



# California dreamin'

As a boy growing up in Iran in the 1970s, Prince Behara could have hardly imagined that one day he would live in Beverly Hills, California and own a small fleet of classic Mercedes from that same era – here he reveals all about them

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IT'S JUST AFTER DAWN ON A SUNNY SUNDAY morning and in a parking lot of a nearly deserted shopping centre in Glendale, California, a city north east of Los Angeles, early shoppers would see a strange sight: three classic Mercedes-Benzes. All of them from the early 1970s – a blue 1971 280SL, a light cream 1972 280SE 4.5, and a yellow 1973 450SL.

This scene is a long way from the Iran where Prince Behara grew up and from which he immigrated, at age 11, to the United States. "I enjoyed cars at a very young age," he says. "Travelling to Europe with my family at age three exposed me to a lot of

European cars. My dad had a Mercedes-Benz Fintail, a BMW 1600, a Peugeot 504 and a Jaguar XJ6. But Mercedes were among my favourites, and the Pagoda especially."

Fast forward about 15 years and Prince, now living in the United States, finally owned his first Mercedes-Benz. "After an Alfa Romeo, I bought my brother's 1989 190E and drove it many miles before handing it to my younger brother," he says. "In 2001, I acquired my first new Mercedes, an E320, on a three-year lease. That was a very memorable day to be able to drive away with a \$50,000 car after a relatively small payment! At the end of the lease term I returned the Mercedes to the dealer.



**“Travelling to Europe with my family at age three exposed me to a lot of European cars”**

Walking out to assess the car, the agent passed right by it. When I informed him that he had missed it, he replied, ‘Is that your car? But this is a brand new car!’ He could not believe that there was not the slightest mark on it.”

**STARTING THE BALL ROLLING**

Following the E320, Prince leased a 2004 CLK550 that he felt was a fun car, especially with its powerful V8. But then Prince crossed to the dark side, choosing a BMW 335is that he felt gave a less than satisfactory ownership experience. After the 3-Series, Prince returned to three-pointed stars from Stuttgart, a 2010

E550 Coupe followed by a 2014 GLK350. Up next? Prince’s plan is to return to the seat of classic Benzes.

Although he likes his modern day Mercedes, Prince’s heart lies with classics bearing the three-pointed star. “My interest in classics cars hinges on their originality,” Prince relates with a smile. “I label cars with a colour change as having an identity crisis. I like them exactly how they left the factory, preferring an original car with patina to a concours restoration. The smells of an original car can’t be replicated. In the case of each acquisition seen here, I had each one inspected and sorted by my mechanics in Santa Monica and Woodland Hills. In the case of some ▶



# Just the facts

## Mercedes-Benz 280SL (W113)

ENGINE M130 2,778cc 6-cyl

POWER 168bhp@5,750rpm

TORQUE 177lb ft@4,500rpm

TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD

WEIGHT 1,360kg

0-62MPH 9.0sec

TOP SPEED 121mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 24.8mpg

YEARS PRODUCED 1968-1971

## Mercedes-Benz 280SE 4.5 (W108)

ENGINE M117 4,520cc V8

POWER 195bhp@4,500rpm

TORQUE 264lb ft@3,000rpm

TRANSMISSION 3-speed auto, RWD

WEIGHT 1,675kg

0-62MPH 11.0sec

TOP SPEED 124mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 18.8mpg

YEARS PRODUCED 1971-1972

## Mercedes-Benz 450SL (R107)

ENGINE M117 4,520cc V8

POWER 222bhp@5,000rpm

TORQUE 278lb ft@3,000rpm

TRANSMISSION 3-speed auto, RWD

WEIGHT 1,580kg

0-62MPH 8.8sec

TOP SPEED 134mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 19.5mpg

YEARS PRODUCED 1971-1980

Figures supplied by Daimler AG; fuel consumption determined at ¼ of top speed (not more than 110km/h, 68mph) plus 10 per cent; top speed electronically limited

**“It’s a matching numbers car, a true survivor”**



Resprayed in original 903 Blue; vinyl trim and a Becker Europa radio await within.

▷ minor upkeep items, I do the work myself. And I love cleaning them.” Who can blame him? In chronological order, Prince talks about each of his classic Mercedeses...

## 1971 280SL

Prince is a firm believer in acquiring well preserved, original cars whenever possible. His 280SL is a great example of this philosophy, a Pagoda that hits all the hot buttons for any classic Mercedes-Benz enthusiast.

“I found this car after a long search through many sources,” Prince explains. “I bought it from an agent of a collector of mostly American classics who also had a few European cars among his collection. The SL had been sitting for a long time, so I had to have my mechanic go through pretty much the entire car. To get it back on the road, the fuel tank needed removing, cleaning and respraying. Next was a full rebuild of the transmission, then changing all suspension bushings. There were many other details to attend to. This car is all original except for a respray of the rust free exterior in original 903 Blue paint. It’s a matching numbers car, a true survivor. And I must admit that it’s probably my favourite of all the cars in my small collection of 1970s Mercedes-Benzes.”

When it came to photographing all three cars, we made the decision to head to the intersection of Wilshire Boulevard and Rodeo Drive, home to some of the world’s best known luxury boutiques. There, we would photograph each car parked in front of a different Beverly Hills landmark. For Prince’s 280SL, which he calls Maximus, after making several unsuccessful attempts on



On hand for our shoot were Prince’s brothers Persai and Pascal, and friend Billy.





## 1972 280SE 4.5

Of his three Mercedes-Benzes in this feature (a fourth, an exceptionally original, 1971 250C will appear in a future issue of *Mercedes Enthusiast*), his 1972 280SE 4.5 is the one that draws the least amount of attention. Prince calls it Ivy.

He noted that it was a San Fernando Valley car (yes, the same San Fernando Valley where the drugs and sex-fuelled, coming-of-age film, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* was set) that was originally owned by a Hollywood make up artist. "I bought it from the second owner with about 165,000 miles on the clock," Prince recalls. "She had it parked in her garage for about five years. I was able to acquire the car as she was moving home. Like my 280SL, it's a very original car, and at 165,000 miles it's just getting broken in. As you can see, it's what we call here in California a clean, driver quality car. While it has some blemishes, these are battle scars that a car will acquire during a half century of use. But at 165,000 miles, over the car's 44-year lifetime, that's less than 4,000 miles per year."

After driving back up Rodeo Drive and not finding any open parking spaces in front of any of the boutiques, we headed a few blocks east, and in-keeping with our film theme



▷△ Compact instrument cluster behind a wheel with central crash pad.

▷ A quick photograph outside the Beverly Hills Police Department.

▷▽ The 4.5-litre M117 V8 was also used in the R107.



▷△ Parked by the Beverly Wilshire Hotel.

▷△△ M130 2.8-litre has raspy charm.

Rodeo Drive to shoot the blue Pagoda, we went to the famous Beverly Wilshire Hotel. If it sounds familiar, it's because it has featured in many movies, but is probably best known for 1990's *Pretty Woman* starring Richard Gere and Julia Roberts.

One of the great things about photographing a classic Mercedes-Benz from the 1970s is that everyone seems to cut you a little slack. In this case, as we pulled up to the Beverly Wilshire, after explaining to the doorman that we were shooting for *Mercedes Enthusiast*, he let us grab a few quick shots. Usually if one doesn't have a proper permit or clearance to shoot from management, you're chased away. In Southern California, if you look like a professional photographer, especially shooting with a tripod, it usually takes just a few minutes before a police officer appears, asking to see your photography permit. If you don't have one, you get a costly citation. Thus it's important to shoot quickly, then move on to a different location.

▷ The 280SE 4.5 was not sold in Germany.

▷▽ The drive is dignified, the looks stunning.

