

## Picking a Pagoda

The Paul Bracq-designed 230SL faced a high level of expectation, considering it had to replace the iconic 300SL

by Alex Dearborn



280SL

**M**ercedes offered the all-new, Paul Bracq-designed 230SL as a replacement for the 300SL roadster, which was last produced in early 1963. The 300SL had become prohibitively expensive to build, so it was logical for the company to seek a design using the MB family bits and pieces assembled on a platform of stamped steel, instead of the complex multi-tubular space frame of the 300SL. The new 230SL replaced the aging 190SL as well.

Although the wheelbase was kept at the exact same 94.5" as the 300SL roadster, the 230SL was much roomier. It was also lighter, quieter, and easier to drive. It offered power steering, reclining seats, a large trunk and performance approaching that of its famous predecessor. The car faced a high level of expectation, considering it had to replace the iconic 300SL, but it was instantly recognizable with its concave "pagoda roof."

### 230SL

The 230SL made do with an evolution of the 220SE SOHC inline-6, which was itself evolved from the 1951 220 sedan engine. For the 2.3-liter SL version, there was a hotter cam, tubular headers, and some fuel injection tuning to produce 150 hp. The five-main-bearing design proved reliable by the standards of the day, easily achieving over 150,000 miles in many cases.

This engine was stretched to the end of its development cycle, however. Some examples had ex-

cessive blow-by due to crankshaft wear. 230SL buyers should check for blow-by by removing the oil filler cap on the cam cover with the engine running to see what comes out. A durable and positive-shifting 4-speed automatic was offered as well as the expected 4-speed stick.

### 250SL

To update the successful 230SL, Mercedes installed an all-new, seven-main-bearing 2.5 liter OHC inline-6, essentially the 250SE sedan motor but producing 160 hp. Disc brakes were now standard on the rear as well as the front. Trim details were essentially unchanged.

### 280SL

For the next iteration, Mercedes improved (some would say encumbered) the SL with more sound deadening, better rust-proofing, shorter gearing, and more torque and power. The six was now at 2.8 liters and produced 170 hp. Contemporary road testers didn't discover much per-

	230SL	250SL	280SL
<b>Years</b>	1963-67	1966-68	1967-71
<b>Production</b>	9,830	5,196	23,995
<b>Prices</b>			
<b>Concours</b>	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$90,000
<b>Very Nice</b>	\$35,000	\$40,000	\$50,000
<b>Driver Project</b>	\$20,000	\$25,000	\$35,000



1966 230SL, Euro-spec



250SL

formance gain for this model, however. An aftermarket under-dash air conditioning system made in the U.S. by FridgiKing was blessed by the factory for installation by dealers or at the port of entry. These systems blew pretty cold air, although it was not well diffused. The natural-fiber square-weave carpeting of the early cars gave way to nylon floor coverings, and some of the interior chrome trim details were replaced with anti-glare matte finishes. Headrests and shoulder harnesses appeared.

### Which model to buy?

The earlier cars, the 230/250SLs, were for a long time ignored by collectors, as they were the first to deteriorate from age, wear, and rust. Buyers simply found better-preserved cars in the 280SL fleet. Now it's getting hard to find any nice original SL, so some 230SLs are getting restored, thereby raising the value (and the awareness) of these early examples.

We had three restored 230SLs at Dearborn Automobile Company to sell last year, all in the \$65,000–\$80,000 range. These early cars have seen the biggest rise in prices in the past five years, compared to the 280SLs. All models have risen in value, as nice originals are getting scarce, and more cars are being restored well.

Even though the 280SLs are generally favored as the most highly-

developed examples of the series, the earlier cars are rarer. This factor, along with rare options in the early cars like a 5-speed ZF gearbox, seems to offset the intrinsically higher value of the 280SLs in some cases.

### How to build a dream SL

How to compare these W113 (the internal Mercedes designation) SLs? Let me describe the SL of my dreams, which would incorporate the best features of each car:

Buy the latest, pre-emissions car, the 1969 280SL. Make sure it has the ultra-rare ZF 5-speed overdrive transmission, as the too-short gearing of the standard 4-speed box translates to a buzzy 4,600 rpm at 80 mph. Add an enhanced version of the "factory" air conditioning. Back-date the visuals to 230/250SL specs by retrimming the car with square-weave carpeting, chromed interior touches, hubcaps and beauty rings. Delete side markers and bumper guards. Toss the U.S. headlamps and install full-cover European-spec units.

The resulting car will cruise more quietly than any '60s-era sports car, handle and track better than all but the most aggressive (and more expensive) sports cars, and exhibit the smart, clean look of the original Paul Bracq design. ♦

## Top Pagoda SL Sales\*

Rank	Model	Sold Price	Location	Date	Lot#
<b>230 SL</b>					
1	1966 230SL	\$139,185	RM—London, UK	10/31/07	208
2	1965 230SL	\$61,335	Christie's—London, UK	12/6/05	68
3	1966 230SL	\$37,800	Barrett-Jackson—Scottsdale, AZ, USA	1/14/06	626
4	1964 230SL	\$36,380	RM—Boca Raton, FL, USA	2/10/06	644
5	1964 230SL	\$36,080	Shannons—Sydney, AUS	7/23/07	6
6	1967 230SL	\$34,214	Coys—London, UK	12/4/03	757
7	1963 230SL	\$32,400	Kruse—Auburn, IN, USA	5/19/05	820
8	1965 230SL	\$31,875	Coys—Monte Carlo, MCO	5/20/06	202
9	1965 230SL	\$31,825	Bonhams—Nürburgring, DEU	8/10/02	140
10	1965 230SL	\$31,724	H&H—Buxton, UK	11/21/07	96
<b>250 SL</b>					
1	1968 250SL	\$42,521	Bonhams—Monte Carlo, MCO	5/20/06	213
2	1967 250SL	\$40,206	Coys—Nuremberg, DEU	7/22/06	211
3	1968 250SL	\$39,094	Barons—Esher, UK	12/11/06	119
4	1967 250SL	\$35,039	Artcurial—Paris, FRA	4/16/07	11
5	1968 250SL	\$34,100	RM—Amelia Island, FL, USA	3/10/07	210
6	1968 250SL	\$33,699	Shannons—Melbourne, AUS	12/6/04	46
7	1967 250SL	\$32,865	Bonhams—Hendon, UK	4/18/05	634

Rank	Model	Sold Price	Location	Date	Lot#
8	1967 250SL	\$32,683	Bonhams—Stoneleigh Park, UK	3/15/08	331
9	1967 250SL	\$30,250	Hershey, LLC—Hershey, PA, USA	10/6/05	474
10	1968 250SL	\$28,875	McCormick—Palm Springs, CA, USA	11/18/07	392
<b>280SL</b>					
1	1969 280SL	\$96,460	G. Potter King—Atlantic City, NJ, USA	2/28/08	6144
2	1970 280SL	\$76,871	Bonhams—Nürburgring, DEU	8/10/02	113
3	1969 280SL 6.3L Special	\$66,235	Poulain—Paris, FRA	2/10/03	21
4	1969 280SL	\$66,000	Gooding—Palm Beach, FL, USA	1/24/06	40
5	1970 280SL	\$61,900	Bonhams—Nürburgring, DEU	8/9/03	67
6	1971 280SL	\$61,600	Barrett-Jackson—Scottsdale, AZ, USA	1/21/07	408
7	1969 280SL	\$57,319	Poulain—Paris, FRA	2/10/03	23
8	1968 280SL	\$56,891	Bonhams—London, UK	12/12/06	659
9	1969 280SL	\$55,200	Bonhams & Butterfields—Carmel, CA, USA	8/15/03	532
10	1971 280SL	\$55,097	Coys—Nuremberg, DEU	7/22/06	246

\*As recorded in the SCM Platinum database. May not reflect all public sales.