From the curb to the horizon with these brutal Mercedes AMG brothers

Lead
A potent combination of race-bred performance, real-world usability and unicorn rarity combine to make the Mercedes-Benz CLK DTM AMG among the most collectable modern-era Mercs of them all. We organised a rendezvous with both coupé and convertible versions to experience it for ourselves...

In addition to their unquestionable talent, what do Formula 1 veterans Jenson Button, Kimi Räikkönen, Juan Pablo Montoya and Takuma Sato have in common? Well, at one point or another, they all had a Mercedes-Benz CLK DTM AMG tucked away in the garage. Think about that for a moment. Four men used to piloting neck-snapping, mind-melting single-seaters were all sufficiently impressed with the way the 'Mega Merc' drove that they coughed up their hard earned to call one their own.

Even for an esteemed Formula 1 driver, getting hold of one of these unicorns can't have been easy. See, Mercedes-Benz and the boffins at AMG built just 100 of the steroidal CLK coupés to celebrate Bernd Schneider's near flawless DTM championship in 2003. And they weren't sold to any Tom, Dick or Harry, but rather via invitation or special order. The CLK DTM AMG's reception and commercial success prompted its maker to build a further run of drop-top versions – just 80 cars that time around but they, too, never struggled to find homes.

So, what of the cars themselves? With the generous assistance of Classic Driver dealer Rosier Classic Sterne, we were able to assemble both a coupé and a cabriolet to find out. They're quite clearly modelled on Schneider's DTM car, featuring aggressive aerodynamic addenda, a number of carbon-fibre exterior body panels and stripped out interiors. Beneath the bonnets lurk the ultimate iteration of AMG's old 5.4-litre supercharged V8, which develop around 580HP and a mighty 590lb ft of torque. There's also height-adjustable suspension, a clever multilink rear axle and a plated limited-slip differential for laying down all that power.

The DTM AMG's performance is accordingly spectacular. Nought to 60mph is dispatched in a supercar-toppling 3.8sec and it'll nudge 200mph despite all its carbon-fibre protrusions. It's the way the car tackles the twisties that's really impressive, though. To say a sports car grips like it's on rails is a bit of a tired cliché, but given the Mercedes generates 1.35g in the corners, you'll forgive us for using it. Its chassis is stiff and stable and, when coupled with that mighty engine, truly comes alive.

For all its performance-oriented credentials, the CLK DTM AMG's civility and on-the-road ease of use are perhaps its most attractive attributes. And it's this duality that's found favour with collectors keen to make the most of the car's extraordinary handling without having to wear gloves and a crash helmet.

Of course, rarity is also music to collectors' ears and probably the primary driver for these cars' value. New, the coupé cost a princely 235,000 euros while the rarer cabriolet was even more at 277,000 euros. Putting a value on them today is difficult given how infrequently they're sold in public, but a glance at the Classic Driver Market suggests quite a fair stretch further north of the list price. We can hardly say we're surprised – the first and last Mercedes road car to wear the DTM badge is arguably AMG's noughties swansong.

Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver © 2019

Gallery

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