



Steam's up – not only under the hood: The 300 SEL 6.3 in the Nesjavellir geothermal area



Supply secured: Pipeline from the Nesjavellir power station to Reykjavík

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WHEN LEAST EXPECTED

Sveinn Þorsteinsson rode in this 300 SEL 6.3 when he was a child. It once belonged to his uncle. Many years later Þorsteinsson rediscovered the automobile quite by chance – and now he drives the only 300 SEL 6.3 in Iceland.

On the rear seat he found the little red plastic rings from the caps he used to fire with his toy revolver when he played cowboys – and in the ashtray in the front there were still cigarette stubs his uncle had left there long ago. Sveinn Þorsteinsson suddenly felt transported back to his childhood when he rediscovered the dark-blue 300 SEL 6.3: “It was as if I was a little boy again and my uncle was taking my brother and me on an outing into the countryside.”

Today it is Þorsteinsson who takes the wheel. Not long ago he hit upon the Mercedes by pure chance. “For almost twenty years I never once thought about this automobile – my family and my job were more important. Then one day the car of my childhood came back to my memory, and all of a sudden I had a strange, undefined feeling in the pit of my stomach,” Sveinn recalls.

Telepathy or pure chance?

As if someone had been reading his thoughts, while waiting for a spare part in an automotive workshop a few days later Þorsteinsson stole a look under a tarpaulin: “Suddenly, there it was, right in front of me. A short while and a quick glance at the vehicle documents later it was clear: it was indeed my uncle’s automobile! He was the last one to drive a Six-Three in Iceland. Ever since 1986 the car had stood in the workshop, forgotten, waiting to be awakened from its protracted sleeping-beauty slumber.

Now the dark-blue 300 SEL 6.3 of 1968 vintage once again purrs its way across Iceland’s rugged countryside like a proud tomcat – and what’s more, as the only representative of its kind on this North Atlantic island. As soon as we leave Reykjavík behind, the country road winds this way and that through ancient moss-covered lava fields. Sveinn enjoys weekend trips to Þingvellir, not far from the capital. “It may not be the most beautiful spot in Iceland, but it certainly is the most significant,” he says. The Alþingi, the traditional general legislative assembly, was held here for the first time back in 930, at the end of Iceland’s settlement by Norwegian Vikings.

And it was here that the parliamentary Republic of Iceland was proclaimed on June 17, 1944. The red, white and blue Icelandic flag flutters proudly in the wind. Behind it rises a steep rocky cliff, several hundred meters long, its top perfectly straight as if cut off with a huge sharp knife. Þingvellir is located in the midst of a rift valley, on the diverging boundary between the North American and European continental plates. It is surrounded by four active volcanic systems. Together with the Gullfoss waterfall and the Haukadalur geysers, Þingvellir belongs to the best-known sights of Iceland, the so-called Golden Circle.

The Six-Three came to Iceland in 1971

Sveinn Þorsteinsson stops the automobile and unpacks his picnic hamper – an old-style one, bearing the three-pointed star, of course – then brews coffee and offers us Icelandic cookies. Children play



Breathtaking panorama: View of Pingvallavatn Lake in Iceland's southwest

“SUDDENLY, MY 6.3 WAS SPEAKING IN ITS OWN MOTHER TONGUE AGAIN.”

on the meadows. The W 109 shines majestically in the sun. Sveinn Þorsteinsson's uncle Geir, at that time manager of the Icelandic automobile import company Ræsir, had the 300 SEL 6.3 brought to the island in 1971. Geir Þorsteinsson, a Mercedes dealer, had already imported the first autos back in the 1950s. Sveinn thus grew up with the love of Mercedes-Benz from his earliest childhood. In 2003 together with other enthusiasts he founded the Icelandic Mercedes-Benz Club, whose president he remained for four years. Apart from the 300 SEL 6.3 there are other treasures in Sveinn's possession, such as a white 1964-model 190 D (W 110). “They are simply fantastic automobiles,” says the 50-year-old programmer with conviction, carrying on with a touch of sentimentality: “In many ways, old automobiles are like people: as they age they often gain more and more of an aura.”

A picnic with a star: Sveinn Þorsteinsson enjoying coffee, Iceland-style



A stately Mercedes in a wild-romantic setting

Our drive back to Reykjavík takes us along the picturesque western shores of Pingvallavatn lake, past the Nesjavellir geothermal zone in the region of Hengill volcano. Imposing clouds of white smoke rise above ochre-yellow rhyolite mountains. The power plant installed here supplies the capital of this second-largest European island-state with hot water and electricity. Its pipelines crawl over the fractured slopes of the volcano and its foothills like stout, endlessly long, gray earthworms. They wend their way to well within the city of Reykjavík.

Uncle's cigarette stubs still in the ashtray

Sveinn Þorsteinsson says that as soon as he bought the 300 SEL 6.3 after finding it concealed under its canvas cover, he set about refurbishing it, completing the task in just a few weeks. After his uncle had sold the luxury sedan in 1986 it was hardly moved at all. No one had cleaned it up, let alone removed the cigarette butts. “And even though it was packed full of spare parts, it was in surprisingly good condition.” The W 109 now rolls along the roads of Iceland in its stately manner once again, just like it used to many years ago. “When I am at the wheel I feel transported back to my childhood,” smiles Sveinn. “There are so many details of this car that have been familiar to me as long as I can remember.” When Sveinn Þorsteinsson bought the car in 2002, he repaired the Becker radio and switched it on, finding the set was still tuned in to a German station. “My Six-Three had suddenly found its voice again – in its own mother tongue,” he smiles. And what about the cigarette stubs? He keeps them in the ashtray – where they appear to have lain since time immemorial. ●



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