

AMG: A Very Proud History



by Kevin Ehrlich and Mary Fischer | photos courtesy Kevin Ehrlich and Mercedes-AMG

Reflecting on AMG's 50-year anniversary, it is clear that the original focus has not deviated, but instead has grown exponentially. Co-founders Hans-Werner Aufrecht and Erhard Melcher met while working on racing engines at Daimler-Benz and enjoyed tinkering with engines in their spare time. They worked out of a garage in Burgstall, Germany that was previously a mill, less than 4 miles to the east of Affalterbach, where AMG is presently headquartered. Tuning Mercedes cars for private customers, the 300 series cars became their specialty.

A 300 SE that they tuned for Manfred Schiek, a fellow Daimler employee, powered him to ten wins in the 1965 German Touring Car Championship. When Daimler discontinued motorsports activities, Aufrecht and Melcher departed Daimler and in 1967 they founded the company that became known as AMG.

The AMG name comes from the last names of Aufrecht and Melcher, and Aufrecht's birthplace of Grossapach.

With a head start based on tuning cars for private customers, AMG walked directly in to the vacuum left by Daimler's withdrawal from the racing scene. In addition to more power, those customers willing to make the trip to Burgstall also engaged AMG to provide improved transmissions, suspensions and brakes. AMG quickly became a busy – if still largely unknown – enterprise.

That would all change when the two apparently got word of a cheap and used Mercedes 300 SEL four-door sedan with a 6.3-liter V-8 engine. They acquired the car and set to work. They widened fenders to accommodate larger wheels and rubber. They tinkered with almost everything in the engine to transform it into a 6.8-liter beast.

Amidst a field of smaller and more nimble but underpowered entries, the 1971 Spa 24 Hours didn't see the AMG freight train coming. The track couldn't have suited the car better. Nicknamed the "Red Pig" or "Rote Sau" it ran flawlessly, claiming first in class and second overall. If not for the stress the heavy car put on its tires requiring more frequent pit stops, it might have even won.

Hans Heyer and Clemens Schickentanz drove the winner after several others apparently passed on the opportunity. Four door sedans weren't supposed to be able to do that, but the car and the race success planted AMG firmly on the performance car and racing maps.

The original race car is lost to history because it was sold to Matra, a French company, that used the car to test airplane tires and landing gear. The car displayed by AMG in modern times is a faithful replica/tribute car, made for debut at the 2006 Geneva Auto Show.

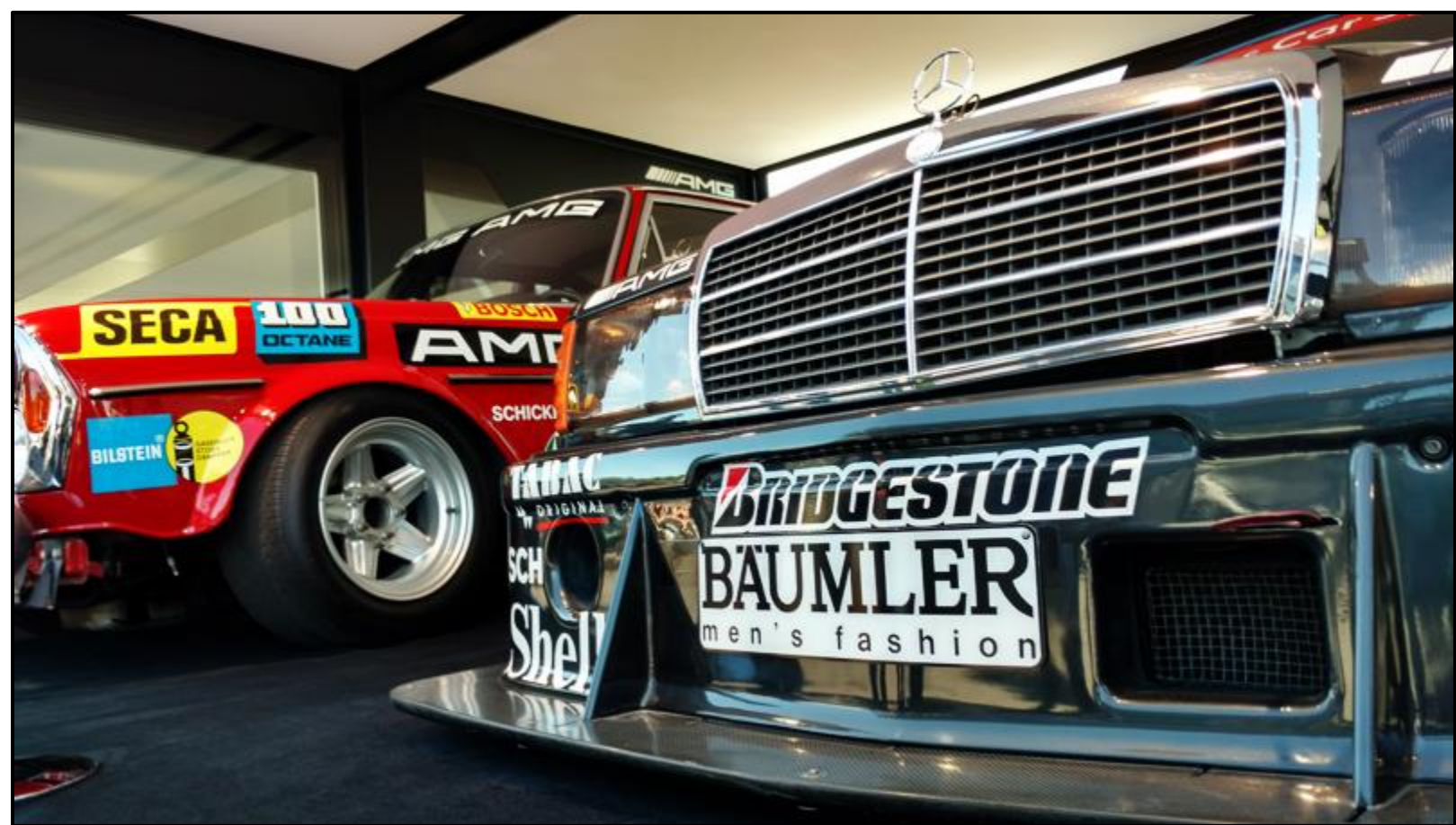


After the Spa success, growth quickly followed and AMG outgrew the old mill. Operations in Affalterbach began in 1976 with about 40 employees who moved from Burgstall. Erhard Melcher remained as an employee in the racing effort but ceased to be a partner in the business.

Sales to private customers and racing teams fed the growing company from a financial standpoint, but racing clearly played a major role in the approach, psychology, and the culture that remains to this day.

Critically, racing established the ethos of ownership. In a race team, each person serves a vital role and all must perform well in order for the driver and car to achieve success together. Nobody wants to be the reason the race car doesn't win. The same philosophy applies to everyone who works in Affalterbach. That core sense of ownership – AMG's DNA – permeates the company and is infused into its identity.





At some point, it became apparent to management at Mercedes Benz that this group in Affalterbach was doing good things with Mercedes Benz products. Factory supported efforts in the DTM (German Touring cars) racked up wins in tight competitions throughout the 1980s. Glory on the race track was good for business and marketing, but AMG was also developing engineering strength and expertise. Customers in Europe paid AMG to turn their competent but docile road cars into understated land-based missiles. Racing fed production car business which fed the racing business.

In 1986, AMG found itself front and center on the global performance car stage with "The Hammer" – a tuned E-class sedan which was not only the fastest sedan in the world, but a faster car than many supercars of the era. Every car magazine in the world featured The Hammer and AMG was no longer a secret kept among German customers and racers.

Formal collaboration with Mercedes Benz came in 1990 when AMG upgrades were made available through certain Mercedes dealerships. Customers seemed to like the AMG touches and growth followed. The four door C36 was launched in 1993 as the first car fully developed through the Mercedes-AMG collaboration. The C36 designation was a nod to the 3.6 liter in-line six-cylinder engine and the car gave Mercedes a more robust four

door sedan for its showrooms. While some AMG models dribbled into the US via the gray market in the early 1990s, the 1995 launch of the C36 was AMG's first official presence in the US market.

Since then, AMG has developed a reputation for transforming Mercedes road cars that are already competent into stealth rockets with an angrier edge. AMG cars are faster, they sound more aggressive, and they carry subtle styling cues for aerodynamics that hint at their capabilities while retaining the original Mercedes DNA.

AMG joined the corporate fold in 1999 when DaimlerChrysler (as it was known then) acquired a majority stake in the company. The racing operation was separated into its own company and was named HWA AG, in honor of the initials of founder Hans Werner Aufrecht. About 80 staff joined HWA from AMG.

Growth continued with the Daimler connection. In 1999, AMG made engines for 6,500 cars. It almost doubled production to 11,500 by the following year. DaimlerChrysler formally acquired the remaining AMG shares in 2005. At that point, AMG was responsible for about 20,000 cars per year and still growing.



Something else significant happened during that period as well. While the tradition of “One Man, One Engine” was AMG’s practice, it also became the company’s most well-known public identity. Starting in 2002, every AMG engine started to carry the personalized badge of its builder. That is when the “One Man, One Engine” phrase became known. Customers and media alike quickly recognized the tagline and associated it with AMG, making it an extremely powerful branding hallmark.

As Mercedes developed passenger cars, AMG engineers developed their more muscular versions in parallel. But a Mercedes AMG was not simply a standard Mercedes with a bigger engine. The key to a Mercedes AMG was that it also boasted driveline, suspension and styling cues that resulted from a separate AMG development track.

When those enhancements weren’t enough, a select line of cars called the “Black Series” boosted the sharp edges and engine growl for a car that definitely wasn’t the sedate Mercedes showroom standard. The first in a line of several Black Series cars was the 2006 SLK55 AMG Black Series. The wizards at Affalterbach stuffed a 5.4-liter V-8 with over 350 horsepower into a two-door SLK platform, transforming it from a sedate droptop into a performance car capable of outrunning most other cars on the road at its price point.

Modifying someone else’s design could only placate the appetite of the hungry group in Affalterbach for so long. That changed when Mercedes entrusted the SLS project to AMG.

It was a significant sign of faith that Mercedes not only looked to AMG to develop the halo car for the entire Mercedes range, but trusted that AMG would do justice to the original 1955 300SL gullwing.





The 2010 Mercedes AMG SLS echoed the famous gullwing doors of the 300SL but more importantly was the first car fully engineered by AMG. Variants of the SLS included a standard coupe, a convertible, a

GT3 race car (developed together with sister company HWA), a Black Series, and even an electric version most commonly seen in a bright matte yellow color suitably called "Electricbeam."

The SLS served as the halo car for the Mercedes family for several years. More than that, it was a proof of concept for a design spearheaded by AMG which was now known for engineering expertise rather than just engine tuning.

Sticking with a successful formula, Mercedes looked to AMG to develop the SLS successor. The AMG GT platform was unveiled to the public in the fall of 2014. After the SLS, it was the second car fully engineered by AMG. The base GT featured softer lines than the SLS, lost the gullwing doors, and came in at a lower price point.

The GT platform has spawned a multitude of road car variations, including the GT, GTS, GT Roadster, GT C Roadster, a limited run of "Edition 50" coupe and cabriolet models in recognition of the 50th anniversary, GT R, and even a GT Sedan.

If you're looking for a tangible sign of AMG's responsibility and ownership for the GT range, look no further than the rear of every AMG GT variant. In the past, the Mercedes model designation badge was placed on the left side, the three-pointed star in the middle, and

the AMG badge affixed to the right side. With the GT, the three-pointed star stays in the middle, but the AMG badge has moved to the left and the AMG model designation now takes up residence on the right. A subtle, but tangible signal that AMG owns the model line altogether. There is no such thing as a non-AMG Mercedes GT.

The AMG GT is also fully built in Baden-Württemberg, the large state in Germany that surrounds Stuttgart and encompasses the southwestern part of the country. The AMG engine is assembled in Affalterbach, the body shell in Weinsberg, and the final assembly takes place at Sindelfingen. There is a significant amount of pride in the regional ownership of the process.

Present day AMG is busy growing. 1600 employees are on staff with about half in engineering and development. In 2016, AMG made just under 100,000 units representing double digit growth over the past several years.



If that weren't enough, the Formula One-inspired 1000hp+ hypercar known as "Project One" is poised to emerge soon. Potential customers have already seen a preview and a rolling chassis was even taken to the 2017 Nürburgring 24-hour race for other potential customers to view.



The AMG marque is also expanding beyond the Mercedes family. It continues to be the exclusive powerplant for all Pagani automobiles and is also enlarging the partnership with Aston Martin that will likely see a lot more involvement with that marque going forward.

Fifty years ago, AMG started with a laser sharp focus on engine tuning. While it has refined, shaped and evolved that focus over the decades, every AMG engine badge continues to bear its distinctive round emblem that speaks to its roots. On that badge, the AMG name sits across the bottom while the Affalterbach town name spans the top. On the left, a green apple tree with red apples grows alongside the water. The literal German translation of the word Affalterbach is "apple tree by the creek." On the right, a cam lobe, valve and valve spring come directly from the company's focus on engine components.

Other than the modest display area at the reception center, the Affalterbach complex does not have a dedicated museum. The old mill in Burgstall is no longer in AMG hands. Erhard Melcher still has a small personal workshop with assorted parts and pictures, but it is only

his personal place to tinker. Few of the important road and race cars or prototypes were retained, particularly in the early years. Mercedes displays some AMG hardware in the main Mercedes Stuttgart factory museum but AMG is a supporting act to the main event. Given the landmark cars that are associated with AMG and its history, and the growing and loyal customer base, it seems inevitable at some point that a dedicated AMG museum will be established (to your humble correspondent at least).

The family relationship with Daimler and Mercedes-Benz is acknowledged, respected and undeniable, but AMG has its own roots and its own proud identity. Maintaining its own physical space in Affalterbach is a tangible recognition from both AMG and Mercedes that the arrangement is working to the benefit of both parties, and both parties know that they're pointed in the same direction.

The Southwest Star congratulates AMG on 50 years and eagerly looks forward to and wishes all the best for the next 50!

