

RENNTECH MERCEDES- BENZ CLK60

A PORSCHE-EATING LUXO-COUPÉ by Jeff Bartlett

Fiddling with the superb Mercedes-Benz CLK is like approaching a piece of fine art with a touch-up brush; it would be far easier to ruin than to improve. RENNtech founder and former AMG technical director in North America, Harmut Feyhl has the credentials to pull off an envelope-expanding transformation worthy of the automotive elite and celebrities that are his customer base.

Beginning with a perfectly desirable Mercedes-Benz CLK430, RENNtech yanks the 4.3-liter/275-horsepower SOHC V-8 to punch it out to a 6.0-liter displacement by increasing both bore and stroke. Only premium components—purchased from AMG suppliers and custom-milled by independent shops—are used in the exhaustive \$50K engine conversion. "My cars are going to still be expensive even if I can save a few hundred dollars here or there," says Hartmut, "To me, it is worth it. I know these components are the best money can buy."

RENNtech-spec upgrades include lightweight Mahle pistons, aggressive camshafts, valves, connecting rods, rocker arms, intake manifold, throttle body, mass air meter, external oil-to-water cooler, engine management programming, and carbon-fiber air filter housing. Resulting output is 408 peak horsepower and nearly 500 pound-feet of torque.

In a corollary \$19K procedure, the standard five-speed automatic transmission was ambitiously replaced in this car with a Getrag six-speed manual. Even though Mercedes told Hartmut the swap was impossible, a few won't-take-no-for-an-answer insiders assisted in the development. The manual transmission works with a heavy-duty Sachs dual-mass flywheel and clutch, a setup designed to withstand the 6.0-liter's brutal power onslaught.

This exotic drivetrain combination purrs smoothly at idle, eager to receive heavy accelerator input. Tip into the throttle, and the engine races swiftly and smoothly, awaiting the next shift. The stick has microscopic throws with zero side play. Our test car required somewhat heavy clutch effort, with a shallow engage/disengage range of motion that conspired to permit lightning-quick shifts. Once rolling, judicious throttle application

unleashes raging primal forces in the CLK60 that seem to warp time and speed, pushing the driver deep into the supportive Recaro leather bucket seats and slowing the outside world. Motive force is applied through multipiece 18-inch OZ Racing F1 Cup wheels wrapped by wide Pirelli PZero tires at each corner. Behind the massive aluminum wheels lurk Brembo four-piston brakes, with 14-inch front discs and 12-inch rear discs plumbed with stainless lines.

Tested at Moroso Motorsports Park, in south Florida, the CLK60 demanded a mild 1300-1400-rpm launch. Much like a Dodge Viper, any less and the car limps away from the Christmas tree waiting for the revs to climb. Any more, and wheelspin liquifies the \$300-a-piece Pirelli tires. With the technique sorted out, the CLK60 hit 60 mph in a Corvette-spanking 4.7 seconds, knocking 1.8 seconds (or 28 percent) off the stock CLK430's time. Soaring down the 1320-foot track, the über coupe flew past the quarter-mile mark in 13.3 seconds at 106.4 mph, quicker than an Aston Martin DB7 Vantage, Ferrari 456M, or Porsche 911.

RENNtech fortified the suspension with custom-tuned components, including linear-rate H&R springs and Koni dampers. The lowered car remains flat and stable through turns, orbiting radii as if tethered. Steering is heavier due to tire fitment, with more feedback than the stock car, enhancing road feel without detracting from the upscale motoring experience. Pushed to its considerable limits, the rear-drive car oversteers predictably, encouraging naughty fun.

The interior makeover suits the high-tech spirit of the vehicle, dressing it with an extensive carbon fiber kit, gray-faced gauges, leather/carbon steering wheel, and CLK60 floor mats. Body-hugging seats provide the lateral support needed for the centrifuge-level forces this car craves, while also being quite comfortable for tame driving excursions.

Such luxury performance and luxury doesn't come cheap. The cost of the mods alone is near \$100,000, or almost \$150,000 complete. Pricey, to be sure, but, to a select few, well worth it.



The stock 4.3-liter V-8 is transformed into a 6.0-liter 408-horsepower velvet brute. A six-speed shifter takes center stage in the carbon-fiber-enshrouded interior.



GENERAL

Vehicle configuration	Front engine, rear drive, two-door, four-pass. coupe.
Engine type	90° V-8, SOHC, 3 valves/cyl.
Displacement c/c	363.3/5963
Engine modifications	Bored and stroked, machined heads, upgraded valvetrain, Mahle pistons, custom crankshaft, oil-to-water cooler, reprogrammed software, carbon fiber filter housing
Horsepower, hp @ rpm, SAE net	408 @ 5800
Torque, lb-ft @ rpm, SAE net	484 @ 3300
Transmission type	6-speed manual
Tires	Pirelli PZero Asimetrico 235/40ZR18, 265/35ZR18
Wheels	OZ Racing F1 Cup, two-piece aluminum
Other modifications	Body kit, performance suspension, Brembo brakes, carbon fiber interior, Recaro seats, six-speed transmission

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration, sec	
0-10 mph	0.4
0-20 mph	1.1
0-30 mph	1.7
0-40 mph	2.8
0-50 mph	3.7
0-60 mph	4.7
0-70 mph	6.3
0-80 mph	7.8
0-90 mph	9.5
0-100 mph	11.8
Standing quarter mile, sec/mph	13.3/106.2

PRICE

Base price (stock)	\$49,995
Price as tested	\$145,765
www.renntechmercedes.com	
561/845-7888	