

# The family grows...

...and the bank account shrinks as Reed Hitchcock satisfies a long-held ambition with his latest buy

**FACTSHEET**  
**CARS** E420/300SEL 6.3  
**OWNER** Reed Hitchcock  
**LOCATION** Virginia, USA  
**PURCHASED** May 2004/August 2004  
**WORK SINCE LAST REPORT** E420: New radiator, Eprom ECU upgrade(6.3); Various work

PICTURE THE SCENE AT A RECENT meeting of Benzaholics Anonymous:

"My name is Reed Hitchcock, and I have a problem..."

Group: "Hello, Reed!"

"It's been exactly 33 days since I bought my last Mercedes."

Group gasps!

"Another V8 – but this time a 6.3..."

Group leader: "INTERVENTION!"

It's a recurring dream of late – the part about the meeting. I really did pony-up for a W109 300SEL 6.3. But then, how could I not? This is the original "Banker's Hotrod" and the car that *Road and Track* said was "Merely the best sedan in the

**Clockwise from below: Paintwork needs love; engine in good order; velour unusual in US.**



world". And I got one for a song!

It's not actually that simple. Ever since I attended my first meeting of the International M-100 Group, I have really wanted one of these cars. The 600 is overkill, at least in my world. I certainly don't need to wrestle hydraulic demons in addition to my world job, and I'm fairly certain my wife and kids don't want to live in one after upkeep means forfeiting the house and all of its contents.

Conversely, though, the W116 6.9 is, to me, too modern. Its styling and driving experience reminds me a little too much of the E420 already gracing my driveway. Besides, the older cars just look cool.

This car (No5083) is a French-delivery 1971 model. It has some features particularly rare in the US, including velour upholstery (American cars had leather), no headrests, no extraneous emission controls to speak of, no side repeaters, and a pair of wacky French taillights with

**"THE CAR IS IN THE CAPABLE HANDS OF M100 GURU KARL MIDDELHAUVE"**

All in good time. As I write, the car is in the capable hands of M100 guru Karl Middelhaue, who has already tamed the fuel leak and is addressing other niggles in order to ensure that the car should be safe and good to go. In the short term I will be addressing the sub-standard tyres and then just bonding with the car. Look forward to watching my bank balance and marriage decline as I bring this beauty up to good driver spec.

amber reversing lenses – apparently made of unobtainium, so I best not break them. Otherwise, the car is mechanically sound, having had a replacement motor and suspension air bags in 1999, or about 30,000km ago.

**TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?**

When offered the car, I was sceptical to say the least. But the price, combined with the relatively recent service and the way it runs convinced me to have a go. For a mere \$6,000, I now have an ultra-classic Q-ship that looks and feels every bit the part of a factory hotrod in sheep's clothing.

That isn't to say that No5083 is perfect – far from it. A fuel leak at the pump has prevented me from taking delivery yet, and the car has, um, certain other 'cosmetic' issues to be resolved. Specifically, a bit of rust is scattered in various places, although there's nothing structural at fault. Not such a big deal, since the paint is faded beyond repair anyway. And the interior could use a fairly serious de-lousing.



Meanwhile, there's life in the E320 yet, as Eprom chip has been installed.

**BACK AT THE RANCH**

I am still enjoying the heck out of the E420, too. I originally thought it was a little bit of a ladies' car – what with being conceived as a Lexus fighter and all – but I've got over that, because very few ladies seem to appreciate the growl this car makes when it gets excited. Present company and my dear wife excepted.

The car made exactly the same growl immediately before the radiator let go. I knew the car had a very mild coolant leak, and it was on my list of things to deal with but was just about the furthest thing from my mind as I turned on to Hampton Road, shifted down to second and floored it. I saw two puffs of... well, something come over the bonnet.

About 30 seconds later I noticed that the temperature gauge (thank goodness this car does not have a dummy gauge) had risen higher than ever. By the time I found a safe spot to pull over, the temperature was just under the red and the system released the final bit of coolant.

Generally speaking, I like to fix things when I recognise a problem, but this time I kept putting it off with the idea that it was so small an issue that surely it would mend itself, or at the very least I could simply monitor the level and top-off when necessary. Serves me right, I suppose. After paying \$610 for a new radiator, expansion tank, and labour and the E420 was back and better than ever. Think I learned my lesson? Not bloody likely.

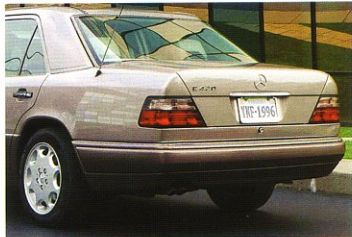
**CHIP TUNING**

If anything, I spat in the face of karma and instead of being a little kinder and gentler to my middle-aged E420, I gave it a boost.

Having read mixed opinions about Eprom chip replacements, I decided to give one a try and find out if there was any truth to the hype about performance and economy gains. I purchased a chip from eBay for the very modest sum of \$79, and it arrived very well packaged with detailed installation instructions.

I was hesitant to start dismantling what is certainly one of the most expensive parts of the car's electrical system, but went ahead anyway. The chip was remarkably easy to fit, using only the most basic tools. I then replaced the symphony of wires and plastic covers, and cautiously turned the key. The car fired right up, no warning lights, nothing untoward, so I hit the road.

There is essentially no difference in around-town driving. On the open road,



Upgraded ECU chip has led to greater mid-range pull.

Coolant leak wasn't dealt with, so the radiator blew. Oops.



however, there is definitely a boost in passing power – the car has more pull in the mid-range. I didn't get to test the supposed gains in top end, but truthfully I couldn't really care less if the car can now go 155 versus 147, because, unless I find myself in the middle of the desert in the middle of the night, I'll just never need to know.