



Offroad dreams

A long-held passion for the G-Wagen hasn't diminished over the years for one enthusiastic owner, writes *Lizzie Pope*



Craig Pusey

G-Wagen ownership has helped Jesús forge new friendships.

There can be few better reasons for choosing a car than fulfilling a childhood dream, and for company director Jesús Fernández-Salguero, the mighty G-Wagen was just the car for the job.

Born and brought up in Spain, Jesús was no stranger to the Stuttgart marque. "My father always had them," he recalls. "He used to say 'Mercedes is Mercedes, and then there's the rest.'" He remembers being at secondary school when the G-Wagen was launched, and being impressed by its engineering. Since then he knew that one day he'd own one.

"I always fancied one but there's no point when you live in a city like Madrid or London," says Jesús. "They're too big, too bad with fuel and not politically correct, you wouldn't use it enough." However when he moved from Madrid to a more rural location he seized the opportunity. "I knew this was the time for me to buy one," he says.

His first G was a 12-year-old 300GD. He loved it so much that when his

company moved him from Spain to Surrey in 1998 he couldn't bear to leave it behind. After a few years this was joined by another, newer 300GD. He couldn't resist the chance to get a left-hand-drive G-Wagen ready for his return to Spain.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

"The trouble was this left us with two near-identical cars," recounts Jesús, "so unfortunately we had to sell the old car, even though my wife Maria preferred the older, scruffier one." With a big smile Maria agrees. "The other one was literally like a tractor," she says. "But I've got electric windows now!"

They've got a C180 Estate for ferrying their three children about in, but it's clear the G is the family favourite. "My wife loves it," says Jesús. "We have to fight for the car. We've always liked how they drive and their presence on the road." But what he really values is the car's off-road capabilities. "What is the point in Mercedes having spent so much effort in

Mercedes-Benz 300GD

Engine 2,996cc six-cyl

Power 111bhp@4,600rpm

Torque 141lb/ft@2,700-2,900rpm

Transmission five-speed manual

Weight 2,090kg

Top speed 88mph (44mph off-road)

Years produced 1979-1991



engineering the car if you don't use it?" asks Jesús. "It was engineered for the purpose it was engineered for – going off-road in the most efficient and least disruptive manner, with no waste of power."

But for Jesús this car has achieved more than off-roading prowess, it's been a social lifeline. "It's hard when you move countries and you don't have any friends," he says. "I heard about the G-Wagen Owner's Association on the internet [www.gwoa.co.uk], and within two months of landing here I was elected as a committee member. Finding a club and being made welcome was a good opportunity to make friends." He's now the club's Regional Southern Representative and has enjoyed going off-road on club events. "We sometimes end up pulling the Land Rovers out!" he jokes.

With a five-speed 'box, permanent four-wheel-drive and high and low ratio transfers, it's clear that the G's ready to tackle anything Jesús throws at it, and he's certainly not precious about his pride and joy, which

bears the battlescars of his off-road antics.

"I got a wheel in a gully coming down a hill and hit a tree," he explains, gesturing towards a dent on the roof, "but what do I care? It's meant to have scars. You don't get these with metallic paint because you scratch it, it's what the car was made for. I love driving it." His driving experience isn't just defined by the G's extensive off-road abilities. Winding down the window, a huge grin creeps across his face. "I love the sound of it. On the road it doesn't go anywhere but it sounds beautiful."

PRIZED BUT NOT PRECIOUS

However he concedes that he must curtail his exuberance to some extent. "I can't overdo it," he says. "It's the car my wife uses for the school run, and we can't afford a third car."

"I CAN'T OVERDO IT BECAUSE IT'S THE CAR MY WIFE USES FOR THE SCHOOL RUN"

Clockwise from top left: Jesús likes to use the G properly; tough trimmings not just for show; G300 is full of driving pleasure; mud on the wheels is a sign of a good day!

A self-confessed G-addict, Jesús thinks it's a shame his choice has never been that popular in the UK, and laments the G-Wagen's new-found popularity as a celebrity fashion accessory.

But while such owners are busy decking their G-Wagens out with the latest mod-cons and carefully waxing and polishing their gleaming metallic paint, Jesús will be found scrambling through some muddy undergrowth, and we know whose smile will be the biggest.



Jesús takes pride in both his car and his country of origin.