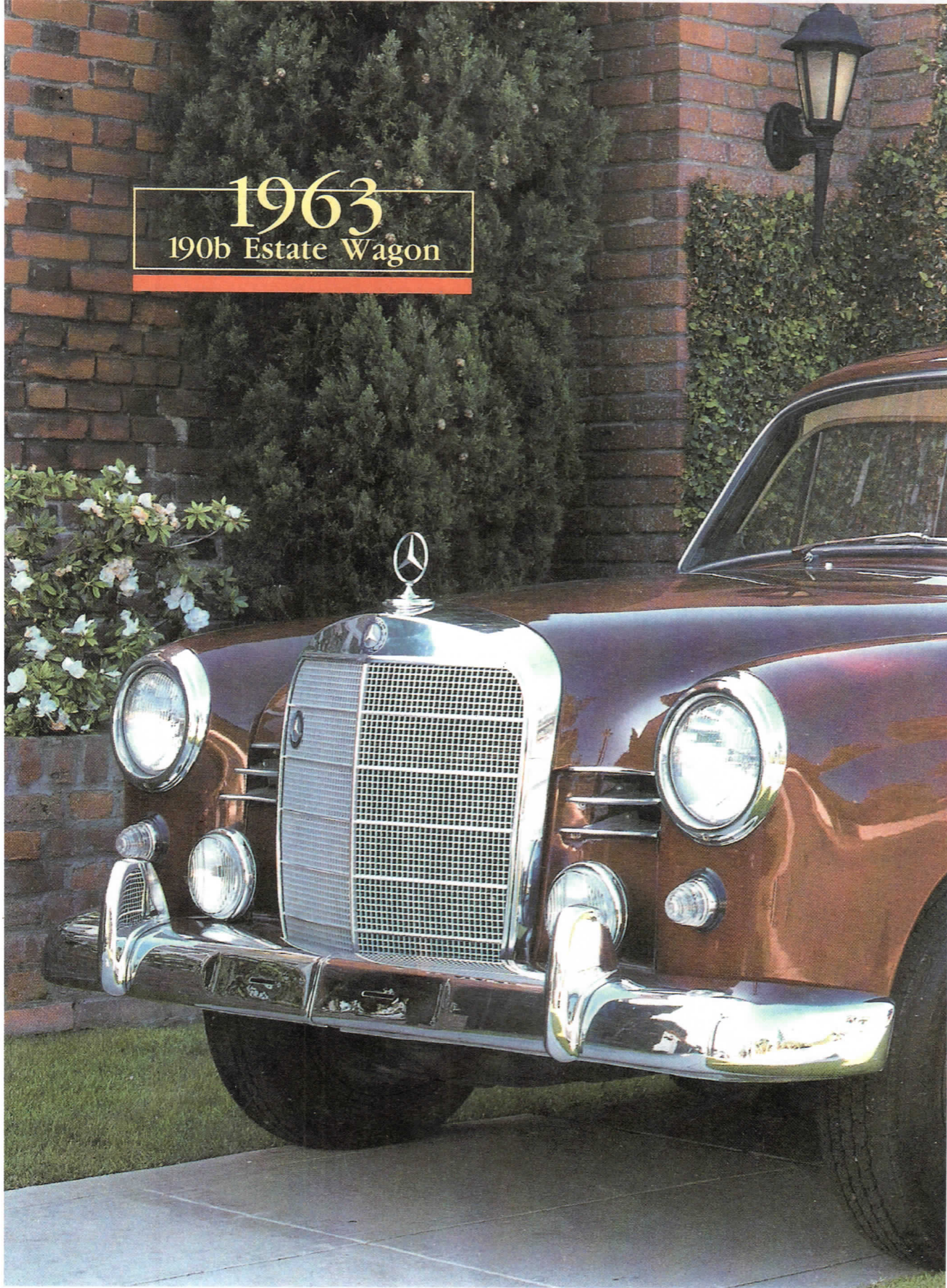


1963
190b Estate Wagon





1906 Estate Wagon

Article and photographs by Dennis Adler, Contributing Editor

Perhaps this Mercedes-Benz station wagon should have been called a "Mercedes-Binz".

Back in the 1930's, ordering a coach-built body on a Mercedes-Benz chassis was not uncommon, even from the Sindelfingen factory itself, which occasionally produced one-off specials. World War II changed all that, ringing down the curtain on both the classic era and on custom coachbuilding in Europe. But coachbuilding wasn't limited to luxury models.

In the early post-war years, as Daimler-Benz began rebuilding itself, anything other than a factory-built body was rare indeed. For a price, one could have a custom cabriolet or limousine built, but these luxury cars were few and far between, and very costly. Almost the only non-standard bodies being built were for police cars, taxis and delivery vans.

Enter the Kombi

Apart from a few outside-built ambulances and hearses, there was, though, a line of semi-custom utility models offered through Mercedes-Benz dealerships in the 1950's and 1960's. They were called Kombis, or Estate Wagons, which DBAG didn't build in-house, at least until the Universal model line was introduced in 1965. Until then, if you wanted a wagon, the only approved Daimler-Benz models were those built by Karosseries Christian Miesen, in Bonn, and by Binz & Co., in Lorch/Württemberg, near Stuttgart. Binz had the most experience with Mercedes-Benz, having built Kombis on the separate body-chassis 170 models in the early 1950's. Miesen began building Kombis when the 190 was introduced, in 1956.

Although relatively popular in Germany, the stylish little 190 estate wagons made up only a small percentage of Kombis built, and most were fitted out as ambulances, hearses, vans or other commercial vehicles. The exact number of Kombis built by the two firms is unknown, but on the basis of available figures for delivery of frame-floor units from Stuttgart, about 4,000 seems to be a good estimate, the vast majority being sold through the DBAG network from 1955 to 1959.



180 Sets the Stage

The new, low-priced 180 models were introduced in 1953. These contemporarily styled, three-box sedans were the first unit-body designs from DBAG and, in a sense, the first truly new, low-priced, post-war Mercedes-Benz models. Abandoning the traditional Mercedes-Benz tubular frame, designer Fritz Nallinger used a pressed, sheet-steel floor section attached to closed, box-section side members as a platform upon which to build the 180. Rather than being mounted and bolted to a separate frame, the body was welded to the reinforced floor pan, making it an integral part of the chassis. The resulting structure, much stronger than the old frame/body construction, enjoyed more even distribution of stresses, greater torsional rigidity and almost total freedom from the squeaks and rattles common to separate frame/body designs.

As to the 180's underpinnings, its entire front suspension, springs, shock absorbers, steering gear and the forward engine support were attached to the front of the chassis via a box-section sub-frame. This structure was said to resemble a pontoon bridge slung between the front wheels, so the cars were christened "pontons", after the German for pontoon. The 180's rear suspension, attached directly to the floor pan, used the traditional swing-axle with coil springs and double-acting hydraulic shock absorbers.

Aside from being lighter than the old frame/body system, the real beauty of Nallinger's unit-body design was the ease with which the entire front sub-assembly could be mated with the engine and suspension components then simply wheeled under the body shell and bolted up. This also made repairs easier, as the sub-frame could be dropped to allow full access to the engine, transmission and suspension. The unit-body also allowed DBAG's stylists to design a lower, wider and roomier passenger compartment with nearly 25 percent more space than the 170 that it replaced.

The new four-door sedans were plain-looking in the contemporary idiom, only their integrated fender/hood lines suggesting a hint of pre-war style. The new look, however modern, appeared a bit pedestrian beside the longer, more luxuriously trimmed 220 and the elegant 300 models being built at the same time.

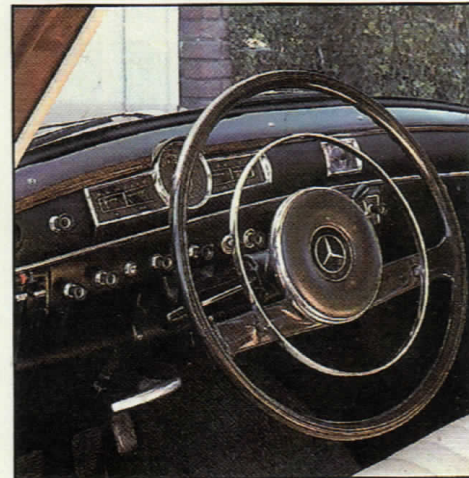
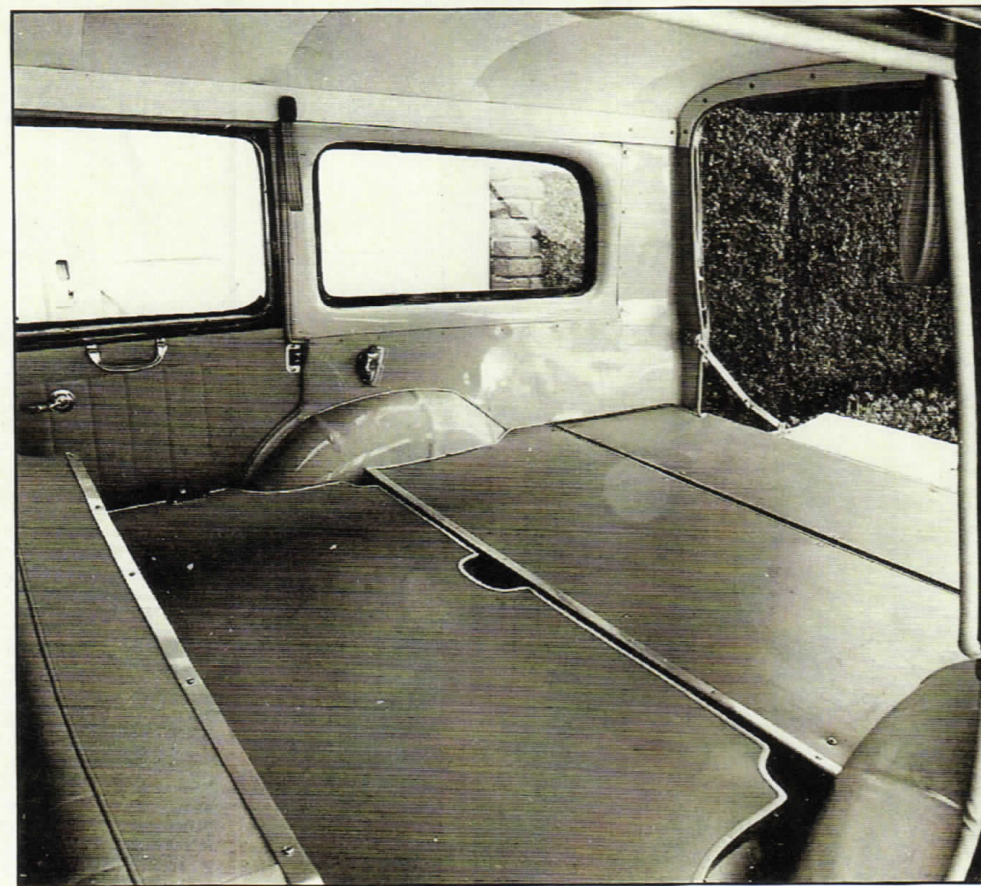
New, Improved 190

The 190 models introduced in 1956 offered several mechanical and styling improvements over the lower-priced 180's. In terms of performance, less than remarkable in either car, the 190's were powered by a de-tuned, 75-bhp version of the 1,897-cc, overhead camshaft, four-cylinder gasoline engine used in the 190SL. The rear suspension was improved with a new, low-pivot swing axle. The front brakes were changed to more effective finned, cast-iron drums, and a wider radiator grille gave the new series a distinctive look.

Interior appointments included a heater blower, a reading light, twin sun visors, coat hooks and new, easier to use, curved door handles. The 190b's dashboard had extra padding, and a new steering wheel with a padded safety hub replaced the familiar wheel and its dual-purpose horn ring and rotating turn signal control. Now the horn ring operated only the horns; turn signals were actuated by a more normal steering column stalk that also functioned as a headlight flasher.

From the front, the wagon looks just like its sedan counterpart.





Top: rear passenger doors are squared off, easing access to rear seat.

Rear seat folds down, enlarging cargo area.

From Benz to Binz

No small degree of skill was involved in transforming a 190 sedan into an estate wagon. DBAG shipped the cars to Binz in partially finished form—essentially the entire front body section, all four doors and most of the interior. Binz then fabricated the upper rear body section, including the cargo area, and completed the interior.

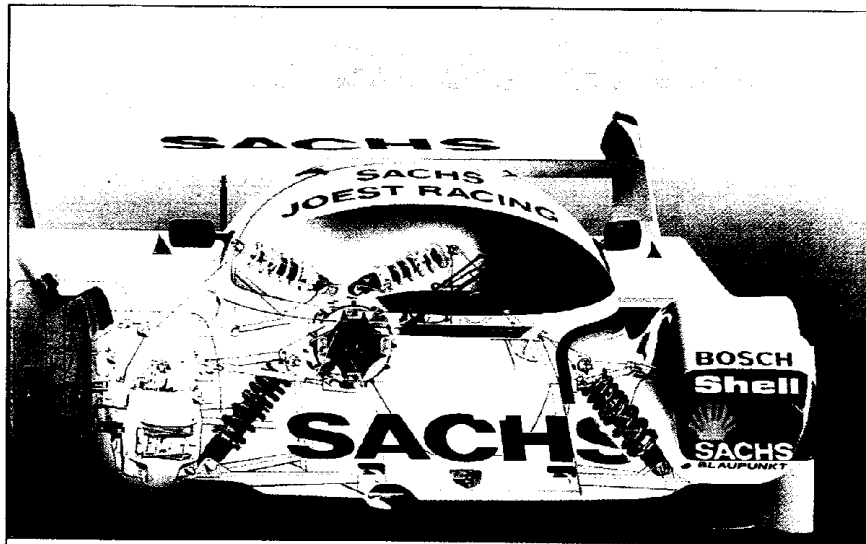
DBAG built a total of 61,345 190's from 1956 to 1959, then 28,463 190b's in 1959, 12,986 in 1960 and 8,864 in 1961. But Binz built estate wagons on both the 190 and later 190b platforms through 1963. When 190b production ended in September 1961, Karosserie Binz had a stockpile of 190b platforms; they continued to build on them for another two years while switching to a similar design on the fin-back chassis. The late round-body examples, such as the wagon featured here, were veritable parts bin assemblies completed with an odd variety of interior and exterior accessories used on other Mercedes-Benz models. Because of the low production, Binz bought components as needed and used whatever was available at the time. For example, this 1963 wagon has 300SL sun visors; the door pulls, rear dome light and lift gate T-handle are all from the 300 sedan; and the rubber stops on the lift gate seem to be pre-war pieces.

From the sedan's rear pillar back, Binz fabricated the wagon body, beginning by squaring off the tops of the rear doors. Inside, there's a definite line of demarcation where DBAG craftsmen stopped and Binz workmen started! The interior rear body panels and door trim pieces are attached with raised screw heads (DBAG's were countersunk), and the workmanship around the rear seats and quarter panels is not equal to that up front. From the doors back, the wagon has a very commercial, utilitarian, almost agricultural look. Even so, they were priced 20-30 percent higher than the standard sedans, selling for DM 12,500, about \$4,400.

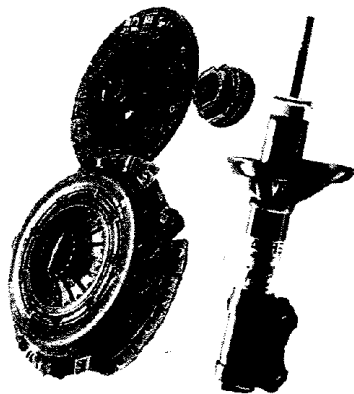
Little Red Wagon

Our feature car is owned by Bob & Terry Gunthorp, San Diego Section. Bob bought the car in 1984 for just \$200, and over a period of three years he researched the model's history and restored the wagon to its original condition. In March 1988 it appeared in a Mercedes-Benz television commercial, and the car was first shown publicly at Fashion Island in 1989.

One of the lesser-known offshoots of DBAG's early post-war era, the Kombi is certain to remain interesting to Mercedes-Benz historians and enthusiasts for years to come. Sometimes being unusual is almost as good as being rare.



Sachs sets its standards high, then proves them on the race tracks and highways of the world. That's why Mercedes Benz and dozens of other manufacturers of fine automobiles specify Sachs shocks and clutches.



Working hand in hand with OEM's keeps Sachs at the forefront of contemporary automotive technology, and assures customers that they're getting leading edge materials and designs in Sachs products.

Sachs Products for Your Mercedes Benz:

Clutches • Clutch Kits • Fan Clutches • Super Gas Shocks • Hydropneumatic Load Leveling Units • Sporting Sets • Bumper Impact Shocks • Engine and Steering Dampers • Gas Springs

Insist on Sachs original parts. Available through distributors in the U.S. and Canada.

SACHS
Performance under pressure.

Main Office Dist. Ctr.: 909 Crocker Road, Westlake, OH 44145 • 216/871-4890 Fax: 216/871-6904
Western Dist. Ctr.: 14526 S. Garfield Ave., Paramount, CA 90723 • 213/633-6218 Fax: 213/633-6163
Canadian Dist. Ctr.: 264 Tillson Ave., Tillsonburg, Ont. N4G 3B6 • 519/688-0120 Fax: 519/842-8111

2-109-90MB

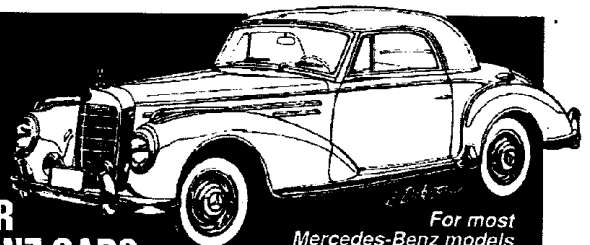
- Seat Upholstery
- Carpet Sets
- Tops
- Headliners
- Horsehair Pads
- Original Materials

INTERIORS FOR MERCEDES-BENZ CARS

Authentic materials cut and sewn to original specifications in our California factory.

XXSS

For orders, samples and brochures, call toll free:
800/222-XXSS in CA; 800/922-XXSS outside
P.O. 485, Thousand Oaks, CA 91359 • 805/482-4682



For most Mercedes-Benz models from 1955 - present