

# Mercedes-Benz 190E 2.6



PHOTOGRAPHY: DICK KELLEY

## *The little prince with the big heart.*

• Mercedes-Benz manufactures more than just cars: it builds the rolling aristocracy of the roads. From New York to Nairobi, from Brussels to Budapest, the nouveau riche, the riche, and the almost riche all agree on one thing: arriving in a Mercedes-Benz is about the best way to say you've arrived.

The new 190E 2.6 embodies every last iota of Mercedes tradition. Daimler-Benz is a technological tortoise inching indefatigably forward, often managing to stay a half step ahead of the car industry's hares. Each new M-B model evolves logically from its predecessors; no great leaps are encouraged or sought. Thus everything that makes Mercedes-Benzes the objects of both reverence and puzzlement is present in the 190E 2.6.

You'll recall that the four-door 190, Mercedes' smallest model, was conceived

during the darkest moments of OPEC's last fuel shut-off. In the three years since its arrival on these shores, the 190 has benefited from the slow but steady flow of improvements enjoyed by all M-B products. Its handling balance was improved with fresh suspension calibrations. Larger wheels and tires strengthened its once-feeble grip on the road. Its engines were fortified. Mercedes even made a model for hard-charging enthusiasts: the 190E 2.3-16, a winged autobahn screamer with a Cosworth-designed sixteen-valve cylinder head.

This year's twist on performance enhancement is the introduction of six-cylinder refinement. Even as the 190 was going from computer console to reality, M-B's studious engineers foresaw an end to the fuel-crisis hysteria and looked forward to the day when their car would require an

engine larger and smoother than its four-cylinder. They left just enough room under the 190's hood to shoehorn in a compact six-cylinder powerplant.

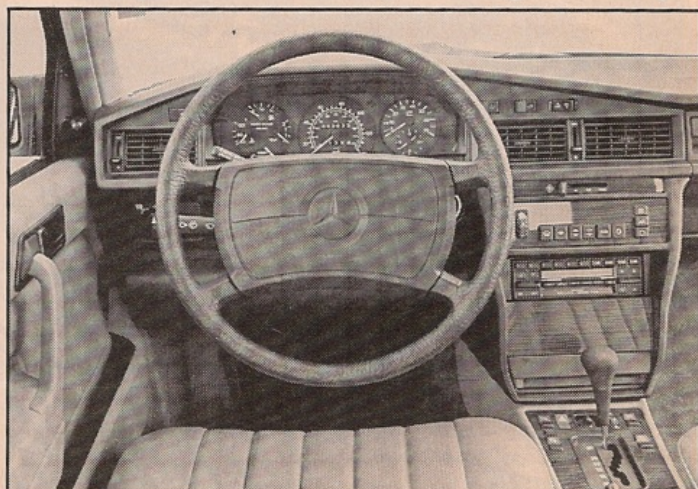
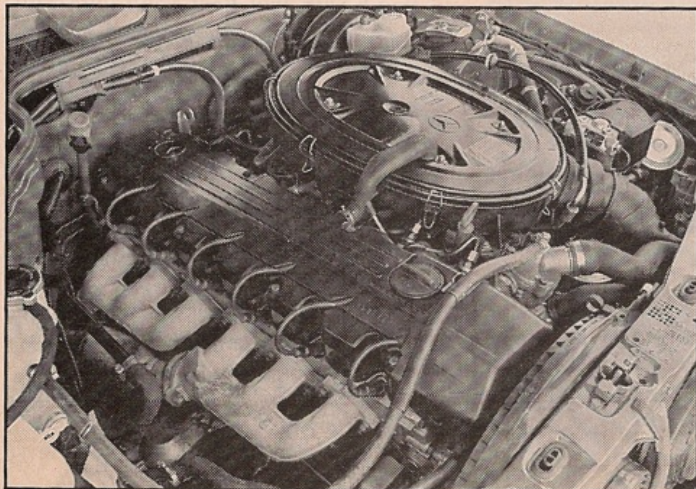
The new engine, which also powers the just-introduced 260E mid-size sedan, is the smaller relative of the creamy 3.0-liter in-line six that whirs contentedly under the hood of the impressive 300E. Reducing the six's displacement by 363cc was merely a matter of decreasing its cylinder bore by 5.6 millimeters. The size of its valves was also reduced slightly, but that's about it for major changes.

Like its 3.0-liter big brother, the 2.6-liter is a deep breather. Although the smaller engine's 158-hp maximum output is 19 hp lower than the 3.0-liter's, it still compares well with the most potent two-valve-per-cylinder motors in its size range from anywhere in the world.

The marriage of little prince and big engine couldn't be happier. Our 190E test car was fitted with M-B's four-speed automatic, the right transmission for the job. The Daimler-Benz automatic, with its superlative gated shifter, is a model of refinement, preferable to M-B's wide-ratio five-speed in almost all conditions.

The new drivetrain works almost as well as the 300E's. The 2.6-liter six is only nine horsepower shy of the output of the hot-rod 2.3-16's sixteen-valve four, and it delivers equal torque. You expect brisk performance and you get it, with 60 mph arriving 8.1 seconds after liftoff and the quarter-mile going by in 16.4 seconds at a racy 84 mph.

Around town there is always plenty of torque on call when you need to squirt ahead of traffic. Hold your foot down and the tranny lets the engine fly right to the redline—and beyond. We're fairly sure our car's gearbox calibrations were off, because they let the engine rev well past





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## MERCEDES 190E 2.6

the 6200-rpm red zone in both second and third gears. Very un-Mercedes-like.

Not that the silky six protests such treatment. The 2.6-liter sounds as if it were made out of money when you call for all the horses, and it settles back to a well-oiled hum when you're just cruising. An enthusiast could live on the sound alone.

Thanks to a reasonable 0.35 drag coefficient and just-right gearing, the 2.6's acceleration doesn't plateau until 128 mph. It's only when you get well up in the triple-digit range that you can appreciate the full measure of the 190E's breeding. The air-stream rushes by in a hushed *whoosh*, the suspension keeps a firm grasp on the ride motions, and the tracking is straight and true. A hundred twenty is inspirational.

The other changes made over the years do their part, too. The steering is now direct and accurate, and the improved chassis serves up enough agility and grip to keep a serious driver involved when the asphalt ribbon tries to tie itself in a knot.

If only the 190E were as accomplished at pampering its passengers. Daimler-Benz's stubborn insistence on clinging to a rear-drive layout puts a serious dent in this car's practicality. The 190 is about the size of a Honda Accord, but it offers nowhere near the spread-out room. Six-footers won't be comfortable in back for long. The rear seat itself is outstanding, but what good is a comfortable perch if your head hits the roof and your legs are locked in by the front seatbacks?

The driver, too, could be made more comfortable. His legroom is limited by the bulky knee bolster that is part of the standard Supplemental Restraint System (which includes a driver's-side air bag), and the steering wheel is too low, too far away, and too big in diameter.

The cabin may be tight, but it is tidy. True to tradition, the quality of the 190E, inside and out, is past great and headed for awesome. How can vinyl upholstery look so luxurious? How is it that Benzes fit together better than anything else in the world? How does Mercedes get the doors to thunk with that bank-vault authority? And how can it keep a straight face while charging so much for such a small car?

It's all part of the Mercedes-Benz mystique—the irresistible force that mesmerizes people into parting with huge sums of money for cars wearing the three-pointed star. Even considering the 2.6's wealth of standard features—including ABS brakes—its \$32,200 base price strikes us as going, going, *gone*.

A host of larger, more comfortable sedans with equal or better performance are available for the same money or less, and for not much more, you could even have a 260E. We know that royalty has its price, but even for a little prince with a big heart, \$32,000 is a king's ransom. —Rich Ceppos

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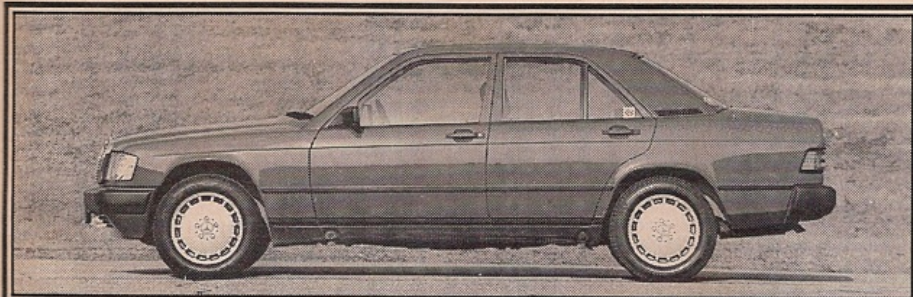
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Vehicle type: front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 4-door sedan

Price as tested: \$32,200

Options on test car: none

Standard accessories: power steering, windows, and locks, A/C, cruise control, rear defroster

Sound system: Becker Grand Prix electronic AM/FM-stereo radio/cassette, 4 speakers

**ENGINE**

Type ..... 6-in-line, iron block and aluminum head  
 Bore x stroke ..... 3.26 x 3.16 in, 82.9 x 80.3mm  
 Displacement ..... 159 cu in, 2599cc  
 Compression ratio ..... 9.2:1  
 Fuel system ..... Bosch KE-Jetronic fuel injection  
 Emissions controls ..... 3-way catalytic converter, feedback fuel-air-ratio control  
 Valve gear ..... chain-driven single overhead cam, hydraulic lifters  
 Power (SAE net) ..... 158 bhp @ 5800 rpm  
 Torque (SAE net) ..... 162 lb-ft @ 4600 rpm  
 Redline ..... 6200 rpm

**DRIVETRAIN**

Transmission ..... 4-speed automatic  
 Final-drive ratio ..... 3.27:1  

Gear	Ratio	Mph/1000 rpm	Max. test speed
I	4.25	5.1	29 mph (5700 rpm)
II	2.41	8.9	61 mph (6800 rpm)
III	1.49	14.5	96 mph (6600 rpm)
IV	1.00	21.5	128 mph (5950 rpm)

**DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES**

Wheelbase ..... 104.9 in  
 Track, F/R ..... 56.6/55.8 in  
 Length ..... 175.1 in  
 Width ..... 66.1 in  
 Height ..... 54.7 in  
 Frontal area ..... 20.7 sq ft

Ground clearance ..... 5.9 in  
 Curb weight ..... 2922 lb  
 Weight distribution, F/R ..... 57.2/42.8%  
 Fuel capacity ..... 14.5 gal  
 Oil capacity ..... 6.3 qt  
 Water capacity ..... 9.5 qt

**CHASSIS/BODY**

Type ..... unit construction with 1 rubber-isolated crossmember  
 Body material ..... welded steel stampings

**INTERIOR**

SAE volume, front seat ..... 48 cu ft  
 rear seat ..... 34 cu ft  
 trunk space ..... 12 cu ft  
 Front seats ..... bucket  
 Seat adjustments ..... fore and aft, seatback angle, height  
 General comfort ..... poor fair **good** excellent  
 Fore-and-aft support ..... poor fair **good** excellent  
 Lateral support ..... poor fair **good** excellent

**SUSPENSION**

F: ..... ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar  
 R: ..... ind, 2 lateral links and 3 diagonal trailing links per side, coil springs, anti-roll bar

**STEERING**

Type ..... recirculating ball, power-assisted  
 Turns lock-to-lock ..... 3.5  
 Turning circle curb-to-curb ..... 35.0 ft

**BRAKES**

F: ..... 10.3 x 0.9-in vented disc  
 R: ..... 10.2 x 0.4-in disc  
 Power assist ..... vacuum with anti-lock control

**WHEELS AND TIRES**

Wheel size ..... 6.0 x 15 in  
 Wheel type ..... cast aluminum  
 Tires ..... Michelin MXV, 185/65VR-15  
 Test inflation pressures, F/R ..... 30/33 psi

**CAR AND DRIVER TEST RESULTS**

**ACCELERATION**

	Seconds
Zero to 30 mph	2.8
40 mph	4.2
50 mph	6.0
60 mph	8.1
70 mph	11.0
80 mph	14.3
90 mph	18.8
100 mph	27.3
Top-gear passing time, 30-50 mph	4.4
50-70 mph	6.7
Standing 1/4-mile	16.4 sec @ 84 mph
Top speed	128 mph

**BRAKING**

70-0 mph @ impending lockup ..... 176 ft  
 Fade ..... none moderate heavy

**HANDLING**

Roadholding, 300-ft-dia skidpad ..... 0.78 g  
 Understeer ..... minimal moderate excessive

**COAST-DOWN MEASUREMENTS**

Road horsepower @ 30 mph ..... 6 hp  
 50 mph ..... 15 hp  
 70 mph ..... 32 hp

**FUEL ECONOMY**

EPA city driving ..... 19 mpg  
 EPA highway driving ..... 22 mpg  
 C/D observed fuel economy ..... 17 mpg

**INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL**

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 Full-throttle acceleration ..... 76 dBA  
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