

AMG DRIVING ACADEMY ARRIVES IN UNITED STATES

By GREG MAGNUS

Mercedes-Benz driving enthusiasts are hardcore. They are passionate people who know what they want and, more often than not, are first in line to get it. Buying a finely tuned, 500-horsepower driving machine is just the beginning. While gripping the reins, they want more than the adrenalin rush as the gate swings wide open. They also want a memorable driving experience that races the heart as well as the engine, and they want confidence and control.

In pursuit of these goals, during 2008 many enthusiasts participated in the exclusive, and popular AMG Challenge events sponsored by MBUSA. Now a new driving program, the AMG Driving Academy replaces the Challenge events and will be coming here this fall.

The AMG Driving Academy was established in Europe two years ago to give AMG Mercedes-Benz drivers the opportunity to improve their driving skills under professional guidance and to experience

unforgettable events with like-minded enthusiasts. With venues such as the Hockenheim and famous Nürburgring, or simply "the Ring" to enthusiasts, as well as driving instructors with multiple German Touring Car (DTM) titles, these are high-caliber, unforgettable events indeed.

During 2008, the AMG Driving Academy in Europe registered twice as many applications as in 2007. The demand for high-class racing circuit training has led AMG to undertake a considerable expansion of event options for 2009.

In addition, 2008 was a record sales year for Mercedes-AMG, with the U.S. market representing 38 percent of total sales, surpassing second-place Germany by 25 percentage points. The idea of introducing the AMG Academy to the United States seemed logical.

But how will the AMG Driving Academy events here in the U.S. compare to the programs offered in Europe? What can you expect?

First of all, MBUSA has four Academy events scheduled for this fall, all at track schools owned and managed by Skip Barber Racing School: Lime Rock Park in Connecticut, Palm Beach International Raceway in Florida, and Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca in California.

The U.S. version of the AMG Driving Academy starts off with two driver training programs, designated Stage I and Stage II. Both programs offer a maximum class size of 40 participants, which is the same size as the Academy in Europe. Participants are divided into four groups of 10 and a dedicated instructor will stay with each group throughout the day. Stage I is a day-long event while Stage II is a more advanced, two-day event.

From what we understand, the Stage I program here in the U.S. will teach the fundamentals and know-how for your first high-performance laps in an AMG Mercedes. In Stage II, you'll train more like a pro and experience intensive race-track training with individual coaching. At both levels, approximately 20 percent of the time is spent in the classroom and 80 percent in the cars.

Based on the descriptions of the comparable "Basic" and "Advanced" courses in Europe, here's what you can expect:

The first stage of the program is on ensuring safe and confident reactions behind the wheel. In a professional environment, the participants develop the expertise to tackle their first few laps of driving at the limit, with a detailed theory-based introduction unit providing the

AMG Driving Academy U.S. events will take place this year at Lime Rock Park in Connecticut, Palm Beach International Raceway in Florida, and Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca in California. Training takes place on wet skid-pad, autocross course, and open-road circuit.





basics. The instructors not only highlight the fundamentals of driving physics, but also look at seating position, steering wheel control, the correct line of sight, and safety rules. The practical section, on a wet skid-pad, fast autocross course, and open track, gives participants the chance to assess and enhance their driving skills in their own AMG cars or in models provided by AMG, and to explore the capabilities of the various driver assistance systems. This training course also focuses on understeer and oversteer, slalom and lane-change maneuvers, as well as braking and evasive maneuvers around suddenly-appearing obstacles.

The second stage of AMG training concentrates on enhancing driving skills in spirited driving. In addition to the fundamentals of driving physics, the program introduces cornering technique, the ideal line, and braking points. However, the functioning of the various driver assistance systems, safety rules, and behavior required to ensure safety during the training also play a central role in this unit.

The practical section of the course on the race circuit gives participants the chance to practice what they are learning in the classroom. In sector training, the instructors explore in detail the particular characteristics of each sequence of corners, with participants following behind the instructors, allowing the students to identify the ideal line and braking points.

During many of the driving exercises, the AMG specialists use motorsport data recording technology to support the training activity, making it possible to log sector and lap times as well as longitudinal and lateral acceleration. In-car camera footage is also recorded, and is provided to students for review.

The advanced training program generally uses cars provided by AMG, so the participants have the opportunity to put various models from the current AMG range through their paces.

Stage I will be the initial driving program for most participants unless they have prior high-performance driving experience or other professional training on the track. Stage II will require the completion of Stage I, or a comparable driving course. Prices for the U.S. events will be \$1,899 for the Stage I program, and \$3,499 for the Stage II program.

All program cars are AMG Mercedes, of course, and will include the new E63, C63, CLK 63 Black Series, SL63, and the SLK55, though the cars may change slightly from venue to venue.

In Europe, Daimler advertises that AMG Driving Academy participants will be "learning from the fastest." Though instruc-

tors for the U.S. program have not yet been announced, we can expect them to be comparable to those in Europe: "If there's one thing the instructors at the AMG Driving Academy all have in common, it's the ability to drive cars fast. However, a range of other skills are also required to give the participants on the various AMG training courses an understanding of fast driving and safe car control."

Each event will also highlight instruction from well-known professional racing drivers. In Europe, for example, the AMG chief instructor is active racing driver Reinhold Renger. The latest addition to his team is DTM and FIA GTP champion Bernd Schneider, considered one of the most successful European race drivers of all time.

Course details and registration information for the U.S. events will be announced soon, but you can sign up now to receive information as soon as it's available by visiting www.amgacademy.com or calling (800) 217-6916.



U.S. Venues and Dates

September 8-16

Lime Rock Park, Connecticut

With a 50-year legacy, Lime Rock Park is unlike any other track. There is a reason the word "Park" is in the name, as more than 300 acres of natural Northwest Connecticut beauty surround the 1.53-mile track.

September 21-27

Palm Beach International Raceway, Florida

Boasting an 11-turn, 2.034-mile design, PBIR's road course features some of the fastest and most challenging corners, elevation changes, and straightaways offered by any track in North America. Currently IRL-sanctioned and pending FIA certification, PBIR's track has seen some of the world's fastest cars and racing series, such as the IndyCar Series, Indy Lights and Grand Am.

November 7-8 and November 17-20

Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca, California

At this track you can experience the famous Turn 8 and 8A combination, popularly referred to as the Corkscrew, considered one of the motorsport world's most challenging turns due to the drop in elevation as well as its blind crest and apex on the uphill approach.

Turn 2, with its difficult and technical double apex, has been named the "Andretti Hairpin" in honor of former Formula 1 World Champion Mario Andretti, while the straight that runs between Turn 6 and Turn 7 has been named the "Rahal Straight" after Champ Car race winner Bobby Rahal.

European Events

Upcoming events:

July 18-19, 2009 – AMG Basic-Training: Boxberg

August 7-9, 2009 – AMG Emotion-Tour Bregenz

Phone: + 49 7144-302 575

E-mail: driving-academy@mercedes-amg.com

Website: www.mercedes-amg.com/driving-academy/