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Mercedes-Benz History: The Mercedes-Benz C 124 Series

THE COUPÉ VARIANT OF THE 124 SERIES WAS INTRODUCED AT THE GENEVA MOTOR SHOW IN 1987, THE FIRST MODELS WERE THE 230 CE AND 300 CE



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The Mercedes-Benz model history features various Coupés, each stands in an exceptional way for comfort, dynamic, elegance and style and is consequently a classic right from the start. At the 1987 Geneva Motor Show the company presented the Coupés of the 124 series, which were produced up until 1996. To this day they impress with their balanced, low-key design and are thus the ideal modern classic. The coupé is an exclusive body shape and people who drive such a car have style and demonstrate an appreciation for the

individual.

The 124-series Coupés, internally designated C 124, perfectly appeal to this clientele. Models 230 CE and 300 CE were the first to debut. In autumn 1989 the 300 CE-24 was added as new flagship model. One year later it was joined by the 200 CE, which was intended solely for export to Italy. The year 1992 saw the arrival of the 200 CE, 220 CE and 320 CE with up-to-date four-valve-per-cylinder engines. In 1993 the powerful E 36 AMG Coupé marked the brilliant climax of the series in regard to output.

Stylistically the Coupés of the 124 series display their affinity to the Saloon, presenting themselves with the same composed, clear lines for which chief designer Bruno Sacco was responsible. And yet their looks make them cars in their own right: the Coupés are a little shorter than the corresponding Saloons, are designed as two-doors, and their windscreen and rear window have a flatter angle. These stylistic features emphasise the character of these exclusive vehicles.

For the technology the engineers fell back on the Saloon: the Coupés have the multi-link independent rear suspension of the four-door cars and their shock absorber strut independent front suspension located by individual wishbones. The braking system also originated unchanged from the Saloons. Features like this ensure the high safety for which Mercedes-Benz stands. The passive safety is characterised by an elaborate bodyshell structure which provides crumple zones that deform according to a specific pattern and attains excellent ratings for stability and stiffness despite the lack of B-pillars.

The vehicles scored high on safety with further equipment features, such as the anti-lock braking system ABS, which was standard equipment in the 300 CE from the outset and in the 230 CE from February 1988 on. In autumn 1988 all cars of the series got a heated nearside exterior mirror and, adopted from the S-Class, a windscreen washing system with a heated washer reservoir including heated nozzles and hoses.

The innovative strength of the company found expression in details like the eccentric-sweep panoramic windscreen wiper in the 124 series, which ensured a swept area that was the largest of any car, but also the electric belt feeder, which automatically extended the Coupé seat belts to a convenient gripping position once driver or front passenger had taken their seats.

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Mercedes-Benz set new standards for comfort with the 124 series. The engineers have an extremely comprehensive understanding of the term comfort: not just a pleasant atmosphere in the interior, with comfortable upholstery and high-grade materials, a sophisticated suspension system and refined engines create a sense of comfort, but the perfect interplay of all vehicle components. Drivers always have the feeling that with this vehicle they get the perfect mobility solution to suit their needs. The 124 series is a prime example of this philosophy.

The Coupés are special highlights in the model portfolio. Accordingly they have an extensive range of standard equipment which admittedly is often upgraded with further extras by the buyers of these exclusive vehicles – a plus point for all those who today look for a modern classic with many amenities.

Within a nine-year period, 141,498 Coupés of the 124 series were built. This may sound like a lot at first, but the figure is put into perspective by the overall production volume for the series: inclusive of all body variants almost 2.6 million vehicles were produced. Today there are still fairly many Coupés in daily use, but the appearance they present on the streets is what it always has been: exclusive.

And that is precisely what buyers of a 124-series Coupé today value, who see it as a modern classic. It combines comfort, dynamism and style with complete suitability for everyday use. The perfect supply of parts through the Mercedes-Benz service organisation also guarantees this – almost every part is still available. The company even has complete vehicles to offer: they are available at Mercedes-Benz Young Classics in Stuttgart for purchase or rental.

Model history: the C 124 series (1986 to 1996)

- Convincing body design with timeless elegance
- Various four- and six-cylinder models to choose from
- Most powerful model: the Mercedes-Benz E 36 AMG

The Coupé variant of the 124 series was introduced at the Geneva Motor Show in March 1987, exactly ten years after the presentation there of the previous models of the 123 series. The first models out were the 230 CE and 300 CE. Though technically and stylistically closely related to the Saloon, the Coupé was a model in its own right.

The floor unit of the four-door was the basis, but wheelbase and overall length were 85 millimetres shorter. That and the uncompromising two-door design underscore the coupé character. Accordingly, in construction and form the body represents a completely independent variant, as was the case with the previous model. The visual commonality with the Saloon was limited to the front end up to the A-pillars, the tail lights and the dashboard. All other body parts had been redesigned. That includes the windscreen and the rear window, which were angled more flatly (1.0 and 1.5 degrees, respectively) compared with the Saloon. An important side effect of the elegant design: the low coefficient of drag with a Cd of 0.30 to 0.31 (depending on engine) appreciably reduced the fuel consumption of the Coupé versus the previous series.

Where the engineering is concerned it was a different story: the mechanical components of the Coupés were completely identical with those of their four-door counterparts. Like the Saloons they had a multi-link independent rear suspension that further improved the handling characteristics compared with the previous models, plus a shock absorber strut independent front suspension located by individual wishbones. The braking system likewise was taken unchanged from the four-doors.

The drive system technology also came from the Saloons. The debut models 230 CE and 300 CE were fitted as standard with a closed-loop catalytic converter. Optionally they could also be ordered as so-called catalyst retrofit versions in which a closed-loop catalytic converter could be installed any time subsequently, and which had a slightly higher output. This offer applied in the transitional period when unleaded petrol was not yet available everywhere. The 230 CE had a four-cylinder engine (M 102) with an output of 97 kW (catalyst retrofit version: 100 kW), the 300 CE a six-cylinder with 132 kW (catalyst retrofit version: 138 kW). A five-speed manual transmission was fitted as standard in both variants. For an additional charge a four-speed automatic transmission was available whose fourth gear was not designed as an overdrive, i.e., engine speed could be fully utilised. Externally the 300 CE could be identified by its twin tailpipes – and the model plate, unless it was deleted on ordering.

It goes without saying that the safety standard attained in the Saloons of the 124 series was adopted for the Coupés. The missing B-pillars could be compensated by reinforced A-pillars, rocker panels and doors as well as a particularly high percentage of high-strength sheet steel. This made the overall weight of the Coupés slightly higher than the Saloons'. The design engineers trod new paths in designing the end section of the roof: the interior panelling of the roof was extended slightly over the rear window, benefiting the safety and comfort of back seat passengers: in dangerous situations neither the edge of the panel nor the edge of the window were close to the head. And since the roof, despite the coupé shape, did not begin its downward slope until well to the rear, the passengers in the rear had much more headroom for themselves than one is accustomed to in a coupé. The overlapping area was visually camouflaged by a dark pattern on the rear window.

The anti-lock braking system ABS was standard equipment in the 300 CE from the outset, and in the 230 CE from February 1988 on.

A characteristic design element documenting the independence of the Coupé design compared with the other variants of the series were the rub strips combined with integral side skirts. Between the wheel cut-outs, at bumper level, they created an optical link between front apron and rear apron and, like the aprons, were painted in contrasting metallic colours.

As in the SEC Coupés a belt feeder extended the seat belt as soon as driver or front passenger took their seats. This comfort feature is necessary because the seat belts are positioned fairly well to the rear owing to the elimination of the B-pillar.

Like all models of the series, the Coupés got an extended range of standard equipment in September 1988. It now included a heated and electrically adjustable nearside exterior mirror and the windscreen washing system of the S-Class with a heated washer reservoir including heated nozzles and hoses.

Model refinement packages keep the Coupé up to date

In September 1989 at the Frankfurt International Motor Show Mercedes-Benz showed a revised intermediate class model range, including Coupés. In the Saloons and the Estate the refinements focussed on changes to the styling of the body and the redesign of the interior, while on the outside the Coupés presented themselves practically unchanged since they had been equipped from the start of their production with the side rub strips which were the most conspicuous feature of the facelifted 124 series models, and in a way served as model for the revamp of the other body variants.

The side skirts were optically upgraded with narrow polished stainless steel trim strips which continued along the tops of the front and rear aprons. In a discreet form they brought back that often missed touch of sparkling chrome after a long period of abstinence. They were complemented with chrome trim elements on the door handles and changed wheel embellishers in which the Mercedes star and a narrow trim ring on the circumference also were chrome-plated. Another new feature were exterior mirror housings painted the colour of the car. The interior also presented itself in a new design offering improved front and rear seats and numerous improvements to details.

For the facelifted 124 series, from September on the Sportline package familiar from the 201-series models also was available as an optional extra. External features were the sports suspension with wide-base tyres size 205/60 R 15 on 7 J x 15 light-alloy or steel rims and a lower-slung (23 millimetres) body. The other appointments of the package included 20-percent stiffer springs and shock absorbers along with modified interior appointments with a leather steering wheel (diameter 390 millimetres instead of 400) and leather gearshift lever as well as individual front and rear seats.

Apart from said improvements in design and appointments the revamped series 124 model range shown in Frankfurt offered five entirely new models as well, among them a Coupé, the 300 CE-24. This powerful variant was created applying the modular principle and used the 162 kW 3.0-litre four-cylinder engine (M 104) of the

300 SL-24. Owing to the different installation conditions, however, it was not possible to use the same catalytic converter cross-section as in the SL so that the rated output was 8 kW lower. The 300 CE-24 functioned as new flagship model of the intermediate class and accordingly had a higher level of appointments including light-alloy wheels, leather steering wheel and leather shift lever, burred walnut trim, and courtesy lights in the doors. The electronically controlled five-speed automatic transmission shown in the 300 CE-24 was a world first.

Catalyst retrofit versions were no longer available. From June 1990 on the Coupé also was produced as the 200 CE featuring the tried and tested 2.0-litre four-cylinder engine (M 102, 87 kW with and 90 kW without catalytic converter), albeit exclusively for export to Italy.

In September 1992 the company showed a revised intermediate class model range – at that point two million vehicles of the 124 series had already rolled off the assembly line. If the emphasis had been on styling changes in the first facelift in autumn 1989, this time Mercedes-Benz concentrated on the engine and appointments. The engine range of the Coupé models was completely converted to four-valve technology. Two four-cylinder units with 2.0 and 2.2 litres displacement from the newly developed M 111 series replaced the two-valve-per-cylinder units. The new engines were distinguished by increased output and higher torque over the entire engine speed range; all the same, they had lower fuel consumption. The smaller engine developed 100 kW, the larger 110 kW. An increase in the volume of the catalytic converter reduced the pollutant emissions. With the introduction of the new engines the model designations changed: the 230 CE became the 220 CE; the 200 CE export model, which also got the four-valve-per-cylinder engine, was able to retain its name because the displacement was virtually identical.

The six-cylinder models, the 300 CE and 300 CE-24, were removed from the sales range and replaced by the 320 CE. Its 3.2-litre four-valve engine, which had been providing good service in the S-Class for the previous one-and-a-half years, was developed from the existing 3.0-litre four-valve unit of the M 104 series and bore the same series number, but had changed dimensions for bore and stroke. All four- and six-cylinders now had the same bore – an advantage for more flexible, economical production. The rated output of 162 kW was the same as that of the old four-valve unit, but it was reached at 5500 rpm and thus 900 rpm earlier; the peak torque was much higher and was also shifted towards the lower engine speed range.

Apart from the new engine range, the model refinements included distinctly upgraded standard appointments for all models of the intermediate class. A driver airbag and electrically adjustable exterior mirrors on both sides were part of the standard specifications from October 1992 on. Central locking and a five-speed transmission, which were included in the basic equipment of the Saloon and Estate at this time, had been standard equipment items in the Coupés from the very start of their production.

A discreetly modified radiator grille

In June 1993 all series 124 models were stylistically updated and adapted to the other model series. The most striking feature of the modified vehicles was the radiator grille, which was redesigned after the S-Class. In this so-called integrated radiator the much narrower chrome surround compared with the previous design is harmoniously integrated into the bonnet, and the Mercedes star sits on the bonnet, as in the S-Class Saloons. The changes to the light units could not escape notice: the front direction indicators were given colourless glass covers and the tail lights bichromatic covers which were coloured a uniform white-grey in the area of the indicators and reversing light. The yellow indicator light at the front and the rear was produced by colour light bulbs. Changes also were made to the wheels and the bumpers. The steel disc wheels got new hub caps in a six-hole design, and the protective mouldings on the bumpers now were painted the colour of the other detachable parts. In addition, the protective strip on the rear bumper was extended to the wheel cut-outs.

With the start of the sale of the redesigned models, in June 1993 a new nomenclature came into effect also for the 124 series. In analogy to the S-Class and the new

202-series C-Class the intermediate class now was called the E-Class. The model designations, too, now followed a modified system in which letters document that a car belongs to a certain class. The letter(s) were followed by a three-digit number which still was based on engine displacement. The "E" formerly used as suffix indicating an injection engine could be dropped since carburettor engines now belonged to the past. Mercedes also dispensed with codifying body variants like coupé and estate with a "C" and "T" since they were obvious anyway. Under the new nomenclature the two-doors now were called the E 220 Coupé and E 320 Coupé; the model plate, however, only documented the

class to which the model belonged and the engine displacement.

For the Coupé aficionado with sporting ambitions, from September 1993 the E 36 AMG, a more powerful variant fitted with a 200 kW 3.6-litre four-valve engine from AMG, was available. The power plant was created at AMG from the M 104 production engine with 3.2 litres displacement. Its bore was enlarged to 91 millimetres, the stroke to

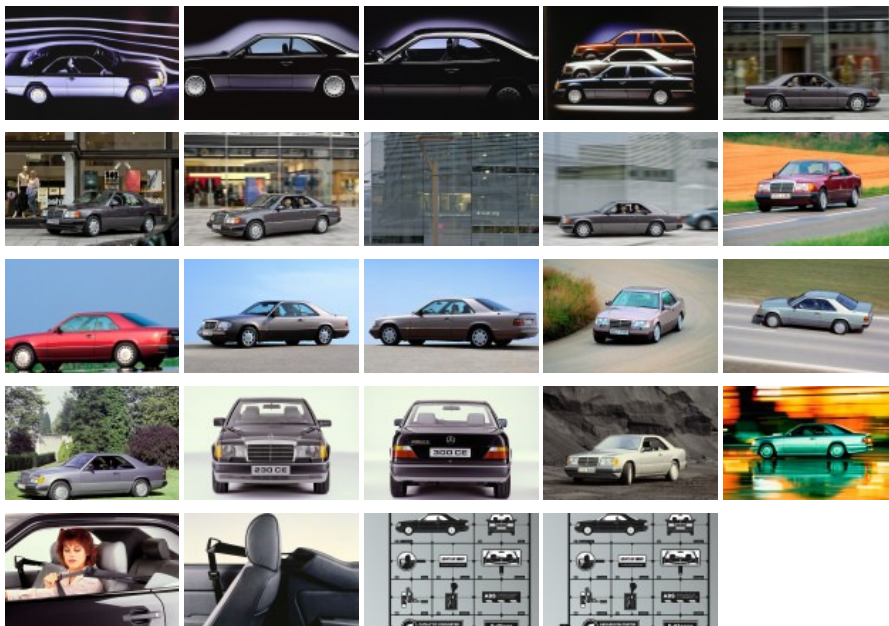
92.4 millimetres. Standard feature: a four-speed automatic transmission. The wheels and brakes were adapted to the higher power and the final drive ratio was lower (1:2.82). With discreetly enlarged chassis fairings the new flagship Coupé of the 124 series also contrasted stylistically with its less dynamic sister models. Front spoiler, side skirts and rear apron were painted the colour of the car and harmoniously integrated into the body shape; the picture was rounded off by standard-fit light-alloy wheels (diameter: 43.18 centimetres) in AMG design.

To offer less performance-minded customers a more reasonably priced entry-level model the general sales range was extended in December 1994 by the E 200 Coupé, which delivered 100 kW and previously, since mid-1990, exclusively had been built for export to Italy, Greece and Portugal.

Production of the 124-series E-Class Coupés came to an end in March 1996, nine years after their debut at the Geneva Motor Show. For Coupé lovers this meant hard times since the market launch of the successor models was not planned until summer 1997. In all 141,498 units, or easily 40 percent more compared with the previous models, were produced in Sindelfingen.

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kikikud

The 230 was my first and most beloved new car; I have since owned many MB's and but have only kept my original 230.

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