



# MERCEDES-BENZ

## 500K SPECIAL ROADSTER

### 1934

PRODUCED BY  
BAUER

A preview by Roger Thiedeman

There are classic cars *and* there are classic cars. But few are as desirable as the sleek and brutally powerful 500K – and later 540K – built by Mercedes-Benz in the 1930s. Without doubt they were the supercars of their time, along with the Bugatti Types 57S and 57SC, Duesenberg SSJ, Cord 812, etc. Significantly, the 500K was designed and marketed during a period when Germany was continuing to reassert its might as an industrial powerhouse after World War I, with the German government supporting the Daimler-Benz AG conglomerate's return to eminence as one of the world's leading motor car builders.

Concurrently, the legendary Mercedes-Benz "Silver Arrows", or *Silberpfeile*, racing cars (along with archrival Auto Union) were dominating grands prix in Europe. This success reflected favorably on Benz road cars, which attracted the rich and famous in addition to becoming "chosen

chariots" of high-ranking members of Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party. In that regard, the 500K and 540K – and their less-potent, unsupercharged Stuttgart stablemates – were certainly no exceptions.

Endowed with head-turning, superbly proportioned styling, impeccable engineering, and breathtaking speed, the 500K was the stuff of young boys' dreams – and many older "boys" and "girls" too! – especially the sensuous 500K Special Roadster version, of which only 29 were built between 1934 and 1936, of a total production of 342.

Also known officially as the Type W29, the 500K was a logical development of the 380 (3.8-liter/232ci) and 390 (3.9-liter/238ci) models of 1933 and 1935, respectively. So you don't need to be Einstein to figure that the 500K had an engine displacing 5.018 liters, or 306ci. But that's not the whole story. The water-cooled, eight-cylinder, in-line motor had

overhead valves operated by a camshaft set in the side of the enormous block, and driven by spur gears. And what about the suffix "K" in the 500K type designation, you ask? That stands for *kompessor*, as the Roots-type double-lobe blower, or supercharger, is known in German.

It was that piece of equipment which gave the car such awe-inspiring performance. Activated by flooring the gas pedal, the Roots supercharger cut in with the kick of a mule to boost power output from 100 to 160hp, rocketing the 500K to a maximum speed of 100mph; this in an era when the magical figure of 60mph was regarded as the "sound barrier" for most cars! But even more exciting, while doing its thing the blower emitted what's been described as a demonic shriek that was both exhilarating to the 500K's occupants and alarming to mere mortals watching and listening to the car's swift passage.

Completing the technical specification