



MINITEST

RENNTech CLK60

A Feyhl-safe method of outaccelerating the factory.

By October, Mercedes-Benz will display in its showrooms the much-anticipated CLK55 AMG, whose 342-hp V-8, according to the Germans, will make it "quicker than any previous Mercedes." Better yet, it will cost less than the \$73,000 E55.

To *C/D* readers, however, it will come as no surprise that Benz aftermarket tuner RENNTech, led by the irrepressible Hartmut Feyhl, has already been there, done that. Last February, Feyhl let us drive *his* notion of CLK nirvana. This one, naturally, boasts 6.0 liters of oomph rather than the factory's puny 5.4 and produces a sternum-snapping 408 horsepower and 465 pound-feet of leverage, enough to affect the tides on Mars.

What you first notice about RENNTech's black-as-pitch CLK60 is its steel rear fender flares, which one onlooker described as resembling "Johnny Cash's billfold's bulge." The car is as taut and muscle-bound as a 911 Turbo. Viewed from dead astern, those flares, housing squat 18-inch Pirelli P Zeros, alter the CLK's whole countenance, making it difficult to identify. Once civilians spy the twin NACA ducts on the hood, however, they have their answer: It's a hot rod.

And you're reminded of that the moment you twist the key. At idle, the engine sets the whole car a-quiverin', and the rumbling dual exhausts sound like some sort of colossal Dodge Ram V-10 haulin' Texas longhorns. We'd normally point out that Mercedes products aren't supposed to sound truckish, but there is one intriguing upside to the racket: When you crack the CLK60's accelerator, the

car leaps to attention like an ass-kicked pit bull. Sixty mph looms large in—hold on to your lederhosen—4.0 seconds, and the quarter-mile is a historic matter in only 12.4 seconds at 119 mph, meaning that this four-seat Benz is slightly quicker than a Mallett 435 Corvette. Keep your right foot planted, and the CLK60 will have clobbered 150 mph 2.4 seconds sooner than a Dodge Viper GTS. No kidding.

Wide-open-throttle upshifts, at 6000 rpm, remain as smooth as Gerber's finest, and the CLK60's steering is remarkably light, although the pot-walloping P Zeros do minor damage to the tracking and induce a moment of skittishness just off center. But who really cares?

Startling civilians is more fun. Tromp the pedal at 45 mph, and there's an instantaneous gear kickdown, a jolt of spinal compression, a doubling in decibels, and . . . wait a second, how can we now be traveling 120 mph when all we needed was to pass one Buick

and two 18-wheelers and . . . hey, is that a cop up there? Dispatching dawdling roadmates is so scalpel-quick, so gratifyingly amusing, that you spontaneously repeat the maneuver over and over, like a kid who's discovered he can pull wheelies on his Schwinn.

Oh, by the way, did we mention that this Benz is capable of 172 mph?

Sure, the usual creamy Mercedes throttle tip-in is compromised, the big Brembo brakes are initially grabby, the engine-conversion alone costs \$50,000, and the CLK60's deep-bass burble threatens to annoy the very doctors and pro athletes who are RENNTech's mainstay customers. On the other hand, Feyhl *guarantees* his CLK60 will humiliate the upcoming factory-built CLK55 AMG, and that's all that many of those doctors and sports heroes need to hear. You could ask Ken Griffey Jr. He bought a black RENNTech CLK60 himself. Then he bought a white one. Griffey runs an integrated household.

—John Phillips

Vehicle type: front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 4-passenger, 2-door sedan
Price as tested: \$133,222 (base price: \$116,222)

Engine type: SOHC 24-valve V-8, aluminum block and heads,

RENNTech/Bosch ME2.1 engine-control system with port fuel injection

Displacement 364 cu in, 5969cc

Power (SAE net) 408 bhp @ 5800 rpm

Torque (SAE net) 465 lb-ft @ 2400 rpm

Transmission 5-speed automatic with lockup torque converter

Wheelbase 105.9 in

Length 180.2 in

Curb weight 3400 lb

Zero to 60 mph 4.0 sec

Zero to 100 mph 8.9 sec

Zero to 130 mph 15.1 sec

Standing 1/4-mile 12.4 sec @ 119 mph

Top speed (drag limited) 172 mph

EPA fuel economy, city driving (est) 18 mpg

* Base price includes all performance-enhancing options.



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