Ventilation and heating levers for the right side of the car (see p. 11).
 14. Electric clock: this is set by depressing and turning the knob at the clock.
 15. Lockable glove compartment; when the lid is opened, it is illuminated by an interior light.
 16. Electric cigarette lighter: press the button for a few seconds until the heating coil glows red.
 17. Ash tray. To empty it, pull out the ash tray; the lower part can be removed by pressing on the sides.
 18. Rear view mirror. Fold back the control lever to bring it into anti-glare position.
 19. Speedometer with total and trip mileage recorder (see page 9).
 20. Combi-instrument (see p. 10).
 21. Tachometer.
 22. Cushion-mounted sun visor (1 each on the right and left side). The sun visor is only supplied upon special request.
 23. Light of interior department; is also used as courtesy light. A screen over the light serves to switch on and over:
 - Screen closed: light is switched off.
 - Screen half-opened: courtesy light. When the driver's door is opened, the light is switched on by a door contact switch and remains lighted as long as the driver's door is opened.
 - Screen completely opened: map light; light burns constantly.
 When you get out of the car, you should always set the screen to the "courtesy light" position.
- The seats can be adjusted backwards and forwards. Depress the lever at the seat, shift the seat backwards or forwards, and let the lever go.

The back rests can be pushed forward; moreover, they can be adjusted in an oblique direction.

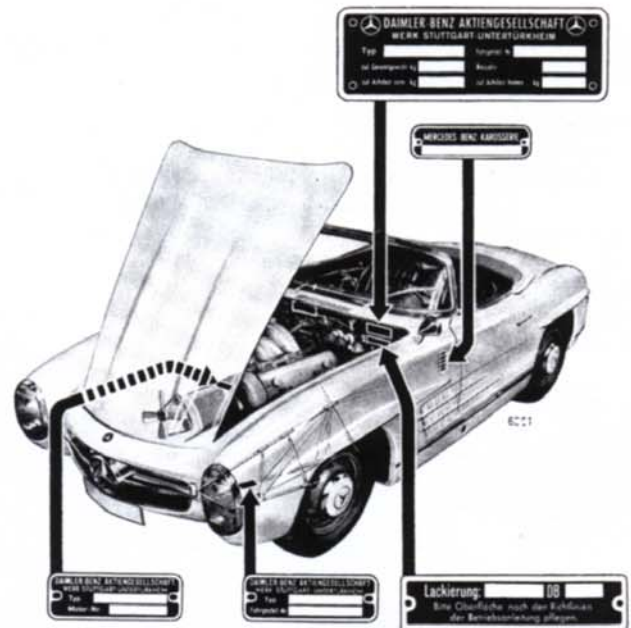
Take out the cushion, push the back rest forward, pull out the two retaining bolts below at the back of the seat frame and insert into the next hole required (3 positions). Both bolts should be adjusted to the same degree.

If the seats are upholstered in leather, the upholstery is fitted with longitudinal air grooves and small holes (ventilated seats).



7

Where to find the model, engine and chassis number plates



Make a note of the chassis and engine numbers of your car including the complete model designation which you will find over them.

Should you require any spare parts - and this also applies to the ignition key and key to the door lock (which also fits the cover of the tank) or luggage compartment key (which also fits the glove box) - we will only be able to deal with your order satisfactorily and quickly if you indicate the chassis number and the engine number together with the complete model designation on your order.

3

