

CLASSIC DRIVER

Mechatronik is building the ultimate Mercedes-Benz restomod

Lead

Remember the big, bellowing and brutish Mercedes-Benz 450 SLC AMG 'Mampe' touring car from the late 1970s? Now, the German marque specialist and Classic Driver dealer Mechatronik is reinterpreting the milestone AMG model as the ultimate modern-day Mercedes restomod. Enter Project 107...

Brrrr. On these frigid rural German roads, the rear wheels of the mysterious camouflaged Mercedes prototype scabble at the greasy surface, desperate for grip. With even the gentlest dabs of the throttle, the wide and imposing body of what looks to be a 1980s SL on steroids is thrust out of shape, before being delicately balanced on the fringes of control for what feels like an age. It's a hypnotic and mightily impressive sight, treading the line between brute force and finesse.



Situated a stone's throw from Stuttgart, Mechatronik has been expertly fusing modern-day technology with classic Mercedes-Benzes for a number of years, providing blissful peace of mind to owners who want to experience all the benefits an old car has to offer but with none of the well-documented downsides – holding your breath to find out if it feels like starting, for example, or feeling like you've worked out with Arnie after parking.

In fact, if you'd like to buy one of Mechatronik's M-SL or M-Coupé models, you're facing a two-year wait, such is their incredible demand.



Anybody who's had the pleasure of walking around Mechatronik's sprawling complex, however, will know that it's the awe-inspiring road and racing cars breathed upon by the wizards at AMG in Affalterbach that really fuels its passion, from 1980s 'Hammers' and 1990s CLK GTRs to 2000s Black Series' and DTM veterans.

It begs the question: why have the folks at Mechatronik never used their expertise in building practical and reliable 'restomods' to create the ultimate performance-oriented classic Mercedes? Enter Project 107, an entirely reengineered R107-gen SL evoking the spirit of one of the most significant AMGs of them all: the Mampe-sponsored 450 SLC from 1978.



Although the 'Mampe' touring car only won a single event during its three-year competition career (the 1980 Nürburgring Six Hours, in case you were wondering), the silver sledgehammer did wonders for AMG's public image and encouraged the company to integrate further into the Mercedes 'system'. In 1990, AMG sold a controlling stake to the Stuttgart giant, before offloading the remaining shares in 2005. The 'Mampe' Mercedes is about as good an example of a 'pre-merger' AMG as any, though, which is why Mechatronik deemed it the perfect car from which to draw inspiration for Project R107.

"We wanted to create a modern version of the 'Mampe' SLC," explains Mechatronik's Pascal Stephan. "Our car will be based on the original chassis of the SL or SLC, but that's where the similarities end as virtually everything else will be modern, from the carbon-fibre bodywork to the entirely new suspension, brakes and exhaust system."



Further details remain scant at this stage – only this prototype has been built and is in the middle of an extensive test and development programme. What Stephan can confirm is that the car will be powered by an eight-cylinder AMG engine, mated to either a manual or automatic gearbox. Customers will be able to choose from three distinct variants: Touring, which is both the most comfortable and most discreet, Roadster and Performance. We’re told an optional Clubsport package will be available for the latter. The initial production run and price will remain a secret for now.

“I think it’s very important to understand the philosophy of Project 107 is very different to the other cars we build here such as the M-SL and M-Coupé,” continues Stephan. “Of course, they’re greater in performance than the cars on which they’re based, but the focus is on reliability and creature comforts. This car is entirely different – the onus is entirely on performance.”



The next hurdle Mechatronik must cross is obtaining an MOT certificate for the car, because road-worthiness is a huge factor in Project 107’s appeal, before completing 4,000km of track testing, a portion of which will be carried out on the infamous Nürburgring Nordschleife.

Mechatronik’s most loyal clients will then be granted an exclusive preview of the car at the end of this year, before the official reveal, which is planned for the Goodwood Festival of Speed in 2021. “At Goodwood we want to bring the original ‘Mampe’ SLC, which is in our private collection, together with the new car. It should be a fantastic sight.”



Understanding the 'Mampe' SLC's significance in the AMG story is vital to appreciating the appeal of this modern-day interpretation. The historic car's spirit will be channelled, but where Project 107 differs is that it will be measurably better in every discernible way. To say we're excited to see the finished car and, more importantly, get behind the wheel would be the understatement of the century.

Photos: Alex Penfold, Zach Brehl and Keno Zache for Mechatronik © 2020

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