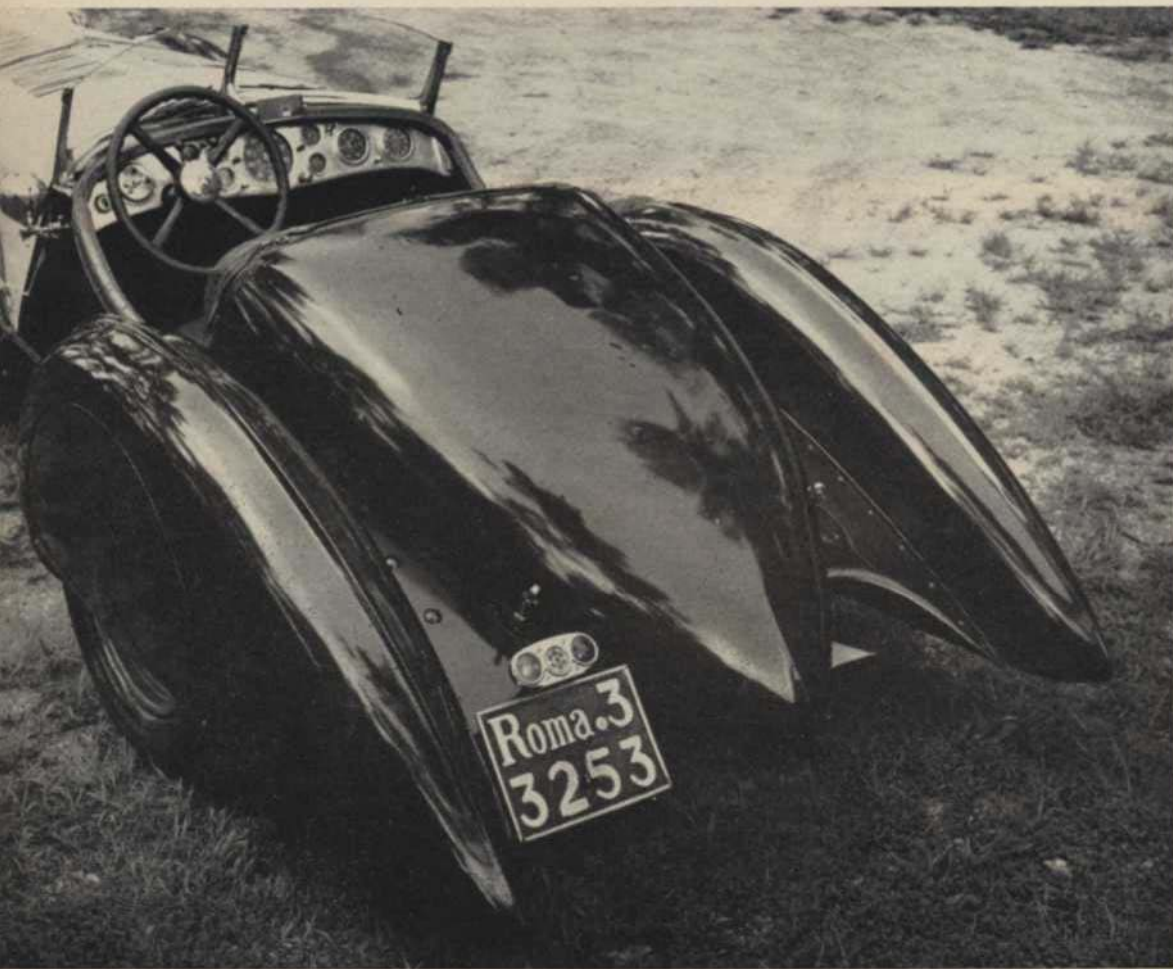


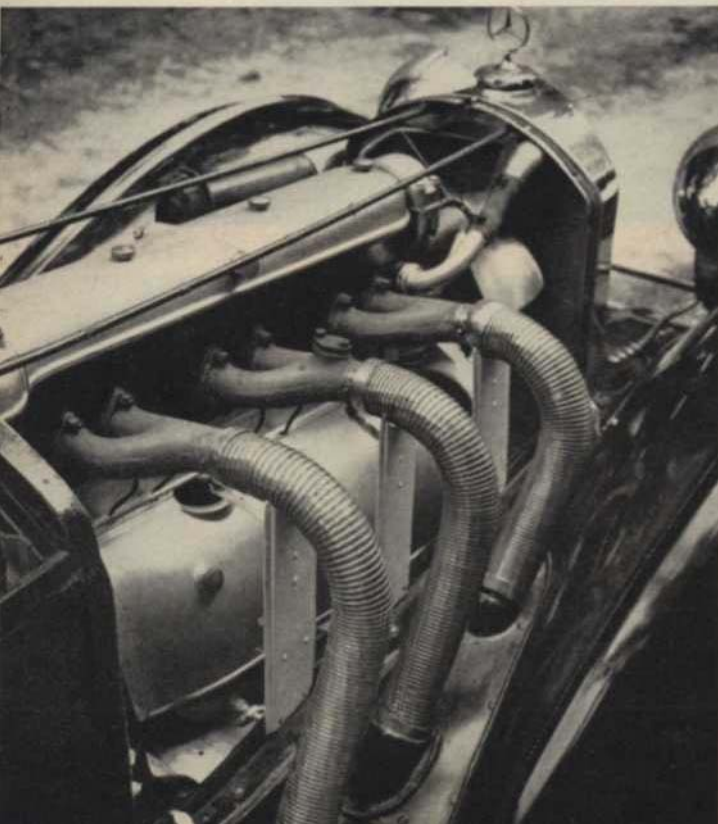


SALON





THE TROSSI MERCEDES SSK

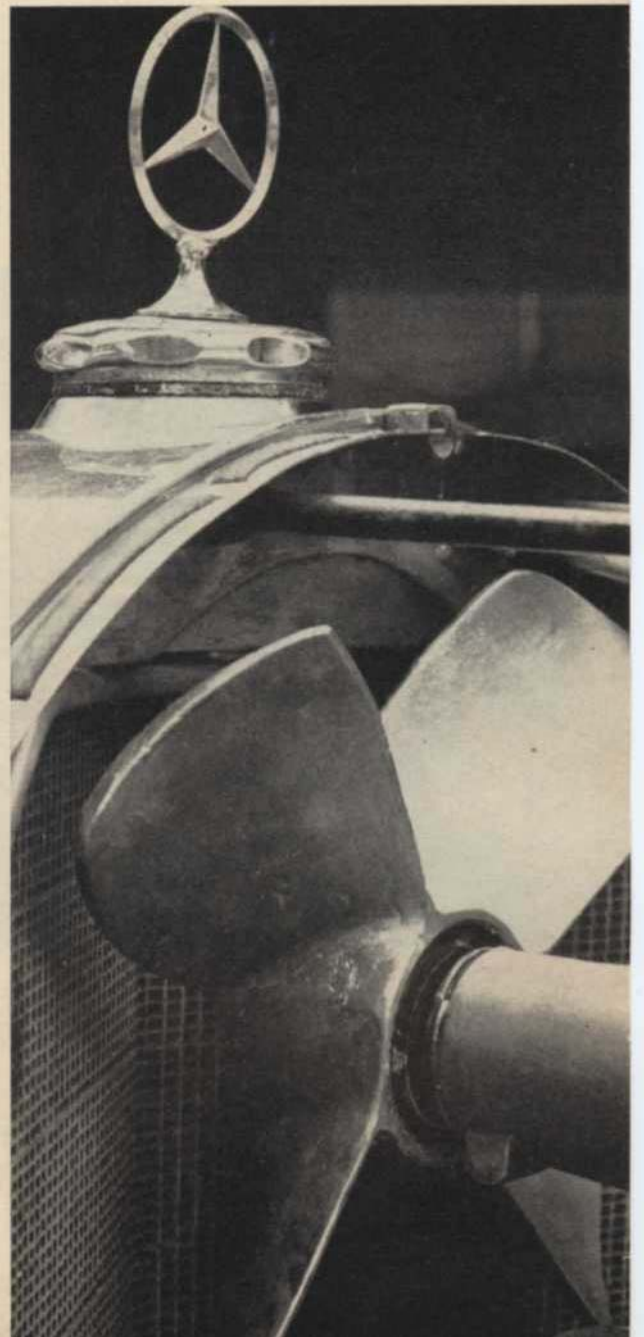
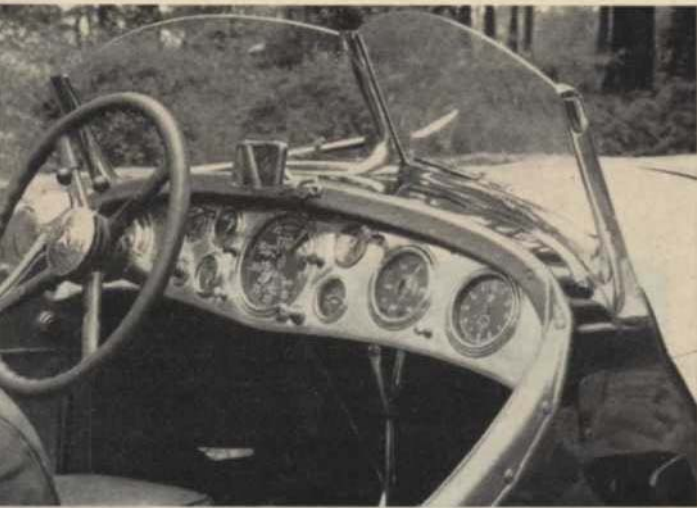
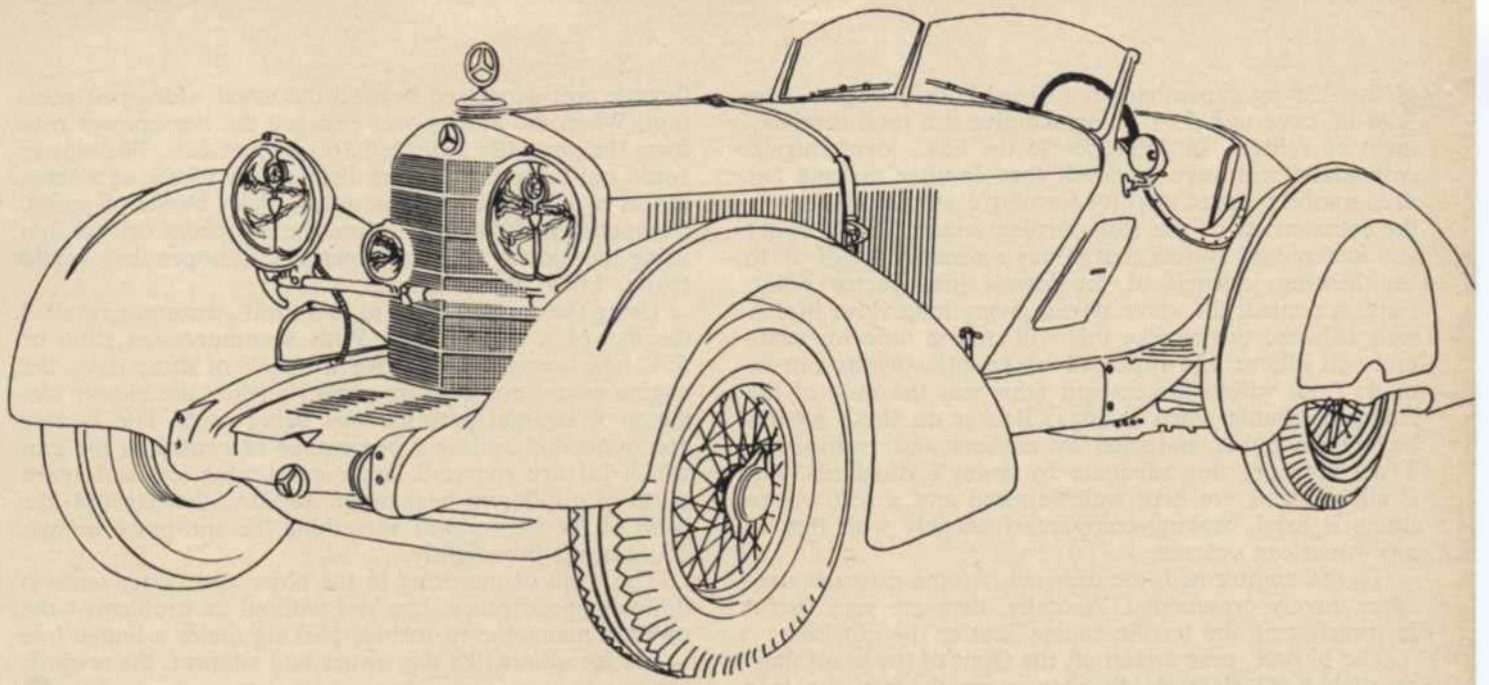


BY C. S. SCHAUB

ANY Mercedes-Benz SSK is a most desirable collector's car. This one, found in South America and now reposing in the Deep South, has a one-of-a-kind Italian body, maker unknown. Among other things, it has been called the largest car with the least luggage space.

According to the log book, the car was built (probably with the standard German body) by the factory in 1929, but it was 1932 before it was finally sold. Just one year later it was acquired by Count Felice Trossi of Italy, who raced Maseratis extensively in the Twenties and Thirties. Before the Count shipped the car to his estate in Argentina, he had the present special body mounted. It is hand-hammered steel, lavishly ground coated to cover up hammer marks. Block sanding is the order of the day for the enthusiast who dares to strip it down to the bare metal. The hood is the traditional aluminum always fitted to these models for ease of raising and lowering the vast expanse of metal. A top, so called, came with the car but seems to have been an afterthought.

The hollow-formed fenders have prompted several fellow collectors to exclaim at the ease with which illegal whiskey could have been smuggled if only one could get around the problem of telltale sloshing. The wheels of



PHOTOS BY JIM LEE, ILLUSTRATION BY BILL MOTTA

this car were cut down from 20 to 18 in. by the Count, resulting in what is probably the lowest SSK in the U.S., only 3 in. higher than a Jaguar XK-120 roadster. The steering wheel was also cut down from stock for more cockpit room and is covered with neat hand-sewn leather.

The late Count evidently hand-inked his own cut-off points on the tachometer. They run up to 149 mph in top gear, though the speedometer shows only 200 kph (120.5 mph). With its high gearing of 2.5:1, this model was noted for only about 125 mph; other SSK's in racing form could easily reach 140 mph.

The Count installed a number of accessories for reasons of his own. An Italian airplane-type fuel pump drives from the camshaft to feed the 2 big Pallas carburetors. The customary feature of bypass is incorporated for blowing in both systems. An Italian hydraulic ride control, adjusted from the driver's seat, sets the frictional shocks on the rear axle only. The magneto is bypassed and a second 12-volt coil provides ignition to the off side, making the dual system fully battery operated. (Owners with sick magnetos please take note.)

Otherwise, the car is similar to other S series Mercedes. The factory seals are still intact on the crankcase


of the 225-hp supercharged (10-psi boost) engine. The 3.94-in. bore and 5.91-in. stroke give it a total displacement of 7 liters. In deference to the SSK, loyal Bugatti enthusiasts will have to admit that another marque has used a solid billet of steel for forming crankshafts. Among the refinements of the slow-turning engine (3200 rpm) is a metered oil system that forces a timed pulse of oil to the bearing journals at the lowest load factor point. Fingers contact the valve stems, giving long valve life. A well adjusted engine like this will stay in tune for years and will idle at 150 rpm. All brake adjustments can be made from within the cockpit (this was the duty of the riding mechanic when racing). Brakes on these models have been much maligned by authors and enthusiasts. True, they are not adequate by today's standards, but if all fulcrums are kept well adjusted and a soft woven lining is used, braking compares favorably with that of any American veteran.

To the uninformed, the exposed chrome exhausts may seem merely ornamental. Actually, they are very useful in transferring the terrific engine heat to the outside.

The blower, gear driven off the front of the crankshaft through a 22-plate clutch, was engaged when the foot

throttle was depressed beyond the usual wide-open position. When the blower was engaged the horsepower rose from the normally aspirated 160 to over 220. The blower could not be used for more than about 15 sec at a time; it was a device strictly for quick, short bursts of speed. Competitors often tried to lure the Mercedes drivers into using the blower for longer periods, in hopes they would really "blow" their engines.

Using the supercharger to its fullest advantage entailed the use of a special fuel. With a compression ratio of 5:1, which was adequate for the fuels of those days, the engine would not perform properly when the blower was cut in if straight gasoline was being used. The factory recommended adding a percentage of benzol to the gas, which in turn required larger carburetor jets and spark plugs of a different heat range. Besides, the banshee-like howl of the blower was something the anti-noise leagues could never take lightly.

The thrill of motoring in the older and better sense is difficult to recapture. It is not without its problems—the owner's manual even forbids parking under a linden tree—but for others like this owner and admirer, the rewards are great. 

THE TROSSI MERCEDES SSK

