

Mercedes-Benz Classic

S-Class – the pinnacle of automotive engineering

A living legend that's never gone out of fashion: ever since the beginnings of automotive history, the top models from Mercedes-Benz have been the most well-known and renowned embodiments of the fine art of automotive engineering. With their trailblazing innovations they have set new benchmarks for the development of passenger cars as a whole. This living tradition will be continued with the introduction of a new model series in the summer of 2013 which will carry the illustrious "S-Class" cachet into the future.



Mercedes-Benz



1903

1928

1930

1937

1951

1951

1954

1959

1963

1965

1972

1979

1991

1998

2005

2013

60 hp Mercedes-Simplex
1903 – 1905

Mercedes-Benz Nürburg
W 08, 1928 – 1939

Mercedes-Benz 770 "Grand Mercedes"
W 07, 1930 – 1938

Mercedes-Benz 320
W 142, 1937 – 1942

Mercedes-Benz 300
W 186 and W 189, 1951 – 1962

Mercedes-Benz 220
W 187, 1951 – 1954

Mercedes-Benz 220/220 S/220 SE
W 180/W 128, 1954 – 1959

Mercedes-Benz 220 – 300 SE long
W 111/W 112, 1959 – 1965

Mercedes-Benz 600
W 100, 1963 – 1981

Mercedes-Benz 250 S – 300 SEL 6.3
W 108/W 109, 1965 – 1972

Mercedes-Benz S-Class
116 series, 1972 – 1980

Mercedes-Benz S-Class
126 series, 1979 – 1991

Mercedes-Benz S-Class
140 series, 1991 – 1998

Mercedes-Benz S-Class
220 series, 1998 – 2005

Mercedes-Benz S-Class
221 series, 2005 – 2013

Mercedes-Benz S-Class
222 series, from 2013

The 60 hp Mercedes-Simplex is an early example of the unique luxury class tradition of Mercedes-Benz. The spacious, luxurious touring saloon dating back to 1904 once belonged to Emil Jellinek, the father of Mercedes Jellinek, after whom the brand was named.

The fact that the car was designed to be driven by a chauffeur is also reflected in the interior appointments: the passengers were seated in the rear on the finest brocade fabric, while the driver's bench seat was covered in hard-wearing leather.

The 60 hp Mercedes-Simplex followed the design of the 35 hp Mercedes, the development of which had been stimulated by Jellinek in 1900. To the present day, this first vehicle to bear the Mercedes name is regarded as the first modern car.

The Nürburg 460 (W 08) made its debut in 1928 as the first series production Mercedes-Benz to feature an eight-cylinder engine. Its model designation "Nürburg" was derived from the Nürburgring circuit, which had been opened just a year earlier. The background to it being given this name comes from a spectacular endurance test in which a 460 model covered some 20,000 kilometres over 13 days of driving at the Nürburgring.

Built at the Mannheim plant, the luxury class model was continually enhanced from the outset. In the autumn of 1929 it emerged with a lower frame and an even more elegantly designed body.

The version produced in the form of the elegant and luxurious Pullman saloon was one of the most popular variants of the eight-cylinder model which was available from 1934 to 1939 with the model designation "500".

In 1930 Mercedes-Benz presented the 770 "Grand Mercedes" (W 07) model as the ultimate in automotive engineering. The luxurious representative car for the most discerning of demands was fitted with a large-displacement eight-cylinder supercharged engine which guaranteed an effortlessly superior performance.

The new model, which continued the decades-old tradition of the Mercedes-Benz luxury motor car, was individually manufactured at the Mercedes-Benz Sindelfingen automotive production facility, where specific customer requirements could be comprehensively accommodated.

The "Grand Mercedes" proved just as popular with crowned and uncrowned heads of state as it did with representatives of industry and high finance.

1937 witnessed the debut of a modern luxury touring car in the form of the Mercedes-Benz 320 (W 142). Its swing-axle chassis with independent wheel suspension provided for safe driving and a comfortable ride.

From 1939, an additional remote-action gear reduced engine speed and fuel consumption while enhancing travel comfort and efficiency. At the same time, a so-called exterior case was also added to the standard scope of equipment for the most spacious variant of this luxury model – the seven-seater Pullman saloon.

This boot was permanently attached to the body's rear panel, affording protection from wet and dirt for the luggage, which was previously accommodated on an open luggage rack.

Today the Mercedes-Benz 300 (W 186) is primarily known by its nickname, the "Adenauer Mercedes". Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, was one of the first people to use the flagship Mercedes-Benz model in December 1951, and from that point on was only ever to be seen being chauffeured around in a "three hundred" model.

At the time of its appearance at the first IAA International Motor Show in Frankfurt in April 1951, six years after the end of the Second World War, the "three hundred" stood, like no other model, for Germany's return to the international automotive market.

It not only served as a representative car for the world of politics and finance, it was also a comfortable and luxurious touring saloon.

Alongside the spectacular 300 model, Mercedes-Benz presented a second luxury segment model at the first Frankfurt International Motor Show in 1951: the 220 model, which also featured a cutting-edge six-cylinder engine.

While the more compact, less powerful 220 model (W 187) may not have caused quite as much of a stir as its big brother, it nevertheless proved highly popular among customers.

Its impressive performance moved the trade press to speak of its "sports car credentials", while its handling characteristics were deemed to match comfort with safety in equal proportions. The lush interior also contributed to the popularity of this luxury segment model.

Introduced in the spring of 1954, the type 220, also known internally as the 220 a (W 180), was the first Mercedes-Benz six-cylinder model with a unitised body design. Its ultra modern, spacious "pontoon" body, which Mercedes-Benz had presented just six months earlier in the mid-range 180 model, offered previously unheard of levels of comfort.

Safe handling was guaranteed by the single-joint swing axle, which was introduced into series production in the 220 model.

With the launch of the overhauled and more powerful type 220 S in 1956, the "S" designation became a permanent fixture in the names of high-end Mercedes-Benz models, underlining the special status of the "pontoon" six-cylinder.

The 220, 220 S and 220 SE (W 111) "fintail models" launched in 1959 earned their nickname from the subtle fintails at their rear wings. Yet these style elements also had a purpose: they served as a parking aid when reversing and as a result were officially called "sight lines".

Another innovative feature proved more important than the fintails, however: the new luxury class generation from Mercedes-Benz was the world's first passenger car to be fitted with a safety body. In the event of an accident, crumple zones at the front and rear absorbed the impact energy, thereby protecting the occupants.

In 1961 the 300 SE (W 112) fitted with standard air suspension and the newly developed Mercedes-Benz automatic transmission was launched.

In 1963, the 600 model (W 100) presented at the IAA International Motor Show in Frankfurt became the new flagship model of the Mercedes-Benz brand and at the same stroke a vehicle of superlatives: its 6.3-litre V8 engine delivered an extremely respectable performance and a top speed in excess of 200 km/h.

Optimum comfort was ensured by air suspension, an automatic transmission, electronic power steering and a unique hydraulic system.

The five to six-seater version was predominantly ordered by highly discerning private customers. In addition, Mercedes-Benz also offered a seven to eight-seater version with a wheelbase 70 cm longer, which was primarily used as an official state or ceremonial limousine.

The W 108 and W 109 series saloons, which replaced the six-cylinder "fintail models" in 1965, were characterised by their timelessly elegant design and generously proportioned windows.

In addition to models with conventional steel suspension – internally designated as the 108 series – as with the "fintails", there were also variants of the 109 series with air suspension which, from the start, were offered with a wheelbase 10 cm longer.

A particular highlight was the 300 SEL 6.3 presented in 1968. The new top-of-the-range model in the series featured the powerful V8 engine from the high-end Mercedes-Benz 600 saloon and provided proud owners not only with the ultimate in comfort and luxurious appointments but also sports car-like performance.

In 1972 the luxury class saloons with which Mercedes-Benz had been setting standards for decades were officially given a name.

The new 116-series S-Class featured a comprehensive safety concept including a fuel tank fitted over the rear axle and protected against collisions, a four-spoke safety steering wheel, side windows designed to minimise the build-up of dirt, large headlamps, conspicuous indicators and ribbed tail lights also designed to minimise dirt build-up.

In 1978, the S-Class became the world's first series production vehicle to become available with the ABS anti-lock braking system, designed to help retain steering control even under full brake application. At the time a worldwide sensation, ABS is now standard across the automotive industry.

In 1979 the 126-series S-Class impressed with its aerodynamically enhanced shape and systematic weight reduction through the use of elements such as the new light-alloy V8 engines.

The model series 126 also set the trend in terms of its design: it was the first Mercedes-Benz passenger car to do away with the traditional chrome bumpers in favour of deformable plastic ones built to withstand a "parking dent".

The airbag, now a key component of automotive safety, made its debut in 1981, in the model series 126, which had been launched two years earlier. The driver's airbag was initially combined with a pyrotechnic belt tensioner for the front passenger. From 1988, Mercedes-Benz also offered its customers a front passenger airbag.

The S-Class of the model series 140 represented the new superlative at Mercedes-Benz in 1991. In developing this model, the engineers and technicians focused on maximum comfort – not least due to the larger dimensions and double glazing for optimum acoustic insulation.

This generation of the S-Class also introduced a pioneering safety innovation to the world of automotive engineering: the ESP® Electronic Stability Program, which was available from 1995 onwards.

The innovative system reduces the risk of skidding through targeted brake application on individual wheels. The end of 1996 saw the introduction of Brake Assist, which automatically builds up the maximum brake boosting effect during emergency braking.

The new S-Class (model series 220) presented in 1998 offered a further increase in safety and comfort, not least due to the new electronically controlled AIRMATIC air suspension, COMAND control and display system, and innovative DISTRONIC proximity-controlled cruise control system.

In autumn 2002, the model series 220 saw the introduction of the PRE-SAFE system designed to prepare occupants for any imminent collision by automatically initiating measures for their optimum protection.

At the same time as the introduction of the new safety system, the S-Class could now also be equipped with the intelligent 4MATIC permanent all-wheel drive, which also helps to ensure optimum traction in adverse road conditions at all times.

The pioneering technical innovations of the S-Class model generation 221 introduced in 2005 included Active Night View Assist, advanced DISTRONIC PLUS proximity control and Brake Assist Plus, which was upgraded to the PRE-SAFE brake with autonomous partial braking in 2006.

Further assistance systems, such as Blind Spot Assist, Lane Keeping Assist and Speed Limit Assist, helped to further reduce the strain on the driver and brought the S-Class one step closer to the vision of safe, accident-free driving.

The Mercedes-Benz S 400 HYBRID launched in 2009 was the first luxury model with the efficiency-enhancing and environmentally friendly hybrid drive and also the first series production car with a lithium-ion battery.

The best car in the world – each generation of the S-Class has earned itself this epithet anew. Consequently, "perfection down to the last detail" was the tall order for the development of the forthcoming model series.

The new luxury saloon will combine first-class driving and responsibility to the highest standard from the summer of 2013. The First Class Fond transforms the S-Class into a comfortable office, while the ENERGIZING massage function provides an ideal opportunity to indulge in a spot of pure comfort.

Numerous innovative and optimised driving assistance systems which have been summarised under the name "Mercedes-Benz Intelligent Drive" combine comfort with safety to open up a new dimension of motoring.