



The finished product. A pre-production model that was maintained in pristine condition to allow it to be used for catalogue photography and members of the press.

60bhp and 93lbft, and the 240D 65bhp and 101lbft – in all cases, maximum power was delivered at 4200rpm, and peak torque at 2400rpm.

The OM617 was basically the same as the OM616 with an extra cylinder tacked on to the end. Other than the obvious changes needed to allow for the fifth cylinder, about the only significant difference compared to the OM616 was the head design on the intake side, a heavier flywheel, and a viscous-coupled cooling fan; even the oil sump was similar in size.

With a 91.0mm bore and 92.4mm stroke (shared with the 240D), giving a capacity of 3005cc, and a 21.0:1 c/r, the 3-litre unit developed 80bhp at 4200rpm, along with 127lbft of torque at 2400rpm. All the diesel cars had the same basic exhaust system, with a single downpipe running into a central silencer, then a round-section back-box before exiting on the nearside of the vehicle.

As for the transmissions, all cars were available with a choice of four-speed manual (4MT) or four-speed automatic epicyclic

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Early production models

After years of running countless model variations alongside each other – some, like the W111 two-door models, lasting six years beyond their four-door counterparts – the introduction of the W123 series saloons in January 1976 brought with them a sense of calm. Although a few of their '8' predecessors were allowed to continue for a little while longer, compared with other model changeovers it was a clean progression this time around. From now on, the W123s would take up the mid-range slot (as what would become known as the E-Class in future generations), the saloons, duly followed by coupé and estate models, augmenting the S-Class saloons at the top of the line, and the SL/SLC sports cars.

The first batch of W123 models included no fewer than nine saloons for the domestic market. As noted in the previous chapter, this was an era when the model designations on the bootlid tended to make sense, so a 200 was a 2-litre saloon with a petrol engine, while the 'D' suffix implied a diesel powerplant was lurking under the bonnet – a 3-litre lump in the case of the 300D, for instance. The only oddity was the 280E, with the 'E' appendage denoting the use of a fuel-injected petrol engine.

When the January 1976 price list was released, it showed that the 200 was introduced at DM 18,382 in manual guise, with the 200D a touch more at DM 18,870. The 230 was next up, commanding DM 19,203, with the 220D DM 355 more, while the 240D was announced at DM 20,146. The 250, with its straight-six, was priced at DM 21,767, and the flagship diesel – the 300D – at DM 22,311. The 2.8-litre cars were significantly more expensive, with the 280 saloon pegged at DM 24,997, and the fuel-injected 280E at DM 26,895 – a premium of almost 50 per cent on the base 200 model.

Standard equipment included disc brakes all-round, gas-filled shock absorbers, front and rear anti-roll bars, a safety steering column, steering damper, long-life exhaust system, underseal and

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Nearly 2000 cars had been made by the time of the launch, mostly 280s and 280Es, allowing dealers to have demonstrator vehicles on hand as soon as the W123 made its debut.



Above and top left: The 240D saloon, loaded with optional extras like the headlight wash/wipe system and rear headrests.

The 280 and 280E saloons came with halogen headlights and front foglights, different bumper trim, power-assisted steering, Zebrano wood-style garnishing pieces on the dashboard, seat height adjustment for the driver, and cloth inserts on the inner door panels, while the diesels came with stronger battery specifications – a 55Ah unit was the norm on petrol-engined cars (albeit 44Ah on the 200 base model), but the 200D had a 66Ah one, and the larger diesel engines commanded an 88Ah



Above and top right: The 1976 250 saloon.

battery. For the record, the 300D also featured power-assisted steering as standard.

The first catalogue featuring the 2.8-litre machines noted alloy wheels (SA code 640, priced at DM 1554), automatic transmission (SA 420, at DM 1610), self-levelling suspension (SA 480, at DM 744), air-conditioning (SA 580, at DM 2664), a manually- (SA 411) or power-operated (SA 410) sunroof (priced at DM 766 and DM 1021, respectively), central locking (SA 466, at DM 311), power windows (SA 583 for the front windows

designated V123s, were aimed more at commercial users, such as high-class taxi firms, undertakers, and so on.

The styling was essentially the same as the regular saloons, but with the rear door squared off on the trailing edge, and C-pillar area extended forwards to fill up the gap created by the significantly longer 3425mm (134.8in) wheelbase. To balance this from a styling point of view and help carry the extra weight, the lwb cars rode on a 15in wheel and tyre combination. Inside, a folding centre row of seats (split so as to give seating for one, two or three people) was added to justify the car's additional length, leading to a 7/8-seater vehicle classification. It was quite

an elegant conversion, helping to further extend the 123 series range with minimal investment.

The 1978 model year

A new price list was issued in Germany in January 1978, with the 123 series line-up already extending to no fewer than 15 models. The prices were as follows: DM 19,196 for the 200 saloon; the 230 saloon DM 20,160; the 250 saloon DM 22,960; the 250 lwb model DM 35,112; the 280 saloon DM 26,365; the 280E saloon DM 28,370; the 200D saloon DM 19,712; the 220D saloon DM 20,530; the 240D saloon



The diesel-powered C111-III (right) picked up a number of world speed records in April 1978, building on those established by the C111-IIID next to it in 1976. The W123 saloon dates from 1977, but the diesel engine link is the key point.

and 280TE – came in at \$39,355 and \$42,340, respectively. A price increase was applied to the station wagons in January 1981, incidentally, adding about \$700 to the base price, while an automatic transmission for the diesel variant added a further \$2060 to the invoice.

In Japan, the 123 series range consisted of the 230, 280E, 240D, 300D, 280CE and 300TD models, with prices starting at ¥6,020,000. All cars came with automatic transmission only, and were duly carried over for the start of the 1982 season. And that's what we look at next ...

The 1982 model year

The easiest change to spot for the 1982 season was the fresh paint palette, with a number of coachwork colours dropped in September, and others changing status. However, the door locks and glovebox were modified at the same time, and an overrun cut-off valve was added on cars with fuel-injection to save petrol.

The 230E's ignition system was improved and the engine tweaked to give a lower idle speed, and manual 250 models were given a taller 3.58:1 rear axle ratio in order to enhance fuel consumption. Ironically, a lot of the benefit was probably lost through higher rolling resistance, though, as the 250 saloon adopted the 195/70 rubber that was already standard on the 250T estate.

The automatic transmission on the 250- and 280E-based models was also changed, with the W4B025 unit giving way to the W4B040 design from the S-Class, which featured smoother downshifts, easier access to kickdown scenarios, and programming that encouraged faster upshifts and second gear starts in a bid to save fuel. The 250s employed the 722.308 version of the new gearbox, while the 280Es used the 722.309 model, although both shared the same 3.68, 2.41, 1.44 and 1.00 cogs, and both lines retained the old back axle ratios.

For the record, the German 123 series line-up looked like this in September 1981. There was the 200 saloon at DM 23,764, the 230E saloon at DM 26,724, the 250 saloon at DM 28,532, the 250 lwb model at DM 42,398, the 280E saloon at DM 34,194, the 200D saloon at DM 24,272, the 240D saloon at DM 25,933, the 240D lwb model at DM 40,703, the 300D saloon at DM 28,645, the 300D lwb model at DM 42,624, the 200T estate at DM 27,448, the 230TE estate at DM 30,408, the 250T estate



A 1982 Model Year 240TD coming to the rescue.



One of the last 280Es to feature chrome grilles on the bulkhead.