

MERCEDES AMG CUSTOMER RACING



The long-awaited announcement of the AMG GT3's racing debut finally arrived at the LA Auto Show in November. Several cars will be run by customer teams in the International Motor Sports Association (IMSA) series in 2017 which includes the most well-known tracks and events the United States.

Three customer cars were delivered in October and ran shakedown laps in private tests at Carolina Motorsport Park and Daytona International Speedway. All three are planning full-season runs in the IMSA series.

NG LOOKS AHEAD TO A BUSY 2017



Article Kevin Ehrlich | photos CRP Racing and Brian Clearly/BCPix.com

Riley Motorsports will spearhead efforts for two of the cars. One car will run as WeatherTech Racing with drivers Cooper MacNeil and Gunnar Jeannette. That team is making the switch from Porsche 911 platform to the AMG GT3. Another car will run as Riley Motorsports with Ben Keating and Jeroen Bleekemolen behind the wheel. Keating is best known for operating a large Dodge Viper dealership and running Viper race cars in IMSA and deserves huge kudos for his support of sportscar racing in the US. Keating, Bleekemolen and Marc Miller combined to win the last IMA race of the 2016 season in their class at the 10 hour Petit LeMans race at Road Atlanta, giving their Viper a proper final outing.



The return to the “car with the star” for Bleekemolen is a homecoming of sorts. The Dutchman has an extensive history running Mercedes SLS race cars in Europe, including a big overall win at the 2013 Nürburgring 24 Hours.

Another AMG GT3 will be run for the IMSA season for SunEnergy1 Racing by owner/driver Kenny Habul who will mix and match driving duties with Tristian Vautier and Boris Said. The trio ran

together in the 2016 Rolex 24 Hours at Daytona in an Audi R8, but this will be their first season-long effort.

The white Riley Motorsports #33 car with green and black trim was shipped to the LA Auto Show for display to accompany the announcement.

Rumors continue to circulate that there could be other AMG GT3 entries from beyond the US that join for some of the 2017 endurance races, such as the Daytona 24 Hours. If those materialize, the AMG GT3 grid at Daytona could be quite robust!

The AMG GT3 will run in the GTD class in IMSA racing which means it will compete directly with Ferrari, BMW, Acura, Lexus, Lamborghini, Porsche and Audi.

Meanwhile, the Pirelli World Challenge series will Mercedes presence with CRP Racing announcing a



move from its former Audi R8 platform to the new AMG GT3 and world-class driver Ryan Dalziel. The Pirelli World Challenge series features more sprint formats – often with two separate races over a weekend – and frequently runs alongside the Indycar series.

DIME Racing based in Huntington Beach has been running in the Pirelli World Challenge series with its SLS GT3 car as the sole Mercedes runner in 2016. DIME Racing had announced

plans to run an AMG GT3 of its own, but it is unclear whether that will materialize for the 2017 season.

The planning for Mercedes AMG's US racing effort has been a year in the making. For example, to support the growing AMG GT3 customer effort, Multimatic Motorsports will assist with a homebase in Mooresville, North Carolina and dedicated track-side support at each race.



Want to buy your own AMG GT3? The car alone carries a price tag of around \$400,000, but includes ongoing support. In some cases, Mercedes AMG may also make one of its factory drivers available to join a customer team as a co-driver. This is especially likely for the longer endurance races. When the Mercedes factory first launched the SLS racing program, its philosophy was to sell the car and leave the teams to handle the task of racing on their own. Over time, that philosophy changed and the degree of support and engagement has increased considerably. After all, success for teams is good for everyone and helps Mercedes to sell more race cars.

With the introduction of the new AMG GT3 race car at the Nürburgring in July 2015, fans, teams and drivers in the US have patiently awaited their turn with the new car. The car has proven itself in major races such as the podium sweep victory at the 24 Hours of Nürburgring and US customers and fans will be able to make their own history very soon.

The IMSA season kicks off in earnest with the Rolex 24 Hours of Daytona on January 28-29. The Pirelli World Challenge season starts on March 11-12 in St. Petersburg. Start making your plans now to visit the race track to see the Mercedes AMG marque in action!





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