



"I AM PLEASED TO REPORT THAT THE CAR USED NARY A DROP OF OIL"

Hands-on ownership

Getting to grips with the more intimate parts of his E420 has taught Reed Hitchcock even more respect for his V8 E-Class

- **FACTSHEET**
- **CARS** E420
- **OWNER** Reed Hitchcock
- **LOCATION** Virginia, USA
- **PURCHASED** May 2004
- **WORK SINCE LAST REPORT** Filter replacement, air-con switch replacement

THE E420 CONTINUES TO ASTOUND me with its dual-personality. This car is Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, both personalities that anyone might find very useful in a daily commute. If you like stealth, then this is a car for you. It does, however, require a bit of periodic maintenance.

A host of W124 maintenance and repair items are entirely manageable for the DIY'er. Now bear in mind that I am no technician. In fact, I am notorious for having cross-threaded more drain plugs than anyone I've ever heard of (3) and I have twice set a motor on fire trying to clean it. You get the picture. All that said I have managed several repairs on the E420. So, kids, feel free to try any of this at home (just don't blame me if you mess it up).

On the mechanical side, I recently changed the oil and filter. One of the things that I love about servicing most Mercedes – at least the ones I've had – is the cartridge oil filters. I love a filter that is easy to reach from the top of the motor. On so many cars you have to be some sort of contortionist to reach around and twist the little can filter off the back of the engine. I am pleased to report that the car used nary a drop of oil in the 3,500 miles between changes, and that the oil came out remarkably clean – which is more than I can say for the sludge that oozed out of the 6.3!

Air-con recirculation switch one of several DIY repairs this month.

Next came the fuel filter. The factory calls for a change every 60,000 miles, but other sources recommend a 30,000-mile interval for good measure. Since I had no record of the last change, I decided it was in my best interest. Crawling under the car, you remove a protective plastic cover, block the fuel line (in my case done with a pair of vice grips), and disconnect the fuel lines from the filter. Replacement, as is usually the case, is the reverse of removal.

PLUG AND PLAY

Finally, I single-handedly changed the dash switch for the air-con recirculation. If you're like me and fear everything electrical in an automobile, you will understand why I feel so accomplished here! Simply remove the two screws below the climate control and lift the entire wood panel to reveal the row of switches. From there it is as easy as plug-and-play.

The 124-chassis cars remain, in my opinion, one of the last of the over-engineered Mercedes-Benz cars. In this age of negative J.D. Power surveys and Star Trek electronic systems, the W124 – even in V8 mode – is remarkably simple to service and drive. My biggest concern these days is the rising cost of petrol. I am currently averaging about 19.6 miles per gallon, which doesn't seem that bad in return for the performance I get. I suppose if I backed-off the pedal a bit the numbers might improve, but where's the fun in that?

