

MERCEDES

E N T H U S I A S T

MARCH 2009

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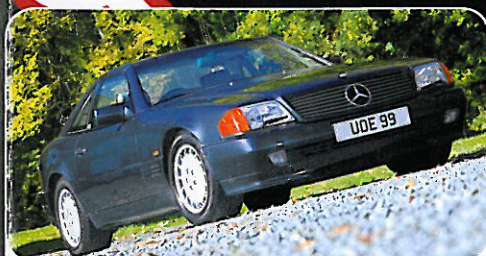
NEW E-CLASS REVEALED

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ULTIMATE

E60

RennTech E60 RS (W210)

Engine M119 5.998cc V8

Power 424bhp

Torque 525lb ft

Transmission 5-speed auto, RWD

Weight 1,725kg

0-60mph 4.5sec

Top speed 202mph

Fuel consumption n/a

Years produced 1997-2003

OVERVIEW

Tuner RennTech's take on the W210 E420, here in its most extreme form, is as rare as it is intoxicating - and definitely not for the fainthearted. *Squidgy photo by Andrew Scott. Photo by Andrew Scott.*

MORE, PLEASE!

Saved from probable destruction, this rare 424bhp Mercedes E60 RS by tuner RennTech hides a mysterious, star-studded past - it may be raw, but the RS is also oh so brutally seductive. **WORDS REED HITCHCOCK IMAGES DAN TRENT**

OVER THE YEARS, MERCEDES ENTHUSIAST HAS enjoyed a number of memorable visits to the Mercedes-Benz Classic Center USA and has had the pleasure of driving an assortment of fantastic Mercedes from days gone by including Pontons, Pagoda SLs, 300SL Gullwings and even grand masters like Adenauers and 600s. But on a recent sojourn we happened to stumble upon something rather unexpected: this silver 210-series saloon curiously hidden among the 120 years of automotive history.

As a 1997 model, my first question was, "why is it here?" Generally speaking, Mercedes-Benz considers cars classics after their series has been out of production for at least 15 years, so the 210-series is barely old enough to be considered a youngtimer, much less a classic. "There's an interesting story on that one," says Mercedes-Benz Classic Center USA Manager Mike Kunz, adding cryptically, "but we're not at liberty to tell the whole story." Well that is one way to get my full attention, not to mention my imagination running wild. Was it a sordid history of drugs and money? Powerful

"The 4.2-litre M119 block was replaced with a five-litre version, then bored out to six litres, pumping out 418bhp with 440lb ft of torque - and this was only stage one"

“This is a special place to be – instead of the normal E420 hum, the E60 RS fires with a growl and a rumble that does not subside”

RS model's front and rear wings were widened to cater for the bigger rubber.



RennTech says 202mph is possible with the bored out six-litre 424bhp V8 engine.



The tuner's shiny exhaust tips suggest this W210 might not be standard.

It is fully loaded, including orthopaedic seats and a phone.

Colour detail added to this car's steering wheel and seats.



politicians gone sour? Maybe it was a tale of lies and misdemeanours. Something tasty for sure – but I'd never know!

What I can tell you is that in 1997, the 275bhp W210 E420 was the most powerful of the 210s available here in the USA, since we did not receive the factory E50 AMG with the M119 five-litre motor out of the SL and the W124 E500. The E420 was a great car, but not quite supercar territory. Enter RennTech, one of the most well known Mercedes modifiers, along with the likes of Brabus, Carlsson and Lorinser.

A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

The RennTech team took a standard issue US spec E420 and transformed it into a force to be well and truly reckoned with. The 4.2-litre M119 block was replaced with a five-litre version, which was then bored out to six litres (naturally aspirated) and made to breathe better, thus taking output to a road clobbering 418bhp and 440lb ft of torque. The tuner also modified the stock suspension with lower progressive rate springs, thicker anti roll bars, sport shocks, and added huge, 13-inch Alcon front brakes. One of the most important changes is that RennTech completely disabled the invasive traction control system. But more on that later.

RennTech claimed a 0-60mph dash of only five seconds from its 418bhp E60, which even blows away Mercedes' own W210 E55 AMG at

5.7 seconds (0-62mph). And as we Americans are all about the stoplight drag, an even more impressive spec for these shores is the quarter mile in a quick 13.3 seconds at 108.5mph. Back in 1997, all this could have been yours for about \$50,000 on top of the cost of a new E420.

Think this sounds good? Then just you wait – this was only stage one. For a further outlay RennTech could take your E60 to the next level, the stage two car packing an even bigger punch with 424bhp plus a stonking 525lb ft torque, meaning 0-60mph was demolished in just 4.5 seconds. And then if you wanted the looks to back this up there was the widebody version, called the E60 RS. Not unlike the Porsche embellished W124 500E/E500, the RS version had aggressively widened front and rear steel wings to accommodate fatter wheels and tyres, giving the car an evil stance. This example is one such car, and the ultimate RennTech had to offer, a stage two E60 RS. For the RS version RennTech would relieve you of an extra \$15,000, but for a stage two RS you were looking at around \$30,000 over and above the cost of a stage one car – that is \$15,000 for the RS work plus the same again to take it to stage two.

The story of this particular E60 RS, one of approximately 50 E60 and E60 RS models built by RennTech, is that it was given by Mercedes-Benz USA to an immensely popular celebrity – whose fame was near its zenith circa 1997. The stock E420 was received by Mercedes-Benz USA and

sent immediately to RennTech for the tuner to work its magic on it. While American cars normally include a high specification of optional equipment, this one came with absolutely everything – including an integrated phone, heated/cooled orthopaedic seats, even park distance control – no doubt to wow the lucky celebrity in question along with all of his friends. He spends a lot of time with his friends.

DESTINED FOR THE CRUSHER

RennTech even custom fabricated a set of special door sills for our mystery celeb, probably with the understanding that he would cherish this car for many years to come, but alas it was not to be. While he did have the opportunity to put on a few thousand of what we can only guess were some of the most fun miles he had ever spent in a car, there was something of a snag. Mercedes, as it turned out, could not permanently give the car to him – or anyone for that matter. Nor could it be sold. Because Mercedes-Benz USA owned the car when it was sent to RennTech, the modifications were made to an untitled car, so under American law, tens of thousands of dollars would have to be spent on government certification in order to be able to sell the car. Instead it languished in a garage awaiting certain destruction until the Classic Center USA rescued it and added it to its permanent collection.

Fast forward to the present day and it is my turn to have a go. At first glance the car looks like any ordinary 210-series saloon – until, walking around it, you note the fat tyres. Maybe an E55? No, look closely, those wheel openings are far from standard. Under the bonnet, the real attention grabber is the carbon fibre airbox in place of the usual black plastic job. What lurks beneath is a modified, ported and polished intake system. From behind, a pair of chrome tips subtly belies the sporting intentions of the car with just a slight hint of what is in store.

Sitting in the driver's seat, I notice the cabin's tasteful coloured accents added to the standard E420 seats and steering wheel, making it an even more special place to be. Turning the key, the exhaust does its trick on start up. Instead of the normal E420 hum, the E60 RS fires with a growl and a rumble that does not subside. You can feel the car running, but a beefed up version of the factory transmission handles all the power with grace – no jerkiness, no slipping. At moderate pedal, this could be nothing more than your mother's E320. Except for that rumble.

Add a little more pressure and the car becomes a real handful, at least for those of us conditioned by the automotive big brother that assumes control upon the slightest hint of wheelspin or lack of traction. No, this car is old school and requires its pilot to pay attention, to exercise a little restraint and a lot of skill to make the most of the power it keeps on

▷ tap. My first full throttle application nearly resulted in a 360-degree spin and a twisted mass of flesh and steel, but karma was clearly in my corner and I just about managed not to kill myself. The second time was a little better and I slowly got the hang of it. I cannot recall the last time I had so much fun pointing and shooting a car.

WONDERFULLY UNRESTRAINED

The E60 RS is seductive and addictive all at once – and so much more raw than its contemporary AMG or even the newer W211 E55s or E63s. Those cars are amazingly powerful but feel sanitised in comparison. This car is more akin to the old 300SEL 6.3, blazingly fast and unforgiving, and able to leave a quarter-mile streak of rubber on the asphalt if provoked – which brings me back to the disabled traction control.

Driving a Mercedes-Benz Classic Center USA car is normally an exercise in restraint – after all, it is a privilege to drive these cars and Mercedes expects them to be around for a long time, and I would not want to be the one to prevent that from happening. The E60 RS was a

little different. Don't get me wrong – the guys don't want the thing trashed or mangled – but we were encouraged to drive it as it was intended. "It needs new tyres anyway, this will give us a good excuse," came the blunt instruction as we were given the green light for a few burnouts. You don't have to tell me twice!

Celebrity X's loss was clearly our gain. I even briefly considered buying one for myself, but I probably wouldn't survive a week. Besides, finding one of the 50 or so that isn't thrashed would likely be an exercise in futility. No, I will wait until next time when I find another excuse to slip behind the wheel and then do what just has to be done – for the sake of journalism and the pursuit of truth, you understand. And if you feel brave enough to take on the might of such a raw, tuned Mercedes, there could still be time. Word has it RennTech still keeps the parts necessary to do the same all over again. Now there's a tempting thought.

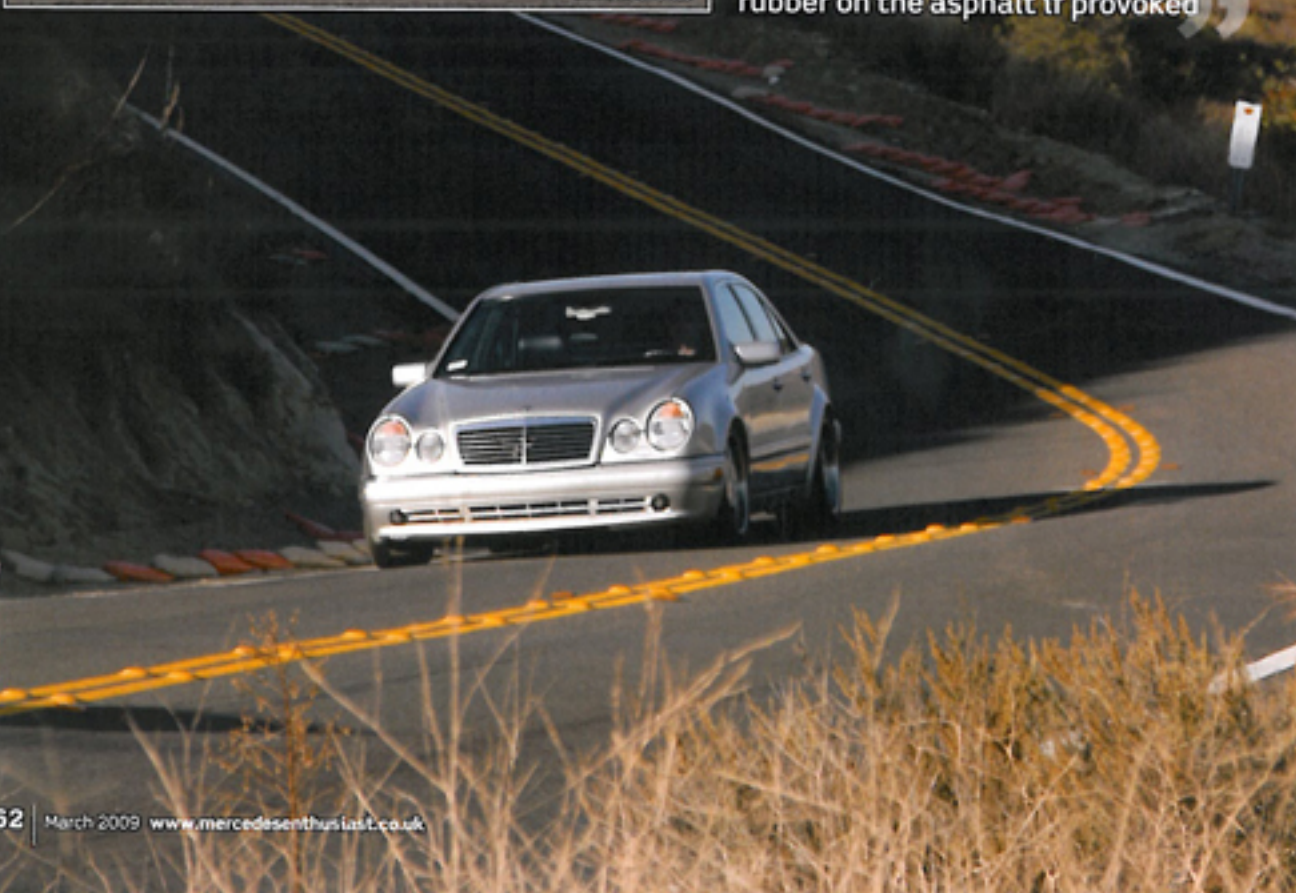
▷ For further information on RennTech's E60 RS Mercedes-Benz super saloon please go online to Web www.renntechmercedes.com



▷ From 4,196cc to 5,998cc with stunning results.
▷ The disabled traction control has its benefits.



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