

JUST THE FACTS



Recommendation Best of 2013 (W100)

ENGINE M100 6.332cc V8

POWER 247bhp@4,000rpm

TORQUE 369lb ft@2,800rpm

TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD

WEIGHT 2,475kg

0-62MPH 9.7sec

TOP SPEED 127mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION 15.9mpg

YEARS PRODUCED 1964-1981

OVERVIEW

Still a landmark car, the 600 has lost none of its commanding presence and headturning ability after 50 years

Figures for car as pictured; fuel consumption determined at ¾ of top speed (not more than 110km/h, 68mph) plus 10 per cent

KING OF KINGS

Five decades young, the W100 600 inspires awe in 2013 as it did when new in 1963 – and at a minimum of 5,540mm long, there's a lot of Mercedes-Benz to celebrate!

WORDS **MATT ZOLLO** IMAGES **TERRY OBORNE**



THE MERCEDES-BENZ W100 600 IS the car that makes prop departments' jobs the world over a whole lot easier.

"We need a grand, imposing limousine for a 1970s very important person," demands a director. "Have a Mercedes 600," say the people in props. It is synonymous with the rich, the famous and the stately of a certain era, with no other vehicle representing

importance and personal wealth like it. That was then, of course, but an aura has remained around it since, and if anything its stock has only risen with age. And certainly there is still no other vehicle that says "I'm a dictator" like a 600.

Der Grosse was Mercedes' statement of authority and superiority when it was introduced 50 years ago at the September 1963 Frankfurt International Motor Show, a technological and





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With light steering and an automatic, the W100 600 is remarkably easy to drive.

▷ engineering masterpiece that no other manufacturer ever came close to competing with. It was so far ahead of the competition that they did not even bother trying to catch up, Rolls-Royce, neatly summing up the whole British car industry's stance back then by keeping its head firmly planted, errr, in the sand, stating that the 600's technology was doomed to fail. Of course the mystique of the model was helped by the fact that it was, by some considerable margin, one of the most expensive cars in the world at the time.

THE OBVIOUS CHOICE

Thus, if you had the means, the Mercedes-Benz 600 was the only rational choice. Yes, back when the 600 was king many Americans would have been saddled with an Imperial Crown Ghia, while those representing the Great British Empire would have rolled (sorry) in a Phantom V. But these cars were transporting those burdened with nationalistic obligations. If you did not have a car industry to represent or were not a sufferer of severe jingoism, from

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the mid 1960s until the early 80s you owned a W100 600. It really was that simple.

That is why there is nothing else like it now, because there is no car that stands so head and shoulders above all else in the market, and therefore no one default car for the most high up of dignitaries, rich persons and influential people. Many will be found in the grand rear pews of a Mulsanne, Phantom or Ghost, sure, but those less interested in (or not allowed to indulge in) pomp and prestige also have the choice of some ridiculously competent and classy cars such as the S-Class, Range Rover

and Flying Spur. Legend has it a few people out there even have a Maybach in their garage.

But if the choice of car was a simple one for those demanding the very best, then what would not have been quite so simple for buyers, as they put aside their movie-acting/song-writing/country-leading/subject-ruling/business/empire-running duties, was choosing which 600 to go for. The full range of versions that Mercedes offered its most influential and affluent of customers was quite bewildering.

The 'base' option, as inappropriate a term as that sounds, was the 3,200mm wheelbase car,

as pictured on these pages. That was the one to go for if you enjoyed driving and wished to partake in the act yourself on occasion. If you could not have imagined any task more menial, however, you went for the 3,900mm Pullman limousine – but there was still the choice of four or six doors. If you lived (it up) in sunnier climates, the option of the Pullman landaulets could not have been ignored and, again, do you go for four or six doors? Finally (for the series production cars), if you lived a life far too perilous for something as exposed as a landaulet, you would have thought carefully >



△ The W100 600 weighs in at 2,475kg, is 1,485mm tall and 5,540mm long.

△◁ The extensive chrome brings the exterior details to life.

△◁◁ Speedo and rev counter split by fuel, oil and temperature gauges.



SELECTED TV SERIES ROLES

- Baretta
- Falcon Crest
- The Persuaders!
- Magnum, P.I.
- Mission: Impossible
- The Rockford Files

Owner's impression **Andy Totten**

"I bought it in August 2011 from a guy called Aidan Corless, who's a really good character," says Andy Totten, the owner of the lovely 600 you see on these pages. "I'd always wanted one but had been put off because if you don't buy the right one they can cost so much to put right. But this example had had everything done, so it was a

bit of a no-brainer, plus it has a lovely colour combo. "It's been really good fun so far," he continues with enthusiasm. "We've used it for a wedding, for the Goodwood Revival twice, when we hired a driver so we could drink and then all jump in the back, and I've taken it to Amsterdam with a few mates. Everybody loves it and smiles at it. And

it's very easy to drive - you think as it's a big old thing it would be difficult, but it's very easy once you get going. Kevin O'Keeffe looks after it, making sure it runs perfectly. It's only needed the double-dizzy ignition and the heating systems looked at, but other than that it's been totally reliable. I reckon I've done nearly 6,000 miles in it now."



△ This 1969 car has been well cared for.

△ Lots of space in even the shortest 600.

△ Cabin styling is low key but still beautiful.

△ The fabulous M100 V8 unit with 247bhp.



▷ about the armoured 600s, available with either the 3,200mm or the 3,900mm wheelbase, the latter being available in, yes, either four- or six-door configuration, plus there was an armoured 600 Pullman limousine with a higher roof. Which gives us nine variants. But these being the cars for the very rich and famous, there were one-offs too - read more about these very special Mercedes from page 30.

But the choice didn't stop there, due to the sheer multitude of options. Do you have a partition between the front and rear cabins? Do

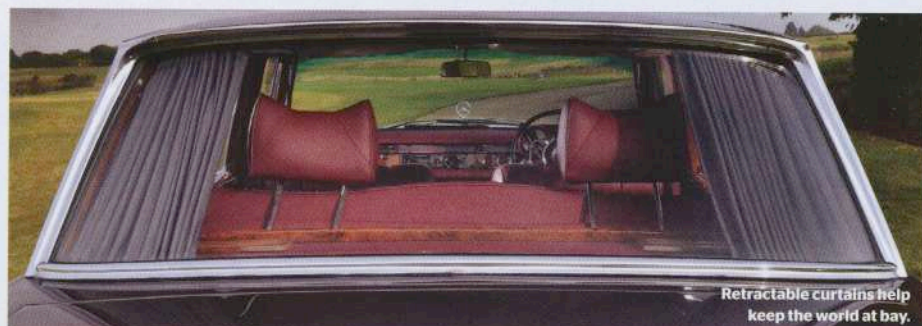
you specify your Pullman six-door with or without handles on the middle pair of openings? Do you have the middle row of rear seats facing forwards or backwards? Do you go for the longer hood option on your landaulet, which extends the fabric roof to the middle partition, as opposed to the front edges of the rear doors? And how about thicker armoured plating for your special security 600? And then there were the myriad colour combinations Mercedes-Benz offered, and extras like the hydraulic sliding sunroof, driver/passenger

intercom system, remote controls for the Becker Grand Prix radio, a refreshment bar, a vanity box and a folding table with lighting.

NO TWO THE SAME

"Individual requests can be taken into consideration." Those were the words on the 600's brochure. It is likely that the possibilities were nearly endless! "Regarding paint, interior design and special equipment," said Mercedes-Benz, "many different customer requests could be fulfilled, so that it is probably impossible to find two cars with identical equipment." In total, 2,677 probably unique 600s were made (429 of which were Pullman limousines, 59 landaulets and 45 armoured), the last one rolling out of the Sindelfingen works in June 1981. At the time, it was the longest production run of any Mercedes-Benz, at 17 years.

The reasons for such a long life are obvious before you have even stepped into the cabin because this is a beautiful car, in a totally unconventional way. Beautiful in a grand, imposing, retro kind of way. Its magnificent

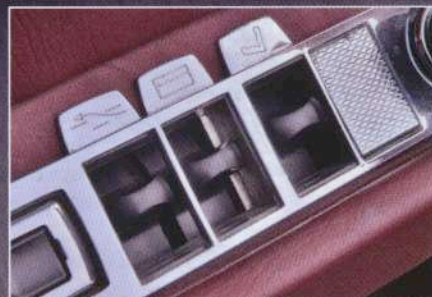


Retractable curtains help keep the world at bay.



► The controls for the sunroof, cabin partition and seats use hydraulics.

►► There is no doubting the W100 600's wood trim is the real deal.



looks are in the scale, the extravagant chromework and detailing, and the simple, somehow elegant three-box shape. Step inside and things get even better. Here is a Mercedes several leagues above the next best in the maker's range. There are familiar elements that a classic Benz owner would no doubt recognise, but from there on they would be strangers to the unique ambience and correspondingly vastly higher level of lavishness and luxury. It reeks of leather with an intensity that cannot help but purvey a sense of expensiveness, and the sheer amount of leather and chrome is at a level quite unlike that of any other three-pointed star.

What is nicest, though, is that despite the definite sense of vastness, because of the way the car has been trimmed and the relatively shallow glasshouse, it feels cocooning. It is

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cosy and colossal at the same time, much like a palace's well appointed smoking room with the curtains closed and the fireplace roaring. That is most unlike other

Mercedes of the era, which have large glass coverage and feel open and airy, and it makes the

600 feel even further removed from its stablemates, and thus even more special. The little curtains around the windows help, too.

The W100 600 might well have impressed contemporary roadtesters with its grip and agility, but even compared to other Mercedes of the era it feels large and unwieldy on the move. You instantly feel sorry for those bad guys who had to grapple with a 600 on tight mountain passes chasing 007 in his sporty little Aston. Like a majestic old elephant plodding gracefully across the plains of Africa, it is as unhurried by modern traffic scurrying past as an elephant is with the gazelles that dart past it. As if to

highlight the point, the throttle pedal is stiff and heavy so you have to really insist on your acceleration to achieve it.

The other controls are the opposite, thankfully, and despite being so large the 600 is ever so relaxing to drive, partly a result of the cabin's atmosphere, partly the light steering and the automatic gearbox, but mainly because of the way the car rolls easily and loosely ►

SELECTED FILM APPEARANCES

- The Witches of Eastwick** (1987)
- The Next Man** (1976)
- Trading Places** (1983)
- Batman & Robin** (1997)
- The Last King of Scotland** (2006)
- On Her Majesty's Secret Service** (1969)
- Octopussy** (1983)
- The Whole Ten Yards** (2004)



▷ down the road. And with almost 250bhp and a huge 369lb ft of torque from the legendary M100 6.3 V8, although it doesn't feel fast it certainly feels effortless.

This is illustrated by motorway cruising. Despite having jumped onto the vast driver's seat for the first time a few brief miles before joining the motorway, a glance at the speedometer surprises as the needle rests on the digits seven-zero. This seems to be the 600's natural cruising speed, as I thought we were travelling a lot slower due to the excellent refinement – the only blemish being slight wind rustle at the top of the A-pillars. The W100 will go plenty faster than 70mph, of course (127mph if you are asking – or feeling lucky), but it feels a bit forced beyond that.

“The Mercedes-Benz W100 600 is surely still one of the best cars in the world”


On the motorway you sense the traffic bunching up behind to get a longer look, and when cars eventually pass, their passengers crane their necks to get a look at the 600's front, perhaps in an effort to ID the gliding gargantuan.

There was even camera phone activity, which invokes feelings of contentment and – dare I say it – smugness.

NO EXPENSE SPARED

This example is a particularly beautifully turned out one, so it can handle the close up attentions of camera phones of even the highest megapixel count. Registered on January 1 1969, it had been in Ireland all its life until current owner Andy Totten brought it to the UK. A previous owner, Patrick Gallagher, made the car what it is, however, spending \$105,000 (after an original budget of \$50,000) in one sitting with well known Wisconsin based 600 specialist Karl

H Middelhaue. From a curtain set costing \$2,200 to front and rear axle rebuilds at \$26,000, with a rebuilt engine and transmission (\$12,300), a respray and a re-chrome (\$13,100), a re-trimmed interior (\$10,200), a renovated hydraulic system (\$8,700) and so much more in between, this car has had it all.

It is a genuine honour to drive, in fact, not just because of the reputation of the model and its status as an absolute motoring legend, but because as a particular example of the breed this must surely be one of the best – it is a credit to its owners, past and present. But, most of all, this car is a credit to the remarkable company that made it. And 50 years on, despite advances in science and technology, the Mercedes-Benz W100 600 is surely still one of the best, and definitely most impressive, cars in the world. 

► Thank you to owner **Andy Totten** for the loan of his W100 600 and to the **London Golf Club** for providing the photoshoot location
Tel 01474 879899 Web www.londongolf.co.uk



◁ Mercedes built 2,677 600s across 17 years.

△ Those in the rear have their own radio tuner.

STARS IN THE UNFEASIBLY PRICED CAR

Famous owners have included fashion designer **Coco Chanel**, playboy **Hugh Hefner**, actress **Elizabeth Taylor**, Beatles members **John Lennon** and **George Harrison**, actor **Jack Nicholson**, musicians **Ronnie Wood** and **Elvis Presley**, and comedian **Rowan Atkinson**, plus **Jeremy Clarkson** and **Jay Kay** (ex Chanel car) own 600s today. While too many governments, regimes and royal families to mention have had Mercedes' W100 600s on their fleets.