



## 1971 Mercedes 280 SL Roadster

"Arguably the best-looking car ever produced by Mercedes Benz..." Tim Slade writing about the design of this Roadster in *Mercedes Enthusiast*, August 2003.

The color is Tobacco Brown, same color as the removable hardtop; has a Tan soft top which disappears into a hidden compartment. The interior color is "Cognac." To save weight, the hood, doors, and trunk lid are all made of aluminum alloy. The windows and soft top are manually operated.

The 6 cylinder engine is fuel injected. Standard equipment includes dual exhaust pipes, tachometer, clock, power boosted 4 wheel disk brakes, and real wood interior trim. Options include power steering, heated Hardtop rear window, FrigiKing air conditioner, Becker AM/FM radio.

An unusual option on this car is the Jump Seat behind the two front bucket seats. This seat allows a third passenger (or a pet) to ride sideways in moderate comfort.

Because the sides of the Hardtop roof are higher than the middle, this car is often called a "Pagoda". This Mercedes was designed by a Frenchman, Paul Bracq.

Mercedes Pagoda Roadster owners have included: Audrey Hepburn, Colin Powell, John Lennon, Priscilla Presley, John Glenn, Peter Ustinov, and John Travolta.

About 3,000 1971 280 SL's were produced from late 1970 to March 1971. Estimates are that about 750 of these models are left in the US today.

Top speed is 124 mph, 0-60 in under 9 seconds, weight 3,000 pounds; cruises all day at 100 mph.

1971 list price: \$7,500 (about \$40,000 in today's dollars.) When they were new, the price of one Mercedes 280 SL could buy two Ford Mustangs. Price of a nice example today is \$20,000 to \$35,000. A "perfect" Mercedes Pagoda will fetch \$75,000 or more at auction.

Mercedes used the same frame (chassis) to build three similar Roadsters over an 8 year period. The three related roadsters are: the 230 SL, 250 SL, and 280 SL. The chassis designation for the three Roadsters was "W113." (W means "Wagen" or car in German).

These three W113 models are nearly identical except for the size of the engine. The model number was based on the size of the engine in liters. The 230 SL had a 2.3 liter engine, while the 280 SL had a 2.8 liter engine. The engines became larger to make up for the horsepower lost when emission equipment was added to the later models.

Turn the page for more details and technical information.

The 6 cylinder 180 hp engine is fuel injected (no carburetors), high compression (9.5 to 1), with a single overhead camshaft (SOHC). The rear axle ratio is 3.69 to 1. Other rear axle ratios were available to give either a faster start or a higher top speed. The Valve Cover is cast aluminum alloy.

Today a 280 SL model usually sells for a higher price than a 230 SL as 280 SL's have a larger engine, improvements in production and safety features, and 280 SL's are newer than 230 SL's.

Among the safety features: if the brake fluid gets low, a red light shows on the dash; innovative for the 1960's. These cars had no computer chips, no cup holder, and no CD player (although a modern stereo CD player can easily be added.)

A small light in the glove box door can shine down on a map and not distract the driver.

The wood and chrome custom-made Nardi steering wheel is a dealer added feature.

These Pagoda Roadsters are among the last "hand-built" Mercedes cars. Many details like the seat covers, the glove box liner, wood trim, even the hood, were individually hand fitted to each car.

"SL" of "280 SL" was for "Sehr Leicht" (very light in German) but when the cars were actually built, they were not 'very light' so the meaning of "SL" was changed to "Sports Light."

The earlier 230 SL's were made from 1963 to early 1967; 250 SL's only during 1967, and 280 SL's were made from late 1967 to early 1971. The total production was about 20,000 230 SL's, 5,000 250 SL's, and about 24,000 280 SL's. About one half of these cars were exported to the US and Canada. Estimates are that about 25,000 of the approximately 50,000 W113's still survive today. Most of these survivors are 280 SL's like this car.

Because of the value of the Euro and the Dollar, some of these cars are being sent back to Europe where they sell above US prices. Europeans prefer rust-free California cars if available.

As the years passed from 1963 to 1971, more and more of these cars were fitted with automatic transmissions. This car has a 4 speed Manual transmission found in only about 20% of the later cars. This Tobacco Brown car was made about 4 months before production of the entire series ended. It is among the last of the Pagoda Roadsters.

Mercedes has excellent support for these and other Classic Mercedes. Parts, technical advice, manuals, restoration services, and more are readily available from the Mercedes Classic Center.

Info about this car is at [www.panix.com/~rmdison/mercedes.shtml](http://www.panix.com/~rmdison/mercedes.shtml)

An Internet website devoted to these Pagoda classic models is at [www.SL113.org](http://www.SL113.org)



# **The 1969 Mercedes Benz 280SL Roadster**

## **Owned by Marcy & Michael Salemi of Novi, Michigan**

The 280SL Roadster was the final model in the Mercedes Benz W113 body style. Introduced in March 1963 at the Geneva Auto Show as the 230SL, the car was produced in three variants as the 230SL from 1964 to 1967; as the 250SL in 1967, and finally the 280SL from 1968 to 1971. In the nine model years of production, less than 50,000 units were produced and about half of these ended up in North America.

With Mercedes program of continuous improvement, there were subtle differences between each year and each model; however the body style remained essentially the same and the most significant difference was the engine. The 230SL had a 2.3 liter; this was increased to 2.5 liter for the 250SL, and finally to 2.8 liter for the 280SL. The car was available in combinations of removable hardtop and convertible top. SL stands for "Super Light", and it is neither light nor super. Often called a sports car, it is more accurately described as a grand tourer. This car can trace its lineage to, and was preceded by, the rare and famed Gull-Wing and roadster 300SL's of the 1950's as well as the 190SL's.

The series was designed by famed Mercedes Benz engineer Rudi Uhlenhaut, with styling by Frenchman Paul Bracq. Predevelopment work by Bela Barenyi yielded an extremely strong and safe body. When fitted with the hard top the car was arguably the safest car produced at that time. The patented hardtop roof is able to sustain loads of more than 2,000 pounds without deformation.

The car's unique styling, both aggressive and soft depending on your perspective, gave it wide appeal amongst the well heeled that could afford it, and is also a primary reason why it remains a collectible car today. Some say it has a timeless look; with design cues from the 1950's such as sensuous compound curves and the wrap-around windshield combined with more modern lines that belie its actual age.

The car is fully supported even today by Mercedes Benz, and its Classic Center. More parts are available for it now than there were 15 years ago. It is a car that is relatively easy to restore due to the parts availability. Many of the parts on the car are shared with other Mercedes cars of the era, and later. Few cars are in the condition you see here; most are regular "drivers" not restored to original condition.

Some experts say that the 1969's are the finest year of the W113. They share this view because as a 280SL, the 1969's had received most of the upgrades that Mercedes engineered into that model without being encumbered with the quickly engineered emission controls that were found on the 1970 and 1971 models. These controls rendered those models difficult to tune well, particularly as the systems aged.

This car is equipped with a stock 2.8 liter OHC fuel injected straight 6-cylinder M130 engine making 170 HP. It has a 4-speed automatic transmission and 4 wheel disk brakes. It weighs 2,948 pounds with the soft top. Suspension is independent front and rear featuring coil springs and a swing axle. It has unitized construction with front and rear sub-frames. There are power brakes and power steering.

### **This Particular 280SL**

This car drove off the assembly line in Singelfingen, West Germany in January 1969. It made its way to the United States through normal import and distribution channels; however we don't know the first owner or how it ended up as a relatively new used car at a Simca dealer in Philadelphia. My uncle,

Angelo Sokol of Huntington, New York bought the car in the summer of 1969. He used it as a daily driver from 1969 to 1979. At that time, the car was then relegated to occasional use. Almost out of a Mercedes advertisement, one of my uncle's primary uses of the car was transportation to and from the Manhasset Bay Yacht Club, where he was a champion sailboat racer. In 1985, after over 100,000 miles and suffering the indignities of life in New York, and the ravages of time and weather, the car's registration expired; the car was put in the garage, and never used again by Mr. Sokol.

Because of complexities with the fuel injection system, these cars do not age well when they are not used. By 1999, the car was the proverbial "basket case" better suited for the crusher than for restoration. After my uncle's passing, we obtained the car and had it shipped to Mr. David Payne of Precious Metal Restoration in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Michael assisted Mr. Payne in the restoration by sourcing many of the parts and subletting work as required. Over 1,000 hours of professional restoration time was put into the car, not including work done outside the shop such as brake restoration, engine and head rebuilding, chrome plating, fuel injection restoration, instrumentation restoration, interior, and other similar work. Nothing was left untouched in this restoration, so everything behind and underneath what you see on the surface is in the same condition as what you see before you. No garage or trailer queen, this car was driven to this show under its own power and will drive home under its own power as well.

In the restoration we strove for "as delivered" which is the Mercedes-Benz Club of America's judging standard. Some concessions were made, however: the car's color was changed, and retractable seat belts were added for additional safety.

This car recently won 1st place in the Mercedes Benz Club of Canada's 2004 Concours in the Vintage Sports Car Category. Its first show.

## **Interesting Facts about the W113 Cars**

- \* Nicknamed the Pagoda due to the style of the hard top.
- \* The hood, trunk deck, and door skins are aluminum.
- \* The Bosch mechanical fuel injection system is a direct injection system, uncommon for the era and only today coming into use. Most fuel injection systems use port injection.
- \* The suspension of the car was designed around a semi-radial tire, the Continental RA60.
- \* The car is fitted with 4-wheel power disk brakes.
- \* Many of these cars, including this one, have a 4-speed automatic transmission. At the time nearly all automatic transmissions were only 3-speed.
- \* Due to inflation in Germany and the United States, and significant increases in Mercedes-Benz pricing in the 1960's and 1970's these cars never depreciated and always sold for more than their original cost!
- \* Famous owners have included: Audrey Hepburn, Colin Powell, John Lennon, Priscilla Presley, John Glenn, Peter Ustinov, and John Travolta.

You can learn more about the Pagodas and meet other enthusiasts by visiting [www.SL113.org](http://www.SL113.org) [www.pagoda113.com](http://www.pagoda113.com) or [autos.groups.yahoo.com/group/W113](http://autos.groups.yahoo.com/group/W113)