

# For Us, These Are Practically Brand-New



## 1994 MERCEDES-BENZ E320

**Owner:** Joe Severns, Auction Reporter  
**Purchase date:** September 2005  
**Price:** \$7,500  
**Mileage since purchase:** 19,000  
**Recent work:** Water pump replaced, new tires; about to replace rear main seal

Every day I would pass the Porsche mechanic's shop in Valdosta, Georgia, and every day I would ponder going in, talking to the owners, and asking them to locate a mid- or full-sized German car for me.

I finally stopped and inquired about possibly buying a customer's car or getting them to inspect one or two local BMWs that I had my eye on. The owner's son had the nicest-looking E320 sitting out back, his daily driver, a car that he babied—but still a car with, to me anyway, a serious price. He talked me into a test drive, even though I wasn't looking for such a formal car. I fell in love with it after two blocks.

The asking price was \$8,500, and through my masterful negotiation skills, I talked him down to \$7,500—high for that model car, but I felt confident, as it belonged to a certified Mercedes-Benz and Porsche mechanic of some note. He took excellent care of the car and kept meticulous records, which went back to the original female owner. Of course, she only drove it to church and the market.

I bought the car, replaced the tires and water pump, and the car has given me no trouble, save for a sometimes noisy fan in the finicky automatic climate control and an oil slick on my garage floor from a leaky rear main seal. It's two-tone black and gray with (illegally) limo-tinted windows. The Police Benevolent Association sticker on the rear window—courtesy of my sheriff brother—has gotten me out of plenty of tickets.

The car drives straight and true, and, for having 180,000 miles, is still one of the best cars that I have owned.



## 1985 AVANTI COUPE

**Owner:** Dave Kinney, Senior Auction Analyst (OK, it really belongs to my wife, Stella Koch)  
**Purchase date:** 1985  
**Price:** \$35,000  
**Mileage since purchase:** 8,000  
**Recent work:** Replaced rear window

Stella owns the matching coupe to my 1985 Avanti convertible, one of three built before production ceased and the factory closed, a recurring theme with Avanti, the car that refuses to die. The coupe is one of seven with a factory-equipped 5-speed transmission, a Doug Nash unit normally found in Camaros and Firebirds of the era. The car is also one of two 1985s built with 1963–64 style fenders, providing a bigger opening for wider tires. It was also factory-equipped with such nice features as Koni shocks and Recaro seats.

We purchased the car new, and it has since led a quiet life, mostly in the garage, driven a few dozen to a few hundred miles per year.

Last October, I was in the garage and saw shattered glass alongside the Avanti. The large rear window was in thousands of pieces, both inside and around the car. I went searching for a source—something that had fallen from the roof of the garage or another source of contact. A friend suggested that the defroster was left on, but the battery had been disconnected since the previous month.

After a bout of procrastination, I called our insurance carrier, Hagerty, and telephonically filed a claim. Hagerty, with my direction, found a new backlight, and it was expertly replaced by KC's Auto Glass of Springfield, Virginia. No one at the glass shop was surprised that the glass just decided to give way on its own time. Lesson learned—and it's a tough one to swallow—sometimes things happen just because they happen, and the best care and planning won't help.



## 1990 BUICK ESTATE WAGON

**Owner:** Geoff Archer  
**Purchase date:** December 2005  
**Price:** \$1,550  
**Mileage since purchase:** 750  
**Recent work:** New tires and wiper blades

As I dragged two jetlagged dogs in huge plastic crates, several enormous suitcases, one cranky toddler, her pregnant mother, and all of their associated externalities through the Portland Airport parking garage in search of our getaway car, I felt like a mash-up of Chevy Chase's Fletch and Clark Griswold characters.

It was pouring rain and after ten at night. Various SCM staffers had set me up with an "arrive and drive" package; though I found the car myself on Portland's Craigslist, I had never seen it in person.

We live in Virginia during the school year and vacation on the Oregon coast whenever we can. When making our travel plans, I was aghast to find that three weeks in a large rental car would have run about \$1,400. I thought, "My first few cars cost less than that!" And that's when it dawned on me. I felt inspired to live the dream: I wanted to buy a car, use it for a few weeks, and sell it for no loss.

There she was, glowing under the buzzing fluorescent lights, beached on level 5G; my first "woody wagon." I climbed in through the passenger side, slid across the huge brown leather bench, and found the keys under the driver's floor mat—just where Web Analyst Jason Gaspey said they'd be. I loaded up my Griswolds and floated precariously round and round the tight, concrete corkscrew exit ramp. Both wipers squeaked on each pass of the windshield crack that Senior Editor Paul Duchene had said, "couldn't get any worse." I breathed deeply through my nose and felt a satisfied grin coming on. Idling at the cashier's booth I felt like a real man; a family man with laminated, simulated-woodgrain flanks. ♦

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Sold for \$253,750  
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July 2005

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