



Greater Washington Section · Mercedes-Benz Club of America

METRO TRI-STAR

May 2001

Tech Forum At Merchant's

On June 2, the section will hold a Tech Forum at the Merchant's Tire Training Center in Manassas, Virginia. The forum will begin at 9:00AM with coffee and donuts. The morning session will include presentations from tire and oil specialists, as well as from Tom Ishler of Mercedes-Benz USA. If history repeats itself, Tom will have some interesting "for-your-ears-only" comments about the new models and current happenings on the international and national scene.

Lunch is included in the \$20 registration fee and will be served at noon. The afternoon session will include a hands-on demonstration in Merchant's on site maintenance bays and involve the replacement of brake pads, rotors, and wheel bearings. Bob Hafemair of Star Auto Service in Baltimore will perform the work and guide the members through each step.

The forum will conclude at 3:00PM or when the last question is answered.

To reach the Merchant's facility proceed on I-66 West and take Exit 53 (Route 28 South). Travel for approximately seven miles. Turn left on Liberia (Burger King is on left). Proceed two streets and turn left on Euclid Avenue. The Merchant's facility is on the right just beyond Eastern Manufacturing.

Previous forums at the Merchant's facility have enjoyed significant member attendance. Space will fill quickly!

Please send your \$20 fee and registration to Treasurer Craig Dabroski right away. Questions on the forum should be directed to our Technical Chairman, Vern Luke.

Mason Beale

Concours Judge's Clinic

The section's two primary concours events, the Mid-Atlantic Concours at the section's Annual Picnic and Tri-O-Rama, are fast approaching. Both events have enjoyed high participation levels in the past with intense competition.

Many concours participants have requested additional information regarding how to better prepare their cars for competition. To satisfy this request the section is holding a concours preparation clinic.

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The clinic will also serve as a training platform for individuals interested in concours judging.

Both competitors and judges will learn the proper way for preparing vehicles and the various areas where judges will focus their attention during competition.

The event will be held at Dr. John's Motor Sports in Sterling, Virginia on June 30 from 10:00AM to 2:00PM. Dr. John's Motor Sports will also provide service personnel to answer technical questions of event participants.

I hope you will take advantage of this prime opportunity for improving vehicle preparation, as well as learning how to perform as a concours judge. The section will benefit from your participation. Spaces will fill quickly, so do not delay with mailing your reservation form.

To reach Dr. John's Motor Sports take the Dulles Toll-Way to Route 28 (Sully Road). Take Route 28 north towards Leesburg. Turn right on Sterling Boulevard (second traffic light). Turn right on East Holly Avenue with Dr. John's address being number 203.

For more information contact Mason Beale at 703-941-1055.

Mason

M-B Sport Bike Raffle!

In our continuing efforts to raise funds for our charities - The Hospital For Sick Children and Children's Hospital - the section will raffle a new Mercedes-Benz Sport Cruiser bike. The bike retails for \$1795. It is two-tone - with burgundy fenders and a titanium bronze frame.

It is handmade in the U.S.A. of lightweight aluminum tubing. It has a 7-speed internal gearing drive train, a front disc braking system, and a rear Shimano internal roller brake. The shock system is state of the art. The bike has a 1950s "retro look" to it (like your old Schwinn) but is a thoroughly new design. Click on the bike picture for a better look, at the MBUSA website.



The tickets are \$10 each or three for \$25. Contact or send a check payable to "GWS-MBCA" to any officer or board member to get your tickets now. There are a maximum of 1000 tickets to be sold. The drawing will be at the Annual Holiday Party and you need not be present to win.

The net proceeds will be divided between the two hospitals. Over the last ten or so years we have donated more than \$10,000 to our charities.

Calendar of Events

Greater Washington Section Events

May 9	GWS Board Meeting Season's Restaurant Fairfax, Virginia Contact: Dick Pedersen Call: 703-771-2205	July 8 July 15	Autocross #4 Annual Picnic Mid-Atlantic Concours Hank Harris's Estate Potomac, Maryland Contact: Judy Roth Call: 301-774-5390 For Concours: Contact: Ed Ayre Call: 301-654-0837
May 20	Autocross #2 James Wood High School Winchester, Virginia Contact: Joe Wozney Call: 703-437-7866		

June 2	Tech Forum Merchant's Tire Manassas, Virginia Contact: Vern Luke Call: 703-323-1249	August 26 Autocross #5
June 10	Autocross #3	September 13 GWS Board Meeting Contact: Dick Pedersen Call: 703-771-22.05
June 24	Drive and Dine St. Michaels, Maryland Contact: Judy Roth Call: 301-774-5390	September 23 Autocross #6
June 30	Concours Judges' Clinic Dr. John's Motor Sports Sterling, Virginia Contact: Mason Beale Call: 703-941-1055	October 6 Vehicle Prep Center Tour
		October 14 Autocross #7
		October 21 Annual Membership Meeting
		November 4 Autocross #8
		December 1 Annual Holiday Party Belle Haven Country Club Alexandria, Virginia

Regional and National Events

June 16-19	Gemütlichkeit 2001 Michigan See The Star	August 4-7 Tri-O-Rama 2001 Summit Point, West Virginia and Winchester, Virginia For registration information: Contact: Joe Wozney Call: 703-437-7866
July 6-8	New England Vintage Meet Granite State Section (article page 9)	For Concours information: Contact: Ed Ayre Call: 301-654-0837
July 19-22	StarTrack 2001 Pittsburgh Section See The Star More here when info is available	

President's Message

Thoughts of a Car Guy

It was a cold flat March, technically speaking when I saw my very expensive front Michelin Pilot losing air each week. So I took the tire off and brought it to Andrew, my favorite racer tire guy at Merchant's in Sterling, Virginia. Andrew is the new manager at Sterling and is an avid supporter of the club. It was a rainy cold morning and I just wanted to drop the tire off. Andrew says, "have you got fifteen minutes". Why, sure. He then proceeds to demonstrate the latest high tech form of tire repair.

Andrew first determined that some builder's staples in the middle of the tread caused the flat. Good news, because we all know sidewalls are a no-no. He cleaned the area and then drilled a hole through the point of the puncture.

I am a little nervous at this point. Maybe he is trying to set me up for another \$250 tire. Not to



worry. Andrew then produced a valve-like item that he is going to put through the hole. The thing looks like an engine valve except it's made of rubber with a brass point at the end. After cleaning up the inside is of the puncture area, Andrew pushed the valve thing through, and clips the excess off on the outside of the tire. He then uses a tool to smooth over the area inside the tire and that's it.

It's been three weeks and no air loss! What a system, no more big chunks of rubber sticking out of the tread doing whatever to the balance and high speed safety.

Our April 21 full tech session at American Service Center was attended by forty members which was a low turnout, but understandable because of all the competition in the area. Garden tours, house tours, antique shows, dog shows, etc. It's hard for a guy to work on the car all day "in season." The members who came got their own personal mechanic for most of the day. ASC brought in ten technicians who worked with almost every member and got many jobs done in record time.

And, don't forget our tech forum scheduled for June 2 at Merchant's Tire training facility in Manassas.

On the social side, Bill Hooper and Judy Roth did a fantastic job with the walking tour of historic Forest Glen Park in Montgomery County. Thirty-five members attended the event. The wine and cheese after the event was equally well received.

Don't forget the Annual Picnic and Mid-Atlantic Concours on Sunday July 15 at the estate of Hank Harris in Potomac. Sign up early for this increasingly popular and well-attended event.

P.S. And, don't forget Tri-0-Rama 2001 this August 4-7.

See you there,

Dick

Drive & Dine "Inn" History

The GWS Social Committee has planned an exciting Drive and Dine activity for June 24 to the historic Inn at Perry Cabin on the Eastern Shore in charming St. Michaels, Maryland. The Inn is owned by one of our section members, Stephen Creese. Stephen and his staff have put together a luncheon for us with a Chesapeake theme, and are offering us the opportunity to stay at the Inn for one night at a fabulously discounted rate.

The English crown endowed one of its original land grants upon Davenport, which is now the present site of the Inn at Perry Cabin. The Inn at Perry Cabin was built by Purser Samuel Hambleton, Aide-de-camp to Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry during the Battle of Lake Erie in the War of 1812. Hambleton retired to St. Michaels in 1816 and designed the north wing of the manor house to resemble Perry's Cabin on the flagship Niagara. The Inn at Perry Cabin was later acquired by Orient Express Hotels, adding another unique property to their collection of Hotels.

The property's history includes transformation from private home and working farm to a riding academy in 1952. In 1980, the Meyerhoff family, owners of the 1979 Kentucky Derby winner Spectacular Bid, transformed this Greek-Revival-style home into a six-bedroom inn and restaurant. In 1989, this charming house was restored and expanded by Sir Bernard Ashley to include forty-one bedrooms and suites as well as an award winning dining room.

GWS Officers & Board Members

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Technical

The Inn at Perry Cabin is a short stroll from the historic village of St. Michaels filled with Victoria storefronts and antique shops. St. Michaels is known as "The Town That Fooled the British." During the war of 1812 the towns people hoisted lanterns in the treetops causing the cannons of the British attackers to overshoot the town, hence the nickname. St. Michaels has many homes and sites of historical significance that date to the early 1600s.

Our hosts at the Inn are preparing a grand day for us. Director of Events Thad Hoy and Executive Chef Mr. Mark Salter have arranged for a 3-course menu. The appetizer course will surprise and delight your taste buds. The main course will feature fresh Rockfish and the experience will be completed by a wonderful dessert that will please that sweet tooth in all of us. The meal will be accompanied by your choice of coffee, tea, and soft drinks. The cost for this world-class luncheon is \$40.00 per person.

We will have an area where we can place our cars on display for the other guests of the Inn and other visitors to see our world-renowned Mercedes Benz vehicles. The final treat is that the Inn has extended a promotional rate for overnight guests starting at \$125 for those of us who care to spend the night at the Inn and experience more of Historic St. Michaels. What an opportunity for history buffs, antique collectors and connoisseurs of fine dining and first class accommodations.

Make your Drive and Dine reservations early. We must provide the Inn with a complete count of attendees by June 19. If you elect to take advantage of the promotional offer of a night at the club price you must contact the Inn at Perry Cabin directly at the toll free reservation number, 1-800-722-2949.

Please remember that when completing the coupon below you will be asked for the number of people in your party and to indicate whether you will make room reservations. Don't forget to make your own room reservations!

It might be fun to get together with other members who live in areas near you or that you will be passing through to setup a meeting point and caravan to our destination.

Directions: From the Washington area -from the Capitol Beltway (I-495) proceed to the Route 50 East across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. Stay on Route 50 at the Route 50/301 split and proceed approximately 30 miles to Easton, Maryland. The Easton airport is on the right. A half-mile past the airport bear right onto Route 322. Go two miles and at the traffic light turn right onto Route 33 to St. Michaels. The Inn at Perry Cabin is located at 308 Watkins Lane, St. Michaels. When coming from Easton proceed west on Route 33 about 9 miles. Go through St. Michaels (route 33 is also Talbot street). Perry Cabin is located on the right just beyond the town limits. Driving time is approximately two hours.

From the Baltimore area - take Route 695 to Route 97 South and pick up route 50 East and cross the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. Follow the directions above.

If you need more information, contact Judy Roth at 301-774-5390 or send an email to her at <judymroth@earthlink.net>, or you call Bill Hopper at 202-363-4189. Bill's email address is <WWHRestoration@worldnet.att.net>.

Judy and Bill

Vern Luke

Social

Judy Roth

Bill Hopper

Technical Advisors

Larry Digges

Younger Mercedes-Benz

Rick Ellinger

RC Imports

Larry Hook

American Service Center

Bob Hafemair

Star Auto Service

Annual Picnic/Concours

Live Music Again! The Pool is Open!

On Sunday, July 15, Hank Harris will host the Annual Mid-Atlantic Picnic and Concours at his home in Potomac again. Tradition is wonderful since it provides us with a chance to repeat what everyone has said has been a good event, and it also means that we can just crank up the old plans (and articles).

We expect Tom and Mary Kestel and Debbie Hirtes will be in charge of the cooking again. So you know the hamburgers and bratwurst will be great! And, of course, we're expecting a repeat of the excellent work of our biermeister and wine sommelier, Jim Van Valkenburg, who will dispense the "gute Deutsche bier und wein" to slake your thirst. We'll also have soft drinks on ice. And, there will be lots of watermelon. So be sure to bring a big bib.

Bring your swimsuits and enjoy the pool. And don't forget chairs or blankets for the lawn.

The Concours has no entry fee. On the registration form, fill out the car information so we can organize the classes. Please send in your registration form early.

We will hold a silent auction again for the benefit of The Hospital for Sick Children and Children's Hospital. In addition to items from both local and national merchants, we ask that you contribute a "treasure" (no white elephants, please) for the auction. All items sell to the highest bidder. Please indicate your contribution on the registration form.

Anniversary pins will be presented to MBCA members celebrating their five-year, ten-year, etc., memberships.

Times: Cars entered in the Concours should arrive between 9:00 and 10:30AM. This year, we will have a Clean Car/Display Class that is not judged. Wash it up and bring it out! Street and Show Classes are judged. Judging begins at 11:00AM and awards will be presented at 3:30PM. Food "judging" begins at about 11:30AM. Beer, wine, and soft drinks will be served all day. The silent auction ends at 3:00PM.

Directions: From I-495 (the Beltway) take River Road, west, pass Potomac Village (five miles); turn right on Esworthy Road; turn right after 0.8 miles onto Query Mill Road and then turn right again into the entrance of Hidden Hill Farm.

The registration form is in the centerfold. If you have any questions on the Concours, call Ed Ayre at 301-654-0837. For questions on the registration or silent auction, call Judy Roth at 301-774-5390. The club does not mail tickets to the picnic/Concours. Cost is \$15.00 per person.

Membership Pins

In a few short weeks we will hold our Annual Picnic and with it comes the year's first opportunity for members to receive their longevity pins. If you still feel confused about how to receive a pin after reading the rest of this article, please email me or send me a note.

We award pins for 5, 10, 15, etc. years of membership in the club. For example, if you joined the club in 1996, you are eligible for a five-year pin this year. However, and this is a big however, you must be present when the pins are awarded. The ceremony takes place just three times a year: at the Annual Picnic; at the Annual Membership meeting; and, at the Holiday Party.

Invariably, several eligible members attend one or all of the above events but leave before the pins are awarded. We do not mail pins. You need to be present! If, for some reason, you must leave before the event is over, please see me, or my wife, Deborah, so we may give you your pin. This year we hope to award pins to an unusually large number of members who have been with the club for a very long time.

The following are eligible for pins this year:

Frank Mallory, 45 years

Dr. S. W. Brown, 30 years

Dr. Charles Emely, Paul Pon, and Nancy Reichehblach, 25 years.

In addition: 13 members are eligible for 20 year pins, 41 for 15 year pins, 55 for 10 year pins, and 155 for 5 year pins.

If only half of the eligible members show up we'll have a heck of a party!

Please note that since the database change at the national office, the date you joined is no longer on the newsletter label. Please check The Star.

One final note: If you are not able to attend any of the above-mentioned get-togethers, you will need to wait another five years before you will be eligible for a pin.

This section offers many different events for almost every taste and fancy for our 1,790 members (as of this writing), so we hope you'll join us for one that interests you. See for yourself what the officers and various chairpersons work so hard to offer you. And, always try to recruit a new member at any opportunity.

Klaus Hirtes

Tri-O-Rama 2000

The Greater Washington Section will host the last Mercedes-Benz Club of America national event to be held this year on August 4-7, 2001.

The headquarters hotel will be the Holiday Inn in Winchester, Virginia. The autocross will be held at James Wood High School, just a few minutes from the hotel. Summit Point Raceway - the site of the driving events - is a mere 20 minutes away. The Concours d' Elegance will be held in the Old Town area, and the rallye will take place in the area around Winchester. The Welcome Reception and Biergarten Dinner will be held at the Holiday Inn. The Final Banquet will (tentatively) be at the beautiful, nearby Winchester Country Club.

The Welcome Reception, Concours, Rallye, and Autocross all take place on the weekend, so there is no excuse for not joining us in Winchester. We urge all members showing cars at the Annual Picnic/Mid-Atlantic Concours in July to sign up. There are three classes: Show, Street, and Display. Members from all over will be participating, so you will have the opportunity to measure how good you are against other national competitors.

The autocross will be held at nearby James Wood High School on Sunday, August 5. We can promise a challenging course on a very good lot - extra big, no poles, and rectangular.

We are planning an interesting Sunday rallye that is planned to take no longer than one and one half or two hours. Winchester is an interesting and attractive old town that changed hands 70 times during the Civil War. The rallye will be followed by the Biergarten Dinner Party.

We've planned four fun-filled days for you. However, this is a great opportunity for those members who cannot take off during the week to join us for at least two days of action on the weekend. Whether you come to one, two, or all of the events, Tri-O-Rama 2001 promises to be an exciting affair and our best yet. Beautiful Winchester is only an hour's drive from the Washington area.

For the food conscious, the meals will be prepared by the same folks who once operated the fabulous Old Post Office restaurant!

Plan to attend what has become the club's premier national event. The time to sign up for Tri-O-Rama 2001 is now. Remember, you must pre-register for all events.

Send the form in to request a registration packet now. (See the centerfold for form.)

Packets will be ready in late May. We also hope to have the registration packet available for downloading on the club's web site at: www.gws-mbca.org

We're not sure we can fit any more in the schedule for you to do, but we'll keep looking and trying! Please plan on joining us for as much of the event you have time for!

RC Imports Goes Racing!



With the 2001 road racing season well under way, it's time to update you on the exploits of [RC Imports Racing](#). After having tested the waters (and done well) at the last two races of 2000 in the Motorola Cup Street Stock Championship, RC Imports decided to contest for a championship in 2001.

To start the season, co-drivers Rick Ellinger and Alex Ratcliffe entered the 2-hour Grand Am Cup Street Stock Series race at a cold and moist Daytona International Speedway during the Rolex 24 weekend February 1-4.

After a fast and steady run, Rick took advantage of a timely full course yellow to change drivers and fuel the car. Alex then put up a valiant effort in the drizzle that started soon after his stint began to bring home a fine 5th in class of 17 starters and 31st overall out of 76!

Race Two saw RC Imports again in Florida. This time at a very sunny and warm Homestead-Miami Speedway on March 1-4 for a 3-hour race. After a disappointing qualifying effort (11th of 14 in class), Alex ended up starting dead last due to a mechanical error made in the paddock while changing the tires before the race.

Thanks to quick thinking by Rick and some willing help from other crews, Alex was able to make the grid in time to start from pit lane. With quick and consistent laps Alex came in during a full course yellow. After 1 hour 20 minutes, RC Imports was 6th in class. Now, Rick had the car with a full load of fuel and 2 fresh right side tires. After running hot laps in 90-degree heat, with position as high as 3rd, Rick nursed a fuel starvation problem that eventually gave RC Imports another 5th in class. Still, a good result.

On to hot and dry Phoenix International Raceway for Race Three on April 18-20. It seems that the RC Imports trademark is a mediocre qualification but a good race. Co-driver Alex Ratcliffe qualified the car 11th and started the race. Alex moved up to 6th in class before pitting due to the still unsolved pickup problem in the fuel cell. Needing fuel to correct the problem, crew chief Bill Lear used a full course yellow to make the call to pit early.

After driving 1 hour 15 minutes, Rick was handed the car with 2 fresh tires and a full tank of fuel. He managed to hold on to a 4th in class, having the same problem as co-driver Alex had, with 10 minutes to go. The podium is in sight!

With 3 top 5 finishes RC Imports looks real strong for a run at the drivers championship as well as team championship. Not bad for an unsponsored team competing against factory and major-sponsor teams. Next up will be race four at Watkins Glen on May 18-20.

Bill Lear

RC Imports Racing

Alex and Rick plan to run the entire season, hoping to pick up a sponsor. All the funds to run the cars - the only Mercedes-Benz in the entire series - have been coming from the drivers themselves. It's difficult to run in a professional series with little or no support. If you have any leads on a sponsor or even a one-race sponsor please forward the information to Rick Ellinger at RC Imports at 301-762-4205. Rick and his wife, Cindi, have been members of MBCA since 1987 and have always supported the section with event sponsorship and tech sessions. (Mr. ed)

Why Autocross?

Only a few locations in the USA have a larger concentration of cars than here in the Metro DC area. And with any situation where a large concentration exists, there will always be problems of varying size and degree. And such is the case here in the Metro DC area.

There is probably not a day that passes that someone in the Greater Washington Section does not encounter one of these "problems" of the road. With drivers on the roads changing lanes suddenly with no warning, cars stopping quickly in short distances, obstacles falling off trucks or from other cars, children running into the path of cars either because they are chasing a ball or being chased by another child are just a few road "problems" that may be faced by any of us on any given day. So what can you do to improve your driving reflexes and reaction times to ensure that these road "problems" do not become a permanent problem for you? One way is to participate in a GWS sponsored autocross.

I have found from my participation in the GWS autocross events, that my "eye-hand" coordination has improved as well as my confidence with moving my car in-and-out, as well as around obstacles at varying speeds.

I have also discovered that driving someone else's car does not provide the same confidence level as when driving my own car. Even though the course is the same for all drivers, the equipment, size, and movement of each car is different and requires the application of varying degrees of input and agility.

For example, if my daily driver is an S-Class car but I autocross an SL or SLK the amount of distance for stopping and turning the smaller cars is substantially less than the larger S-Class car. Suppose you encounter a roadway problem in your S-Class car. The reactions learned from the smaller cars may not immediately translate into the S-Class situation because of the extra car weight for stopping and the additional distance required for turning.

Now I am not saying that autocrossing one size of car and daily driving another size is not feasible or possible, because I have done it on many occasions. But what I am saying is this... autocrossing your daily driver will increase your confidence level to handle your car in roadway problem situations. In addition, you will have a greater appreciation for the superb manufacturing quality that goes into your Mercedes.

I am looking forward to further improving my driving abilities through the 2001 autocross season, because it will better prepare me for situations that I might encounter on the roads.

If you have never attended and would like to learn more about autocross, please contact Joe Wozney, the club's driving event chairman, one of the other club officers, or me for more information. Autocross is a great learning experience for teenage drivers. So bring them with you. I look forward to seeing you, your family, and your Mercedes at our next autocross.

Mason Beale

German Car Show

The Chesapeake Region to the Porsche Club of America and Valley Motors will host the Fifth Annual Valley Motors German Car Show on Sunday, May 27, 2001. The event was formerly known as the Deutsche Marque Auto Show. (Sounds familiar. Mr. ed.)

Where: Valley Motors, 9800 York Road, Cockeysville, MD 410-666-7777.

Who: Mercedes-Benz, Porsches, and Audi, and air-cooled Volkswagens. To be eligible for the vintage classes, the car must be of 1979 or earlier model year.

Time: Gates open at 9:00AM for placement of vehicles. Judging begins at 10:00AM (no cars allowed on show area after 9:45). Lunch will be served at 12:30PM.

Cost: \$15.00 per car, which includes two lunch tickets. \$25.00 at show.

Lunch: All car entrants will receive two complimentary lunch tickets. Additional lunch tickets may be purchased for \$10.00 for adults and \$5.00 for children under 9 but only prior to the show.

Classes: Class will be Pre-1955; 1956-1960; 1961-1965; 1966-1970; 1971-1975; 1976-1979; 1980-1989 and 1990-1999. Additional awards will be given for "Best Cabriolet", "Best Vintage Auto", and several others.

Judging: This is a low-key car show with an emphasis on the camaraderie of the car clubs and enjoying the cars. Judges will spend an average of one to two minutes on each car. Only the interior and exterior will be judged. No storage or engine compartments or underside of vehicle will be examined.

Questions and volunteers: For further info, contact Todd Bernard at 410-461-6570 before 10:00PM or email him at <toddrb@home.com>.

Volunteers are needed, if you are interested in helping, please contact me.

Please mail your check by May 21 payable to "Chesapeake Region, PCA" to 5416 Radel Court Ellicott City, Maryland 21043.

Include your name, email address, address, phone numbers, make, year, and car model.

New England Vintage Meet

On July 6-8, the Granite State Section will host the fifteenth annual New England Vintage Meet for classic Mercedes-Benz at the Gideon Putnam Hotel located in the Saratoga Spa State Park in New York State. Check out the hotel at: www.gideonputnam.com

This beautiful setting was also the site of the meet in 1996. There is a lot to see and do in the area including the famous mineral baths, horse racing (www.nyracing.com) and the performances of the Lake George Opera Company in the park a short walk from the hotel.

Still the only MBCA full weekend event in the Northeast for classic Mercedes-Benz, this year's meet will feature touring, site seeing, a German banquet, and an informal car show.

The reservation deadline is June 4. The contact for the meet is:

Henry Magno
MBCA Granite State Section
19 Cranberry Lane
Burlington, MA 01803
781-229-0500 home/Fax or 978-887-8809 work
hmagno@shore.net

High Gear

Scrambling for a foothold upon the Balkan scarp I press on ever upward toward the azure sky. On this land before me scampered the standard bearers of Alexander and then the divisions from the Tiber. Thracian, Bulgar, Scithian and Slav. In the footsteps of barbarians I find my path. Upward, ever upward through the rocks and twixt the pines.

My great-grandfather spent some time in Bulgaria in the 1880s fighting to liberate the Balkans from the Ottoman yoke. His colorful letters home describe a pastoral land, a beautiful people, and an

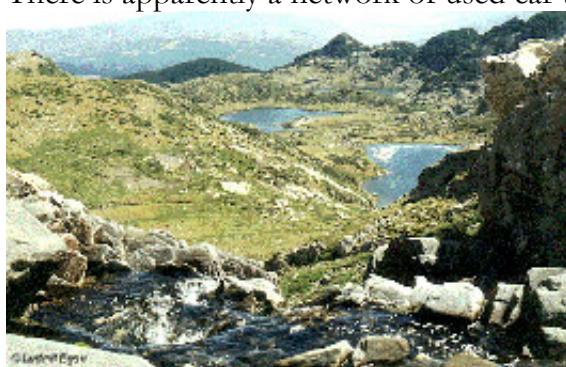
Orthodox civilization just breaking free from 500 years of Turkish oppression. It has been my good fortune to have just visited Bulgaria as she shakes loose from other tyrannies and struggles toward a hopefully bright future.

Bulgaria is an unexpectedly beautiful country with craggy, snow capped mountains; verdant valleys rich with grapes upon the vine; a sun baked coastline on the Black Sea; and a culture crusty with antiquity yet vibrant as tomorrow.

I am a car person. Wherever I journey I cast an eye in the direction of the local automotive culture. In Bulgaria I found a rich medley of four-wheeled transport. Of course there are the ubiquitous Russian Ladas with their utilitarian 3-box design, unbreakable suspension and robust 4 bangers capable of ingesting anything approaching 76 octane.

Then there are the 2-cycle Trabants made of recyclable plastic and banished from their native East Germany ever since the Wall came down. Skodas and Volgas round out the representation from the days of the Warsaw Pact.

There are also clapped out examples of Western Europe's finest from the 1970s and 1980s. Elderly Mercedes, BMWs, Volkswagens, Renaults, Fiats, and Volvos are all soldiering on here in the Balkans. There is apparently a network of used car traffic traveling across Europe whereby as a vehicle gets older it finds its way ever further East.



Economic conditions are such that there are very few new automobiles on the roads. However, that does not mean that the Bulgarians are not car enthusiasts. On a newsstand in Sofia I purchased five different automobile magazines in the Bulgarian language. All were professional looking monthlies. (Publishers of our bimonthly STAR, take note.)

A substantial number of cars in Bulgaria show evidence of the tender ministrations of loving, enthusiast owners. I saw Ladas with after market alloy wheels and even a Trabby with a chin spoiler and a rear deck wing. There is apparently a lively community of rallyists here. When it comes to World Rallye Cup competition I expect that the Bulgarians will enjoy a substantial advantage as some of the tertiary roads require the skills of a professional capable of executing a 4 wheel drift in order to get from point "Ah" to point "Yat."

In a land of older cars there are, nonetheless, also old car enthusiasts. While driving from Sofia to Sliven on the main highway I overtook a beautifully restored 1938 Fiat Ballila. An exchange of waves and thumbs up established the bonds of our noble automotive fraternity. While visiting the medieval city of Plovdiv I encountered a 1937 Lancia Aprilia, a 1962 Mercedes 190c and a 1952 Chevy Bellaire reposing under tarps awaiting careful restoration by the local equivalent of Bob Platz or Scott Grundfor.

I was talking to a Bulgarian friend about things automotive when I happened to casually mention that I had not seen any British cars on the roads. I opined that perhaps it would be a bit daunting to take on the narrow Bulgarian byways with a right hand drive vehicle. My companion chortled meaningfully "Angliskiye!" he exclaimed. "We have a junkyard just 40 kilometers south of the border. Very few of the English cars get that far under their own power!" Jaguar enthusiasts please note that I now know of a great source of used parts... cheap.

John Kuhn Bleimaier



TradingPost

230SL, 1965: Blue/new red leather. Right hand drive! Auto. Two tops. 57k miles. Spent its entire life in Palm Beach, FL. \$15,500. One owner. Photos avail. Call Jack Swift at 301-596-9120.

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500E, 1992: Pearl black/black leather. All original, no mods. All maint. records incl. \$82,000 window sticker. Always garaged, never damaged or raced. 124k miles. Asking only \$27,000 for this rare and desirable model. Call Jonathan at 703-759-7115.

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