

The Long Way Home
(Why this car is RHD with European specs and North American Headlights)
History of a 1969 Mercedes Benz 280SL

In 1969 a young married couple of New Zealand teachers were visiting the UK when they saw an advertisement for a teaching contract in Canada for 2 years. They successfully applied for positions, in Canada. Some time after arriving they ordered a 1969 280 SL to be picked up from the factory in Sindelfingen (Stuttgart). The car was ordered with Dunkel Grün (Dark green) solid paint, Bamboo upholstery, and Dark Brown carpet. Mechanically the car was ordered with a manual gearshift, no power steering, and no air conditioning (hurray). Bob, the original owner tells me he had a choice of a 4 speed or 5 speed manual gearbox, and settled for 4 speed (boo-hoo.)

Although the car was ordered Right Hand Drive, the headlights had to be North American Pattern to comply with driving requirements in the USA, and Canada, hence the unusual combination of Right Hand Drive with North American Headlights. Mercifully the car was not fitted with exhaust emission control.

Bob writes "Helen and I were on our (three-year) honeymoon and had a two-year job teaching in B.C. Canada. At the time the first two years was tax free as they were so short of teachers, so we had a bit of spare money. I ordered the car from the agent in Victoria (or Vancouver?). We were teaching in Powell River which at the time was a thriving paper-mill town north on the coast. I asked for british racing green and manual (auto was not so common in those days) and explained that it would end up in NZ. I paid a deposit and then the balance of the total of \$6400, That summer we flew to England and I flew to Stuttgart and then got a bus to Sindelfingen to the factory. I checked the car out and realised it did not have safety belts - so had to wait for about 5 hours while they fitted them. They were obviously an optional extra - although I thought that as the car needed specs for NZ I would get them. So I then drove to Paris where I had a date to meet Helen who had come on the hovercraft and we met at the Gare de Nord. We then stayed at the Bois de Boulogne camp ground in our pup tent then found a friendly mechanic at a garage in south Paris who agreed to store the hardtop for us. This was July, so warm. We tossed up whether to go to Scandinavia or Spain and Portugal and ended up going south. (see below). This is where we had the first service. We could drive in some places at 100 mph - especially if there was an american tank to beat.



"We ended up with bad dehydration as we kept driving with the top down. Then back to London where a friend shipped it to Seattle for us. We collected it there and drove back to BC but had to pay \$1000 import duty at the border". (see below)



Picking up the story again, the present owners says, Bob & Helen shipped the car back to New Zealand in 1970. It was registered in NZ on 9th September 1970 with a mileage of 13,000 miles.

The car was sold in (3rd July 1973 with a mileage of 34,371) and subsequently has had 7 owners, including ourselves (the present owners) and excluding car dealers. The current mileage is 127,000 miles

In 1991 the owner previous to us, had a bare metal restoration carried out. (see photo), he also put a new soft top on the car. He meticulously recorded every trip, every part that he replaced, and all vehicle checks.



On 1st February 2011 we bought the car off him, in Lower Hutt (Wellington) and drove the car to Auckland without a hitch (about 400 miles). (see below, Mt. Ruapehu; National Park)



We have the original NZ registration papers with all the owners on it. We also have the original owners handbook, service record book and the vinyl pouch that they came in.

Last year I managed to contact the original owners (Bob & Helen) and early in 2013 they visited us to see what the car now looks like. They seem to think it is very original.



We have continued to maintain the car. The biggest replacements have been the complete cooling system, cleaning and painting the engine bay, and rear suspension rubber bushes. Door seal rubbers were also replaced. Repaired the indicator column switch and got the instrument panel lights working. I have just replaced the rear axle pinion seal.

After attending the Australian 50th year Pagoda celebrations, in Canberra we realised that the present carpet was not original, and that the boot (trunk) was supposed to have several rubber mats, rather than the carpet it now has.

We have fitted a new Dark Brown carpet from KHM in Germany. The filter media in the fresh air scuttle to the cabin has been replaced too. The RH tail light chrome bezel was replaced recently.

Future work includes rubber mats for the boot, checking the engine valve clearances (slightly noisy) and a new paint job as the paint, after 21 years is starting to let go in places, although it still looks very tidy. As a measure of this, the car recently won the Classic Driver Magazine's "Best Car In Show" at the 2013 Franklin Lions Club "Wheels of Fortune". Over a 1000 vehicles were on show (see below).

Wheels of Fortune – Best in Show

At the recent Wheels of Fortune show at Pukekohe, *Classic Driver* was invited to come along and judge the best car in the show. Never an easy job, but the perfect opportunity to take a long look at every car there and keeping personal bias aside to make a fair judgement. Our publisher Wes Davies was just the man for the job and after a day of deliberation, he chose the Mercedes Benz SL of Rutger Kohler as the deserved winner. ●



I love the fact that the car is a 280SL manual gearshift without power steering and air-conditioning. To me this is what the designers originally conceived the W113 as, without all the overblown trimmings, that can define the model as a boulevard cruiser.