



Mercedes-Benz

Contact:
Birgit Pillkahn

Phone:
+49 711 17-49049

Mercedes-Benz Classic

A stylist with a strong sense of aesthetics and proportion

Friedrich Geiger

Born on: 24 November 1907 in Süssen
Died on: 13 June 1996 in Bad Überkingen

Friedrich Geiger was a remarkable person in many respects. Until 1975 he was the first head of the styling department, as the design unit was then called. And he was not only a masterly craftsman and engineer in this function, but also a gifted artist. But it was typical of the man that during his active working life his ability to paint beautiful watercolours remained virtually unknown. Exceedingly modest and reserved, Geiger was always happy to let others take the limelight.

Born at Süssen on the edge of the Swabian Alb on 24 November 1907, Friedrich Geiger first learned the coach maker's trade before studying coach design. Given that most bodies at the time consisted of a wooden auxiliary frame planked with sheet metal, this was a logical and consistent career path. On 10 April 1933, Geiger then joined the special coachbuilding department at the Sindelfingen factory of Daimler-Benz AG, led by Hermann Ahrens. Here, too, this bodybuilding approach was practised, also for the individual creations which the customers had mounted on a chassis. All-steel bodies were not introduced by Daimler-Benz until 1938 in the Mercedes-Benz 230 (W 153 series). At the special coachbuilding department, Geiger was able to convincingly demonstrate his double talents both as engineer

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and a person with a sense of aesthetics and proportion. For instance, the body of the Special Roadster version of the famous 500 K/540 K models (W 29) is Geiger's work. Specially armoured saloons for the Grand Mercedes (W 07 and W 150) and the 540 K also originated on his drawing board.

Geiger's time of greatness began after the Second World War, in the 1950s, when he built up and managed the styling department of Karl Wilfert's body testing unit in Sindelfingen. Werner Breitschwerdt, future chief engineer and Chairman of the Board, thought very highly of Geiger in retrospect on account of his creativity, inspirational power and ability to take a broader view, while Karl Wilfert, ever the artist, was more the visionary engineer and driving force for passive safety.

Geiger was a man of iron discipline and rigour – qualities that resulted in his being perceived in different ways. His self-discipline included a daily one-hour swim at the mineral spa in Bad Cannstatt before going to the office. Work in Sindelfingen began at 7 a.m.

A major, if not his most important, achievement was the Mercedes-Benz 300 SL (W 198), the famed Gullwing, presented in New York in 1954. Only a year later, Geiger was designing the first bodies for the future 300 SL Roadster, introduced at the Geneva Motor Show in 1957. His design for the luxury car of the W 111 series beat studies submitted by colleagues Hermann Ahrens and Walter Häcker. He succeeded in producing a design of timeless elegance in the coupé variant of the 220 SE and 300 SE models (W 111/W 112), which was initially presented in 1961 as the 220 SE. In its formal finality, this Coupé attained a great significance in Geiger's creative work. The Mercedes-Benz 600 (W 100) with its angular, restrained design idiom was also his work. The heavy use of chrome was more to the taste of the Board of Management members responsible for development, Fritz Nallinger and – later – Hans Scherenberg. But the

composed and clear lines of the luxury vehicles of the W 108/109 series and the upper-intermediate range W 114/115 series also reveal his determining influence. Geiger was especially proud of the Coupé of the W 114 series, a car he himself drove for many years.

The body of the Mercedes-Benz 230 SL (W 113), the successor to the 190 SL (W 121 I), also took shape under his direction, while the “pagoda” roof was championed by the engineering duo of Béla Barényi and Karl Wilfert and its design realised by Paul Bracq. Prominent Geiger creations include other classic cars of today, notably both the SL and SLC models of the R/C 107 series and the W 116-series S-Class along with the E-Class predecessor W 123. One characteristic feature of the SL of the R 107 series is the logical mirroring of the concave roof shape in the rear boot lid – this too a Geiger creation which, as Breitschwerdt recalled, resulted in a few problems at the time. For the body manufacturing process did not make it easy to mould concave boot lids.

When Friedrich Geiger retired on 31 December 1973, he could claim to have decisively shaped and influenced the formal vocabulary of Mercedes-Benz passenger cars over four decades – and in particular the design idiom of the SL models built up to that time. Geiger died at Bad Überkingen on 13 June 1996.

Further information from Mercedes-Benz is available on the Internet:

www.media.daimler.com and www.mercedes-benz.com as well as www.mercedes-benz-classic.com