

CLASSIC DRIVER

Mercedes-Benz 450 SLC AMG 'Mampe' Touring Car



Long, long ago, in an age where fashion took leave of its senses and cars with all brightwork painted satin black caused a sensation, AMG was king. Then, the German company made only occasional appearances on the circuits, and in 1978 its weapon of choice was a 450 SLC.

It was an impressive machine, with a first-rate, all-German driving team of Hans Heyer (trademark Bavarian hat) and Clemens Schickentanz (implausibly impressive mane of floppy blond hair). They had previously shared AMG's 6.8-litre racing version of the Mercedes-Benz 300 SEL 6.3, the famous *Rote Sau*.

The car made its entrance in early 1978 as AMG's sole representative in the European Touring Car Championship, then run to Group 2 rules. As a 2+2, it competed with other... ahem... 'saloons' such as BMW's CSL. From a marketing perspective, too, it made sense to use the C107 'Venetian blind' car, which was a staple of the German tuning company's range at the time.



Sponsorship came from German liqueur manufacturer Mampe, eager to promote its 'Lufthansa Cocktail', a drink served on all the airline's flights. The car, the truck and the shiny rally jackets were in patriotic German silver and black. Silver Arrows? Silver blunt instrument, more like.

While AMG's road cars might tote 5.2-litre or 5.4-litre versions of the strong V8, the racing version stayed at its 4,520cc homologated capacity. Power, though, was up from the standard Mercedes' 217HP at 5,000rpm to 375HP at a screaming 6,550rpm.

Thanks also to the homologation process, the big car had to run with a three-speed automatic gearbox — AMG's afterfit 5-speed manual was not a standard option in the range.



The 450 SLC had one of the biggest engines on the grid. And monstrous BBS split-rim wheels with 'cones' ducting air to the brakes. Compared with the Alpina-prepared BMWs it was a bit of a brute.

But it had charisma and it had presence. When the team arrived at Silverstone for the RAC Tourist Trophy in

1978, with accompanying tuned Mercedes saloons, big trucks and big hair, it brought something truly exotic to the windswept Northamptonshire circuit.

Over the three years in which AMG competed with the 450 SLC, it scored just one win, fittingly at the Nürburgring Six Hours in 1980 when Schickentanz, now paired with Jörg Denzel, finally crossed the line in first place.

From then on, AMG became more and more integrated into the Mercedes 'system', selling a controlling interest in the company to the marque in 1990 before disposing of the remaining shares in 2005. For many, though, the original tuned AMG saloons and coupés are the best – and the racing 450 SLC is as good an example as any.

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