

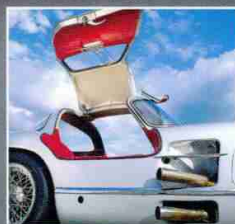
Mercedes-Benz Classic

Breezing
along in luxury

Mercedes-Benz 350 SL



MERCEDES-BENZ L 3500
**Omnibus with
truck genes**



MERCEDES-BENZ 300 SLR
**Silver Arrow
in street attire**



Driven to collect

Model cars, dogs and automobiles – such are the passions of Ron Sturgeon. Where vehicles are concerned, his preference is for those bearing the three-pointed star, whether full-size or scale models. This Texan self-made man and multimillionaire is a genuine hunter-gatherer.

Text Axel Westphal

Photos Cornelius Braun



Ron Sturgeon paid the handsome sum of 12,000 dollars for this handmade, remote-controlled model of the W 154

Everything tends to be just a bit different in the USA. Any type of business is honorable if it brings in money - because 'moneymaking', as they call it over there, is civic duty number one. And one which Ron Sturgeon has fulfilled in exemplary fashion, as a member of the rags-to-riches club.

The Texan started out living in an old camper and repairing cars that had been involved in accidents, primarily Volkswagens. But soon he realized there was quite a bit more money to be made from dismantling the vehicles and selling the parts. "These days we call it recycling," Sturgeon says. Over a period of 26 years the self-taught man from Fort Worth has built up a flourishing business.

"My father died when I was at high school; he left my twin brother and me a life insurance policy worth 2,000 dollars. My stepmother wanted us out of the house. We had to work out how we were going to make ends meet," Ron Sturgeon reflects. Apart from Kathy, a one-time employee whom he soon married, his first love was drag racing - in clapped-out VW Beetles of course. But he soon fell under the prestigious spell of another famous German marque: Mercedes-Benz.

A 1978 300 SD, which was brand new at the time but had been slightly damaged in an accident, first sowed the seeds of Sturgeon's passion for Mercedes; he carefully restored it and drove it for five years. Nowadays the sharp auto-enthusiast fre-

quently orders new cars long before they come onto the market, as was the case with his Mercedes-Benz CLS 500, for example. An SL 55 AMG and an SLK 55 AMG - both in black - also grace one of the two garages on his estate.

Getting the boss on the order list for interesting new cars is the main task of one particular employee. "He telephones all over the States to find the dealer where I can get highest on the list," says Sturgeon with a serious mien. And of course for a businessman like him, the urge to make a few bucks is an important consideration too. "I keep cars like this for a few months then sell them on, so usually I get to drive them for virtually nothing or even at a slight profit."

But that is by no means the case with his classic cars. He recently reduced his collection from over sixty to fewer than ten vehicles. At one time his collection included a red 300 SL coupe, but someone offered him a fairly substantial sum of money for the exclusive car so its number was up and it had to leave the garage. These days the fast-thinking and fast-speaking Texan doesn't do that sort of thing any more: "Nowadays I hang on to my classics!" His current collection includes a white 190 SL, a red 280 SL Pagoda, a 280 SE 3.5 convertible in dark green and a white 450 SL - all in showroom condition, naturally.

While it is fairly easy to understand someone building up such a gallery of noble

Ron Sturgeon loves classic cars with the three-pointed star, and he loves his Cavalier King Charles Spaniels

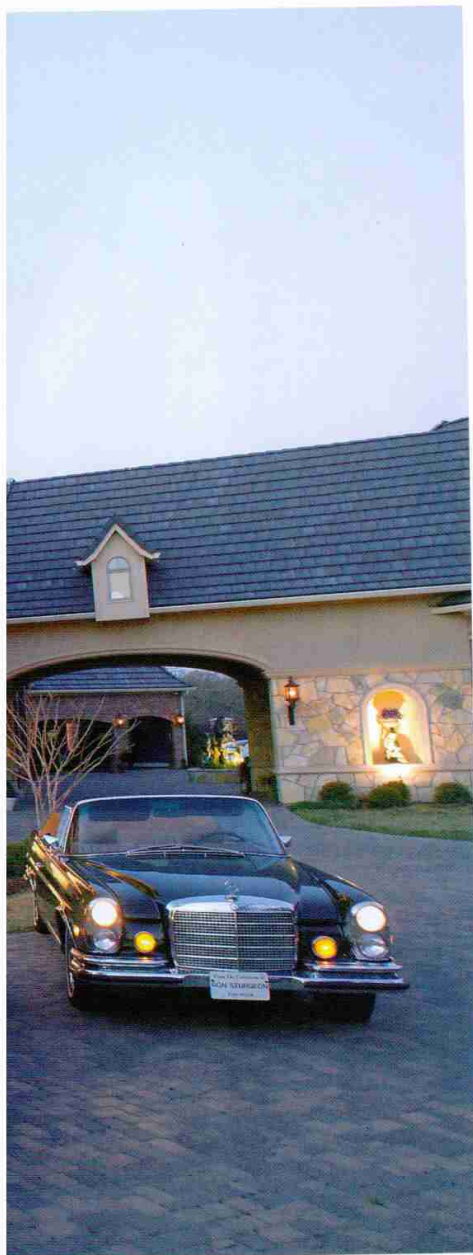




conveyances, the appeal of one of Sturgeon's other collections may be less obvious: model cars, predominantly Mercedes. But anyone wanting to write about them really has to start out by saying a few words about his "French château" - as an American architecture magazine described it - which boasts almost 1,000 square meters (more than 10,000 square feet) of living space. Ostentatious displays of wealth are quite a different matter in the States than in Germany, and are in no way looked on as an embarrassing means of attention-seeking

but rather as something well worth striving for. Consequently, the concentrated luxury of Sturgeon's giant property completed three years ago is displayed openly and with pride. As well as the businessman and his wife, the 'château' is home to three rare pedigree Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, who have their own apartment with its own address and a separate entrance. A small color TV provides diversion for Sturgeon's long-haired four-legged friends. The master of the house is particularly proud of his somewhat unusual library.

Taking as his prototype the old libraries of the great European stately homes, the 'Tin Man' - as he is known in collecting circles - displays his collection of model automobiles over two stories of oak shelving with an open gallery. Sturgeon, who describes himself as a fastidious organizer and a bit of a control freak, has created a database in which he enters details of when he bought which car at what price and from whom. The catalogue lists 2,655 model cars with an overall purchase price of 916,549 dollars. And the collection is growing all the time.



My home is my castle: Sturgeon houses his 1:1 scale Mercedes-Benz models in the garages of his 'French château'

ing three-quarters of a circle and adorned by a lead-lined fanlight in stained glass. The various rooms contain eight fireplaces and several bars, despite the fact that the master of the house is teetotal. The bar in the library is particularly noteworthy: it dates from 1840 and originated from an Irish pub, although it has been updated with modern equipment.

A newspaper from 1963 with the headline "President dead. Shot by assassin" lies on an antique walnut occasional table with an inlaid chessboard. This reference to the assassination of John F. Kennedy reveals an interest in world-changing events on the part of this father of three grown-up sons; a man who had to leave school early due to family circumstances and never went to university. A few particularly rare items, such as a model of the Mercedes that Adolf Hitler allegedly gave to his lover Eva Braun, built by the German firm of Tipp & Co., and a miniature of the 500 K driven by Goebbels, are kept away from prying eyes in a locked cabinet.

"The Eva Braun model was bought from a Swiss collector for 12,000 dollars," says Sturgeon, whose collection of model Mercedes automobiles is no doubt one of the largest in the world. He has developed a particular love for the racing cars and, along with numerous versions of the 300 SLR, he owns Silver Arrows from every year of production, with models on every scale ever produced. The largest, a 1:4 model, comes from the workshop of

American Jerry Mrlik. This handmade, remote-controlled model of the W 154 is fully functional and propelled by a one-cylinder engine.

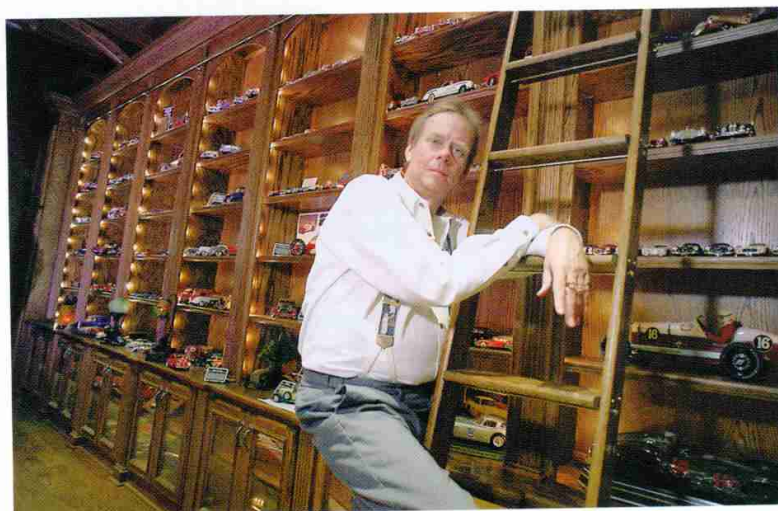
"Having money certainly makes life easier," Ron Sturgeon concedes, but it brings a great deal of responsibility too. His recycling business has grown to no less than 1,000 employees, but the boss still makes all the big decisions himself. Being a self-confessed workaholic, he doesn't find this a burden, although it does test his patience at times. "I can hardly even manage half an hour at the barber without doing some work!"

He somehow also managed to use the few free minutes in every day to complete a manuscript, and his book *How to Salvage Millions from Your Small Business* is now going into its second edition. And of course 'salvage' is another way of saying 'recycle' - an allusion to his recycling business. The ever-active Sturgeon also passes on what he has learnt about building up a business and making it a success by means of articles in marketing journals and by giving regular talks and seminars. For a fee, naturally.

The black CLS 500 glides smoothly along the road on the way back from lunch, and the Texan turns philosophical: "There are some people who do their work and are happy to go home after eight hours, and there are others who can build up and expand a business. Both ways are OK." Mr. Sturgeon belongs to the latter camp. ■

"These days I only go for the real rarities," Sturgeon explains. The aforementioned employee wades through auction catalogues for him, hunts on the Internet, spends hours on the phone, and makes enquiries among other collectors.

Entering Ron Sturgeon's library, the visitor passes through enormous, heavy mahogany doors that date from the nineteenth century and once graced the Hungarian embassy in Paris. The dark-brown oak paneling lends a dignified air to this room 8 meters (26 feet) in height, bordered by a chapel-like section describ-



Model display: A library with no books, but miniature cars instead