

300 SLS

(Continued from page 11)

Most of the instruments are stock, although a speedometer is not fitted. After the ritual of checking the pedals for foot clearance, (you've only got to catch your foot once between brake and throttle pedal to find out how really hard some little things are to explain), a flip of the fuel pump switch, a quick turn and release of the ignition key and about 240 bhp sit idling quietly waiting.

The clutch is surprisingly light in operation but has a healthy bite. The standard first gear is of a fairly low ratio and makes light work of getting this car off the mark.

TRIALS

The first laps were as sedate as an old-fashioned waltz. The coupe had made an indelible impression, but it didn't take long for the obvious ability of the SLS to get through. To put it bluntly, the car handles.

Although some of the characteristics of the coupe are still apparent, they are so to a lesser degree. On entering a fast bend, caution is demanded just as with the coupe because the condition of oversteer is still present. The latitude for an error in judgment just isn't as great as it might be with a car of neutral, or understeering, characteristics. The brakes are excellent and according to Porter, they have never given trouble through fading. Although acceleration below 60 mph is not shattering, above 60 it's pretty stout.

One hundred and twenty-five mph could be reached consistently by the end of the main straight when lapping seriously. The lack of everything it takes to really get out of the chute does not hurt the speed at the end of a quarter mile, 103 once being recorded, but it does reflect itself in the elapsed time. Best elapsed times are in the neighborhood of fourteen seconds for the standing quarter. There is the definite feel of plenty of hp at the rear wheels in cornering that is reassuring and this combined with slight oversteer makes interesting work of Willow's tight corners.

During the afternoon Reventlow and Porter traded cars in a generous manner, with Kelly making sure that he wasn't forgotten (did I hear someone say something about a nice job?)

In this little game of musical chairs, played here with \$10,000 automobiles, each of the drivers found himself to be on the average of ten to twelve seconds per lap faster with the SLS than with the coupe. In view of the high speeds

involved, this is an outstanding testimonial for the handling of Porter's car.

After initially trying the car, I remarked to Porter that it handled surprisingly well. It took me awhile to recover from the salty statement that came back from behind Porter's ever-present cigar. In essence it was, "What did you expect?"

Porter's right, it isn't surprising that this special is a potent racing car. It's just surprising that someone didn't think of it sooner.

The 300 SL prototype of 1952 that had all the competition running around in circles was a hot rod built by Uhlenhaut in the Mercedes factory out of stock production components. The stock SL of today is by all indications only a heavier and possibly higher powered version of that startling 1952 competition car.

Porter had the right idea, apparently so simple that it didn't occur to anyone else. Just by building a super light body on the SL, he made himself a reasonable replica of a car that would still not be outclassed today, the Mexico 300 SL.

The record of the car in races to date has been an encouraging one for Porter, whose road racing career began with the completion of the SLS. Although he had a successful career as a midget driver, he wasn't too certain of his ability to adjust to a road circuit.

SLS's RECORD

The first actual test of the car came at a local drag strip. Speeds of 100 to 105 mph were recorded at the end of the standing quarter. Not too impressive when it's remembered that in overall competition this car runs against the Murphy Buick and the D-Jag, but creditable enough for what Porter calls an engine straight from the junk yard.

In its first race at Pomona, California, the car proved reliable and stable, recording third in class and eighth overall even though difficulty with the fuel injection timing left the car woefully short of revs. At Santa Maria, run under SCCA rules, Porter was accepted in the novice race and ran off and hid from everybody for an overall first place. This quickly graduated him from the classification of novice to senior driver where his entry in the senior main event gained him another first in class. A few weeks later at San Diego, in Saturday's racing, he placed second in class to one of Enzo's very potent three liter Monzas. In the Sunday main event, the reliability of the Merc saw him outlast the Ferrari and he gained another class first when the Monza lost its gearbox.

With five starts, three of them class wins, one second and one third and an overall first in the novice class, with no retirements and with a driver who admits himself to be inexperienced, Porter

has really set a precedent in Specials' Building. There's only one hitch. What else can be done to improve its performance?

The engine is notoriously hard to improve upon. Extensive bench testing and road testing of each SL before it leaves the factory insures that near maximum is being obtained. The camshaft can be changed to advantage and slight alterations in the injection timing can be made with noticeable improvement. Other than this, tuning becomes a series of little dodges, like running twelve quarts of oil instead of fourteen and blanking off the radiator so that the oil temperature is maintained at a high operating level or like changing the distributor rotor from the type with resistor to the type that does not have the resistor.

Little could be done with the compression ratio without really extensive modifications. Stock clearance between exhaust valve and piston on the exhaust stroke is one millimeter, or 39 teenie weenie thousandths of an inch. This should really give SL owners with a heavy foot the fits.

In contradiction to this, the performance of some of the SL's that ran the Mille Miglia would lead you to believe that somebody had monkeyed with them, and not just changed distributor rotors either. If the factory does have further modifications for the SL engine, they will undoubtedly let Porter know about them.

CHASSIS

The chassis, suspension, and body need very little modification from a performance standpoint. The installation of competition shock absorbers and springs combined with the low weight and the lowered center of gravity leave little to be desired, although the new low pivot point rear axle might result in higher speeds through the corners and better acceleration out of them. The brakes seem more than adequate. The available axle ratios make it possible to suit almost any course conditions.

Porter has proved pretty well that he has initiative, and you can be sure that the performance of this car will not remain static.

Perhaps this would be a good time to say a word about Porter and other specials' builders. Their cars are fast, terrifically so, compared to what you normally drive. All you have to do is unravel one of these things down off the hill and into the sweeping corner at Willow to feel a stir of admiration for these guys that build and race them.

Reventlow, who has proved himself a pretty heady and competent driver, made a statement that I most heartily agree with after trying the SLS, "It goes!"

— Mourning, Kelly