



# Das Heimatblatt

Newsletter for the Alabama Section  
Mercedes-Benz Club America

October • 2010

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## STERNBLICK

(View through the Star)

*James Roberts*  
*President, Alabama Section MBCA*

What a fantastic experience Starfest was! This unique biannual immersion in Mercedes-Benz enthusiasm was enhanced by Alabama Section's hosting of "Startrek" – the group trip from the MBUSI Factory near Birmingham to the event in Winchester, VA and Summit Point, WV.

Alabama Section is so well thought of by the MBCA and MBUSA leadership that we have been asked to host Startech in 2013. Since this will coincide with production of the C-class in Alabama, it should be a unique Startech.

Our incoming Regional Director, Bill Hopper (chairman of Starfest 2010) is a tireless worker with an infectious enthusiasm and great connections with both the company and the club leadership. Bill has a passion for actually driving these wonderful cars. As you all know, I share this and was able to do pretty well in the Starfest 2010© driving events in the late Dodie Bowron's 2000 S430.

Closer to home we will enjoy extending the summer with a car show and drive hosted by the Perdido Key Chamber of Commerce. We are anticipating a great time to meet more of our Gulf Coast members and to have a great excuse for another road trip from the northern parts of the section.



Fritz and Marlis's dog Willy

Don't forget that in our October meeting we will elect officers for 2011. David Rice of Mobile has agreed to serve on the board. David frequently participates in our board meetings and wants to start making some dinner meetings in the Mobile/Pensacola area.

We are already working on events for 2011. We look forward to even more participation by Alabama Section members. If you have suggestions for events, please let us know.

ALABAMA, MISSISSIPPI, GULF COAST

## Visit Our Website

This will keep you informed on the exciting events planned and will have descriptions and registration information.

It will also serve as a reference if you lose your newsletter.

[www.mbca.org/alabama](http://www.mbca.org/alabama)

## Monthly Membership Meeting

Where: Dale's Southern Grill, Hoover

When: 3rd Tuesday of every month

Time: 6pm dinner, 7pm meeting

Dale's Southern Grill in Hoover is 1/2 mile south of the Vestavia location and is south of I-459 and 1/4 mile south of the Alabama 150-US 31 intersection on the left

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### October

19 - Membership Meeting

### November

13-14 - Car show/scenic drive  
Perdido Key, Florida/Alabama

16 - Membership Meeting

### December

21 - Membership Meeting

Holiday party (Info coming soon)

### January

21 - Membership Meeting

Polar Bear Run/ Eisreise  
(Info coming soon)

## MERCEDES-BENZ CLUB OF AMERICA ALABAMA SECTION [www.mbca.org/alabama](http://www.mbca.org/alabama)

### Executive Board

President, **JIM ROBERTS**  
205.933.9333  
FAX 205.933.9338  
[jertoosaver@bellsouth.net](mailto:jertoosaver@bellsouth.net)

Treasurer, **CARL CULLISON**  
205.274.4706  
[cmculli@otelco.net](mailto:cmculli@otelco.net)

Vice Pres., **MANNY SOUSA**  
205.995-4911  
[porgal@charter.net](mailto:porgal@charter.net)

Secretary, **DODIE ROBERTS**  
205.871.7235  
[edbrowron@windstream.net](mailto:edbrowron@windstream.net)

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*Member-at-Large*, **GEORGE KOTELES** 850.729.0566

*Member-at-Large*, **SAM POWERS** 256.461.4252

*Member-at-Large*, **CAROL WADLEY** 205.529.5400

*Eastern Regional Director*  
Greg Magnus  
[greg@eoecho.com](mailto:greg@eoecho.com)

## das Heimatblatt

EDITOR

RHIANNON SCHLANGEN

**das Heimatblatt** is published bi-monthly by the Alabama Section, Mercedes-Benz Club of America, Inc. Copy deadline: 10th of the month preceding the month of issue. Please type and double space copy.

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# Coming events

## Indian Summer at Perdido Key

**B**renda Brown and Pierce Williams along with Judy & Glynn McMillan have been working with Perdido Key Chamber of Commerce director, Pete King to stage an informal show and shine and an interesting drive around the Pensacola & Southern Baldwin County area on 12-14 Nov. The weather will still be pleasant-- probably still "top down" for the open cars.

We will have an opening reception at Sunset Grill located at Holiday Harbor on Friday evening at 7pm.

Please bring your Mercedes-Benz to the Lost Key Golf and Beach Club on Perdido Key by 10am on Saturday 13 Nov. for an informal "Show & Shine"

After lunch at Lost Key we will have a 2 ½ - 3 ½ hour drive around southern Baldwin County and the German communities of Lillian, Josephine, and Elberta with some visits to the local sights including the National Seashore

We will also visit the Mercedes-Benz dealership as well as the historic part of Pensacola.

We have reserved a private room at the Oyster Bar at Perdido Key for 7pm on Saturday evening. This seems to be a nice site for perhaps quarterly or even monthly meetings for our Alabama (AMG) section members in this area.

Those who stay over Saturday night might want to visit the nearby Naval Aviation Museum on Sunday. If you are that close, you really need to see this history of military aviation.

The Frank Brown International Songwriters Festival will be taking place on the same weekend with artists performing at 25 different venues in the area.

Golfers staying through Monday are invited to participate in the Celebrity Songwriters Golf Tournament at Lost Key Golf Club.

### Caravan Info

If you are from the Birmingham area or northward, and would like to caravan, we will leave Crown Mercedes-Benz at 1pm on Friday 12, Nov

Crown Mercedes-Benz is located at 1800 Montgomery Hwy S. At the intersection of US 31 and Hwy 150 just past the Galleria



### Accommodations for Mercedes-Benz Club members

#### Cottages on the Green Room Specials

Hotel room: \$69.00 per night plus tax, includes a \$10 daily food voucher per room

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#### Additional Condo Specials

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Palacio- 2 Bedroom unit with  
2 night min for \$419.24

Beach Colony- 2 bedroom unit with  
2 night min for \$471.23

Contact Pete King:  
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[Pking@resortwquest.com](mailto:Pking@resortwquest.com)

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# Alabama Section MBCA Ballot

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Mail ballot to: Alabama Section MBCA, 2301 Arlington Ave S, Suite 200,  
Birmingham, AL 35244  
Or e-mail to : jertoosaver@bellsouth.net

## Perdido Key Car Show/Scenic Drive Registration

Name (s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Car(s) : \_\_\_\_\_

Mail entry form to: Alabama Section MBCA, 2301 Arlington Ave S, Suite 200,  
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# Event recap



Blue Ridge Parkway by: Gary Anderson

## Startrek

### A Memorable Drive to Starfest

**W**hen the announcement was made that Starfest 2010 © would be hosted by Greater Washington Section in Winchester, VA and Summit Point, WV, it rekindled an idea I had been thinking about for years to do a southern tour from the MBUSI factory to Little River Canyon, the well known roads through the Smoky Mountains to the Biltmore House in Ashville, along the Blue Ridge Parkway to Thomas Jefferson's home, "Monticello" and then via the Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park.

In this case it would put us within 25 miles of Winchester, VA which was the site of Starfest 2010©.

The Alabama Section Board was very supportive, and I spent every weekend in the summer prerunning the route and working out different ways for people to arrive at the same destination. This attracted the interest of The Star editor, Gary Anderson and his wife, Genie who had spent some of her life in the south.

I also contacted leaders of all the sections we would pass through or near as well as our neighboring sections. Surprisingly, there was little or no response, but we did have people from California, Oklahoma (6!), South Florida, Texas (via Pensacola), South Georgia, Chicago, and Kansas as well as all over the Alabama Section and a few from Peachtree.

If you look at a map, you will note that most of these MBCA enthusiasts made significant detours to join us. Some almost doubled the mileage they covered to be part of Startek.

Gary Anderson has allowed four pages in the upcoming issue of The Star to cover this epic journey that greatly enhanced the Starfest experience.

The Mercedes-Benz models ranged from the brand new E350 to the current S-class back to a 380SL (mid 80's). The 76 240D driven by Jeff and Denise Klepac came the longest distance (Kansas) and was the oldest car. It always works out that way: remember the 1966 250SE that drove from Maine to take the concours best of show at Heimatfest 2009? He beat MBCA president Roger Van Ness for this at Starfest 2010.

## The Gathering

MBCA likes for us to offer suggested routes and attractions without trying to have a giant caravan of cars that is unwieldy.

I had made arrangement with the Barber Motorsports Museum for a special tour on Sunday, but unfortunately the one I spoke with did not convey this to the staff. I wound up being the docent, so I limited the tour to the automobile collection. This is quite extensive, being the largest collection of Lotus race cars on the planet.

Many of our M-B enthusiasts recognized Mika Häkkinen's name on the 102 from 1992, since this was his first F-1 ride.

We gathered again at Brio for dinner and were joined by even more Alabama Section members.

## Factory Tour

Our friends at MBUSI gave us an especially warm welcome. Terri Ritchey even tended the Meister's dog, Willy while Dustin led us on yet another different and very interesting tour. People who had not done the tour for a few years remarked about how much more they saw this time.



# Event recap

The group photos were made, the two gift shops were cleaned like locusts going through a wheat field, and the group prepared for the beginning of the drive.

The route guide said to meet at the rest stop near Steele to gather before the rather intricate directions to get to the mouth of Little Rive Canyon. In spite of running the route only two weeks before, we encountered a repaving operation on the county road shortcut that crosses the flank of Look-out Mountain. Only 50 feet of it was not completed, and we did not have to cross any wet tar. Still this discouraged some. The spirited 27 mile drive along the canyon rim was great fun, and the dry weather had resulted in some unseasonably early color in the foliage. Our visitors were impressed with the fact the we did not catch a single car on this great road. We did see a few other people at Desoto Falls, but were but were not hindered by traffic.



While the other Alabama people turned back after Mentone we drove onto Sweetwater, Tn and grouped up awaiting the Oklahoma contingent that had visited the US Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville.

We noted that the hotel owner like virtually every one of them we stayed with owned a Mercedes-Benz. We signed them all up as MBCA members!

## On to Asheville

The guide had three routes to Asheville depending on how much time people wanted to spend at the Biltmore vs. how much they wanted to drive these great roads. I led the group that wanted to drive the notorious "Tail of the Dragon" (US 129) with its 318 turns in 12 miles. Motorcyclists have made this (in)famous by running it at near race speeds and consequently regularly flying off into the trees. This has resulted not only in heavy traffic and teams of police patrols but even groups of photographers linked by radios. The cops have no chance against this network and their victims are typically first time visitors slightly faster than the ridiculous posted 30 mph. Fortunately my Valentine was quicker on the draw than they were.



Alas the 12 miles is over far too quickly but we stopped, photographed the "Tree of Shame" decorated with smashed motorcycle parts , and , of course, bought the T-shirts.

We had more arrangements with my friend, Piet van Russom, who owns Silver Star Restorations at the end of US 129 to tour his facility. His friend, Drew Tibkin, who owns the wonderful woodwork restoration place in nearby Andrews brought over a Finback and a demonstration of their skills in restoring Mercedes-Benz and other cars' decorative wood trim. They pointed out that while Rolls Royce, Bentley, and Jaguar all have nice wood, theirs is flat while the Mercedes-Benz wood trim has compounded curves.

While it was fascinating to see how they do this, it reminds me of a journalist who pointed out that while Toyota had perfected

Peggy & Ed Hoag, Oklahoma Section Pres.

# Event recap

making plastic look like wood, Mercedes-Benz had perfected making wood look like plastic.

Between them Piet and Drew showed us 10 cars ranging from disassembly to completion. They both love driving the cars they restore. Both strongly prefer Mercedes-Benz, but they will take on certain other European cars. Camero's need not apply.

Even though they served us coffee and donuts, Piet and Drew had arranged lunch for us down the beautiful Nantahala Gorge with its whitewater rafters and kayakers and historic train.

We just beat the train passengers to a restaurant overlooking the river. A bunch of M-B enthusiasts on challenging picturesque roads dining in beautiful scenery with even an antique train awaiting its passengers. Does it get any better?

When we reached the Blue Ridge Parkway, most wanted to drive the southern loop that is the highest point on the parkway. Traffic was very light, and we made several scenic stops.

## [The Blue Ridge Parkway to Charlottesville](#)

This part from Asheville to the Virginia line is the most dramatic part with the best known scenery including Craggy Gardens, Mt. Mitchell (highest point east of the Rocky Mountains), Linville Falls, and the breathtaking viaduct where the road is a giant free standing bridge skirting the base of Grandfather Mountain.

Even though traffic was much heavier and stubborn about pulling into the frequent scenic overlooks to let us pass, we went up Mt. Mitchell which allowed us to see the plants change to those you would see in northern Maine or New Brunswick.

After many other sights we had lunch at the quaint "Little Switzerland" resort that hasn't changed in 75 years. The setting was idyllic, and each meal gathering was now taking longer as new friendships developed.

Near Boone, NC we were forced to leave the BRP to allow time to reach Charlottesville, VA in time for our evening gathering.



Blue Ridge Parkway by: Gary Anderson



## Event recap

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We reached I-77 just south of the Virginia line. This state does not allow radar detectors. They lower the speed limit and vigorously enforce it. Fortunately my concealed Valentine was still effective enough to save us.

Amazingly one car that had separated saw us ahead on I-77 and in his haste to rejoin us was nabbed by the Virginia troopers in one of their many ambushes.

When we reached I-81 traffic was really heavy, and it started raining. We longed for the peaceful solitude of the BRP, but we had "miles to go before we sleep" to paraphrase Robert Frost.

With a final dash past Staunton and across the mountains we made it to Charlottesville in time to join everyone for the evening meal within ten minutes of the planned time.

### **Monticello, Shenandoah National Park**

We had booked an early tour of Thomas Jefferson's home, Monticello thanks to Hetel, our host for our stay in Charlottesville who had saved for 8 years to purchase a GL 450. She is also becoming an MBCA member. Nat had recruited the ML owner hostess in Asheville.

Monticello has taken notes from Disney on crowd control. Since we were somewhat later than "the season", it seemed relatively empty. As our minibus arrived at the top of the "Little Mountain" the guide apologized for not having a Mercedes-Benz bus. He told us that they had M-B busses that served them much better in these grueling conditions. They had replaced them with Fords due to complaints that the Mercedes-Benz was not "American made". This kind of prejudice really irritates me. Especially in that the small M-B busses are, indeed, built at the Daimler owned Freightliner factory in neighboring North Carolina. Perhaps this is the reason the Daimler markets the big trucks here as "Freightliner" rather than Mercedes-Benz. We will see whether they sell more Sprinter Vans as Freightliner than Mercedes-Benz.

At any rate we learned that Thomas Jefferson was so obsessive/compulsive that he continued to embellish and reiterate Monticello to his financial ruin. He kept very detailed records about construction, gardening, etc. He probably would have made a great MBCA concurs participant or judge!

Following extensive tours of the house, support, and gardens, we assembled for lunch at Mitchie Tavern, a late 18th century tavern that had been moved here in 1924.

For our final meal as a group we had yet another trivia quiz to be sure everyone had a memento of the trip we had enjoyed so much.

By: Gary Anderson



Startridders at Monticello

The participants talked about the fun they had, so much that several people asked me if this were going to become an annual event. I'm not really prepared to devote another summer to preparation right now, but when we have a major event in Birmingham we may consider repeating it. The moral is: when you see an event like this go ahead and take advantage of it then, because it wears the organizer out so much that is unlikely to be repeated the next year.

In all we had close to 30 participants, but there were never more than 20 at any one time. The entire route with diversions, twisty roads, etc was about 1200 miles over 4 ½ days vs. 685 miles in 10 ½ hours that I drove to return from Winchester via interstate.

The only mechanical problem occurred with Richard Kirk's 2007 S550 which had a preexisting intermittent problem of not shifting beyond second gear. His dealer had not been able to diagnose it, and it finally failed permanently just short of Winchester.

I had a left front window that did not want to go all the way up, but one of the techs at the event simply adjusted it and told me to lube both front guides. After this all was uneventful.

My mileage was 26-28 mpg in the mountains and 28-30 mpg on interstate.

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# Event recap

## Starfest 2010

**S**tarfest is the biannual national event for MBCA. The five day event includes many technical seminars, a Mercedes-Benz concours d'elegance with emphasis on originality, an autocross, acceleration runs, two days on a road course with timed runs, and, of course, social events each night with awards and dinner on Saturday and Tuesday nights.

It always amazes me how many nice people are enthusiastic about these wonderful cars. This event allows you to really appreciate the cars' great design and their capabilities.

Friday allowed time to clean up cars after the long trips. Arrangements had been made for the hotel to provide hoses and a wash area. Apparently I was the first to ask about this, and the hotel staff responded as though I were in charge. Little did we realize that the water there spotted so badly that cars had to be washed and dried in sections to avoid spotting.

Some of these people were very serious about prepping their cars, but over the course of the day many new friendships were made.



A MBCA member prepping their 280SE for judging

My progress on clean up took longer because of taking Dodie's mother's 2000 S430 (220 series). This isn't thought of as a particularly sporting car, since it has the smallest engine of that series. It is, however, easier on Dodie's back when set in the softest settings of its air suspension. I had my sporting tires already mounted on its 16 inch wheels when she realized she could not attend. There was no time to switch them back to the 300SL (129).



MBCA judges thoroughly reviewing the winning 113 SL

Mrs. Bowron's eyesight was failing when she bought the car almost 11 years ago, and for the last 5-6 years her employees had driven it. The result was that all four corners had scrapes, a wheel had major curb rash, and there were numerous door dings and superficial scratches.

With the short notice, there was no time to have all the damage repaired. In the bright sunlight in Virginia I found even more and set about touching then up and polishing scratches out as well as I could.

The opening reception was at the Old Court House of Winchester which serves as a Civil War Museum. At 40 miles from Washington, Winchester changed hands 37 times during the war — 7 times in 1 day!

The concours was held at a 19th century resort. It has been said that politicians should never rent a hall they can't fill. Greater Washington section did it just right with the 200+ Mercedes-Benz vehicles ranging from a couple of prewar 540 K's through several 300 SL's all the way to a preview of the 2011 CL coupe and a Smart. Even the sponsor, Liqui Moly, has a Sprinter van.

The MBCA concours judging teams are notoriously obsessive about originality and cleanliness. They even wanted the trunk mat and floor removed to verify that the battery was a Mercedes-Benz one and that the tool kit was original.

On Werner Frehaur's Smart they unscrewed the rear floor to look at the engine and even removed bodywork to look at the radiator!

They really didn't take off much for the areas I had tried to repair, and I learned a lot about

# Event recap

things I never knew were not perfect.

Pete Lesler told me the competition in my class was really close. I was amazed to take third place, but he said that with just a tiny bit of effort I could have been second. Of course, I had spent two days on it by then.

John Fair, one of my new friends from the preparation area got a first place with his SLK 320 after removing engine parts to clean it better.

John went on to explain that there was a special award from MBCA for the participants with the highest total score from concours, autocross, acceleration runs, and road course lap times. John had a goal of winning this. I jokingly told him that I knew I had an advantage in the road course times, but I really did not like autocross—especially with such a big car.

At the autocross site MBCA event coordinators Frank and Mary Cozza teach an accident avoidance clinic consisting of an emergency lane change, threshold braking, and a brake release, turn exercise. Many people attested to these maneuvers having saved their lives, but I noticed that this served to get more people enthusiastic about what their cars could do. It really seems to be the way Frank gets people hooked on driving events.

The autocross course was short, tight, and confusing. Even after working the course, I went off course two different ways in the first two runs. My first timed one was ok, and I nicked a cone on

the second timed one.

Many of these cars were set up for this sort of event, and, of course, nearly all were smaller which is a big advantage in autocross.



By: Jim Roberts

1937 540K from the Kemp Museum

MBCA always divides the participants into classes, but since very few S-class cars participate, we are thrown in with the later E-class cars which are more agile. Results are not released until the Tuesday awards dinner.

The first track day at Summit Point was met with pouring rain for most of the day. The track people did not think we could use turn indicators correctly, so after the first laps they insisted on having the windows down. I wasn't willing to get the beautiful light colored leather, wood, and carpets wet, so I just helped instruct the instructors all day. It was amazing how many instructors had things so wrong.

By afternoon things had started to dry a bit, so the participants all wanted to start practicing the "dry" lines.

The so-called "acceleration runs" consist of a quarter mile on the straight of the race track. This seems odd to me, since this was the last thing I wanted to do with my first Mercedes-Benz; a 220 D. Its 60 hp and 3100 pounds took close to 30 sec to reach 60 mph.



By: Jim Roberts

Starfest 2010 concours d' elegance



# Event recap

It started to rain again as my group lined up, so it was tricky to launch quickly without excessive wheel spin. Again we would not know the numbers until the next night.



Jim Roberts participating in the autocross

That night Fritz and Maris Meister took me to dinner along with The Star editor, Gary Anderson and other friends.

It rained all night and then tapered off on Tuesday morning. Again I instructed in every session. John and Fritz wanted me with them but I also got to ride in a CLK 63 AMG Black Series—effectively a street legal DTM car. Finally just before lunch with the track drying, it was time to work in a few laps in the purple S430.

I was able to make quick work off most of the instructors. I did see an ominous black dot that gradually emerged as Frank Cozza in his SLK 55 AMG.

I learned that by turning early and driving the inside front wheel over the curb I could rotate the rear (ESP off and air springs and dampers on full hard). I could rotate the car with the throttle through the tight parts. I would actually corner faster than Frank but his larger supercharged engine and 1300 less pounds gave him better acceleration and top speed. I was seeing 130 mph on the longest straight and I couldn't draft him, so he was seeing 140+ mph. His passenger was MBCA president, Roger Van Ness. Both were amazed at how well the big S-class got around the track.

Ultimately his lap times were 2 seconds quicker, but he was on track tires which are good

for 3 seconds. I was second overall to Frank. The next 18 cars were all AMG's including several SL's, SLK's and even the CLK Black.

The timed runs started in order of speed, so I got finished in time to rewash the car. Nothing gets a car dirtier than a damp track.

The awards banquet had the usual thanks towards the entire event committee, and they richly deserved it. John had found us a table with the Renntech people from Lake Park, FL.

I was amazed to get a first place in autocross while John got fourth. Now I was ahead of him.

Then they announced that I was first in acceleration runs, and of course, first in my class for the track times. All this time director Werner Freylauer had been getting first place awards with his Smart.

The composite total MBUSA award was presented to me as well. I'm not sure how this happened, since Werner had no competition. This was amazing, since this is the last car of our six Mercedes-Benz cars I would have chosen. As Jim Ball (greater Washington Section) said "It was the perfect storm".

The trophies are all really nice. I will bring them to the next meeting in hopes of inspiring some of you to participate in the next Starfest. Don't pass it up just because you think your car couldn't win. I didn't think Mrs. Bowron's would either. She had ordered an S63 AMG so I could "race" it for her! Thank you, Dodie for the ideal competition car!



MBUSI's Christine Chase and Jim Roberts with his Starfest award



# Neues aus Mercedes-Benz

(New from Mercedes-Benz)

## Redesigns

### R-class nose job

The mid cycle facelift of the R-class is more striking than is typical for Mercedes-Benz, since everything forward of the windshield has been redesigned. The raised nose makes it appear longer and thus more like a tall station wagon than a large minivan.

The interior has also been revised with more wood and a different steering wheel and instrument design. The rear is also noticeably different.



New R-class nose

Engine choices are now limited to the 3.5 liter 268hp V-6 and the 3 liter Bluetech diesel with 400 lb-ft of torque. Since the diesel accelerates faster and reduces fuel consumption 25% with diesel and premium gasoline almost the same price, the \$1500 extra for the diesel seems to be a worthwhile investment.

The R-class is again available only with 4-matic.

We saw these new R-class cars in production on our visit to the MBUSI plant of Startrek, and they really look much more like cars.

## Production

### C-class production brings two suppliers

Two more suppliers are the vanguard of more to come even though Alabama production of the C-Class will not begin until 2014.

Actually the logistics firm is incorporated in production at MBUSI in Vance, but their base will be greatly expanded from the present 50 employees up to 300 as the C-Class is added.

Also setting up in Birmingham is a firm that coordinates the various suppliers from Bremen. This North German Hanseatic seaport town produces the European C-Class. Daimler actually has a higher percentage of the total employment in Bremen, since it is significantly smaller than Stuttgart.



C-class

My friends in Bremen tell me that after the Hanomag truck/former Borgward car operation was acquired by Daimler-Benz, the 190 was produced there. This smaller more affordable Mercedes-Benz sold so well that it became the C-Class which is now by far the best selling model in most markets. It is critical to the success of Daimler, AG. The current model has achieved critical journalistic praise, and reliability seems to be superb.

## AMGs

### Special Starfest Treat

Mercedes-Benz USA, of course brought an SLS AMG Gullwing to Starfest. There were at least three others in private hands which did not quite equal the number of original 300 SL's.

It was neat to get to experience these striking cars, but there was one even rarer 2011 CL 63 AMG that was inconspicuously mixed in with the cars parked around one of the hotels. As Oklahoma Section President Ed Hoag and I checked it out, we began to realize that this was the new twin turbo 5.5 liter AMG that produces 565 HP.

In fact that was the first sneak preview of this first of the new generation CL and its new AMG engine that will replace the current 6.2 liter normally aspirated AMG engine. While these have 50+ more horsepower, they use 25% less fuel!



2011 CL 63 AMG

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