



With the hardtop in place, a snug, distinctive coupe like no other is created.



A good sized boot means this Mercedes is a stylish option for holiday driving.



DREAM COME TRUE

Car designers have loads of ideas that never see the light of day, right? So find out what happened when one enthusiast set a challenge to iconic Mercedes designer Paul Bracq

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The remaining R129 SL parts include the neat, efficient folding roof.



The 777 Mercedes silver paint sits nicely against the black fabric roof.



I AM SURE MANY OF YOU WOULD LIKE an automotive challenge, but how far would you go? When we asked famous Mercedes-Benz designer Paul Bracq, the father of the W100 600 and Pagoda SL, among others, how he pictured a coupe-cabriolet version of the 600, he replied, "I'll let you know." Soon, five design concepts were presented, the selection process narrowing it down to two frontrunners.

Option one was to use a classic W100 600 with the front axle moved six inches forward, the roof line dropped by four inches, the windscreen sloped back like on an R129 SL and the boot shortened a little. The alternative was to take a V12 engined R129 and refit it with sheet metal in the style of the W100. The latter

proposal was settled on and very soon this ambitious engineering project began.

Bracq's drawings arrived on October 25 2009, work started on February 4 2010 and just a few months later, on July 29 2010, the 'Grand Mercedes-Benz 600SL', as it has been christened, was complete. Yes, that's right, six committed men worked together to build this car in only six months – well, seven if you include the photographer, but he was less keen on getting his hands dirty!

The base cars were a 2002 R129 SL600 Silver Arrow (a special edition model of which just 100 were produced) and a 1967 W100 600, the 600 with rather decent sheet metal for a donor car. So far, so good. The ideas were in place, the cars were in place, but the budget? A one-off ▷

“We asked Paul Bracq how he pictured a coupe-cabriolet version of the W100 600**”**



Plenty of chrome reminds us of this cabriolet creation's classic connection.



▲ A V12 engine sits under the now front hinged bonnet.



▲ A limited edition Silver Arrow R129 SL is the base car.



The modernity of the R129's cabin makes it perfect for easy, comfortable cruising.



The wheels are too modern for Bracq's taste, so a different set will be fitted.

Whatever it looks like from the outside, in the cabin and under the skin, this is an R129 SL



Seen alongside two R129 SLs, the similarities and the differences are clear.

▷ project can be hard to judge. Let's just say we worked out what it was likely to cost and we are pleased to say we managed to not overspend.

Work started with the doors, the seemingly innocuous task of replacing the door handles the first hurdle that had to be overcome. We wanted to preserve the slick, classic style of the W100 600's handles but also retain the younger SL's remote locking with keyless entry. A real case of old meets new.

Next came the front fenders which had to be made to fit – and it was not just a case of trimming them. But actually, the bonnet was the real issue. The way the W100's fenders had to be attached since the R129 is four to five inches narrower forced a complete re-engineering of the bonnet opening. The W100 and the R129 bonnets were taken to create one new bonnet, so now it opens the opposite way, like on a W113 Pagoda SL, which is rather fitting considering this car is a Bracq re-imagining. We did have grand plans to shift the rear axle back, but decided in the end the headache was not worth it, so we just shortened and rechromed the bumpers.

Although this is a one-off car, we wanted it to look as 'factory' as possible and a key

element in this quest was ensuring the bodywork looked fantastic. After a thorough preparation, a coat of Mercedes' 777 silver was applied to the shell, this chosen as it was the sole colour for the limited edition R129 Silver Arrow range. Once all the parts were attached, two more coats were added. Then the doors and bootlid were removed, clear coated, polished and then the car was reassembled.


A ONE-OFF WONDER

And so the project was complete! Not conventional by any means and we are quite sure not to everyone's taste, but somehow, as it comes from the mind of he who penned the W100 600, it feels authentic, a fantasy come true, if you like. A generously proportioned cruiser for two with headturning capabilities, this Mercedes-Benz has great road presence and gives us the satisfaction of being a job well done. It is also great to know the whole team enjoyed the work, making it satisfying whichever way you look at it.

Open a door, take a seat inside and you are soon reminded that whatever it looks like from the outside, in the cabin and under the skin, this is an R129 SL. There is, however, perhaps

no greater aide-memoire than the moment you turn the key and the SL600's 5,987cc M120 V12 catches. Driving it is a dream and very relaxing, the five-speed automatic easing its way through the gears. You can't but have a broad grin plastered across your face as you cruise gently along in this unique creation. Whether with the panoramic hardtop in place or the soft top, both from the original R129 and both retaining all their original functions, this is a Mercedes like no other – and on an impressive scale.

But what, crucially, does the man himself, Paul Bracq, whose concept has been made a reality, think of this Grand 600SL? Thankfully, we have a happy ending. Bracq sent his sincere congratulations with a single caveat – he is not a fan of the wheels which are too modern in his opinion. Fear not, this one area is still a work in progress. But it is the icing on the cake to have the seal of approval from the great man himself.

Ambitious? Yes. Crazy? Well, maybe. But all for the love of the three-pointed star and the quest for a motoring experience like no other. Mission accomplished. 

► Please see [Web www.mbgrand600.com](http://www.mbgrand600.com) for more information on this car