

# DOUBLE STRENGTH

Murray Ambler-Shattock searched long and hard for an E36 estate, eventually finding a car with an unexpected bonus under the bonnet...

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 DRIVE ESTATES"



Not all of Murray's Mercs are full size...

**T**he fear of discovering a hidden secret in your recently purchased, secondhand car is usually the stuff of nightmares. For Murray Ambler-Shattock however the secret past of his E36 estate turned out to be more interesting than he could ever have hoped for.

A family man with four children, the W124 E280 saloon he'd bought previously (and still owns) was fast being outgrown by the ever-burgeoning Ambler-Shattock clan. Clearly something with more space was required and Murray's W124-inspired enthusiasm for the three-pointed star meant it had to be a Mercedes.

"Like most people I consider carefully where to spend my money," says Murray. "Most of the options left me fairly uninspired and I just kept coming back to the W124. The E280 has been such a joy to own that an estate version seemed the obvious choice." Counseled by his car-mad stepfather, who had himself owned several Mercedes, Murray's initial thought was to track down a good six-cylinder W124 seven-seater and be done with it.

## IN THE FAMILY

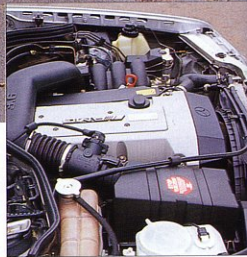
One of the Mercedes Murray's stepfather had owned, and allowed Murray to drive, was an E36 Coupé, a car he credits as overturning his prejudices that Mercedes were "an old man's car". When he realised he could have an estate version of the E36, Murray knew it was the answer to his dreams. Now all he had to do was find one.

"I was told that they only ever made fourteen right-hand-drive estates," offers Murray, "and that I'd be very lucky to find one at all." Find one he did though, taking his stepfather along to see it and offer his expert opinion. "He drove it and said it seemed good," says Murray. "But he said he thought there was something different about it that he couldn't quite put his finger on." Satisfied that it was a good example, Murray handed over the cash and took it along to a nearby Brabus dealership to see about servicing.

Cross referencing of the car's chassis numbers revealed a surprise Murray hadn't bargained for. "The chaps got very excited," he recalls. "They were saying this code means this and this one means that and it turned out that the engine had been breathed on by Brabus as well as AMG." Obviously not shy with the pennies, the original buyer of Murray's car had worked his way through the AMG options list and found he still had money to burn. This was spent on bringing the engine up to full Brabus 3.6 spec, resulting in a new cylinder head and a power hike from 268bhp to a touch over 300bhp. More aggressive cams endow the Brabus engine with more top-end grunt and an aggressive, rev-happy character unfamiliar to most Mercedes big-sixes.

The fact that Brabus had also had a hand in his E36 came as a complete surprise to Murray, who discovered that the car had in fact been stolen and stripped of "anything that said AMG or Brabus on it" before being recovered. In their haste to get the car back on the road in a driveable condition, the previous owners had simply used stock parts and the absent Brabus cam cover had been replaced with a standard item.

The more Murray has discovered about his car the greater his enthusiasm for it grows. Piece by piece he's been restoring it to its former glory and in the meantime it continues doing what W124 estates do best; namely playing the part of efficient, luxurious transport for his family. That dad can also have a bit of fun when he's on his own only adds to the appeal...



Clockwise from above: Sleek and discreet, Murray Ambler-Shattock's E36 estate is a rare car; Brabus' cylinder head conversion transforms the character of the 3.6-litre six. Soft Nappa leather is one of the many attractive options fitted to Murray's car.