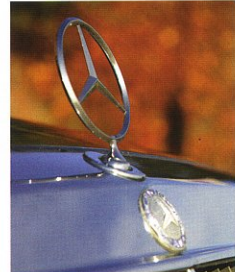


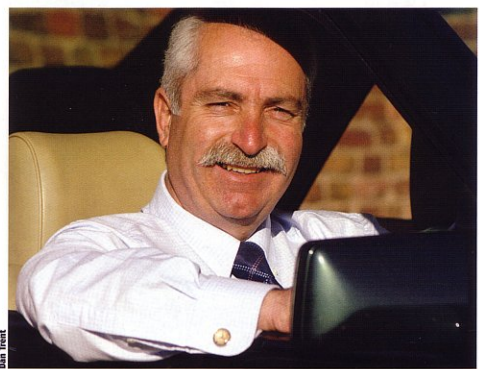


"IN THE WORDS OF AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD FAMILY MEMBER, 'IT LOOKS AND FEELS LIKE A POSH PERSON'S CAR!'"



GREAT EXPECTATION

Ali Goultekin finally realised his long-held dream of owning a Mercedes coupé with a 320CE, writes Leah Milner



Dan Trevis

When he was only 11, Ali Goultekin was already driving an ex-army Land Rover, a column-change Vanguard and an Austin Cambridge over his father's farmland in North Cyprus. It wasn't until a little later, however, that he got to drive his uncle's 190 Fintail and really caught the Mercedes bug.

"It was sheer quality," he recalls. "As soon as I stepped inside, I could tell it was a different sort of car." Later, while living in London, he helped to maintain another uncle's bright red W124 200. "I looked after that car more than he did," he recalls with a smile. This encounter merely strengthened his resolve to have a Mercedes of his own one day.

For Ali, it is the robust look and prominent, upright badge on the grille that distinguish the marque from other luxury cars. "There's no mistake about it," he says. "As soon as you see one, you know it's a Mercedes. You don't have to look twice." Despite having owned a succession of cars from other marques, from Fiat 124s to BMW 5-Series, he was always a Mercedes owner at heart, albeit without the vehicle to match his enthusiasm.

As soon as his means permitted, though, he set about getting himself a 320 coupé. "I liked the style," says Ali. "The long bonnet, relatively small passenger cabin, short boot and, of course, the shape of the roof with all the windows down."

He bought a 1993 Mercedes 320CE in November 2001 and has subscribed to *Mercedes Enthusiast* since its launch that same month. The magazine has been a steadfast companion to his first experience of Mercedes ownership. His car now has 130,000 miles on the clock, 15,000 of which are Ali's, and he hasn't made any modifications.

"I pretty much like the car to be standard," he states, "and if you study the spec, you'll find it has lots of extras already. The engine is quite powerful and the gearing is perfect. For everyday driving, I don't need anything more." There's one feature of the car that Ali is especially fond of, however. "The automatic seatbelts impress everybody who gets in!" he says with a laugh.

Three years since first getting the keys, he's still revelling in the excitement of Mercedes ownership. "It's a delight to drive," he says with enthusiasm. "The

cream coachwork combined with the cream leather interior looks good. In the words of an eight-year-old member of the family, 'it looks and feels like a posh person's car!'"

CLEAN SWEEP

Ali certainly does his best to keep it that way, breaking off mid-conversation to take a chamois to some previously unseen smears on the paintwork – a reflex he explains is by no means unusual. "I was panic-stricken when a careless colleague scratched a newly replaced wing," he admits. Though nobody owned up to the crime, Ali eventually traced the culprit by checking CCTV footage. An arrangement was made and a quick trip to the bodywork shop restored it to its original condition.

That's not to say he's precious about his car: Ali insists he is more than happy for the rest of the family to drive it. Yet they seem strangely reluctant to take the wheel themselves. "It's mostly in fear of damaging it because they know I'm so careful," he admits. In the interest of domestic harmony, however, he has a plan which has met with all-round

Cream interior has lasted well; 320 suits Ali's needs; star is a big attraction for Ali.

approval. "Ideally my wife will own a C240, my son a C200 and my daughter a Sports Coupé," he explains. His self-appointed role as a missionary for Mercedes doesn't end there though, as he has recently converted a colleague to the brand. "Last week he bought a 320CDI," says Ali, "and he's well impressed!"

For the time being Ali is pleased with the 320 and doesn't see himself upgrading any time soon. "This is still a good car and I'm enjoying it," he states. "If it gets to a stage where I need to change, it would be for either an R107 SL or an SEC. But if I can hold on to this and buy the other one as well, that would be better!" As he professes his Mercedes cufflinks for inspection, it's clear that his love affair with the marque goes well beyond his own cherished vehicle.

Ali wears his heart on his sleeve – with Mercedes cufflinks!

