

[Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing Teams Set For 12 Hours of Sebring Debut This Weekend](#)

**Press Information**

March 16, 2017

## **Mercedes-Benz Returns To Sebring's Legendary 12-Hour Race After 60 Years**

**Sebring. Three Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing teams will race in the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship's Mobil 1 Twelve Hours of Sebring this weekend (March 16 – 18), bringing Mercedes-Benz back to the iconic North American sports car race for the first time in 60 years. AMG-Team Riley Motorsports, WeatherTech Racing and SunEnergy1 Racing will compete in the 65<sup>th</sup> running of the legendary 12-hour endurance race in the Mercedes-AMG GT3.**

In the 1957 running of the 12 Hours of Sebring, a pair of privateer Mercedes-Benz 300SL cars raced competitively in what was the last time the Mercedes-Benz was represented in the historic race. The No. 18 300SL of Fred Windridge, George Reed and Rundle Gilbert finished first in the GT 3500 class, while the No. 17 300SL of drivers Chester J. Flynn and Ed Hugus finished third.

While Mercedes-AMG did race in and win a one-off FIA GT Championship three-hour race at Sebring in 1997, it has taken a full six decades to get back to the 12-hour race.

Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing teams will aim to replicate the success of their ancestors in the 12 Hours of Sebring, one of the key races in the season-long battle for the 2017 IMSA WeatherTech Championship GTD team, driver and manufacturer championships.

The No. 33 AMG-Team Riley Motorsports Mercedes-AMG GT3, co-driven by Ben Keating, Jeroen Bleekemolen and Mario Farnbacher, comes to Sebring with the momentum of a third-place GTD finish in January's season-opening Rolex 24 At

Daytona. The team was in contention for the win for the majority of the Daytona race, leading on eight occasions for a total of 106 laps.

The No. 50 WeatherTech Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3, co-driven at Sebring by Cooper MacNeil, Gunnar Jeannette and Shane van Gisbergen, also led in the Daytona season opener. Van Gisbergen took the lead just under six hours into the race and his nine circuits up front were the first race laps a Mercedes-AMG has ever led in IMSA competition.

The SunEnergy1 Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3, which will be co-driven at Sebring by Kenny Habul, Boris Said and Tristan Vautier, was the early pacesetter of the three Mercedes-AMG GT3 entries at Daytona. The new team races for just the second time at Sebring in what will be team principal Habul's first 12 Hours of Sebring after testing at the track last month.

Several drivers on the Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing teams have scored 12-hour class wins or support-race victories on the Florida circuit. Bleekemolen, Farnbacher, MacNeil and Said have all earned at least one career GT-class win in the 12 Hours of Sebring, while Vautier won a support race in 2010.

The 65<sup>th</sup> Mobil 1 Twelve Hours of Sebring gets underway today with three practice sessions – two during the day and one at night. Friday, March 17<sup>th</sup> features a final practice session in the morning with GTD qualifying taking place at 1 p.m. EDT.

Race-day kicks off on Saturday, March 18<sup>th</sup> with a 20-minute warm-up at 8:00 a.m. EDT before the 10:40 a.m. EDT scheduled start of the 12 Hours of Sebring.

Coverage of the 65th Mobil 1 Twelve Hours of Sebring begins Saturday, March 15<sup>th</sup> at 12:30 p.m. on FOX Sports 1 (FS1). Flag-to-flag online coverage will begin at 10:30 a.m. EDT on [www.FOXSportsGo.com](http://www.FOXSportsGo.com) or with the FOX Sports GO mobile app. More information and live timing and scoring is available on [www.imsa.com](http://www.imsa.com).

**Ben Keating, Driver – No. 33 AMG-Team Riley Motorsports Mercedes-AMG GT3:**

“I am very excited to go into Sebring this year. The character of Sebring, with big braking zones, sweeping high-speed curves, bumpy sections and pavement changes, should be good for the Mercedes-AMG GT3. It is easy to drive at the limit and this makes for a great endurance racing car. As the track changes throughout a race, and as the tires change throughout a stint, I really like the way the Mercedes-AMG GT3 handles everything that is thrown at it. It's an extremely well-rounded race car, and

the greater variety of situations the track has, the better we will be compared to the competition. Consistency is super important in a 12 hour race, and the Mercedes-AMG GT3 has it in spades.”

**Jeroen Bleekemolen, Driver – No. 33 AMG-Team Riley Motorsports Mercedes-**

**AMG GT3:** “I'm really looking forward to Sebring. I feel this track should fit our Mercedes AMG GT3 very well. We have good downforce for the high-speed corners, and it should take all the bumps well. There isn't another track as bumpy, so you have to get comfortable over them. This track is old school, and there's no room for errors because the walls are close; it is a very challenging track. That, in combination with all the fans there and the history, makes it one of the best races there is. It's such a great event with a long history. It's definitely one of the highlights of the season. I love it.”

**Mario Farnbacher, Driver – No. 33 AMG-Team Riley Motorsports Mercedes-AMG**

**GT3:** “Sebring is really amazing. I love this track, it is unique, the racing started there in the 1950s, and when you go through the pits you see all of the sign boards showing all of the big manufacturers that have won there in the past. I was fortunate to win there in 2015; it was very, very special and the biggest win of my career. It would be even better if I could do the double and win again, especially this time with a manufacturer like Mercedes-AMG that has jumped into North American motorsport for the first time. The 12 Hours of Sebring is a cool event and it is a real pleasure for me to be part of it with AMG-Team Riley Motorsports and Mercedes-AMG.”

**Cooper MacNeil, Driver – No. 50 WeatherTech Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3:**

“Our new Mercedes-AMG GT3 will be strong at Sebring and I'm looking forward to taking the green flag on Saturday morning. We had an extremely positive test there a few weeks ago and made strong improvements to the car. We were down a bit on top speed at Daytona and at the Sebring test, which was a bit frustrating, but with the latest BoP [Balance of Performance] change we were given a little larger air inlet. This will help our top speed, which is exactly what we needed.”

**Gunnar Jeannette, Driver – No. 50 WeatherTech Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3:**

“I'm really happy with how our Mercedes-AMG GT3 performed at Sebring during the IMSA test a few weeks ago. It is without a doubt the best GT car I've driven over the bumps around the iconic Sebring concrete runways. This will make life a little easier for Cooper, Shane and myself over the course of 12 hours. Sebring has so many nuances, and just learning where you can drive to avoid bumps in certain corners takes a lot of laps. The track itself changes so much through the race

weekend and the race with the rubber going down as well as temperature changes. To really get your set-up right for the race is tricky”

**Shane van Gisbergen, Driver – No. 50 WeatherTech Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3:**

"I have been doing a lot of laps on the iRacing simulator and also looking at some footage from the test. When I get to the track on Wednesday I will be doing a track walk with the guys so that as soon as I hit the track on Thursday I will be able to get straight up to speed. My initial thoughts is that it looks very bumpy, but fun.”

**Boris Said, Driver – No. 75 SunEnergy1 Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3:** “I love Sebring, and after driving our SunEnergy1 Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3 in testing, I think we are going to be the car to beat! This old, bumpy track suits the Mercedes-AMG well with the combination of fast corners and bumps, and this car was made for it. It’s been 20 years since my first Sebring GT-class victory so it sure would be nice to celebrate another victory with SunEnergy1 Racing and Mercedes-AMG at this historic track.”

**Tristan Vautier, Driver – No. 75 SunEnergy1 Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3:** “We are very hopeful for a strong pace like we had in Daytona. Just like everybody else, the big challenge in Sebring is to be good over the bumps. The Mercedes-AMG GT3 damping is very good and our engineer Kent Stacy is super smart, so we should be good. Our focus as a new team has to be on processes, just putting everything together. We have an amazing group, and each person at every post has an incredible potential, so as soon as we put everything together the result will be there. If we manage it, our chances for a win or podium are real.”

**Contacts:**

Jochen Übler	Tel .: +49 (0) 7144 302-92 470	jochen.uebler@daimler.com
Birgit Zaiser	Tel .: +49 (0) 7144 302-581	birgit.zaiser@daimler.com
Robert Moran	Tel.: +1 770-705-2270	robert.moran@mbusa.com

Further information from Mercedes-Benz, Mercedes-AMG and Mercedes-Benz USA is available on the Internet: [www.media.daimler.com](http://www.media.daimler.com), [www.mercedes-benz.com](http://www.mercedes-benz.com) and [www.mbusa.com](http://www.mbusa.com).

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