

CLASSIC DRIVER

Beat the Paris - Geneva flight with this aerophobe's Mercedes 190 E Evo II

Lead

With triple the sticker price and triple the road presence of a regular 190 E, the homologation special EVO II was Mercedes at its craziest and best, and for one heroic owner it was the perfect alternative to air travel.



If you had a fear of flying how would you travel across Europe? Would you make use of the rail networks and take a train, or perhaps long haul bus journeys would have to be the solution? To us car enthusiasts, however, both those options sound like fate worse than death, which is why the owner of this 190 E 2.5 EVO II is such a hero. In order to circumnavigate his fear of flying, this car's previous and only custodian circumnavigated the globe behind the wheel of his wild homologation special Mercedes, racking up mileage more commonly associated with space travel. However, it's worth exploring the history of one of Merc's maddest saloons to understand why it's the perfect choice for crossing continents.



As the name suggests, the EVO II was the second evolution of Mercedes' sporty baby sedan. Things started with the 190 E 2.3 - 16, initially intended to compete at rallying, Mercedes wisely decided to turn to the DTM championship after Audi debuted its world beating Quattro. However, for Mercedes to compete in the DTM, the race cars had to have a road-going counterpart, thus the 190 E 2.3 - 16 was born with a detuned version of the Cosworth engine found in the touring car. Mercedes was just getting started though, and a fierce rivalry with BMW and their iconic E30 M3 meant that the 190 E saw a constant stream of improvements, resulting in the 190 E 2.5, which featured a larger, more robust engine and a 17 bhp bump in power. These first two models, although certainly much more spritely than the standard 190 Es, didn't look all too extreme - with little more than a boot spoiler to hint at their motorsport credentials, however, things were about to change.





BMW were hardly resting on their laurels and were constantly updating their baby sports saloon themselves. The M3 Evolution, and Evolution II saw the E30 M3 gain more power, more aggressive bodywork, lighter glass, and bigger tyres. However, it was the introduction of the M3 Sport Evolution in 1989 that really lit a fire underneath Mercedes' engineering department. It boasted a larger 2.5-litre engine with 235 bhp, an adjustable front splitter and rear wing, and brake cooling ducts in place of the front foglights. Enter the 190E 2.5-16 EVO I, resplendent with a larger rear wing, bigger front splitter and more muscular arches, and even an adjustable suspension system controlled from an interior switch - cutting-edge tech for the late 80s. Clearly Merc's skunkworks department enjoyed letting their hair down with the EVO I, because things were about to get really crazy with the introduction of one of the coolest homologation specials of all time.



Which brings us to the undisputed king - the 190 E 2.5 EVO II. Unveiled at the 1990 Geneva Motor Show, at first glance it seemed that Mercedes had mistaken Geneva for fighter jet convention. But don't mistake that outrageous bodykit for the work of an overexcited teenager, Mercedes enlisted the help of the big guns to ensure their über saloon had the edge on its BMW rival. Aerodynamicists from the University of Stuttgart were responsible for shaping the bodykit, which included an adjustable front splitter as well as adjustable flaps on both the boot lid and the wing itself. The end result of the combined efforts of Germany's brainiest boffins? 57.1 kg of downforce on the rear axle and 21.2 kg over the front axle, not mind-blowing by today's standards, but at least it worked! The [1990 Mercedes 190 E 2.5-16 EVO II](#) you see here is number 309 of just 500 examples, making it rarer than even the shiny [new Ferrari Daytona SP3](#). It has had only one flying-averse owner in over 30 years, who used the car as his daily during its first 10 years, regularly driving between Paris and Geneva. He then kept it for weekend pleasure drives for the remainder of his ownership. This is no garage queen, but it is in excellent condition and its high mileage should encourage its next custodian to enjoy it as much as its first. If you see yourself behind the wheel of this wild Merc, then [Aguttes Autumn sale on December 12th](#) is your chance to acquire one of the most iconic Mercedes of all time.

Photos by Mathieu Bonnevie

Gallery

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