

HIDE AND SEEK

Period charm does not always mean a sizeable price tag – if you are prepared to put in the effort

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WE CALL THESE FEATURES 'Buyer's Guides', but in this instance perhaps the term 'Buyer's Search' is more appropriate. This is because anyone looking for one of these staidly gracious Mercedes W114/W115 saloons, built for eight years until 1976, should be prepared for considerable legwork in not only finding one for sale, but one that is worth buying.

Over three decades having passed since the last were made, the survival rate is low and most will be so rusty and worn out they will just be a monumental headache. They have never been worth enough to justify major restoration so were usually left to deteriorate. However, a few have escaped the ravages of time, either by leading an extraordinarily cosseted life or as a result of very committed owners ignoring the economics of restoration and lavishing money on them.

W114/W115s are generally not cars bought on a whim or as a cheap runabout, but because a buyer finds a fascination with that particular era of Mercedes-Benz. The charm is in the simple styling and the good old fashioned engineering.

Another important point is you need to think of a W114/W115 as an ongoing project. Like all cars still around long past their normally allotted span, they require constant attention and you can almost hear them turning grumpy when starved of it. Usage has to be realistic too. Subject one to 20,000 miles of commuting and you will run it and probably yourself

into the ground. Gentle weekend outings, with an optional spot of polishing before or after, will suit it much better.

DESIGN, ENGINEERING

Let's start by defining what this car actually is, because in title terms this one of the more baffling Mercedes models. The cars were introduced in 1968 to replace the Fintail range and were commonly referred to as the New Generation models. They also became known as the Stroke 8 or /8, referring to their 1968 launch date, to allow parts departments to distinguish them from Fintails, which used the same badging. Another point of confusion is the factory codes, W115 denoting the four-cylinder cars, and W114 the six-cylinder models.

Things had certainly moved on from the Fintail. The styling was far more conservative, although the angular lines set the template for the Mercedes look for years to come – you can still see the timeline in today's E-Class. Inside, a much plainer approach was adopted, with simple looking instruments and trim, again a layout that would be seen in successive Mercedes generations. The image of a Mercedes as an austere furnished car probably started here, particularly as many came trimmed in MB-Tex, a tough looking vinyl.

Measurable advances over the Fintail included a new independent, trailing arm rear suspension on coil springs to replace the old swing-axle setup. This had the advantage of decreasing the amount of unsettling camber change on the rear wheels as the suspension

JUST THE FACTS

MERCEDES-BENZ W115 (FOUR CYLINDERS)

	220	230.4	220D	240D
ENGINE	M115 2,197cc	M115 2,307cc	OM615 2,197cc	OM616 2,404cc
POWER	104bhp@5,000rpm	108bhp@4,800rpm	59bhp@4,200rpm	64bhp@4,200rpm
TORQUE	132lb ft@2,800rpm	137lb ft@2,500rpm	93lb ft@2,400rpm	101lb ft@2,400rpm
TRANSMISSION	4-speed manual, RWD	4-speed manual, RWD	4-speed manual, RWD	4-speed manual, RWD
WEIGHT	1,335kg	1,350kg	1,375kg	1,390kg
0-62MPH	13.7sec	13.7sec	20.1sec	24.6sec
TOP SPEED	104mph	106mph	94mph	86mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION	25.5mpg	24.8mpg	33.2mpg	29.7mpg
YEARS PRODUCED	1968-1973	1973-1976	1968-1976	1973-1976

MERCEDES-BENZ W114 (SIX CYLINDERS)

	250	250 (2.8)	280E
ENGINE	M114 2,496cc	M130 2,778cc	M110 2,746cc
POWER	128bhp@5,400rpm	128bhp@5,000rpm	182bhp@6,000rpm
TORQUE	147lb ft@3,600rpm	159lb ft@3,200rpm	176lb ft@4,500rpm
TRANSMISSION	4-speed manual, RWD	4-speed manual, RWD	4-speed auto, RWD
WEIGHT	1,375kg	1,395kg	1,455kg
0-62MPH	12.8sec	11.5sec	10.8sec
TOP SPEED	112mph	112mph	121mph
FUEL CONSUMPTION	24.1mpg	22.6mpg	22.6mpg
YEARS PRODUCED	1967-1972	1970-1976	1972-1976

OVERVIEW

The 1960/70s middleweight Mercedes saloon is now thin on the ground, but sound ones still exist and ooze period charm

Figures given for models available in the UK and for standard cars with four-speed manual transmissions, apart from the 280E where figures are for an automatic as pictured. Fuel consumption determined at 1/10 of top speed (not more than 110km/h, 68mph), plus 10 per cent

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MILESTONES

- **January 1968** W114 and W115 saloons launched
- **August 1970** 2.8-litre single cam engine introduced for 250 2.8 model
- **April 1972** 2.8-litre fuel injected twin cam engine introduced for 280E
- **March 1973** Safety update includes padded steering wheel, headrests and automatic seat belts
- **September 1973** Facelift - new bonnet and grille, also revised interior trim
- **December 1976** W114 and W115 range replaced by W123 models

► moved up and down, but also retaining the same generous amount of bump absorbing spring travel. Another key improvement was the extended service interval (to a whole 5,000 miles between services) and the elimination of that old DIY joy, chassis grease nipples.

The W115 engine line up comprised 2.0- and 2.2-litre units in petrol and diesel form, though only the 220 and 220D came to the UK, while just one W114 was imported initially, the 2.5-litre six-cylinder 250 (one distinguishing feature being the double deck front bumper). All petrol engines were fuelled by carburettors, the fours having a single carb and the sixes a twin set up with automatic choke.

EVOLUTION

The W114 and W115 underwent a facelift in autumn 1973, but prior to that a manual five-speed gearbox was offered and two new engines appeared. In 1970 a 2.8-litre, single camshaft engine was offered for the 250 (alongside the original model), its 128bhp matching the 2.5-litre car, and torque of 159lb ft a 12lb ft increase. Two years later the M110 2.8-litre

twin cam unit was introduced, in carburettor form (the 280, not in the UK) and with Bosch D-Jetronic fuel injection and 182bhp for the 280E. Besides the 250's larger front bumper, these top line models had a wraparound rear bumper and twin exhaust pipes.

The facelift, just three years before the end of production, saw subtle visual changes, the main one being a slightly lower bonnet line and grille to soften the car's upright stance. The front windows lost their quarterlights, while a new type of decorative trim on the A-pillar was designed to direct dirt away from the side windows. Internally adjustable door mirrors were fitted, the rear light clusters were a new ribbed design to repel dirt, and the double front bumper was replaced by a slimmer single panel item. Little details, such as mounting the front number plate on rather than under the front bumper and a redesigned bootlid handle, smartened the car's exterior lines.

Interior revisions came in place six months before the facelift, and were mainly safety related. A four-spoke padded safety wheel of the type seen in the then recently launched ►



The sixes are rather more lively than the fours and many are autos for a smoother, more fluid drive



BUYER'S CHECKS

- ▶ Serious rust attacks engine/cabin bulkhead
- ▶ Rust likely on wings, sills and in boot
- ▶ Twin carbs on six-cylinder engines can be tricky to set up
- ▶ Interior trim parts can be hard to find
- ▶ Good cars are scarce - buy on condition, not model

▶ Earlier cars had this more classic steering wheel.

▶ Many W114s like this 280E had smooth autos.

▶ Old school interior is part of the model's charm.



▶ R107 SL and W116 S-Class replaced the original, rather delightful item with the chrome ring horn push, while headrests and automatic seat belts were fitted as standard.

Mechanical updates included the introduction of a new four-cylinder 2.3-litre petrol engine. This model replaced the 220 and was badged the 230.4 to tell it apart from the six-cylinder 230 model. The 240D joined the 220D, and the following year the 240D 3.0 was launched, the world's first five-cylinder diesel, giving a then unprecedented 79bhp.

DRIVING THE W114/W115

These cars frankly do not offer a big driving experience. The 220's engine was not particularly revvy and its 104bhp didn't go a long way, 62mph coming up in 13.7 seconds (with the manual gearbox) and a top speed barely into three figures.

The 220D reminds us of how diesels used to be: noisy and rattly and with performance that would scarcely be believed today. This model boasts 59bhp, a 28.1-second 0-62mph time and a 84mph top speed (with a manual gearbox). Likewise, fuel economy of around 33mpg

would hardly impress nowadays. The manual 240D is almost as snail like, taking almost 25 seconds to reach 62mph.

The sixes are rather more lively and many have the four-speed auto for a smoother, more fluid drive than the rather slow, lumpy four-speed manual. Power steering is also desirable, as without it the recirculating ball system is heavy and low geared (4.6 turns lock to lock as opposed to three with power assistance).

Handling is probably best described as 'contemporary'. Compared to the agility of a modern C-Class the cars feel ponderous, but again you have to judge them by the standards of the day, and in this respect the Merc with its secure and predictable manners was notably better than some of the nose heavy, understeering horrors around at the time. And apologies if we are stating the obvious, but you should be aware that the W114/W115 is an old design and requires a different approach to driving. Classic Mercedes-Benz dealers tell us people coming from modern cars are sometimes shocked at the lack of equipment such as power steering and airbags. We are talking period motoring here.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Without doubt the most important issue is rust. Mercedes engines are capable of healthy mileages, but rust resistance was no better than that of any other car at the time, indeed we can think of one contemporary expert who reckons this generation was worse than the Fintail, owing to the numerous spot welds on the body's box sections. These quickly attracted corrosion particularly as the sealing was poor, the process accelerated by the thick layer of underseal designed to prevent rust, but which actually trapped the moisture inside.

Rust shows in all the obvious places, such as on the wings and sills, but also check the bulkhead between the engine bay and the cabin. A large air intake in front of the windscreen allowed water to gush in, which was soaked up and held in place by the generously applied sound deadening material, the perfect recipe for early corrosion - a rust trap designed out of the W123 that came after.

It may sound heartless given how we love old Benzes, but we cannot recommend starting a rebuild on a W114/W115. You might not pay much for the car, but restoration costs have ▶



WHAT YOU'LL PAY

- ▶ **Up to £500** Rusty runner, short MOT, possibly in a terminal state
- ▶ **£500-£1,500** Rusty but with some potential
- ▶ **£1,500-£3,000** Sound cars with some kind of history
- ▶ **£3,000-£5,000** Show winners, no rust and good interiors
- ▶ **£5,000-£7,000** That extremely rare, concours 280E model

The engines are capable of healthy mileages – the most important issue here is rust

▷ certainly kept pace with inflation and you will not recoup the money spent when reselling. But if you do feel brave enough, you will need to know who the specialist Merc breakers are, as they will be the prime sources of parts. Some advertise in *Mercedes Enthusiast*. The one that always springs to mind is Mercman in Southampton (023 8078 4444) with its warehouse full of reasonably priced parts for old Meres.

Engines are simple and easy to work on (although bear in mind the 280E is a double cam unit, adding some complexity), with no ECU to worry about. However setting up the two carburettors on the six-cylinder cars can be tricky, which is why the fuel-injected 280E is easily the preferred model if you don't want a four.

Regardless of model, the engine is going to be the most durable part of the car, as a Greek cab driver demonstrated a couple of years ago when he eventually retired his 1976 240D after 4.6 million kilometres on the job – although regular oil and filter changes are also essential for long life.

With the 1973 facelift a fairly minor affair, you do not get a substantially improved car by going for a later one. Indeed, a useful advantage of W114/W115s built before January 1973 is they are exempt from road tax.

HOW MUCH TO PAY

In all, 1.9 million W114s and W115s were built, but very few survive. "They went through the zero value stage in about the early 1980s," says long time Mercedes specialist Alan Deakin of realmb.co.uk, "and then they fell into the wrong hands. They were never as well regarded as the W116 S-Classes." One indication of how rare the cars are is that even eBay did not have a single one during the time this article was being written. It is the sort of car Mercedes specialists have from time to time, usually taken in part exchange. "I can't remember when I last saw a W114 or W115," is a typical response.

And how much do they go for? Sheer age and scarcity has probably seen prices of the very scruffiest ones creep ahead of comparable W123s. However the classified advertising columns in the back of *Mercedes Enthusiast* regularly carry them, and some examples from the past year give as good an indication as any as to what values are. Our January 2007 magazine saw a 1971 two-owner 220 described as a "show winner" for £1,600, while March contained a tidy looking 230.4 ("used daily") for £1,500. The same issue saw a 280E with an automatic gearbox at £2,700, the higher price reflecting the claimed genuine 70,000 miles. And what would the best example, sold by a recognised Mercedes-Benz specialist,

command? "You would like to think a nice example in blue, yellow or tan would make £6,995," says Deakin.

VERDICT

Setting out to buy a W114 or W115 is something of a mission. Some might question why anyone would want one in the first place, given its W123 successor looks quite similar but does everything better and is around in bigger numbers. But those who love the big grille, the stacked headlamps and the simple but stylish interior will feel it worth the effort to put in the work necessary to find one of the few remaining good examples.

The W114 six-cylinder models are clearly the preferred option (although we can understand a desire to take on the unrefined but rather characterful diesels), but the golden rule of old car shopping applies: buy on condition rather than model.

Buying the very best example you can afford is of critical importance, because there is no financial sense in attempting restoration. Thinking of it as an affordable classic rather than a canny investment is the best, most realistic approach. And bear in mind that with even the very youngest cars being over 31 years old, the pristine, rust free example exists in your dreams only.



△ A late facelift saw the then passé quarterlights phased out.

◁ Colour coded wheels add to the feeling of classic car motoring.

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