

Eugene H. Smith
723 Sutter Avenue
Palo Alto, California

24 July 1964

R. Uhlenhaut
Daimler-Benz Aktiengesellschaft
(14a) Stuttgart-Unterturkheim
Germany

Dear Mr. Uhlenhaut:

I take this opportunity to express my appreciation for your kind effort on my behalf concerning my purchase of the prototype 230SL. The car was delivered to me in January, and I have been most pleased with it.

I have driven the car ~~since~~^{soA} approximately 9,000 miles since it was delivered, including a recent 1,300 mile trip through the Sierra Nevada mountains in company with a 1600S Porsche. The route included temperatures ranging from 32°F. to 110°F., and altitudes from -120 ft. in Death Valley to 9,200 ft. over Sonora Pass. Performance throughout the trip was excellent, and was apparently uniform throughout the range of conditions.

On the basis of this experience, I thought comments on the car might be of interest and useful to you.

Power Train

The entire power train has performed faultlessly since receipt of the car. Gasoline consumption for the trip mentioned averaged 17.5 miles per gallon, despite the fact that a major portion of the distance was driven in second and third gears. Oil consumption is somewhat higher than that in my 1908L (which will pass the 200,000 km mark shortly), but is not inordinate.

Suspension

I have had real problems with the suspension system of the car which we have not been able to correct locally. The problem consists of excessive softness and resulting pitch when accelerating and, more particularly, braking, to the point that when driving at night the lights are lost from extreme front-end dip when braking. This results in a hazardous condition when doing medium or high speed night driving. Roll stiffness, on the other hand, seems to be adequate.

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The shock absorbers installed when the car was delivered were completely worn out with only 11,000 miles. When removed, they appear to have been experimental units in that they carried no factory part number. They were replaced with the heaviest Mercedes shock absorbers that were available, but this has not solved the problem.

If a correction has been developed, please inform me. It occurred to me that perhaps a stiffer suspension has been developed for the factory rally cars, and if this is available, I would be interested in securing the appropriate replacement parts.

Brakes

The brakes on the car are exceptionally good, and have performed without fade through an extreme range of conditions. I did find on the above mentioned trip that at one point, having driven rapidly down a steep, winding road, the front brakes had heated to the point that when I came to a halt, lubricant from the king pins was running onto the backing plates and smoking badly. It is therefore possible that a heat transfer problem may exist under extreme conditions. I would note, however, that even under these conditions, no brake fade occurred.

I have noted that on my car, the rear drums are free to rotate against the lug bolts. This is causing wear on the bolts, and tends to make replacement of the bolts during wheel change difficult. One or more positioning pins might well alleviate this.

Tires

Tirewear on the front tires has been fairly high, with the left going to the cord with only 6,000 miles. The wear pattern on both has been approximately two inches wide starting approximately one inch from the outside edge of the tire. This may have been corrected by a realignment which has now been accomplished. In addition, three of the four tires, which are Firestone Phoenix, have developed a crack in the outside sidewall rubber running the entire circumference. I have not been able to determine how deep the crack runs, or whether it represents incipient structural failure, but thought it might be worthwhile to bring this to your attention. I have been carrying 41 psi in the front tires, and 44 psi in the rear, which seems to have significantly improved roadholding characteristics.

To date, it has been impossible to obtain replacement tires in this country. Mr. Hans Grethe, the local Continental representative, has kindly agreed to obtain some pre-production Continental tires for me, in order that I may continue to drive my car.

Interior

Perhaps the most conspicuous design fault of the 230SL to the driver, is the placement of the ash tray. The problem here is two-fold: 1) its location results in interference when shifting in second and fourth gears

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when the lid is open, and 2) its location requires looking away from the road to use it.

I would be interested in obtaining, if it were made available, an optional relocation of the ashtray, which might consist of mounting it in a panel below the dash board over the transmission. If this were done, I would also appreciate having installed in this panel a matching ammeter and an oil temperature gauge.

Although I personally have not had particular difficulty, some passengers have experienced some difficulty in closing the door because of the lack of a convenient handle nearer the rear of the door than the one provided at the front. Indenting the arm rest would perhaps be an easy solution.

I have found the seats in the car to be remarkably good, in that they provide complete comfort, and at the same time hold one firmly in place even in high speed cornering.

Finally, I would like to inquire whether it would be possible to secure factory optional parts to quicken the steering somewhat, and to extend the first gear range to perhaps 40 mph.

I am completely enthusiastic about the 230SL, and feel that in it you have accomplished a real advance in motor car design which will set the standard for years to come. I recognize that some of the comments and questions concerning options would not be applicable to the general purchaser, and none of these should be considered as critical, or as derogating from my appreciation of the car.

Sincerely,

Eugene H. Smith

Copy to:

Hans von Wasner
Daimler-Benz of North America
1508 Custer Street
San Francisco, California