



SPECIALTY FILE

RENNTech SLK

The baby Benz gets a snootful of growth hormones.

BY DON SCHROEDER

The most disappointing part of the delightful Mercedes-Benz SLK230 *kompessor* roadster may be the punk sound that comes out of its exhaust. It's a congested-nasal tooting that will leave you longing for engine-formula Dristan. This electric-blue SLK is not afflicted with wimpy acoustics. Its exhaust growls at idle, and when you floor the throttle, it *honks*. There's also an eerie whine that emanates from underhood that rises and falls in synch with the tachometer.

This Mercedes SLK has been modified by RENNTech, the aftermarket tuner of Mercedes-Benzes located in Lake Park, Florida. Owner Hartmut Feyhl has been hard at work on modifications for the SLK since last spring. It wasn't until December, though, that he completed this "rolling catalog" of available goodies.

Finding a cure for the exhaust turned

out to be the hardest task. It took eight prototypes before Feyhl found a system that was free of objectionable resonances. The result, which runs from the catalytic converter rearward, won't rekindle memories of Alfa Romeos, but it does sound appropriately throaty for spirited driving.

That exhaust is just one part of this car's \$8850 Stage II power package. There's also a more efficient supercharger, modified by Magnuson Products in Ventura, California. Maximum boost is increased from the stock 5.8 to 9.0 psi. A larger intercooler and intake pipes are also fitted, fed by a K & N air filter (the freer-breathing system no longer muffles the supercharger's whine). The engine-management computer has also been reprogrammed. At this time, that reprogramming sadly does not raise the engine's Draconian 5800-rpm fuel shutoff.

No matter. The package, which bumps



horsepower by 55, from 185 to 240, makes a pocket rocket out of the mild-mannered luxury roadster. Sixty mph is 6.1 seconds away, launching this Benz into the same league as a Porsche Boxster or BMW Z3 2.8, despite its performance-sapping automatic. Passing is a hoot. Plant your right foot, and the SLK lunges forward with the supercharger whining madly. Its passing times are, in fact, within a hair of those of the quickest passer we tested last year, the Toyota Supra Turbo automatic. Top speed was 146 mph, 2 mph faster than the last SLK we tested. The modified motor's only downside was some hard-to-ignore flat spots in its thrust, particularly before an upshift.

Our car's \$1660 sport suspension includes Koni shocks and stiffer springs and anti-roll bars. Z-rated 18-inch Yokohama S1-Z tires—225/40ZR-18s in front,

265/35s in back—were also installed, on gorgeous five-spoke SSR wheels that will set you back \$3200. With these goodies underneath, the SLK turns more crisply on its spiffy suspension, and with less body roll. It also registers an impressive 0.90 g on the skidpad. On the other hand, it tramples more on freeway ruts and can crash violently over misaligned expansion joints. Those driving on ruptured roads might want to stick with the factory suspension.

There's more. Stomp on the panic pedal at 70 mph, and the modified SLK comes to a stop in just 159 feet, 11 feet shorter than stock. Credit the stickier tires, as well as our car's front brake package, with massive 13-inch discs and four-pot aluminum Alcon calipers. For this capability, you must pay \$4595.

Other mechanical bits include a limited-slip differential for \$2950 and a neat relay which you can splice into the wiring that will let you operate the folding top at speeds up to 25 mph. (You must be stopped in the stock SLK.) Feyhl hadn't set the price for this little trick yet.

Bystanders seemed mesmerized by this car. If those gorgeous wheels weren't the reason, then the body-color front and rear spoilers and side skirts were probably responsible. They cost \$2630. For another \$1600, you can exchange your SLK's door pulls, shifter knob, roll bars, and parking-brake handle with versions trimmed carefully in yellow leather.

Feyhl is working to eliminate the annoying sags in the power curve. He also thinks our car's cornering grip could be improved with different tires.

RENNTech will sell you each package separately, but if you want an SLK just like ours, you need \$69,566, which is \$26,735 above the price of the donor SLK. (That price includes labor, but not lux tax, which can be avoided if the work is done after the car is at least six months old.) That's serious buckage, but if the rumors are true that the SLK is attracting former SL buyers, then that price is well within the means of some SLK owners. And a better exhaust note may be all it takes to crack open their wallets. ●



Yellow leather pieces can also be trimmed in carbon fiber. Black valve-cover insert (right) distinguishes otherwise stock-looking engine.



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RENNTech SLK

Vehicle type: front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 2-passenger, 2-door roadster

Price as tested: \$69,566 (base price: \$62,650)

Engine type: supercharged and intercooled DOHC 16-valve 4-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, Bosch ME 2.1/RENNTech engine-control system with port fuel injection

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| Displacement | 140 cu in, 2295cc |
| Power (SAE net) | 240 bhp @ 5500 rpm |
| Torque (SAE net) | 250 lb-ft @ 3000 rpm |
| Transmission | 5-speed automatic with lockup torque converter |
| Wheelbase | 94.5 in |
| Length | 157.3 in |
| Curb weight | 3120 lb |
| Zero to 60 mph | 5.1 sec |
| Zero to 100 mph | 16.2 sec |
| Zero to 130 mph | 33.6 sec |
| Street start, 5-60 mph | 6.6 sec |
| Standing 1/4-mile | 14.6 sec @ 96 mph |
| Top speed (drag limited) | 146 mph |
| Braking, 70-0 mph | 159 ft |
| Roadholding, 300-ft-dia skidpad | 0.90 g |
| EPA fuel economy, city driving | 22 mpg |
| C/D observed fuel economy | 22 mpg |