

**K**arl Middelhaue is fearless. I spent the better part of a cool Saturday in Pennsylvania learning about the man, his cars, and his career as the master of things M-100.

I came away with an appreciation not only for the man, but also for the machinery – and the skills it takes to master that machinery – skills that very few have – very few besides Karl.

We started in conversation over coffee and toast with homemade jam. Karl is originally from Siegen, Germany. His early career was spent learning the furniture-making business, from apprentice, to builder, and progressing to working at furniture plants. In typical Middelhaue fashion, he made sure he learned every aspect of the furniture business, eventually becoming a known expert in the field. More than one of his cars wears a 'Consultant to the Furniture Industry' number plate frame.

As many good Germans in America have done, Karl bought a Mercedes to use in travel between furniture factories scattered across the States – in his case, a 300SEL 6.3. While a great car, when it came time for repairs, Karl was flooded. Upon receiving his first major repair bill from the local dealer, Karl decided that there had to be a better way – so he found a specialist, and

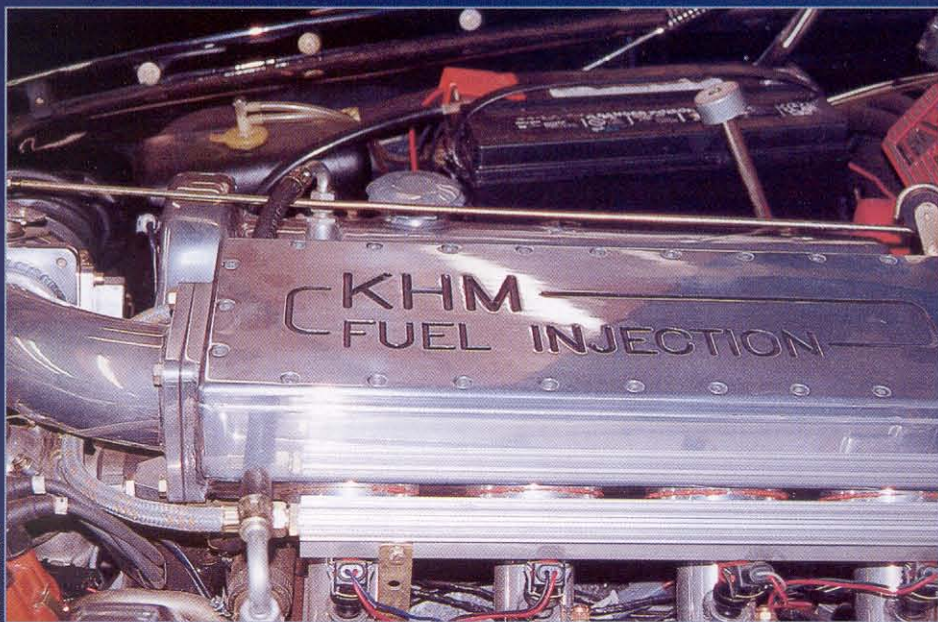
**“UPON RECEIVING HIS FIRST MAJOR REPAIR BILL FROM THE LOCAL DEALER, KARL DECIDED THAT THERE HAD TO BE A BETTER WAY”**

watched very closely as they worked on his car. Then he started doing the small jobs himself. Before long he became quite handy with 6.3s.

So handy, in fact, that he bought another, and another, to drive, fix, and eventually sell – hopefully at a profit. The problem was that 6.3s were really still just plain used cars at that time. They had not achieved 'collectable' status, and they certainly weren't appreciating. The 6.3 business was simply not very profitable. So Karl took the next logical step – he started working on Grand 600s.

He already knew the engines, so it was a matter of learning other systems unique to 600s – the hydraulics, in particular. One of his chief learning methods was disassembly. In fact, Karl has disassembled 13 Grand 600s to the last bolt. What's more, he saves every single serviceable part, and either rebuilds it or sends it for cleaning, plating, and rebuilding, if necessary. There are trays filled with every style fastener used on a 600, and every one comes from another car. He replaces original with original, ensuring the integrity and originality of every car he services.

For someone like Karl, challenge is everything. This is where I came to understand his



Reed Hitchcock

Karl's popular computer-designed M100 intake plenum improves emissions, fuel consumption and performance.

# M100 Maestro

**The proud host of the M-100 Group's annual convention, Karl Middelhaue is a fountain of M-100 knowledge. Reed Hitchcock meets him.**



Methodically stripping dead 600s for parts enables their more fortunate brethren to live on to a ripe old age.



Not all Karl's M100 Mercs are wrecks! Herr Middelhaue is passionate about his cars, whether standard or modified.



☉ fearlessness. Many car enthusiasts like to tinker – to make small ‘improvements’ to their cars that hopefully make them look, feel, or perform better. Karl is no exception, but he takes it to the next level. Actually, he takes it about forty levels up.

Not only did Karl rebuild his 600 funeral car literally from the ground up and build a one-off 600 coupé, he has also built a 6.3 estate, an M-100 Coupé, and the lovely five-speed cabriolet. Further, he has developed numerous mechanical improvements to M-100s over the years, all of which can be easily removed to return the car to absolute original, should a future owner wish.

In his workshop, Karl has an M-100 engine set-up complete with ignition and gauges to demonstrate the fuel management system he has developed in conjunction with automotive software whiz Dale Cherry. This arrangement consists of numerous ‘off-the-shelf’ parts from other manufacturers – reliable parts with the added benefit of costing less than comparable M-B parts. My favourite was the cam sensor sourced from a Cadillac Northstar. And they say nothing good comes out of the American auto industry any more!

Karl has developed a custom intake plenum as part of this system – complete with his initials prominently displayed on top – to improve

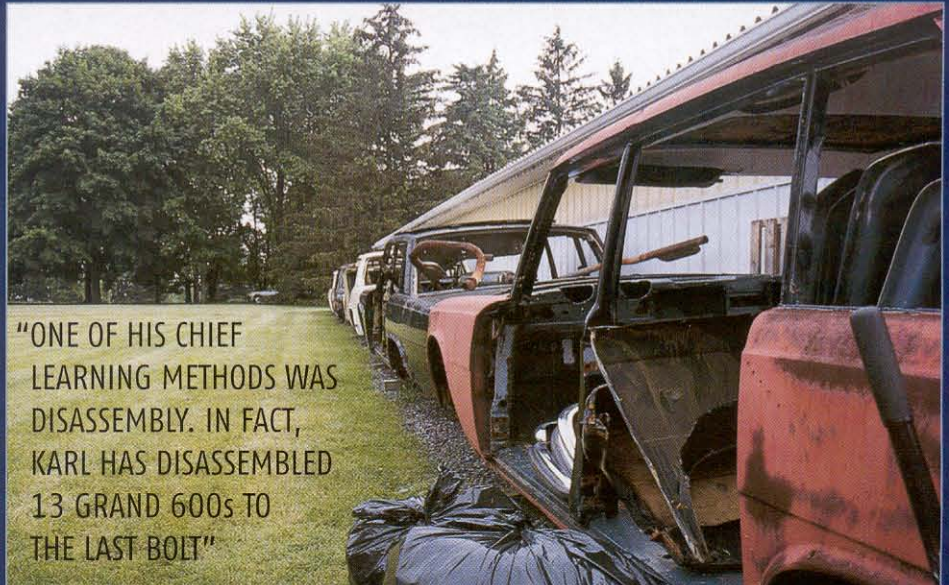
**“NOT ONE TO REST ON HIS LAURELS, HE ALSO DEVELOPED SUPERCHARGER SYSTEMS TO WORK WITH M-100s”**

airflow based on modern flow studies and computer-assisted design programs. In all, as several M-100 owners have confirmed – Karl’s system smoothes the engine, makes it more efficient, cleans-up the exhaust, and raises fuel economy substantially. On a cross-country trip in the Funeral Car, Karl manages over 17 miles per gallon – in a three-tonne vehicle!

Not one to rest on his laurels, he also developed supercharger systems to work with M-100s. In this case, he claims an increase of up to 50 percent in horsepower and torque. He has this system on a 600 SWB – and it makes a mean whine. This is the car that Karl brings to the drag strip to make his point. This year he decided that he had nothing to prove. These folks already know what Karl’s cars can do – so he let someone else have a shot!

“So what’s next?” I ask him. He points to a gold and black 600 SWB which I actually helped him push across the parking lot (unbelievably heavy car!) and tells me: “I’m thinking El Camino with that one – what do you think?” If you don’t know – an El Camino is a car/pick-up truck hybrid. And I think it’s a splendid idea! ☹

☉ Further information **WEB** [www.mgrand600.com](http://www.mgrand600.com)



**“ONE OF HIS CHIEF LEARNING METHODS WAS DISASSEMBLY. IN FACT, KARL HAS DISASSEMBLED 13 GRAND 600s TO THE LAST BOLT”**

**Karl’s 600 graveyard is also his stockroom and, while some are beyond repair, others have come back to life in style.**



**Any part that can be recovered from the wrecks is re-conditioned and added to Karl’s formidable stock.**



**Modern software has been utilised in a new fuel management system Karl has developed for the M100.**



**A test rig in his showroom enables Karl to demonstrate the many detail improvements he’s developed for the V8.**



**It’s not just mechanical parts Karl can help with; luggage and interior fittings are all part of the story.**



**If your 6.3 or 600 just isn’t already powerful enough, Karl’s supercharger kit could well be the answer...**