



WILD-WINGED AND FLAGRANTLY outlandish, Mercedes 190 Evolution II has but one mission: to win the German Touring Car Championship, beating BMW, Audi and Opel. Without this passionately sought-after goal this, the most extravagant-looking Mercedes ever, simply wouldn't exist.

Greeted with derision from predictable quarters when it first appeared at the Geneva show in March — Audi boss Ferdinand Piech claimed the Evo II looked like it had "antlers on its arse", while BMW chief engineer Wolfgang Reitzle is reported to have declared, "It's totally stupid, the laws of aerodynamics must be different between Munich and Stuttgart" — the Evolution II was an instant sell out.

All 502 of the left-hand-drive-only, homologation specials were sold within days of the Geneva show, with the six examples for the UK long-since spoken for, even at a hefty £55,200, £22,000 more than the standard 2.5-16.

No production car since the 1969 Dodge Daytona and 1970 Plymouth Superbird has carried so tall and spectacular a wing, and they too were designed for racing. The theory and practice behind the 190 Batmobile comes from "the Wing-Pope", Stuttgart University's Pro-

fessor Richard Eppler, who calculated the air flow on the 190 body and created a profile for the Evo II that cuts the Cd figure by 20 per cent to 0.308, and gives positive downforce at both ends of the car. According to Eppler, there's so great a quantifiable improvement in roadholding and braking at race-track speeds, that Mercedes' rivals are certain to follow.

There are two rear wings, the second mounted to the rear of the bootlid. Both are adjustable for racing and can be varied to suit individual circuits. Likewise, the ground-hugging front skirt, that now gives downforce, can be moved forward almost 3ins for racing. It is so low that Mercedes has had to fit an adjustable, Citroen-like, Hydropneumatic self-leveling circuit to the suspension.

The fitment of massive disc brakes, with alloy calipers up front, has been made possible by the beautiful new six-spoke fabricated 17ins Speedline wheels.

You expect such a mean, aggressive machine, created within a tight set of priorities aimed solely at the race track, to be harsh, rough riding and raucous, a thinly-disguised racing car for the road. Appearances in this case are deceptive, for under that ruthless exterior,

the Evolution II is a civilised road car that's far easier to drive very, very quickly than the production model, with remarkable grip and astonishing braking ability.

More power has been found from the already highly tuned, 2.5-litre twin-cam four. By improving oil supply, lightening rotating masses, changes to the inlet and exhaust system and timing, power has been raised to 235bhp at 7200rpm, while maximum torque of 180lb ft is developed between 5000 and 6000rpm. That's the road car. Racing versions develop 330bhp and maximum torque at 7000rpm, and weigh 616lb less than the road car's 2948lb.

While the Evo II is no slouch, it doesn't have the brutal acceleration you might expect of so outrageous a car. Instead, it delivers a seamless flow of power from 4000rpm to the red line of 7700rpm, 500rpm higher than before. If the engine rattles when cold, in the way of a highly strung competition unit, at an uneven 1000rpm idle, it still pulls from 1500rpm in the high fifth gear on a gentle throttle opening. But the action doesn't really begin until it has 3500rpm on the tacho, so you need to work the still-notchy gearchange if the performance is to match the car's appearance. There's an urgency about the

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The 190 Evolution II is designed to fulfil Mercedes' passionate goal of beating off German Gr



Evo II has crisp handling, immense braking and arrow-like stability. 2.5-litre engine's power raised to 235bhp to give 155mph. In racing guise engine gives 330bhp. Ruthless exterior is deceptive — interior shows true colours of being civilised, if very fast, road car



MERCEDES-BENZ 190E 2.5-16 EVOLUTION II

ENGINE

Longitudinal, front-engine/rear-wheel drive.
Capacity 2463cc, 4 cylinders in line.
Bore 97.3mm, **stroke** 82.8mm.
Compression ratio 10.5 to 1.
Head/block al alloy/cast iron.
Valve gear dohc, 4 valves per cylinder.
Fuel and Ignition Electronic, mechanical fuel injection.
Max power 235bhp (173kW) at 7200rpm.
Max torque 180lb ft (245Nm) at 5000-6000rpm.

TRANSMISSION

Five-speed manual.
Ratios Top 1.00, 4th 1.26, 3rd 1.77, 2nd 2.52, 1st 4.08.
Final drive 3.46.

SUSPENSION

Front, struts, separate coil springs, wishbones, anti-roll bar, Hydropneumatic level control.
Rear, independent multi-link system, coil springs, anti-roll bar, Hydropneumatic level control.

STEERING

Recirculating ball, power assisted, 3.0 turns lock to lock.

BRAKES

Front ventilated 11.8ins discs. **Rear** 10.9ins discs, ABS standard.

WHEELS AND TYRES

Aluminium 17 x 8¼ Dunlop SP Sport D40 M2, 245/40ZR17.

DIMENSIONS, WEIGHT

Length	178.3ins (4530mm)
Width	67.7ins (1720mm)
Height	52.8ins (1342mm)
Wheelbase	104.9ins (2665mm)
Weight	2948lb (1340kg)

PERFORMANCE (claimed)

0-62mph 7.1secs, Max speed 155mph (250km/h).

PRICE

£55,200.

engine from 6500rpm that grows to a guttural roar. It's not harsh — the multi-valve engine is too fluent for that — but it is a vocal symbol of its heritage.

This is a delicious, vital engine that demands high revs if you want to match a Porsche 944 — it is claimed to cover the 0-62mph dash in 7.1secs — but is as content to work in the enormously wide mid-range. And those aero-aids work, for the top speed has risen from 143mph to an electronically limited 155mph.

Despite the often irresistible urge to use the red line, the Evo II's roadholding and handling are so good this is seldom necessary on the road. Few cars have so delicate and manageable a chassis. There's the mildest understeer: then, after a seemingly endless period when you really begin to believe the car's limits are impossible to find, you feel the outside rear wheel loading up and by adjusting the line with the throttle, at last, there's a gentle, progressive move to oversteer. All this is discovered in the tight corners in front of Hockenheim's grandstands, where initially the steering feels too light and low geared, the wheel too big, and the damping excessively soft.

Outside the circuit, on Germany's smooth

minor roads, the ride is far firmer than the 2.5-16, but never uncomfortably so. The roadholding and handling are peerless. The super-sticky 245/40ZR17 Dunlop D40s occasionally jarred over the few potholes we could find, and hinted at tramlining on undulations. But they offer a level of adhesion way beyond the high lateral forces the chassis is capable of achieving so effortlessly.

Crispness of handling, immense braking power, arrow-like stability: all add to the Evolution II's appeal as a road car.

Maybe the wings are an integral part of this ability, but I wouldn't want to live with their practical limitations — badly reduced rearward visibility — and extrovert character every day. Perhaps you can't have the one without the other. When the new 190 arrives in 1992, the most sporting models will be powered by a new 220bhp 2.8-litre four-valve six-cylinder engine. It will almost certainly be a very different car. There's a chance the regulations for German touring car racing will change in 1992 and bring to an end the need for 500-strong homologation runs (see page 44). Already Evo II looks set to become a sought-after classic. Especially if it's the last of a breed . . . ■

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... rivals, but is it civilised as a road car? Peter Robinson looks beneath its ruthless exterior