

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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VEHICLES • EQUIPMENT • SAFETY • PERFORMANCE • MAINTENANCE • MOTORSPORTS • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS • ATTRACTIONS

CLS63 AMG

TOP-TIER PERFORMANCE GOES AT LEAST A BIT GREEN

BY JOE SAGE



As the AMG crew buffed the dew off our cars, we chose among the basics: Performance Package? ceramic composite brakes? and color. We chose Palladium Silver, a stealthy choice, with package and ceramics.

AMG GmbH is a private subsidiary of Mercedes-Benz, as quattro GmbH is with Audi, and similarly joined to its parent company by the hip. Its purpose is also similar: to engineer extremely high performance via advanced technologies, providing Mercedes-Benz with an über-lineup of luxurious and very fast vehicles. Not everything in the Mercedes lineup gets the AMG treatment, but quite a few vehicles do. The new CLS four-door coupe is a prime candidate, and here's the result.

The AMG group serves a purpose: performance above all. Within the greater framework, that's it. But as a quasi-independent entity with its own broader view, they are sensitive to a full range of considerations—including issues of sustainability, use of materials, fuel consumption—all while delivering the top performance the name implies.

Are these at odds? It could seem so. Is the goal worthy? Inherently, of course. Is it primary? No. Just as the Toyota Prius would not be pushing its performance credentials, AMG is entering new terrain when pushing its green credentials. But the difference is clear: whereas the Prius is never going to be a hot rod, any and every vehicle has room for improvement in emissions, fuel economy, materials use and so on—and, in fact, having a crack engineering team on the job makes it all not only possible, but appropriate.

POWER AND EFFICIENCY

Why do we start an AMG piece with this green message? Well, because they did. AMG Director of Vehicle Development Tobias Moers opened our orientation by stating that performance continues to be the AMG trademark attribute. But he adds a clear emphasis on responsibility. Such high-end engineering is inherently deeply involved in fuel, and he points out that AMG will be cutting all CO₂ emissions 30 percent by 2012 and another 20 percent by 2015. Thus their combined goal: dynamic power with the highest efficiency.

A regular Mercedes-Benz CLS 550 pumps out

420 hp and 443 lb-ft of torque, already impressive. The CLS63 AMG pushes these up to 518 hp and 516 lb-ft. Yet, while doing so, they've increased fuel mileage by 32 percent over its predecessor. At 16/21 MPG city/highway (against 16/24 for the CLS 550), you get a 0-to-60 time of 4.4 seconds (against 5.1 for the CLS 550). Top speed also bumps up from 130 to 155 mph.

Not bad for a car that weighs over two tons (the CLS 550 weighs 4168 lbs, while the CLS63 AMG has been shaved to 4114). Like the SLS AMG, the CLS63 AMG uses deep-drawn aluminum for its doors, while hood, front wings, rear deck lid, parcel shelf, various support sections and major parts of the chassis and engine are also made of aluminum.

Proof of product is in this fact: the CLS63 AMG has fuel economy that keeps it clear of any gas guzzler tax. The CLS63 AMG is surely not the greenest of the green, but who would really want or expect that in this rocket? What they've achieved is remarkable and commendable.

DRIVETRAIN-SUSPENSION

The CLS63 AMG is powered by a 5.5L direct-injected biturbo V8 and shifts via the fabulous AMG Speedshift MCT 7-speed sport transmission. AMG Ride Control sports suspension has an electronically controlled damping system, new front axle, new electromechanical AMG sports parameter steering, and an optional AMG high-performance ceramic composite braking system.

An AMG-spotter's detail is the brake calipers. The basic set are in a medium grey tone; choose the Performance Package and get red calipers; or opt up to race-tested ceramic composite calipers and show them off in a rich copper color (see lead photo).

The AMG Speedshift MCT 7-speed transmission—an AMG exclusive—does away with the torque converter of a conventional automatic, instead operating like a manual with a compact, wet-startup clutch. The engine and transmission are

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CLS63 AMG SCRAPBOOK





The Julian Pie Company was the center of attention as we all invaded and locals drove by for a better look at the hardware. A straightaway between the high country hills—either and any gave a great drive in the CLS63 AMG.

programmed with four modes of operation. A standard stop/start function is active in the basic Controlled Efficiency (C) mode, which turns the engine off when the car comes to a stop. C mode also gives a softer accelerator response with early shifts, usually starting in second gear. A green "ECO" symbol in the instrument cluster shows this function is active.

Alternatives are the S (Sport), S+ (Sport plus) and M (Manual) modes, in any of which the stop/start function is turned off. In these three modes, engine management partially sup-

presses the cylinders, as calibrated interruption of ignition and injection under a full load provides even faster shifts. We never noticed anything but power, strong performance and excellent sound effects in any mode.

An AMG Ride Control sports suspension, with steel struts in front and air struts in the rear, plus automatic level control, is enhanced further by an electronically controlled damping system; it automatically adjusts the damping characteristics depending on the driving conditions and reduces the roll angle of the body. The result: lightning-fast adjustment between optimum driving comfort and the best possible agility. The driver can switch between the three suspension modes of Comfort, Sport and Sport Plus at the press of a button.

OUR CLS63 AMG DRIVE

You couldn't pick a better drive route than the one AMG had laid out for us this day. You also couldn't pick better weather. (In fact, our beautiful spring day in Julian and the high country was replaced by blizzard conditions and extensive highway closures just a couple of weeks later.) Rancho Santa Fe is already out of the thick of it, inland from the traffic and congestion of I-5, railroad and beach town corridor of north San Diego County. The hills and curves start immediately, as we wind our way toward Escondido, which we skirt along its south side, powering over the mountains past the San Diego Wild Animal Park toward Ramona. We hit the convenience store there, which caused a bit of a stir: this car made it clear we weren't from around there, and pulling out a camera didn't help matters much.

We made fantastic time to Julian. This car is a screamer—a luxurious and comfortable one, but a thrill nonetheless. Despite its two-tons-plus mass and four-door-full-back-seat nature (which we didn't need that day), it flies. Simply adding horsepower to weight is not enough: the AMG formula of suspen-

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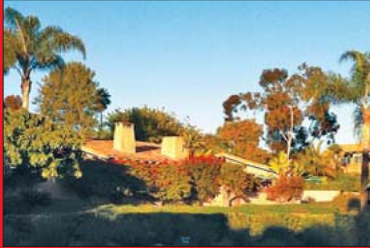
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AMG TRAVEL SCRAPBOOK



We flew US Air to San Diego (with full TSA patdown at both airports). Lodging was in a casita at the Auberge Rancho Valencia in Rancho Santa Fe. We drove to Julian for pie, south to the Mexican border, then worked our way to lunch at the Andaz Hotel in downtown San Diego, where we caught up with colleagues doing the Fiat 500 launch. From there, freeway time back to Rancho Valencia.



Top: our test CLS63 AMG, in Palladium Silver metallic with Performance Package and ceramic composite brake option added. Above: Diamond White metallic (\$795) with standard brakes, still a potent cruiser.

sion helps, the well-balanced Mercedes-Benz basis helps and the AMG application of aluminum helps, not only by saving weight—which we’ve just identified as not being the whole game—but in redistributing it a bit. On top of that, we have the electronic engine management and suspension options to play with, and play we do. The stop/start feature doesn’t come into play much, as we’re doing serious highway time, so we move into the Sport, Sport Plus and Manual modes. Bliss. If ignition and injection are being managed, we don’t notice a thing.

It turns out we made such good time to Julian by missing a whole loop of the route, so rather than start our pie mission early, we double back on that section, and we’re glad we did. Highway 79 to the south is where we have some of our favorite driving, with open stretches of two-lane straightaway between challenging tight hills and climbs. It’s also a great spot for photos and video. From there, we drove back into Julian, where the cars were also creating a pretty good level of curiosity, with probably more AMGs out front than pies inside. Make this stop: Julian Pie Company pies are second to none.

We headed south again, from Julian, this time hitting one short stretch of I-8 at Laguna Pass (1235 feet), then south to the Mexican border, following the fences near Tecate. Plenty of Border Patrol here, but they seem to have figured out whatever we had up our sleeves wasn’t on their list. One word to the wise: turn off your cellphone before

you even get close to the border—a mistaken signal is pricey. We spent significant time arguing our nationality with not the Border Patrol but AT&T.

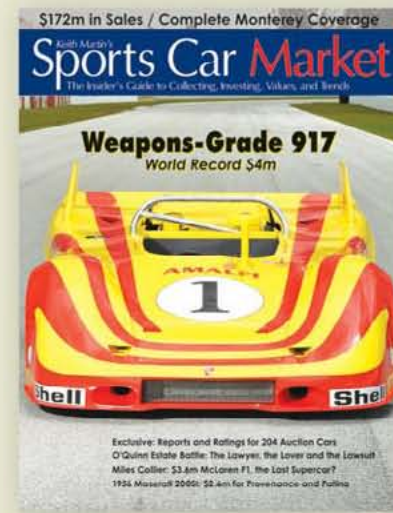
We could have cruised those border highways indefinitely, but were due in downtown San Diego for a bite to eat with the troops. The transition from roaring two-lane to freeway driving was painless.

THE BEST—OR NOTHING

That’s the proud AMG motto and would drive our shopping decisions as far as budget would allow. The CLS63 AMG is the one CLS model for now, though the CL has a 65 also. Is this in the wings for CLS? We’re scheduled to drive the 2012 CLS 550 and CLS63 AMG later this spring, but with no mention at this point of any such thing.

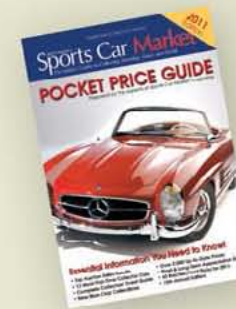
The launch drive was held in January, with the first of the year coming after press materials were created. Everything referred to “the new” CLS63 AMG. A few image files were dated 2012. Yet online today, it is clearly a 2011. AMG production is in limited numbers, so we’d guess they’re essentially the same; you may get a relative bargain now.

The regular Mercedes-Benz CLS 550 starts at \$74,000 and can easily be optioned up to about \$89,000. The CLS63 AMG starts under six figures, at \$99,050. Fully loaded, it can hit just over \$125,000. If you can afford the one, the odds seem good that you can at least look at the other. Give the AMG a spin, don’t hold back and don’t look back. ■



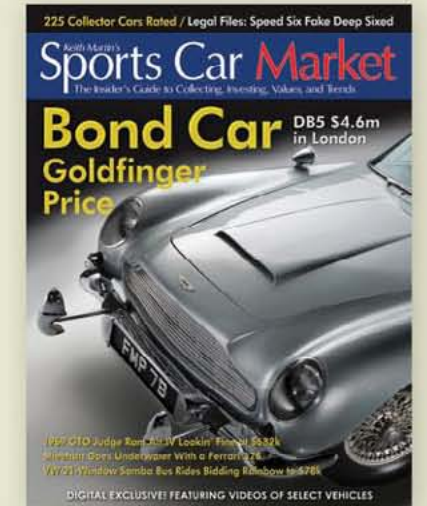
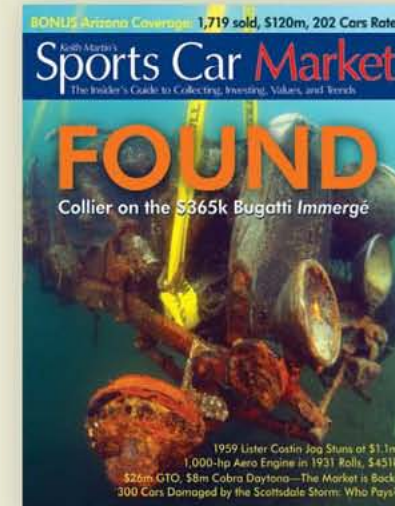
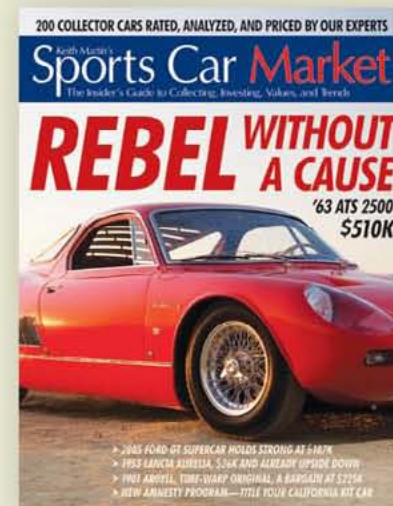
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