

THE CAR

THE MERCEDES-BENZ 300 SL "GULLWING" IS
THE IWC RACING TEAM'S SPORTS CAR OF CHOICE.

Classic car enthusiasts are unanimous: the Mercedes-Benz 300 SL "Gullwing" that will take its place on the grid with the IWC Racing Team at the Goodwood circuit in southeast England and other events has a distinctively timeless beauty and elegance. So no one was particularly surprised when, in 1999, it emerged as "Sports car of the century" following a poll of motorsport journalists. Interestingly, Daimler-Benz had never intended it to go into series production, and we owe the fact that it actually did to the company's official American importer, Maximilian "Maxi" Hoffmann. In September 1953, thanks to his masterly powers of persuasion, senior management at Daimler-Benz gave way and decided to produce a roadworthy series model based on the thoroughbred 300 SL racing sports car. The result was the 300 SL "Gullwing", which was unveiled in New York in February 1954.

NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INNOVATION

From the moment it appeared, the high-performance sports car attracted public interest like a magnet. People were drawn by the overall elegance of its design on the one hand, as well as the characteristic doors that opened upwards to resemble the wings of a seagull on the other. These were not merely a style-inspired by-product. Much more, they were a central element of the 300 SL's design and are a prime example of necessity being the mother of invention – and innovation. The vehicle's aluminum coachwork is mounted on a grid tube chassis. To improve stability, the framework is extremely high at the sides and ruled out conventional doors. The ingenious idea of developing vertically opening doors was a necessary consequence of the grid tube chassis, conceived by Mercedes head of testing Rudolf Uhlenhaut. Weighing just 82 kilograms, this framework was extremely light but at the same time pro-

vided maximum stability. The design of the doors was such that it would detract neither from the vehicle's elegance nor its aerodynamics. For this reason, you will look in vain for a conventional door handle on the 300 SL. Instead, there is a discreet recessed lever to open the lock. The door then swings gently upward, controlled by a telescopic spring.

POWER AND ENERGY THROUGH AND THROUGH

The technical specifications of the 300 SL owe much to the legendary Mercedes-Benz 300, or the "Adenauer Mercedes" as it is known. The latter was the vehicle of choice for countless statesmen, captains of industry, and dignitaries, either in its prestigious limousine form or as a convertible. The engine had already been radically modified for the racing version and was turned through 45 degrees to squeeze it in under the sleek hood. This feature reduced the passengers' legroom but did nothing to detract from the overall driving experience. For the series production sports car, the three carburetors were replaced by innovative direct fuel injection, resulting in a performance boost of 45 hp and increased efficiency compared with the racing car. In total, Daimler-Benz produced just 1,400 examples of this paragon of German automotive design, because production was discontinued after just three years in 1957 in favor of the roadster model. But the Mercedes-Benz 300 SL "Gullwing" was, and has remained to this day, one of the most coveted and admired sports cars of all time, a factor reflected in the high collectors' prices it commands.

MERCEDES-BENZ 300 SL "GULLWING"

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Years of construction:	1954 to 1957
Length:	4,520 mm
Width:	1,790 mm
Height:	1,300 mm
Weight:	1,295 kg
Maximum speed:	Depending on transmission ratio, between 208 and 250 kph
Acceleration (0 to 100 kph):	With series rear-axle transmission, 10 seconds
Engine size:	2,996 cc
Rated output:	215 hp at 5,800 rpm
Clutch:	Single-disk dry clutch
Transmission:	Four-speed, fully synchronized manual shift
Transmission ratio of rear-axle drive:	Optionally 3.64 : 1, 3.25 : 1, 3.89 : 1, 4.11 : 1

IWC SCHAFFHAUSEN

With a clear focus on technology and development, the Swiss watch manufacturer IWC Schaffhausen has been producing timepieces of lasting value since 1868. The company has gained an international reputation based on a passion for innovative solutions and technical ingenuity. One of the world's leading brands in the luxury watch segment, IWC crafts masterpieces of Haute Horlogerie at their finest, combining supreme precision with exclusive design. As an ecologically and socially responsible company, IWC is committed to sustainable production, supports institutions around the globe in their work with children and young people, and maintains partnerships with organisations dedicated to environmental protection.

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