



MARATHON

A daily driver for 30 years and now a cherished classic, this W123 240D is still bringing joy to its first and so far only owner

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THE 1970s WERE GREAT YEARS for Mercedes-Benz. The company was fully recovered from the devastation it suffered during World War Two and was the global symbol of the West German economic miracle. With a succession of successful models that included sports cars like the 300SL, luxury models in the W111s and mainstream models like the 'New Generation' W114/W115 saloons and coupes, Mercedes-Benz was on a roll. This was the backdrop to the 123-series cars.

Like the W114/W115 models they replaced, the 123s were the era's E-Classes, cars that would cover a wide range of buyers' needs, from utilitarian taxis and practical, premium saloons and estates, to stylish coupes. Their styling is now considered timeless and for many, with even the last cars in the series now more than 25 years old, the 123-series is the entry point for classic Mercedes-Benz ownership. The saloon models (W123s) were introduced in 1976, just three years after the first OPEC oil embargo. This made their



“It is in like new condition inside and out, but has travelled more than 113,000 miles!”



△ The familiar W123 face here with the distinctive headlights required to meet US regulations.

JUST THE FACTS



Mercedes-Benz 240D (W123)
Engine OM616 2,399cc 4-cyl
Power 71bhp@4,400rpm
Torque 101lb ft@2,400rpm
Transmission 4-speed auto, RWD
Weight 1,395kg
0-62mph 24.7sec
Top speed 86mph
Fuel consumption 29.7mpg
Years produced 1976-1985

OVERVIEW

This, the most powerful four-cylinder diesel W123, was also easily the best seller, 448,986 units sold worldwide

Figures for a 1982 model year car as pictured; fuel consumption according to EEC urban

◀ These chromed alloys have been on this 240D since Bryant bought it new.

◀ Bryant still has the original manuals and a plate from the supplying dealer.

MERCEDES

relatively diminutive dimensions and wide variety of four- and six-cylinder petrol engines and four- and five-cylinder diesel engines a perfect alternative to traditional luxury cars, especially in America. And so it was that James Bryant walked into his local Mercedes-Benz showroom, House of Imports in Buena Park, California, and traded in his 1979 Cadillac Seville and drove off in a brand new \$22,000, 1982 model year Mercedes-Benz 240D in yellow/gold. It was the start of a love affair that has now lasted 30 years.

UNWAVERING DEDICATION

The *Mercedes Enthusiast* connection to this time capsule 240D started almost three years ago when we encountered it at a car show in nearby Tustin. Even among million dollar exotics like a 1950 Ferrari 195S, Bryant's 240D stood out. It looked exactly like it did when he drove it off the forecourt of House of Imports years earlier. We struck up a conversation with Bryant as he gave us a bumper to bumper tour of the car. In spite of its like new condition inside and out, he pointed out the car had

travelled more than 113,000 miles! It was hard to believe it hadn't undergone a costly restoration. Rather, it is an example of a car that is properly maintained by a meticulous owner who keeps his car as fit as he does himself. Bryant, now 69 years young, is a marathon runner who has participated in his favourite sport for 35 years. Is it a coincidence that he has owned his 240D almost as long?

When asked how he made the transition from a V8 Cadillac Seville to a four-cylinder, 71bhp Mercedes-Benz 240D, here's what he ▶

▷ had to say. “It was at the end of the year in 1982 when I considered a Mercedes-Benz 280,” remembers Bryant. “But the 240D was available and I took a test drive. I couldn’t get over how solid it felt. While not equipped with all the luxury features of my Cadillac, it had air conditioning, which is a must here in Southern California. And after negotiating with the salesman, it was mine.”

For much of its life, the yellow/gold 240D was Bryant’s daily driver, used for his commute. Since his retirement in 2008, this modern classic Mercedes-Benz has covered around 2,500 miles a year, which is enough to keep everything in perfect working order. Bryant notes that he has only had minor problems to deal with, including replacing the water pump, water hose, power door locks, brake pads and radiator. “I keep up the maintenance of my car,” he tells us. “My car has the original paint, upholstery, exterior mouldings and exhaust pipes, and the spare tyre has never touched the ground. I’ve even rebuilt the clock.”

PRESERVING PERFECTION

As you may imagine, keeping the 240D in as delivered condition has been a labour of love for Bryant. “I never drive my car in the rain unless I get caught out, and I never wash my car with soap when cleaning,” he says. “I only use clear water. I change the oil every three months, no matter how little I drive the car. I have used around 12 cans of wax on it! I’m not sure how much chrome polish I have used to maintain the lustrous shine, but it was worth it – and the underside of my car looks as good as the bodywork.” He also says keeping the tyres properly inflated helps fuel economy and extends the life of the rubber itself. Indeed, Bryant is currently on just his third set.

Meeting Bryant and his 240D to take the photographs for this feature only underlined the excellent condition of his Mercedes. It could easily have been 1982. Indeed, had it been 1982, the In-N-Out Burger outlet we stopped at in Costa Mesa to take pictures at and grab some dinner in might well have been there. And although Bryant was happy to take his 240D through the drive-through, a quintessentially Southern Californian thing to do, there was no chance that he would be eating in the car’s flawless leather interior. Instead, we went inside. And as we ate, I could see him keeping an eye on his Mercedes saloon parked just a few feet away. Munching on burgers and fries – Bryant made an exception in his otherwise healthy eating regime – I asked if he were to replace his 240D with a new car, what would it be?

“Firstly, the 240D is like a part of my family now so I’m not sure I would trade it in,” he was quick to respond. “But I think I would purchase a CLS63 AMG. It’s much faster than my 240D. And I’d like to do a European delivery. How great would it be to take delivery in Germany and then put the hammer down on the autobahn?”

We couldn’t agree more. And we are sure that if the time comes to pass on the 240D to a new owner, there would be many Mercedes enthusiasts on both sides of the Atlantic that would happily take the keys. The line starts right here. ■



△ The W123 has enough room for three in the rear.



△ The spare wheel has never been used in 30 years.

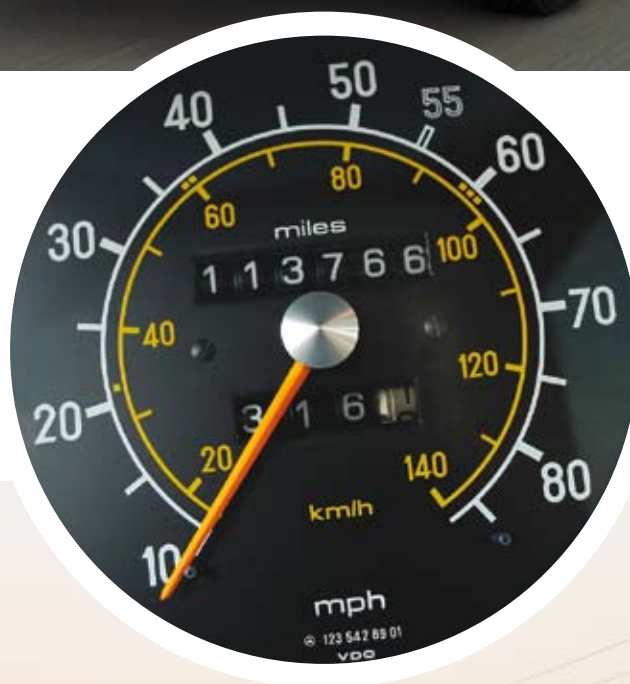


▽ It has a four-speed auto, all the trim is original.





I'm not sure how much polish I have used to maintain the lustrous shine, but it was worth it.



△ It may lack pace, but it is an easy drive and is also very well built.

△◁ The air con keeps you cool, the original leather still remains.

◁ Used little and often, an average of under 4,000 miles per year.

◁◁ The OM616 engine delivers the 240D to 62mph in 24.7 seconds.

