



December 1999

Annual Holiday Party

Bring a Toy and Food

After a brief hiatus, we will be returning to the Belle Haven Country Club -- our haven from the hustle and bustle of the season -- for our Annual Holiday Party. The affair will be held on Saturday, December 18 from 6:00 PM to midnight.

The food and ambiance of the Belle Haven are always superb and the setting spectacular. This year's event will outdo any past party. There will be music, special hors d'oeuvres, an open bar, and a great dinner -- all subsidized by the section. The cost is only \$37.50 per person.

Along with the social aspects of the party, the Member of the Year/Hank Sloane award will be presented. In addition, the 1999 Autocross trophies will be awarded. Autocross trophies will also be awarded to members who competed in their "other" cars.

Members who have not yet accepted their anniversary pins for five, ten, fifteen, etc., years of membership, as of 1999, will receive them at the party. This is one of only three events a year at which the pins are presented.

Several years ago, the Greater Washington Section began a tradition of bringing unwrapped toys to the party for the Salvation Army to give to needy children in the Washington area. Claire Luke is coordinating the effort. Please donate what toys you can and help make some child's holiday season bright. No time to run to the store for toys? We'll gladly accept your check made payable to the Salvation Army.

The same goes with the added request to bring nonperishable food items, which will also be distributed by the Salvation Army.

Members who cannot attend are asked to send their tax deductible contributions to our Treasurer, Craig Dabroski. We will make sure that the Salvation Army gets your gifts.

Please plan to join us. We are making every effort to make this the best Holiday Party we have ever had. And, the only thing that will be missing will be you if you don't register.

We ask that you please not bring children under the age of fifteen. The Holiday Party registration deadline is Friday, December 10. To register, please fill out and submit the form in the centerfold of the Metro Tri-Star. You will not be called or sent a confirmation that your registration form has been received.

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Calendar of Events

Greater Washington Section Events

March 18-19 **Performance Driving School**

Summit Point Raceway
Summit Point, West Virginia
Contact: Joe Wozney
Call: 703-437-7866

President's Message

Thoughts of a Car Guy

Wow, what a year! It goes by so fast with one great event after another. The flea market, eight autocrosses, tech sessions, the Summit Point driver's school, two concours, a picnic, Tri-O-Rama, the Annual Meeting, and now the Holiday Party. Planning for next year has already begun with a firm date for a driver's school on the weekend of March 18-19, 2000. (I think this is the first time I've written 2000 in an article or anywhere else.)

We are trying to get a new member party together for February, maybe on Valentine's Day weekend. The board is also working on a drive and dine, which is a nice weekend day drive in the country to a known or unknown restaurant location.

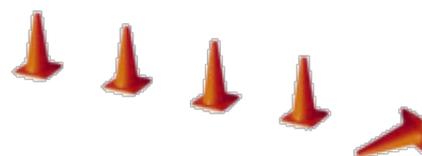
The Delaware Valley Section does a mystery tour around Halloween. Members meet at a location prepared to spend the night. The dress code is given ahead of time along with any other special information -- such as tennis racquet, golf clubs, etc. The drive ends at a surprise inn or hotel. A dinner is arranged for that evening and a brunch/breakfast the next morning -- sounds fattening. What a great idea. We could start at the Beltway and end at either the mountains or the Eastern Shore. We'll see what we can do. This is not a Tri-O-Rama year so our board has a little more time to devote to other events.

The Annual Holiday Party is all set for Saturday, December 18 at Belle Haven Country Club off the Beltway at Route 1 in Alexandria.

I've hired one of my golf buddies for the entertainment. Paul Kaplan is a Fairfax County teacher who has a great DJ act. Paul gets people involved with skits and games and plays just the right music. We plan to have three choices for dinner -- beef, chicken, or salmon. Janet McFarland is handling the registrations. The evening is a deal at \$37.50 per person. The club is kicking in quite a bit for your enjoyment, and as a thank you for supporting our events this year. Use the registration form in the Metro Tri-Star. And, please don't forget to bring an unwrapped toy for the Salvation Army's Toys for Tots drive. Canned and nonperishable food items are also needed. Claire and Vern Luke will take charge of our annual contribution of toys and food and will get them to their proper spot. Hope to see you at the party. Happy Holidays.

Dick

pylon alley by Joe Wozney



Autocross #8

It was a very strange event, indeed! Only two of the Mercedes-Benz classes were contested. Maybe it was a sleep-in day. Could be that a lot of folks were content with their placement for the season. Whatever. It was a great day!

Ed Ayre and his new GREEN E430 came within a tick and a half of FTD. I can see him at a Maryland stop light. "No, it really is just a stock Mercedes sedan. Did I embarrass you in front of your friends? Sorry." Hehe.

Steve Lobell, in the absence of his number one competitor, Jim Smith, ran a great 57.9 run. And, Judy Roth (who asked that we not tell Bruce that she took the car -- and we won't) had a very good 62.3 final try.

Ted Joseph continues to spew the line that his car is a diesel. Yeah, right. It's too fast for an oil burner or he's using old JATO tanks. In the SL crowd, relative newcomer and "ringer," Mason Beale had a solid seven tenths victory over 'nuther newcomer Peter Cutler. All three were separated by less than two seconds.

In the non-Benz class, Steve Roberts had both the line and the power to take a first -- his first first. Well done! And, Gonzalo Puig had a great run of 53.3 to take second place. Anyone else notice he doesn't seem to miss his 2002?

Fast Marty Gallagher took FTD and a solid third in a fantastic 51.3 second blur. What would he do if his car had some power? (Insert chortle here.) In fourth place we had a new car -- an old driver but a new car. Jason "I Don't Own a Car of My Own" Meise drove yet another beast -- a no-paint Nissan 240SX. "No, really -- it's stock!" Yeah, and Bill Gates loves Linux.

Fernando Puig, absent for some time, was also missing one of the family 2002s and drove an Acura Integra to fifth -- good to see him back. Carlos Roberts had trouble finding the line on one turn in particular and was next back. With a 1.2 second difference between his score and Steve's, it is unlikely that we'll see the younger Roberts drive for a while -- like until he gets his own car.

It was great seeing so many Brit cars in one event and all running. And miracle of miracles, no oil spots either! Charlie eked out the win for Mother England over ever-loud Richard Lipsky and Larry Rittinger. First timer Scott Mitchell brought his Lotus Europa -- haven't seen one in a very long time. A couple of heats looked like a trip back to the 70s.

While he placed somewhat down the list, I want to make special mention of Howard Byron. Howard brought his brand-spanking-new Honda S2000. Lord, it had less than a thou on the odo. Neat car! He was kind enough to let me have a few runs with it. Although it wasn't recorded -- it was, after all, unofficial -- I took the true FTD with a 51.299. Yeah, that's my story and I'm sticking with it.

Great event. Great season. Next year? We're back in Winchester unless we find another lot closer to DC. So, keep looking. If nothing else, it would be nice to have two lots to choose from.

Club News

35 Years of MB Enjoyment!

Any club is only as good as its membership. With nearly 2,000 Mercedes-Benz enthusiasts in the Greater Washington section, we are the largest and, we like to think, the best in the country. Some of us may renew our memberships for one year at a time; others for two or three -- but we keep on renewing.

That fact was evident at the Annual Membership Meeting held in October at American Service Center. The Annual Meeting is one of three events where pins are awarded for the number of years (in

five year increments) with the club. The other two are the picnic and the holiday party.

This year, two folks were eligible for 35-year pins. Both Neill Darnmstadter (former club tourmeister) and C. W. Holman joined in 1964 and were present at the Annual Meeting to receive their 35-year pins.

Additionally, pins were awarded to Simon Cain for 20 years of membership, to John S. Trouton and William H. Bowers for 15 years, and to Laslo Bozoky, Douglas P. Broome, and Louis J. Duray for 10 years.

Many more of you are eligible for five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, and thirty-year pins but have not yet attended one of the three events at which pins are given out. The Annual Holiday Party will be the last chance in 1999 for you to receive your membership commemorative pins.

If you miss it this year, you'll have to wait another five years before again being eligible. Check the label on an older *Star* or *Metro Tri-Star* to find out when you joined the club. Current labels do not have this information.

A Couple of Tri-O-Rama Photos



Bob Platz' beautiful cabriolet at the Concours d'Elegance in Winchester. (Photo by Al Angulo)



Ed Ayre and Dick Pedersen worshipping an SL. Knee pads should have been issued to the judges. (Photo by Al Angulo)

(Click on photos to enlarge.)

Summit Point in March

Summit Point Raceway has confirmed a two-day GWS performance driving school on March 18-19. Depending on interest, our normal format might be changed to permit the running of time trials on Sunday afternoon.

Watch the next issue of the *Tri-Star* for more information and a registration form. If we hold time trials, the number of entrants will be very limited to ensure ample time for all drivers. It will also require that entrants sign up for both days. Mark your calendar!

StarFest 2000 Canceled!

StarFest 2000, which was to be held next August in Indianapolis, has been canceled. The 500 Section, which was to host the event, has been asked to prepare for the event for 2002. More when information is available.

Photo Contest Returns

For 2000, the Photo Contest will return. With so many great events, members have asked that it be brought back to give them a chance to display their artistic talents.

Next month we will publish information on the rules, classes, and dates. So, break out the old Brownie Hawkeye and buy plenty of film! Got a new digital? Start learning about how you can produce a great print. Happy shooting!

Mercedes-Benz News

All-New Roadster Concept

Mercedes-Benz will unveil an intriguing roadster concept at the upcoming North American International Auto Show in Detroit. The international debut of the all-new concept roadster will take place in Cobo Center on January 10 at 9:30 AM during press activities preceding the public opening of the world-class auto show.

The open car features striking exterior design, a compelling interior, and innovative Mercedes-Benz technology. At more than a foot shorter than the popular SLK coupe/roadster, the new concept roadster is based on the revolutionary safety platform of the Mercedes-Benz A-Class -- a successful small car not yet available in the U.S. Power comes from the A-Class' top-of-the-line 1.9-liter, 120 hp engine.

The roadster's arrow-shaped front hood and eye-catching front fenders are adapted from the futuristic, high-performance SLR super sports car which is planned for production around 2003. At the same time, its large doors, flat windshield and gently sloping rear styling are reminiscent of the legendary Mercedes-Benz Silver Arrow racers of the 1950s.

Carbon fiber seat frames and innovative light clusters at both the front and rear are just two examples of sophisticated Mercedes-Benz technology beneath the youthful bodywork. While integrating such leading-edge components, the designers of the new concept roadster have remained true to the original roadster philosophy -- an uncomplicated, purist approach to a very direct connection between man, machine and nature.

This article comes to us from the PR Newswire, which means that it was released by MBUSA. When I read it the first time I missed the statement about the A-Class. But at second glance I saw the words "not yet available here." Hmmm.

Those of you who were fortunate enough to attend the tour of the Vehicle Prep Center in October saw the current A-Class. I loved it! The A is due for a redo in a couple of years. Maybe we will get the A on the next go-round! Mr. ed.



Best Ever November Sales

Mercedes-Benz USA recorded yet another sales milestone in November with 16,547 new vehicles sold, a 22.3 percent increase over the 13,525 vehicles sold in November 1998, making it the best November on record for the company.

Year-to-date sales surged to an all-time high of 170,319 for the first 11 months of the year, a 10.3 percent increase over the 154,457 vehicles sold during the same period last year, making it the best 11-month year-to-date total ever for MBUSA. Year-to-date sales surpassed the full-year 1998 MBUSA volume of 170,245.

The company attributed a large portion of the month's momentum to its award-winning M-Class

sport utility vehicle, which was the volume leader for the month, and the CLK model line, which expanded to include the CLK430 Cabriolet and established a sales record in November -- only its fourth month in the market (704 vehicles sold).

For November, the M-Class sport utility vehicle recorded sales of 4,120, and increase of 21.7 percent over the 3,386 vehicles sold during the same period last year, making this the best November on record for the model line.

Trailing closely behind the M-Class, the popular mid-luxury E-Class model line recorded sales of 4,087 (vs. 4,016), the best November on record for the E-Class. The S-Class flagship model also recorded the best November on record with 2,802 vehicles sold.

C-Class sales for the month came in at 2,145, a decrease of 6.7 percent (vs. 2,300). The SL coupe/roadster accounted for 626 units, an increase of 5.7 percent (vs. 592). CLK coupes and cabriolets posted sales of 2,128, up 31 percent over last year's 1,624. SLK roadster sales decreased to 639 from 806 in November.

On a year-to-date basis the CLK, SLK -- along with the E, M, SL, and S-Class models -- achieved their highest 11-month sales volume on record. E-Class year-to-date sales of 45,669 represent a 6.8 percent increase of the 42,743 sold during the same period last year. S-Class sales increased 77.5 percent to 25,222 (from 14,208). SL sales rose from 7,104 to 7,330, an increase of 3.2 percent. CLK sales increased 49.0 percent to 14,246 from 9,558, while SLK sales increase 3.2 percent to 9,944 from 9,638. M-Class sales rose to 40,405 from 39,356, an increase of 2.7 percent (27,503 vs. 31,850).

Separately, through its Starmark pre-owned vehicle program, Mercedes-Benz recorded sales of 2,045, an increase of 60 percent compared to November 1998 sales of 1,311 vehicles. On a year-to-date bases, Starmark sales increased 146.2 percent to 21,559.

S-Class is "Best of What's New"

The all-new 2000 Mercedes-Benz S-Class sedan was selected as a winner of Popular Science's 1999 Best of What's New award. Debuting in the December issue of *Popular Science* -- the monthly published by Times Mirror Magazines that informs consumers of new technology and scientific breakthroughs in the automotive, consumer electronics, aviation/space, and computer/software industries - the all new S-Class was chosen as one of the 100 best achievements of the year in science and technology. Editors of Popular Science review thousands of new products, technology developments and scientific achievements.

For this year's Best of What's New car award, the S-Class was distinguished as a technical tour de force that "features unparalleled luxury and technology" citing groundbreaking automotive technology features such as a "voice-activated GPS navigational system [that] makes you get to your destination" and a "grill-mounted radar that sounds an alarm and automatically brakes the vehicle if it detects another car or an obstacle ahead."

In the automotive technology category, editors of Popular Science chose Daimler Chrysler's NECAR 4 (New Electric Car), noting that the NECAR 4 is the "first fuel cell vehicle that drives like a regular car." They conclude that "the bigger breakthrough, though, is that the company was able to shrink the drivetrain enough to fit under a tiny A-Class subcompact.

The 2000 S-Class sedan also won the Design & Engineering Award by *Popular Mechanics* magazine, the original men's service magazine published by Hearst Magazines that informs readers on mechanical and scientific materials in a popular, easy-to-understand format.

Each year, editors of *Popular Mechanics* recognize new ideas, designs, innovations and developments that represent the best thinking in areas the magazine covers. Debuting in the December issue of *Popular Mechanics*, the Design & Engineering Awards 2000 is reviewed by editor-in-chief, Joe Oldham.

The S-Class was recognized for many technologies and features such as its "double overhead cam, 24-valve, 16-spark plug V8 engines and manual/automatic transmission rear-drive powertrains [plus] its totally integrated climate control/audio/navigation/communication system console." Oldham summed up by adding: "you could make a case for the S-Class being the best car ever made."

"The Mercedes S-Class quickly proved a winner with our clients for its striking design and new high-technology features," said Hal Whiteford, vice president, operations, MBUSA. "Receiving this kind of recognition from both Popular Science and Popular Mechanics reinforces our commitment to continue to design and produce the finest premium luxury vehicles in the world."

Mercedes-Benz launched its all-new model year 2000 S-Class in the spring of 1999 as the newest generation of its flagship passenger sedan. Since its debut, demand for both the S430 and S500 has been phenomenal, with S-Class sales recording the highest monthly sales volume in its history in October.

High Gear

I should have guessed that there was something special about Andrei when the police officer at a crowded intersection snapped to attention and saluted as our Mercedes G500 drove by. The G500 is a Geländewagen, or all terrain vehicle, manufactured in Austria by DaimlerChrysler which meets military specifications. "Plain Jane" Geländewagens with 4 cylinder diesel engines are used by NATO troops on "peacekeeping" and other bellicose missions. Upscale versions like Andrei's G500, with a gasoline powered V8, provide off road luxury for the top end of the European sports utility vehicle market. These are tough sons of guns like the M class SUVs, only more so... if you get my drift.

And Andrei needs a tough set of wheels to take on a tough neighborhood... potholes, washboard roads, mud, snow, whatever... the working environment of the automobile in Mother Russia. I was in Moscow in connection with a lecture. Andrei's girlfriend is a friend of my friends, the Studenikins, and he happened to volunteer to show me some parts of Moscow not usually encountered by foreign visitors. Ever an enthusiastic student of exotica, I leapt at the opportunity. The chance to drive in Andrei's pearl black G500 was the icing on the cake!

Andrei was obviously a Moscow savant. He knew his way around everywhere. We visited a "securities firm" where we watched custom body armor being fitted on the bodyguards for Russia's new capitalist class. And, in a notorious back alley, we saw body accouterments of a different sort displayed at Klub Tsunami. During the course of that evening, we ate a sumptuous dinner of lamb, rice, puffy bread and sticky condiments at an Uzbek restaurant. This was followed up by a dessert of hot house strawberries and clotted cream at Moscow's English Club. Everywhere Andrei and his oversize Cuban cigar seemed to be a well recognized figure. I have been to Russia many times before and consider myself to be a veritable hometown boy when it comes to the Moscow subway (Metro). I've been to Golodnaya Utka and could personally guide a tour through the Tretyakavskaya; but Andrei did manage to show me things that I had never seen before.

Everywhere we went in the pearl black Mercedes G500 parking was never a problem. Andrei was always able to get all four wheels on the sidewalk. Most Russian drivers are about as law abiding as citizens of the Big Apple on the Hudson. Most of them don't crowd out the pedestrians when they want to park their Ladas, Volgas and Nivas. But then, obviously, most of them aren't Andrei!

At one point we were making our way through traffic on the Volokolamskoye Chausse. This is a major northbound arterial road in Moscow with three lanes going in either direction down the middle; grass meridians and service roads are on either side. There are major intersections at infrequent intervals. Traffic was moving at a good clip in a tightly compact mass. Suddenly a blue panel truck

darted in front of us, cutting off the G500. Andrei had to brake hard and swerve to avoid an accident. My new friend stood on the horn and blurted out a long series of phrases, richly expanding my Russian vocabulary.

The offending blue van was far from penitent. The reckless driver engaged some sort of siren, dropped his window and used an internationally recognized signal to convey an impolite message. Andrei's face turned redder than a Stalinist May Day Parade. He stomped the G500's loud pedal as we shot forward into the neighboring lane. His teeth clenched around his big cigar, Andrei informed me in a low growl, "He has no right to use an illegal police siren. We'll teach him a lesson!" With a few deft cuts and thrusts of the tiller Andrei was first alongside the blue van and then in front of him pulling him over to the curb. The rest of the Muscovite traffic gave us a wide berth. As soon as the G500 and the van came to a stop Andrei ceremoniously got out of the car. Arms on hips he walked back toward the van champing ominously on the Havana stogie. As Andrei approached the van the driver threw his vehicle in reverse, jammed into first and floored it, getting away in a cloud of burning rubber.

I was momentarily relieved thinking that a potentially ugly confrontation had been avoided. Andrei sprinted back to our Mercedes. When I saw his face, I knew it wasn't over. I have only seen car chases like this in the movies. I have never seen one, even with professional stunt men, where the chase vehicle was a four wheel drive SUV. In Andrei's hands I firmly believe the G500 could out perform a sports racer. My friend placed a strobing blue light with a suction cup on the roof of the Mercedes as we flew onto the service road parallel to the main flow of traffic. We reached 190 kmph before coming to the next intersection. Indeed, we had overtaken the blue van which was stuck in the flow of traffic on the main roadway. In a whirl of expertly placed hands and feet, Andrei was executing a high speed U-turn. Before I knew what was happening... my God... we were driving south on the northbound lanes of the Volokolamskoye heading for the blue van. Oncoming traffic careened out of our way. The offending blue van screeched to a stop right in front of our bumper. This time before exiting our vehicle Andrei took the cellular phone out of his right breast pocket and called for a backup. From under his left arm he extracted a small black object... a Makarov.

Even before Andrei emerged, the van driver was kneeling on the meridian with his hands on top of his head. "Don't shoot! I'm not armed," came a plaintive cry with a heavy Azerbaijani accent.

After the Ford Crown Victoria squad cars (sic) of the Moscow Police arrived; after the blue van was hooked up to a tow truck from the impoundment yard; after much saluting and chatter; Andrei got back into the G500 and we proceeded to tool down the Volokolamskoye Chausse once again. I turned to my companion and queried, "Andrei, what is your line of work?"

With a boyish, bashful grin he replied, "Well, we used to be called the Kommitiyet Grazhdanskoi Bezopastnosti, but we have a new name now..."

John Kuhn Bleimaier
Mid-Atlantic Regional Director

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