

Insight from a Mercedes-Benz tuning industry veteran

Gaining width



Resident tuning house specialist Ian Kuah continues with tales of how he first came to know of some of the wilder names in tuning and why they developed that way during the prosperous 1980s



SGS specialised in a very particular kind of customisation.

The 1980s were a heady era when the newly minted yuppie marked out one end of the monied spectrum, and the silly but seriously rich the other. What they both had in common was a penchant to flaunt their wealth in conspicuous ways. The German aftermarket accessory manufacturers were always happy to indulge such customers, and companies like Kamei, Zender and BBS profited from selling bodykits and wheels for the growing premium small car segment, personified by the VW Golf GTi, BMW 3-Series and Mercedes 190E.

At the other end of the scale, the Arab oil spigot was wide open and some truly amazing creations were turned out by tuners and coachbuilders which added widebody conversions, gullwing doors and opulent interiors with big sound systems to flagship Mercedes models. Even Ferrari and Porsche did not escape the personalisation treatment, and no matter how vulgar a transformation may have seemed, with substantial profits at stake the old adage, 'The customer is always right' ruled the day!

The most spectacular Mercedes creations of this era came from opposite ends of Germany, the products of Chris Hahn of Styling Garage (SGS) in Hamburg, and Willy Koenig of Koenig Specials in Munich.

SGS made a name for itself with gullwing door conversions for the C126 and the

Marbella Convertible version of this car with its powered soft top. SGS sold around 2,000 cars between 1980 and 1995, including over 300 of the elegant Marbella convertible.

Hahn became such an expert on engineering convertibles even Karmann and Mercedes later consulted him for some special projects.

With a good eye for proportion and detail, Chris Hahn realised that stretching an S-Class limousine beyond a certain point made it look



stretched limousine, the dimensional increase significantly improved interior space and made ingress and egress easier.

The basic Royale had a list price of £100,000, which was a huge amount of money back in 1983. You could then specify just about any bespoke equipment including a TV, video, writing consoles and a state-of-the-art CD, radio and cassette sound system, making the Royale as close to a mobile living room as you could wish for. And if you had a problem with political rivals or potential kidnappers SGS also offered an armoured version!

While SGS mainly worked on 126 SEL and SEC models, having launched Koenig Specials with a tuned Ferrari 365GT4 Berlinetta Boxer, Willy Koenig, a successful technical book publisher and amateur race driver was destined to write his tuning script mainly for two-seater sports cars.

Koenig Specials made a huge splash with the widebody Ferrari and this quickly became the company's signature style. Koenig's designer at the time was Vittorio Strosek, a graduate of the School of Automobile Design in Wuppertal and former employee of Luigi Colani.

Strosek had a gentleman's agreement with Willy Koenig that Porsche was off the table, as he had his own design company centred on Porsche. However, Koenig broke their agreement, and so ended their partnership.

◀ The SGS Royale was also widened to improve the look.



Prior to that, Strosek had designed the wild Koenig Specials R107 SL widebody conversion that really turned heads when I photographed it in Munich back in 1984.

Subsequent Koenig Specials Mercedes were based on the W201, 124-series, 126-series, R129 and C140.

The widebody style originally penned by Vittorio Strosek had a huge influence on the aftermarket styling industry in the 1980s,

inspiring tuners such as Rieger and Kerscher to bring widebody styling to more modestly priced cars like the Escort XR3i, and VW's Golf and Scirocco.

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ungainly. His solution was the SGS Royale that was re-proportioned by increasing its width and height as well. Not only did this car look more 'normal' than any conventional

