

RUF STUFF

Porsches may be his bread and butter but tuner Alois Ruf maintains a long term relationship with Mercedes too with his 230,000-mile 500E **WORDS** IAN KUAH **IMAGES** IAN KUAH/DAN TRENT

ASK ANY PORSCHE enthusiast to name the most famous tuned 911 of all time and their answer will almost certainly be the Ruf CTR 'Yellow Bird.' While it may look to all intents and purposes like a mildly warmed over narrow-bodied Carrera, the CTR is really a completely reengineered car.

In a joint top speed shootout event organised by *Auto Motor & Sport* and *Road & Track* magazines in July 1987, the 469bhp biturbo CTR reached 211.5mph at VW's Ehra Lessien test track, soundly trouncing major league supercars like the Ferrari Testarossa and Porsche 959.

Soon afterwards, a video was made of it on a fast lap of the

legendary Nürburgring Nordschleife with ace driver 'Mr Opposite Lock' Stefan Roser, at the helm. Shot in-car, trackside and from a helicopter, this blinding piece of film shows the Yellow Bird powersliding through every bend on the world's toughest race track, leaving a smoking rooster tail of Mr Dunlop's finest in its wake.

These two events turned Ruf from a top Porsche tuner into a legend, and put the small Bavarian town of Pfaffenhausen at the top of the list of must-do automotive pilgrimages. Since then, Ruf Automobile GmbH has gone from strength to strength, and nearly two decades later, today's hand built Ruf RT12 boasts 650bhp and 218mph.



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▶ JUST THE FACTS

Mercedes-Benz 500E (W124)

ENGINE M119 4.973cc V8

POWER 322bhp@5,700rpm

TORQUE 35.4lb ft@3,900rpm

TRANSMISSION 4-speed auto, RWD

WEIGHT 1,700kg

0-62MPH 6.1sec

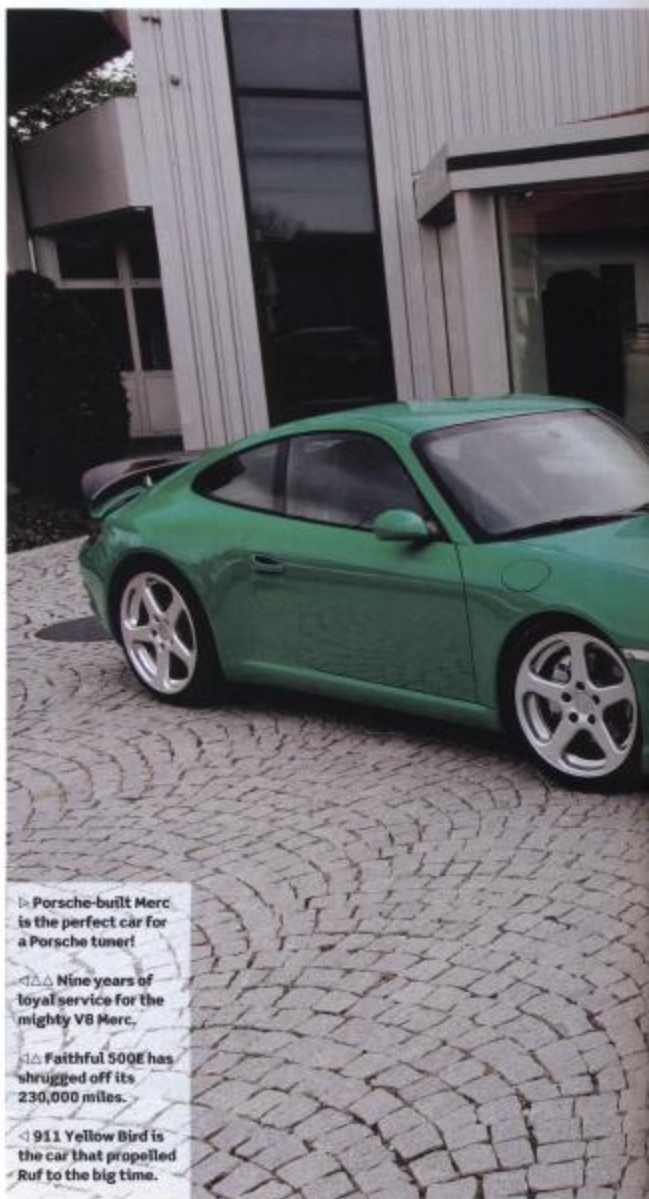
TOP SPEED 155mph (controlled)

YEARS PRODUCED 1991-1993

OVERVIEW

Super fast and very discreet, the 500E's Porsche input and 5-litre V8 guarantee it a special place in the hearts of true Mercedes enthusiasts

Figures for 500E up to October 1992



▶ Porsche-built Merc is the perfect car for a Porsche tuner!

▲▲ Nine years of loyal service for the mighty V8 Merc.

▲ Faithful 500E has shrugged off its 230,000 miles.

◀ 911 Yellow Bird is the car that propelled Ruf to the big time.

So what does the man behind the world's only accredited non-factory manufacturer of Porsche-based cars use as his daily driver? Needing four seats to ferry clients and family around in comfort with speed, the answer could only be one car – the Mercedes-Benz 500E. With its 'built by Porsche' connection, this really is the perfect daily driver for Alois Ruf.

"The 500E is a Mercedes of the old school in design and has bulletproof build quality," Alois says. "I like the philosophy of a car that does not show much from the outside but goes like hell. This dovetails very nicely with the Ruf ethos of form follows function, something the real automobile

connoisseur appreciates."

Ruf bought this 1992 model year, one owner 500E in the spring of 1997 with 100,000km on the clock. "In the beginning, I had one significant problem with the car," he recalls. "The ABS sensor had an intermittent fault, which put the car into limp home mode. However, once the sensor was changed, there were no more issues and the car has remained totally reliable ever since."

GOOD COMPANY

Nine years of ownership have seen Alois pile on the kilometres and when we photographed it earlier this year the odometer was reading an intergalactic 372,530km

(231,490 miles). Is this the highest mileage 500E out there?

The dampers have been replaced once, and in 2001 the car was resprayed in its original silver metallic hue by Ruf's in-house body shop as the original paint had picked up a lot of stone chips and other small imperfections. Now nearly 14 years old, this 500E is not racking up the kilometres as quickly as before. A green Ruf R Kompressor is Alois Ruf's current daily car, his wife and young daughter travelling in a safe but sensible turbodiesel Volvo XC90 holdall. The Mercedes is now only pressed into service when guests are visiting the factory, which is admittedly quite often.

"I only did 10,000km in the Mercedes last year and kept it off the road over the winter," Alois admits, revealing that, considering the 5-litre engine, 500E ownership isn't as expensive as you might think. "I get around 24 to 26mpg in normal driving, without using the kickdown."

Asked if he would ever sell the 500E Alois replies, "It is one of the greatest Mercedes cars ever, but it is worth so little with this high mileage. So when I finally stop driving it, it will go into my private collection." Sitting alongside a few rare classic Porsches, an E-Type Jaguar and a vintage Rolls-Royce, the 500E will be in good company. **EM**

