

AMG HAMMER 6.0

Putting the muscle on the 180-mph mark in a \$167,000, adult-rated Mercedes-Benz hot rod.

BY MICHAEL JORDAN

Beverly Hills—Everyone grows up sooner or later. The warning signs are easy to recognize. First, you are no longer attracted by a car that rides like a cement truck, sounds like an artillery barrage, and looks like a third-place entry in a school science fair. Second, you are rarely seen in the company of women who chew gum.

Even so, there's one thing adults never lose their passion for, and that's horsepower. Adult-rated horsepower should be well proportioned and civilized enough for daily life, but there should always be lots of it. And lucky for you, we've found the studhorse of adult-rated horsepower, the 375-bhp AMG Hammer 6.0. It can pace the streets like a gentleman or stride the freeway at 180 mph. This is the essence of the modern muscle car, a hot rod for adults.

The Hammer is one of the most talked-about cars in recent memory, weighed down so heavily with hype that it is a wonder the car can move under its own power. So it is all the more surprising to find that everything we have heard about the Hammer is absolutely true. This 6.0-liter version puts numbers on the board like no other car, hammering out new standards of street-legal automotive performance: 375 bhp, 0-to-60-mph acceleration in 5.2 seconds, 186-mph top speed, and 0.85 g on the skidpad.

At first glance, the Hammer looks like little more than a Mercedes-Benz 300E with the characteristic AMG monochromatic treatment. The voluptuous swoops of the standard 300E bodywork are embellished only by a front air dam of injection-molded plastic, the usual complement of rocker panel skirts, and a metal ducktail spoiler integrated into the trunk lid. Yet you can sense the muscles rippling beneath this civilized skin, suggested by a ride height 1.5 inches lower than before, polished seventeen-inch alloy rims, and paint of deepest crimson.

Once you fire up this car and plunge into Wilshire Boulevard's gridlock, you risk a twinge of childish disappointment. The Hammer does its business exactly like a real car. It idles smoothly and without overheating. It eases away from the curb, shifting smoothly. The massive tires fall into potholes and emerge again with a remote thump. The Hammer is completely graceful, so civilized that you can actually enjoy the stereo. Only the steering wheel's on-center skittishness, a side effect of the 45-series tires, indicates that Siegfried's hammer lies under the hood.

When the road clears and you press deeper into the throttle pedal, the Hammer shows its

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CINDY LEWIS



AMG HAMMER

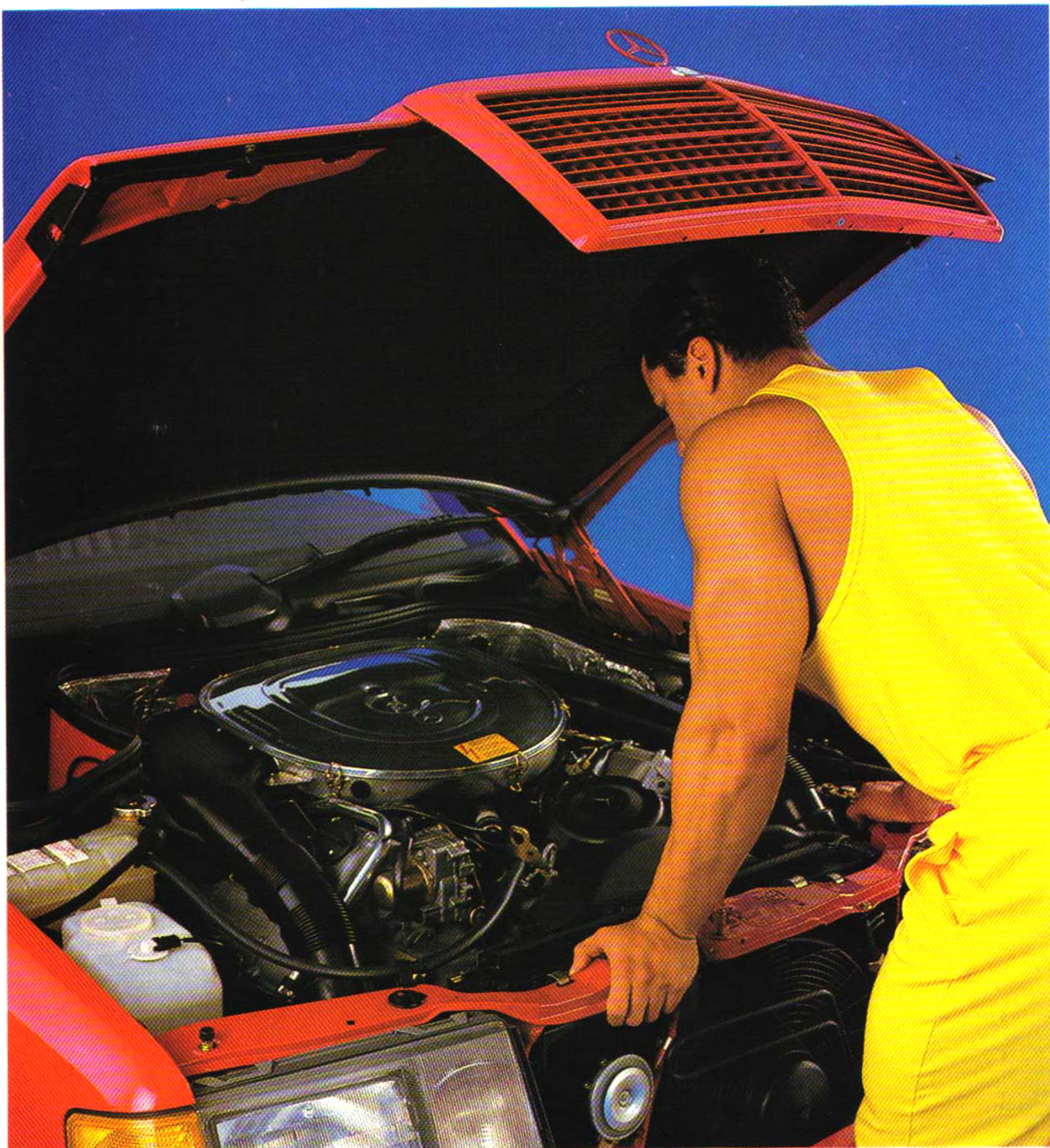
180-mph resolve at last. The engine gets up on the power curve immediately, keeps climbing the dyno chart, and doesn't stop until you're in horsepower heaven. Finally, the secret of the Hammer's strength is made clear: AMG has jacked up the 300E and slid an entirely different car underneath.

Only engineers as wild-eyed as those at AMG could conceive of a proposition like this. The starting point for the Hammer 6.0 is a U.S.-

specification 300E. A 5.5-liter Mercedes-Benz V-8 is bored out to 6.0 liters; then it is adapted to twin-cam cylinder heads, designed and built by AMG, that feature four valves per cylinder; next, it is dropped into the hole left by the 300E's in-line six-cylinder. The 300E's four-speed automatic transmission, calibrated for the engine's power and torque, is matched with the heavy-duty drivetrain from the Mercedes S-class sedans. A torque-sensing

Gleason-Torsen differential with a tall 2.47:1 ratio feeds the power to the rear wheels.

Most hot rodders would be satisfied with a simple drivetrain swap, but AMG carries this project to its logical conclusion. The rear floorpan of the chassis is strengthened to carry the S-class drivetrain, and the battery is relocated to the trunk to improve weight distribution. Specially calibrated springs and Bilstein gas shocks are matched to Pirelli P700



With 375 bhp on tap, the AMG cranks out 0-to-60 times of 5.2 seconds. It's the studhorse of adult-rated horsepower.

AMG HAMMER

tires, 215/45VR-17s in front and 235/45VR-17s in the rear.

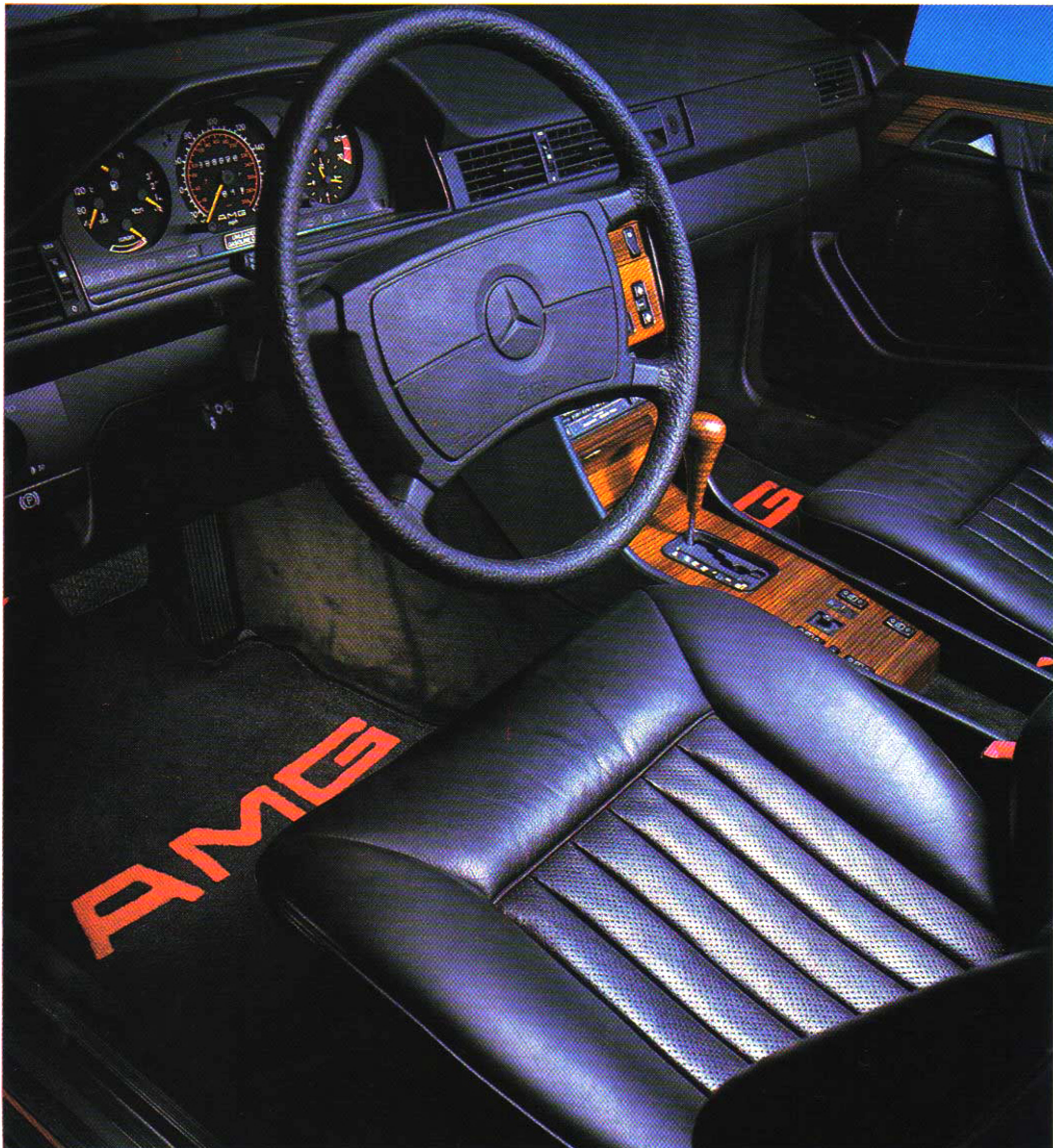
The bad news is, all of these modifications add up to a price tag that'll stretch the limits of anyone's gold-plated charge card: \$167,000. The good news is, this car will stretch your mind, too.

The power never stops. In fact, there is more power than friction, because the Hammer can smoke its tires effortlessly until you reach the middle of second gear. Once third

gear arrives, you are tempted to haul back on the wheel, bring up the landing gear, and see if this bird will fly. And, thanks to a reported Cd of 0.27, the Hammer muscles the air aside quietly and efficiently, so you are relatively unaware of the car's speed until you call on the tremendous brakes to burn off all that energy. The AMG Hammer proves that it is possible to fool Father Physics and momentarily suspend the laws of nature. Things like friction, gravity,

and the speed of light suddenly become irrelevant.

When the road becomes twisty, the Hammer straightens it right out again. The wide low-profile tires respond to your steering cues crisply but predictably. The suspension maintains its resilience over the bumps and around the bends, and you soon feel a euphoric sense of invulnerability. The Hammer's impeccable manners at speed can frustrate you, however, because the car's



Although AMG logos abound inside, the cockpit is unmistakably that of a 300E, with typically largish M-B steering wheel and all.

A RACER IMPROVES THE BREED

Hans-Werner Aufrecht is the muscle behind the Hammer.

AMG appears very successful these days, and for good reason. The company's line of monochromatic Mercedes-Benz bodywork has become a worldwide fashion. Its four-valve cylinder head, which went from blueprint to metal in only a year, has won AMG a reputation for technical excellence. And major manufacturers have begun to hire the company on a consulting basis for production car projects. No wonder Hans-Werner Aufrecht, the principal partner of AMG, looks so prosperous.

Yet the well-bred manners of AMG's *Geschäftsführer* barely disguise a steely-eyed dedication to performance. Aufrecht began his automotive career in the Mercedes-Benz race shop during the early Fifties, building engines for the firm's 300SL sports cars, and more than thirty years later he still has an engine builder's outlook. When it comes to performance, Hans-Werner Aufrecht does not compromise.

Aufrecht and a partner, Erhard Melcher, established AMG in 1967, inside an old mill near the village of Burgstall in Baden-Württemberg. Today AMG has a modern four-building complex in Affalterbach, near Stuttgart, complete with an installation center, a paint

shop, upholstery facilities, engine dynamometers, and a machine shop. Yet Aufrecht says the company still does business in the same way, building high-performance Mercedes-Benz hardware and developing it through racing. "From 1967 to 1977, we did only engine and suspension development work," Aufrecht says. "Always we are racing. In those days we came second in the 24 Hours of Spa with a Mercedes 6.3; this year we have a sixteen-valve 190E in the European Touring Car Championship. So you see that we are always coming from the sports and *technik* way, and we show it at the race *platz*."

The company, which has 130 employees, expects to modify around 3000 cars this year in Germany, in addition to over 1000 to be made in the U.S. for American consumption. AMG hopes that the yearly sales of its cars in this country will expand to 4500 within the next five years. Richard Buxbaum, the president of AMG of North America, is establishing a nationwide chain of ten AMG installation centers to attain that goal. Aufrecht notes: "We want installation centers, not sales centers. We must have trained people so our whole program—

technik, optik, and the interior—is performed properly."

Andy Cohen, the president of Beverly Hills Motoring Accessories, has established AMG West as part of this operation, and he believes the time is right for AMG's approach to the aftermarket. Quality parts and guaranteed installation have become the most important aspects of the business, Cohen says. Moreover, the legal problems of gray-market cars have served to strengthen AMG's position, simply because the German firm can back its work with both warranty coverage and product liability insurance.

Nevertheless, AMG's most important asset appears to be Aufrecht himself. Engine builders are hard-bitten and uncompromising men who believe that perfection is attainable and who will not rest until it is achieved. And it is this race-bred approach to automotive technology that sets Aufrecht and AMG apart from others in the tuning business. As Aufrecht says, "We must always lead and innovate, and we will not worry about those who copy us, because copies always use old *technik*." The difference at AMG is not in the hardware but in the philosophy that shapes it. —MJ





AMG HAMMER


limits lie perilously close to your own limits as a driver. There is simply more speed here than you can let out.

At this point in the conversation, most magazines would admit that this latest contract with speed has a fair amount of fine print. That's because things like prototype parts and a glaring lack of emissions certifications are usually overlooked in the heat of boyish enthusiasm. But since we are adults like you, we are pleased to report that this AMG Hammer 6.0 is a real car that you can drive right here in America. Bosch KE-Jetronic fuel injection and Porsche 928S 4 catalysts prepared it for squeaky clean stateside duty, and in fact, all AMG cars are being built to U.S. emissions specifications these days, a pleasant byproduct of the new no-lead German emissions laws. There are two Hammers available for your driving enjoyment: a 5.6-liter for those of you in the \$143,000 bracket, and the 6.0-liter seen here for \$167,000.

At prices like these, it is tempting to dismiss the AMG Hammer as merely a misguided exercise in exotic technology—partly an advertisement for AMG's four-valve cylinder head, partly an entry in the 188-mph status game called "tempo 300" (300kph) that has fired the imaginations of German tuners. After all, plenty of less expensive cars can



also help you explore the dark side of the speedometer.

Yet the Hammer is alone in its ability to serve as real-world transportation for adults. The AMG Hammer is a muscle car, but it is a muscle car that rewards adult sensibilities. It carries a great big price, but it also offers greatness in every parameter of automotive performance, providing comfort as well as speed. The AMG Hammer is more than merely a fast car; it is a glimpse of what an automobile can be, a benchmark against which all other cars will be judged from this moment on. Frankly, it's worth the money. 

AMG Hammer 6.0
Base price \$167,000

GENERAL:
Front-engine, rear-wheel-drive sedan
5-passenger, 4-door steel body

POWERTRAIN:
DOHC V-8, 363 cu in (5956cc)
Power SAE net 375 bhp @ 5500 rpm
4-speed automatic transmission

CHASSIS:
Independent front and rear suspension
Power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering
11.2-in vented front, 10.2-in vented rear discs
215/45VR-17 front, 235/45VR-17 rear Pirelli P700 tires

MEASUREMENTS:
Wheelbase 110.2 in
Curb weight 3600 lb
Fuel capacity 21.0 gal