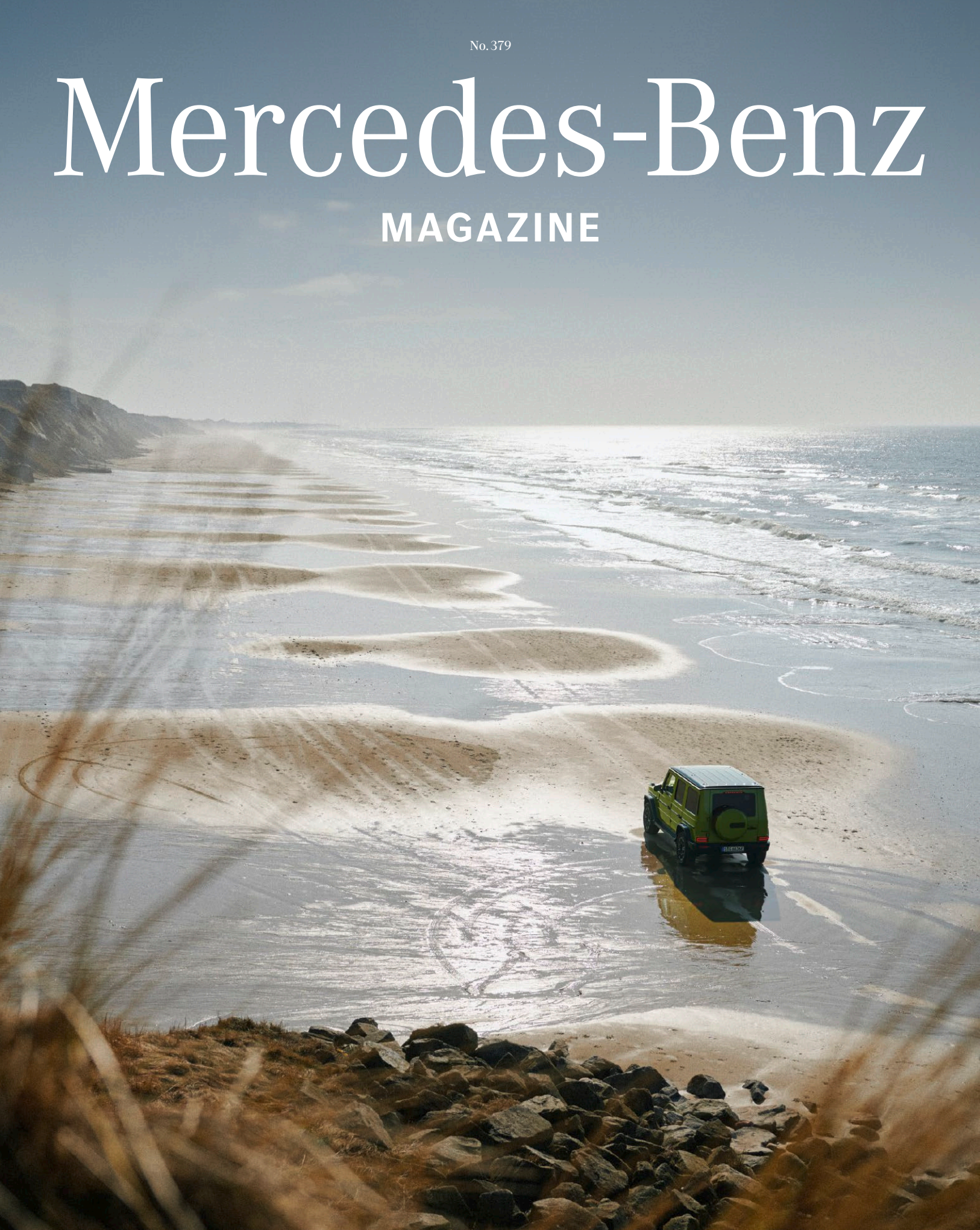
No. 379

Mercedes-Benz

MAGAZINE





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THE ACTION HIGHLIGHT
OF THE YEAR.
Hollywood-worthy performance: the all-new Mercedes-AMG GT 63 4-Door Coupé sprints from 0 to 100 km/h in just 2.4 seconds.
TOO HARD TO RESIST.
AMG
Mercedes-AMG GT 63 4-Door Coupé | Combined energy consumption: 20.9–17.9 kWh/100 km; Combined CO_2 emissions: 0 g/km; CO_2 class: A.

Dear readers,

At Mercedes-Benz, exceptional engineering has always gone hand in hand with extraordinary experiences. As one of the world's most valuable brands, we create vehicles that inspire people and moments that move them – moments they remember.

Sport plays a special role in that. It brings people together, embodies shared values and creates a sense of connection. That's why we have long been part of football, golf and Formula 1. Our partnership with the Women's Tennis Association (WTA), which began in 2025, underscores our commitment to women's sport and its athletes. You can read more about it starting on page 60.

Connection is also central to our Mercedes-Benz Studios. In cities around the world, we create spaces for personal conversation with our customers – places where they can meet, exchange ideas and find inspiration, and where our brand comes to life in a distinctive way.

Some of the moments we remember most begin on the road. That's why, in this issue, we take you through Provence in the CLE Cabriolet, on a family trip with the new GLB, and along the Basque Atlantic coast in the all-electric VLE, our Grand Limousine.

However different these stories may be, they share one idea: wherever people encounter Mercedes-Benz, they should feel welcome. That feeling lies at the heart of our brand. And that is what our promise is all about: "Welcome home".

Yours,

Mathias Geisen

Mathias Geisen
Member of the Management Board of Mercedes-Benz Group AG, responsible for Mercedes-Benz Cars Sales & Customer Experience



Photo: Mercedes-Benz AG

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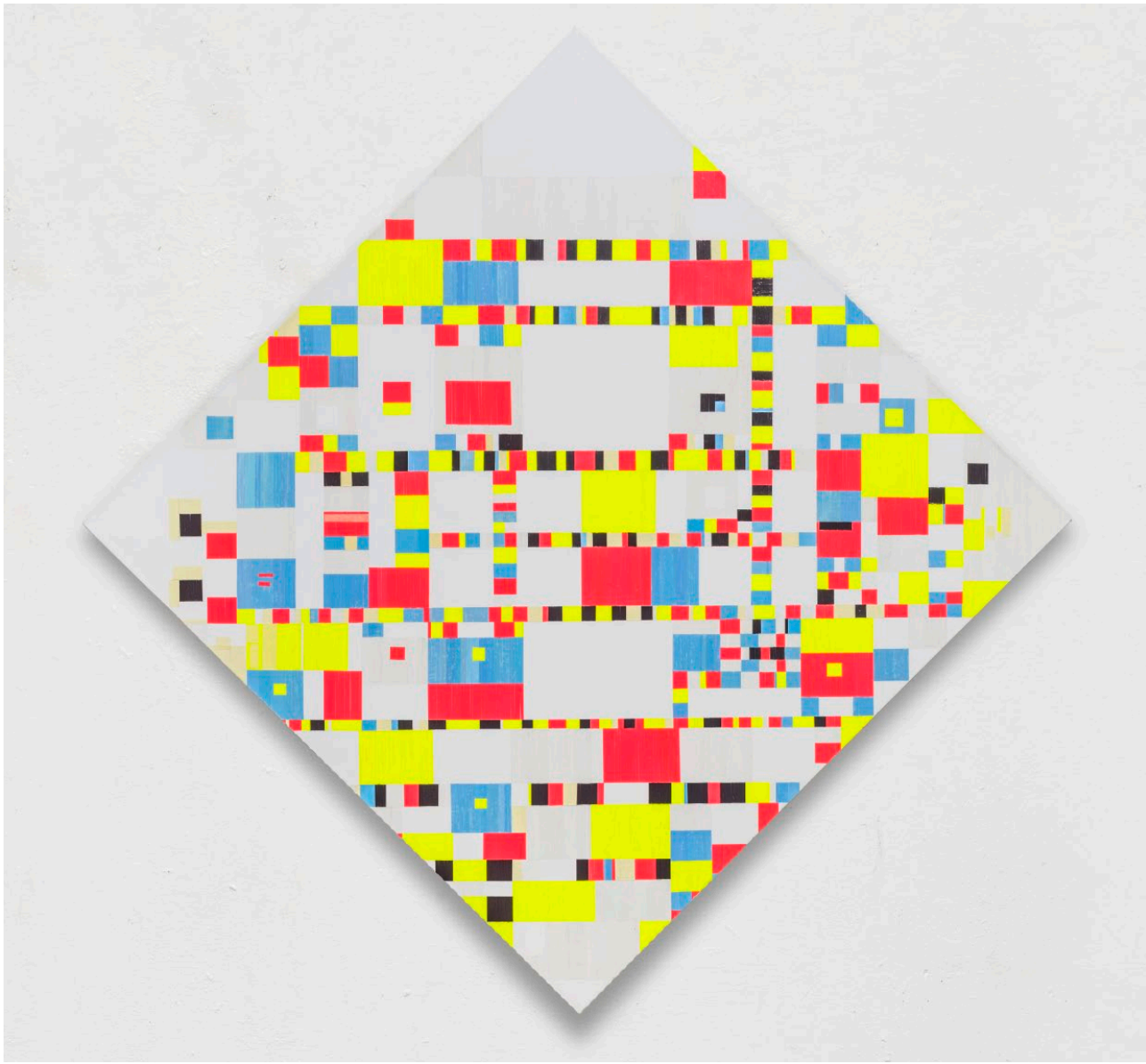
Photos: Benni Bock, Mercedes-Benz AG, Lina Grün, André Tillmann

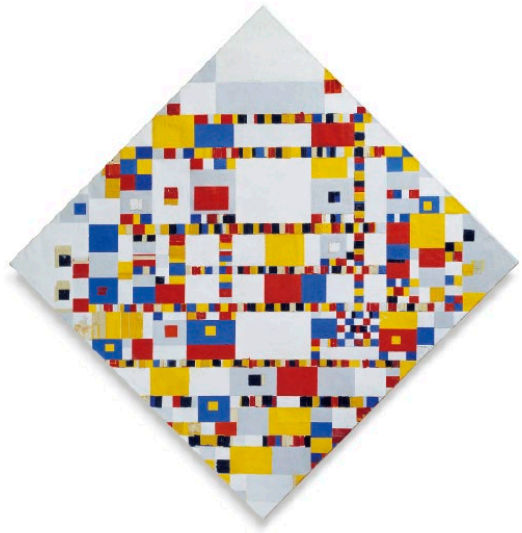
GREGOR HILDEBRANDT



Gregor Hildebrandt, “Non perderti per niente al mondo (Paolo Conte)”, 2019
Audio-cassette tape, beginnings and ends of audio cassettes, masking tape and acrylic on canvas, 127 x 127 cm
Mercedes-Benz Art Collection, © Gregor Hildebrandt

Photo: Roman März, Berlin

The work of Gregor Hildebrandt, born in Bad Homburg in 1974, explores the fleeting nature of memory and the deeply human impulse to overcome that dilemma by documenting, storing and archiving



Piet Mondrian, Victory Boogie Woogie, 1942–1944
Kunstmuseum Den Haag – long-term loan Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands / Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

Text by Dr Anne Vieth

Gregor Hildebrandt's work centres on very specific storage media: music cassettes, vinyl records, video tapes and magnetic film. He puts them to varied use in his paintings, sculptures and large-scale, room-filling installations.

These media reveal more than the mere desire to preserve – they also expose the passage of time that eventually catches up even with storage media themselves. Seen from today's point of view, music cassettes and vinyl records already feel "retro," carrying a faint sense of nostalgia. On several levels, they serve as repositories of time: they literally preserve the music of a particular era, while listening to a song or looking at a record sleeve can evoke memories and emotions. In the case of "Non perderti per niente al mondo (Paolo Conte)," the artist is referencing a song by the Italian singer-songwriter Paolo Conte. The black tape used for the piece carries the song "Via con me," a 1980s hit that reflects the widespread longing for Italy so very common among Germans at the time. The work's title, "Non perderti per niente al mondo," is a line taken straight from that song and, in directly addressing the viewer – "don't lose yourself for anything in the world" – challenges them head-on.

The artwork encompasses yet another dimension, for Hildebrandt also weaves in an art-historical reference. The composition he builds out of cassette tape is based on a famous painting by Piet Mondrian. In 1943, the streets of New York and the sound of blues music inspired this pioneer of abstract art to create his painting "Victory Boogie Woogie" (which is part of the collection of the Kunstmuseum in The Hague today). Scholars consider it to be Mondrian's final, unfinished work. The artwork is composed primarily of the three primary colours – red, blue and yellow – along with white, grey and black. The interplay in the arrangement and scale of the colour fields lends the composition a musical rhythm, with Mondrian approaching the tempo of boogie-woogie through a painterly gesture. More than seventy years later, Hildebrandt picks up that very gesture. On the one hand, he adopts Mondrian's composition, even as he replaces the materials Mondrian used – oil paint, painted strips of paper, cellophane, and black chalk – with cassette tape, drawing on the colours inherent in the tapes themselves. On the other hand, Hildebrandt further intensifies the musical and historical reference by invoking Paolo Conte's song from the 1980s. Here, creativity and time are stored, layered, rethought – and thus made available for the future.

Learn more about the **MERCEDES-BENZ ART COLLECTION** and current exhibitions at **mercedes-benz.art**

IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE



Visionaries spark new ideas and create experiences that move and inspire us. Through their courage to break new ground, they are shaping the world of tomorrow today.
Meet three people whose creative visions show just how much power a good idea can hold

Text by Valerie Präkelt



Illustration: Mathis Burmeister/2 Agenten; Photo: Elin Strååt

ANNA WALLANDER
Anna Wallander grew up in a small town in central Sweden. In 2019, the trained lawyer founded her label Akind, which now generates around four million euros in annual revenue.
akindstore.com

THE DIAMOND GROWER: ANNA WALLANDER

Anna Wallander worked as a lawyer for eight years before turning to her true passion and founding the jewellery label Akind. “Akind grew out of personal frustration. I couldn’t find jewellery I actually wanted to wear, most of it felt either old-fashioned or overpriced,” says the Swede. Her company, founded in 2019, specialises in fine jewellery: high-quality pieces made from precious metals and lab-grown diamonds. “Essentially, a lab-grown diamond is real. Chemically, physically and visually, it’s identical to one that comes out of a mine,” the entrepreneur explains. “A diamond is always 100 per cent carbon. The only difference is where it comes from. In nature, a diamond forms over millions of years under enormous heat and pressure deep underground. In the lab, we recreate exactly those conditions, but it only takes a few weeks.”

That’s how you get a diamond without having to mine for it. Even gemmologists – gemstone experts – need specialist equipment to tell a lab-grown stone apart from a mined one. “The one telltale sign of a natural diamond is an impurity, which is exactly what you’re trying to avoid if you want a flawless stone.” Wallander believes that entering the industry as a self-taught outsider actually worked in her favour. “If you don’t know the rules, you’re free to question them. An insider might have known all the reasons not to start my company. I only saw the gap in the market.”

As a lawyer by training, she has no formal design background, so she hired a team to cover that from the very start. “Knowing what you can’t do is a skill in itself,” says the founder, who describes her brand’s design DNA as minimal, timeless, quiet and Scandinavian. “We also always ask ourselves whether someone would still want to wear our pieces in 20 years.” That question is part of Akind’s sustainability principles too. Wallander points out that a lab-grown diamond isn’t automatically sustainable, though. “It depends on how it’s grown and on the energy that powers the process, which is why certification and transparency matter so much to us. Sustainability, as a word, gets used so loosely these days that it has lost its meaning. For us, it can never become a marketing phrase. It has to be firmly embedded in our business.”

THE PROBLEM SOLVER: DANIEL REYES FLORES

If Daniel Reyes Flores had to explain his job to a child, he'd put it like this: "Picture dirty rubbish that nobody wants any more. Plastic caked in earth, say. We've built a furnace that heats this rubbish without a flame and turns it into a kind of oil. The rubbish becomes fuel, instead of sitting in the ground for centuries."

Experts call this process pyrolysis. Reyes Flores founded EcoNova, a company that runs a pyrolysis and distillation plant in Lerma, Mexico, capable of recycling contaminated plastic waste from the agricultural industry. Straight after studying sustainable development and social responsibility, the 30-year-old went into operational waste management. "I kept seeing farmers burning their old silage or mulch film right there in the field, simply because nobody would take that waste off their hands. Once you've seen black smoke rising over the fields, not doing anything starts to feel like a risky choice," explains the founder, who is a participant in the beVisioneers: The Mercedes-Benz Fellowship[1] programme, describing his motivation.

"We want to prove that even contaminated materials can be a resource, and to decentralise recycling: instead of transporting waste to one huge plant, you could place compact pyrolysis units right where the waste is produced. A farmer's used mulch film gets turned into fuel just a few kilometres from his own field. We're making it possible to trace that entire process." To guarantee that traceability, Reyes Flores has built EcoNova on two pillars. "Alongside the physical process runs NovaTrace, our blockchain-based platform. It documents every single step. The data record can't be tampered with, so the whole journey can be verified." That, says Reyes Flores, is what lets customers trust the product.

For now, EcoNova is still a small team, focused mainly on proving that the recycling process actually works. "The problem we're trying to solve matters everywhere in the world. Right now, we're focusing on Mexico: the need here is urgent, and there's no shortage of contaminated waste that has so far been impossible to recycle."

BEVISIONEERS
Find out more about the beVisioneers fellowship at **bevisioneers.world**



[1] beVisioneers: The Mercedes-Benz Fellowship is independently designed and run by the non-profit organisation The DO School Fellowships gGmbH. Mercedes-Benz funds the programme through donations. The seed funding for the fellowship came from the auction of a 1955 300 SLR "Uhlenhaut Coupé". The beVisioneers fellowship reflects key elements of Mercedes-Benz's Corporate Social Responsibility strategy, promoting environmental sustainability and supporting community empowerment.



THE STORY WEAVER: MICHELLE ADEPOJU

When Michelle Adepoju travelled through West Africa in 2018, after finishing her degree in art and marketing, she discovered the local craft scene, and was instantly captivated. “I was especially struck by the weavers and dyers, whose work got far less recognition than it deserved.” Back in London, she couldn’t stop thinking about the craftswomen, and got to work. In 2020, she founded her fashion label Kíléntár, which manufactures in West African countries such as Nigeria and Burkina Faso. Adepoju designs long, voluminous skirts with fringing, tassels and beading, working with asymmetric cuts, corsets and oversized sleeves. Fabrics with texture and tactility come first for the designer. “I’ve always been drawn to hand-woven textiles that feel alive, even before they’ve been sewn into a garment.”

Adepoju found the inspiration for her label’s name in Nigeria’s markets. In Yoruba, the language spoken in southwestern Nigeria and parts of Benin and Togo, “Kí lè ń tà?” means roughly “What are you selling?” “You hear that phrase in every single market!” says the Londoner, whose parents are from Nigeria. “Our answer to that question is that yes, at Kíléntár we sell clothes, but never only that. It’s always about the craft and the making process too, about culture, identity and, of course, emotion.”

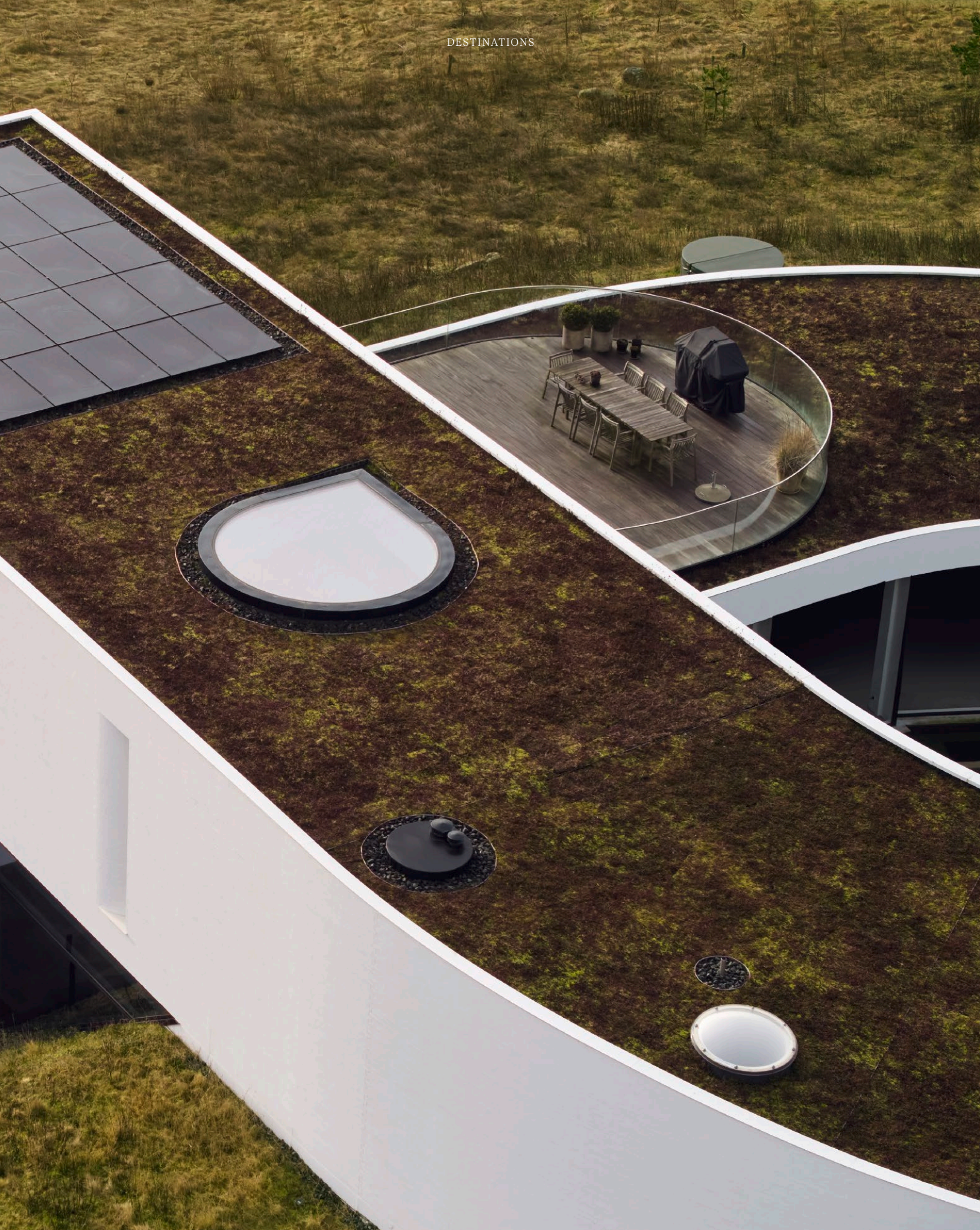
Every garment is made with precision. “A lot of our pieces go through several stages of handwork.” The artisans weave and embroider, then add the beads and fringing. “Some dresses take days, even weeks, to finish.” And yet the pieces remain fairly affordable. Adepoju hopes her customers feel that they’re investing in something special, beyond just the price tag. “I wanted Kíléntár to feel luxurious and high quality, but I also didn’t want women to only admire the brand from a distance. Because we work so closely with the artisans and oversee the process directly, we can keep it affordable.” Above all, though, she says, the clothing “still carries the energy of the hands that made it. You can really feel that presence of craft.”

MICHELLE ADEPOJU
The entrepreneur, whose label is based in Lagos and London, has already made the Forbes 30 Under 30 List, and her designs have been featured in magazines including Vogue and Business of Fashion.
kilentar.com

Photos: private archive, PR



MERCEDES-BENZ G 580 WITH EQ TECHNOLOGY
Combined energy consumption*: 30–27.9 kWh/100 km | CO_2 emissions combined*: 0 g/km | CO_2 class combined*: A



There is a house in Northern Denmark where cars aren't just parked, but staged. We travelled to Aalborg to see what it's like to live where iconic architecture and a love of the automobile are so closely intertwined

Text by Lutz Schilling
Photos by Benni Bock

The MB.UX navigation system steers us faithfully through quiet residential streets. The closer we get to our destination, the more space opens up between the houses, and the more distinctive the architecture becomes. The last stretch of the cul-de-sac winds steeply uphill, though that's child's play for our electric G 580 with EQ Technology, finished in MANUFAKTUR Made to Measure citrus green metallic. We enjoy the ease with which the G-Class takes it in its stride, its G-ROAR a discreet soft growl. And even though we sit high up here, with a clear view all around, the villa doesn't reveal itself until the final few metres: the one-of-a-kind villa named after Gug, a district a few kilometres south of central Aalborg, for which it has become a landmark.

The region around Aalborg, the largest city in North Jutland, was once a Viking stronghold. From here, Danish kings ruled a North Sea empire stretching from England to Norway. Warriors and traders threatened Paris, founded Dublin, settled Normandy, and extended their reach as far as the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean. Entrepreneurial spirit, a willingness to innovate, a healthy dose of pragmatism and straight talking: the qualities that those legendary Norsemen once took pride in still define the Danes today. Mads Peter Veiby is one of them.

DREAMING OF A NEW HOUSE

The entrepreneur, developer, owner and resident of Villa Gug greets us with an open, friendly smile and a handshake that is as warm as it is confident. With a welcoming gesture, Mads shows us into his home, just a stone's throw from where he grew up. "About fifteen years ago, we dreamed of building a new house here, so I bought the whole undeveloped plot and started developing it." With its open, modern layout and no fences or plot boundaries in sight, this new part of Gug feels less like a conventional housing estate today, and more like a landscaped park.

Yet when it came to planning his new home, the devoted family man and passionate car enthusiast added something rather unusual to the brief: Alongside the demands of everyday family life, his car collection was to move into the modern, futuristic villa too. "I had this idea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MADS PETER VEIBY

Like many children back then, Mads Peter Veiby, born in Aalborg in 1975, developed a passion for cars and vehicles of all kinds while playing the card game Quartets. His success as a tech entrepreneur, investor and founder now supports an active lifestyle that includes flying, skiing, and riding motorbikes and driving sports cars. He is also a regular charitable contributor and takes part in Denmark's political debate. The amateur pilot is married with two children.



of putting my cars on display," says Mads. "I like looking at them, I think of them as works of art."

For the job, he brought in the renowned Danish architect Bjarke Ingels, celebrated worldwide for his iconic, innovative buildings. Ingels on the brief: "Designing a home for a family is like painting a portrait. The success lies in capturing the expressions, the character, the personality, even the soul, of the people you're portraying. As an architectural portrait, it's about creating a framework for the life the family wants to lead." And rather than tucking the cars away in a basement or garage, the Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG) designed a house where garage and residential area flow seamlessly into one another.

A DESIGN THAT REFLECTS ITS RESIDENTS' PASSION

Picture the elongated shape of the house as a kind of ribbon, laid in a gently rising loop against a hillside, forming a central private courtyard at its heart. What sounds simple is, architecturally, a remarkable piece of design: the



BJARKE INGELS

Born in Copenhagen in 1974, Bjarke Ingels founded the Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG) and is widely regarded as one of the most influential architects of his time. His designs combine spectacular forms with pragmatism, sustainability and social benefit. He made his name with projects such as 8 House and CopenHill in Copenhagen, VIA 57 West in New York, and the LEGO House in Billund. Ingels' architecture often feels playful and visionary, while staying grounded in everyday life, function and urban living. His approach is often described as "pragmatic utopia".

Photo: Sofie Matthiassen





character of the building shifts gradually from a sheltered garage and display space by the driveway to more open, functional spaces, including the kitchen, living room and rooftop terrace. From inside, the rooms open onto the central atrium garden, with an ever wider view the further they climb the hill, gradually revealing the horizon beyond the roofline. All the while, the cars stay protected from the outside world, yet remain clearly visible across the courtyard from the living areas and bedrooms.

Mads remembers the drive home with his wife after the concept presentation at BIG's Copenhagen office: "We were in complete agreement, we fell in love with the idea straight away." He has no time for suggestions that the concept is too niche: "It's by no means the most expensive house in Denmark. But it is the most interesting. I thought, why does everything we do have to make economic sense? Why not see a house as something you simply use for yourself, right to the end?"

With that, Villa Gug becomes another landmark on Denmark's rich architectural map. And it suits Aalborg perfectly, the city on the Limfjord that has successfully reinvented itself, from an industrial town into a hub for knowledge and culture. You can see it in the thorough transformation of its waterfront, in the radically re-designed harbour promenade, the Musikkens Hus, and the Utzon Center, dedicated to Danish architect Jørn Utzon, who designed the Sydney Opera House. The university, too, draws students from across the region to Aalborg, adding to the city's young, lively feel. We enjoy our brief stay here, sensing something of the quality-of-life Aalborg offers, a city with real urban credentials that never feels as anonymous as other major cities.

WELCOME HYGGE

"I love classic cars. I love the W 100. Last year I even used it as my everyday car," the car enthusiast admits. We're more than a little in awe as we approach his gleaming black 1964 Mercedes-Benz 600 in the showroom. Proud, and clearly at home with the technical details, Mads talks us through the limousine, nicknamed "Lille Frede" by its first Danish owner, a now-deceased entrepreneur who was himself well known across the country. For our visit,







“As an architectural portrait, it’s about creating a framework for the life the family wants to lead”

BJARKE INGELS, ARCHITECT

Mads had the 600 brought especially from Copenhagen to Aalborg, only to drive it straight back the next day, so it could be shown in time in the Danish capital, as the highlight of a Mercedes-Benz exhibition on “140 Years of Innovation”. Mads says, “I think it also gives our house a nice touch.” Then, laughing, he adds, “Even my wife loves it!”

Villa Gug, though, is more than a shrine to cars, more than a new landmark, more than iconic architecture. During our visit, we witness a busy, lively and harmonious family life unfold around us, with two children on the cusp of adulthood. And right at the centre of it all: Figo, a Samoyed, the four-legged linchpin of the household. This medium-sized Nordic breed carries an air of strength, stamina, grace, dignity and self-assurance, all paired with charm. Surprising as it seems at first, we rather like the connection to the name of the famous Portuguese midfielder.

The villa’s large living and dining area, together with its adjoining rooftop terrace, is a favourite setting for family celebrations and gatherings with friends and neighbours. At the Veibys’, hygge matters. It’s a Danish word with no real English equivalent, only rough approximations: cosiness, comfort, relaxed closeness, a conscious sense of well-being. It describes an atmosphere, a mood, that deliberately makes everyday life feel good. In Denmark, creating such little islands of warmth, light and togetherness carries real cultural weight.

IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT

Our tour and visit are drawing to a close. In the living room, we stand at the large window where the building technically ends, though our impressions and our thoughts do not. We marvel at the panorama, almost






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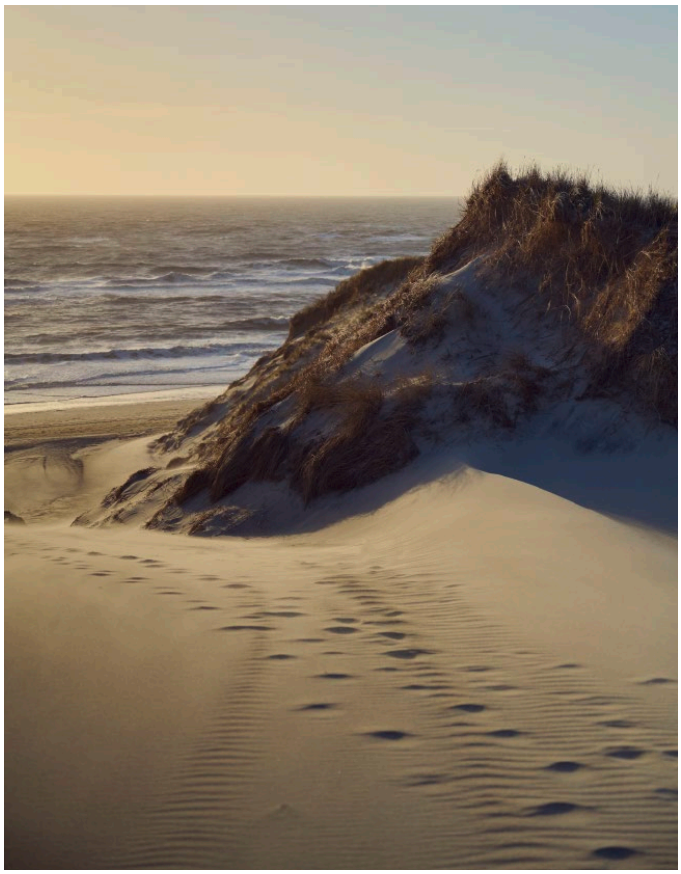
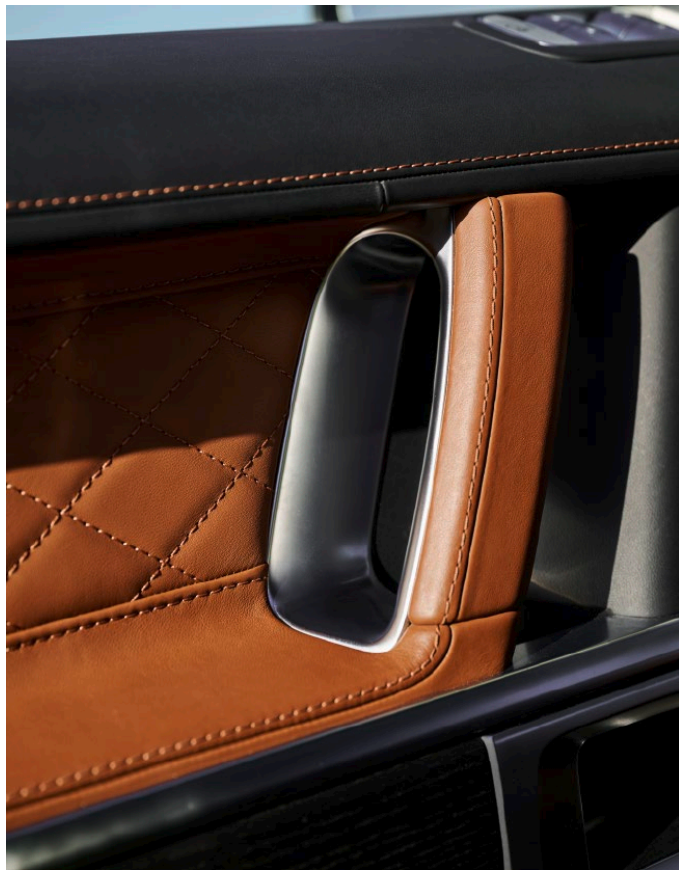




cinematic in its quality, and let it sink in: the camera tracking slowly and steadily across a landscape of lush greenery, flecked with woodland, gentle hills and, here and there, small towns, all flowing in harmonious sequence towards the distant horizon.

What makes this view so striking today, and what casts its spell over so many painters and filmmakers, is the light in this part of northern Europe, which has a character all of its own. Accentuated by the low spring sun, it is soft and diffuse, with a distinctive clarity that sharpens contours without casting harsh shadows, lending landscape and architecture alike a sculptural quality.

Out of the corner of our eye, we spot our G-Class waiting on the drive, ready to go. On the way back, we want to experience one more Danish quirk with the G, the real reason we brought the electric 4x4 along: drive-on beaches. What sounds like a paradox is a living tradition in Denmark. Coastal fishermen have used these beaches for centuries as natural access routes and workspaces, launching and hauling out their boats, and transporting their catch. What became established as customary law was later written into statute, and certain beaches may now be used as public roads. The west coast of Jutland is particularly well suited to this, with its broad, flat beaches of firm, hard-packed sand. Caution is still called for, though, and not every vehicle is up to a carefree outing on sand, as we see first-hand a little later. With the G-Class's assured power and traction, we're able to pull a stranded driver out of a jam.

FARVEL, VILLA GUG!

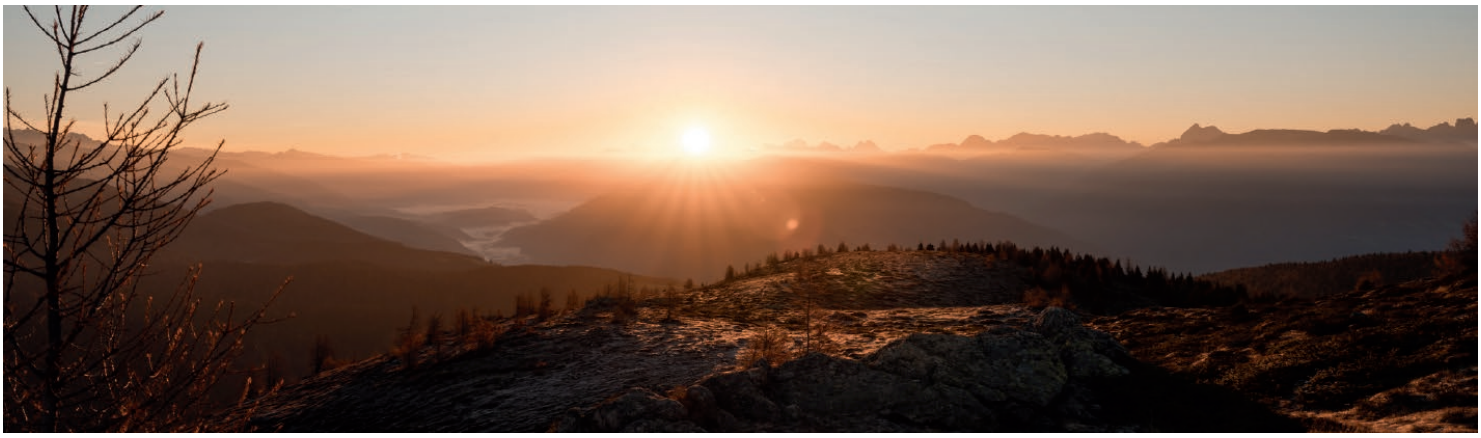
We say goodbye to our hosts as warmly as we were welcomed. Our thoughts drift back to the bronze Möbius strip we spotted on the sideboard, a mathematical curiosity with only one side and one edge, and a fine symbol for this extraordinary house. A house that brings so many different things together, harmoniously and as if it were the most natural thing in the world, while still forming a self-contained, coherent whole. A fitting portrait of the interests, dreams and wishes of the people who live there. Figo included. He sits in the driveway, watching us go, calm and utterly at ease. Bye-bye, Villa Gug!



★★★★★

Valsegg

LUXUS CHALETS IN SOUTH TYROL





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PURE PRESENCE: THE NEW GLA



The new Mercedes-Benz GLA looks more dynamic than ever. Available as a fully electric drive or a high-tech hybrid, its lower silhouette, longer wheelbase and iconic front grille give this city SUV a strong, distinctive presence. Here are its highlights at a glance

Text by Christof Wenig | Photos by Mercedes-Benz AG



A confident silhouette
The upright front and flat windscreen create a dynamic silhouette. A long wheelbase, wide track, muscular shoulder lines and flush-mounted wheels give the GLA a confident presence on the road.

MERCEDES-BENZ GLA 250+ electric
Combined energy consumption*: 17.3–15.1 kWh/100 km | Combined CO_2 emissions*: 0 g/km | CO_2 class*: A



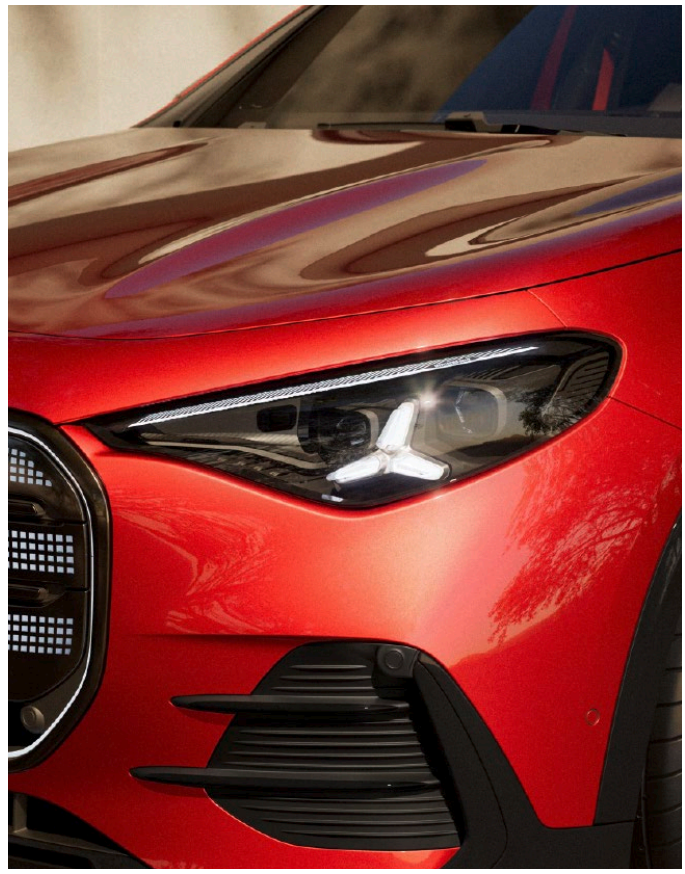
Making an entrance
Far more than a design detail, the iconic radiator grille makes its presence felt. On the electric GLA, a chrome frame, a smoked-glass lattice panel and the integrated central star come together to form the new front end. In the illuminated version, hundreds of individual lights create a distinctive graphic – optionally animated.



A Cinemascope cockpit
The latest generation of infotainment: the GLA's floating MB.UX Superscreen spans the full width of the interior for a genuine Cinemascope feel. Behind the glass sit the instrument display (10.25 inches), the central display (14 inches), and a screen for the front passenger (14 inches).



A front with the classic star pattern
The GLA with 48-volt hybrid drive features the star grille, with 150 hot-stamped stars in a chrome finish, creating the Mercedes-Benz pattern. Depending on the equipment line, an LED light strip also frames the radiator grille, putting it in the spotlight.



Star signs with real presence
The MULTIBEAM LED headlamps and star-pattern tail lights make a statement. Their distinctive light signature draws attention by day and by night.



A window to the sky
The standard panoramic roof gives the interior a generous, open feel. The optional SKY CONTROL panoramic roof can be switched between transparent and matte, either fully or in individual segments. The centrepiece of the clean, pared-back interior is the floating, sportily raised centre console.



Outdoor character
Wraparound wheel arch cladding, short overhangs, and visual underbody protection front and rear underline the GLA's character and add to its sporty look.





BONJOUR, PROVENCE!

Lavender fields, limestone cliffs, and of course: the Mediterranean Sea. Provence is considered one of France's most beautiful travel regions, and rightly so. We explored it in the Mercedes-Benz CLE 200 Cabriolet

Text by Katalina Farkas
Photos by Ole Westermann

Summer in the south of France. Even the mere sound of those words carries a promise: it is a story of long days in the shade of olive trees, of a meandering summer sun, and of evenings that never seem to end. In summer, one is allowed to be gentle with oneself; it is expressly permitted to let the hours drift by, to accept a small detour or two in exchange for a particularly beautiful sight.

That holds especially true when you're travelling in a CLE 200 Cabriolet, the open-top sibling of the CLE Coupé that should be called summer on wheels, if you ask us. On our journey from France's Mediterranean coast into Provence and the Luberon, we set out to reach several destinations – but we allow ourselves, every now and then, to ignore the suggested route, to follow our curiosity, and to explore the small country lanes instead.

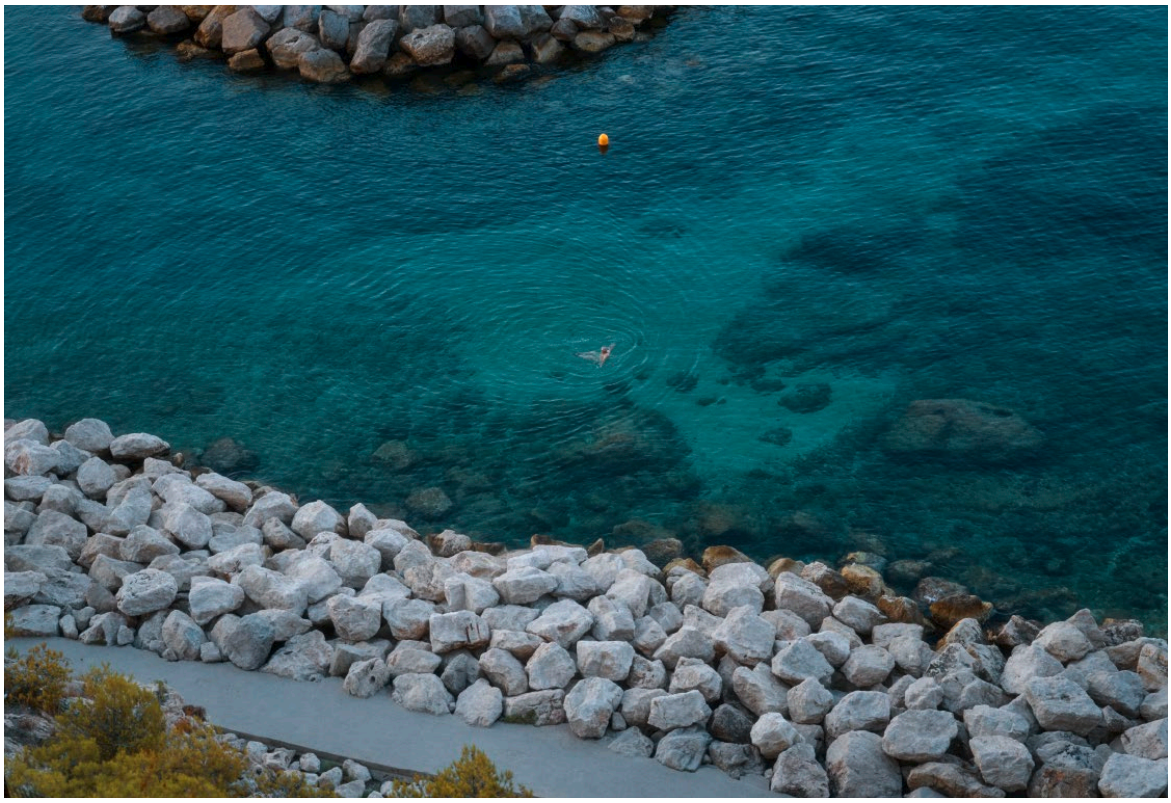
MARSEILLE

In Marseille, summer means, above all, that the city becomes increasingly crowded, as do its beaches and streets. In recent years, more and more tourists have discovered this Mediterranean metropolis. By day, they wander in small groups along the crooked lanes of the Malmousque district before making for one of the many coves that belong to the neighbourhood, and there, plunging into the glittering green sea. In doing so, they're only following the example of the Marseillais themselves – the locals on whom the sea exerts such a particular pull. Drivers, if we're honest, need a certain amount of creativity in this southern French metropolis. We park along the city's best-known – if occasionally most crowded – waterfront promenade and head for our first destination: the Cécile Food Club.


S CL 4101



MERCEDES-BENZ CLE 200 CABRIOLET
Combined energy consumption*: 7.3–6.8 l/100 km
Combined CO_2 emissions*: 165–154 g/km
CO_2 class*: F–E



"Marseille is the sea," says a friend of Barthélemy Tassy, the bistro's owner, spending his sunny morning drinking coffee while Tassy busies himself with the espresso machine. "Everything in this city revolves around the sea," the friend adds. "Children jump off the cliffs the moment they can swim, and the grown-ups go for a swim every single day." It isn't without its risks, this favourite pastime of the Marseillais, he admits – "but the Marseillais treat the sea the way they treat life. Now and then, you have to take a leap."

That Malmousque has long since ceased to be a well-kept local secret is partly thanks to the Cécile Food Club. Since 2023, Barthélemy Tassy has been supplying holidaymakers and regulars alike with everything you need for long days by the Mediterranean. Minimally furnished, with a generous counter running its length, the living-room-sized bistro fills up fast, especially around lunchtime. Visitors from all over the world arrive in waves, waiting patiently for pastrami sandwiches, kimchi-chicken baguettes, pan bagnat, an iced matcha latte, or one of the sweet pastries baked upstairs in the in-house bakery.

"Cécile is an invitation, like a well-stocked fridge," Tassy explains, preparing two espressos and wrapping a sandwich in paper. "It's named after my grandmother." He points to a photo on the wall showing a woman with a captivating smile: Cécile. "She was a fantastic hostess," Tassy says. "Great fun. And her fridge was always full!" Tassy, a Marseille native, belongs to that young generation of entrepreneurs who've given Malmousque a fresh, modern look. "The sea has always given Malmousque its very own identity," he says. "But the neighbourhood used to be much quieter, much more unassuming. I always loved it, but back then there were no shops or restaurants here," he continues. "I was away for eight years, working in Los Angeles and New York, and when I came back, there was still nothing. But I knew we could do something."



“The Marseillais treat the sea the way they treat life. Now and then, you have to take a leap”




Cécile


S CL 4101

Once he found the right storefront, he opened Cécile. His ambition: “We simply wanted to make the things we like to eat ourselves.” Simple dishes made from good ingredients, quickly prepared – a snack straight from his grandmother’s kitchen. His regulars say the bistro feels like a second home. One can only speculate, but it’s tempting to think that “grand-maman” Cécile would be very proud of what her grandson has created in her name.

AIX-EN-PROVENCE

We leave the heat and the noise of the city behind, cross the Viaduc de Corbière heading northwest, and open the fully automatic soft-top acoustic roof to let the summer into the car. To our right rise white chalk cliffs, to our left the sea glows deep blue, and the air smells of pine. The sun reaches its highest point as we pass through the hiking region of L’Estaque. The Burmester® 3D surround sound system treats us to modern takes on French classics (who doesn’t love scanning through the local radio stations on holiday?), blending with the sound of the road and the wind – and a feeling of boundless freedom.

By the time we reach Château de la Gaude, an 18th-century Provençal bastide near Aix-en-Provence now converted into a five-star hotel, another sound has joined the chorus. It will dominate the soundtrack of our drive from here on: cicadas. Their song is the acoustic emblem of Provence, and here, in the gardens of this sprawling estate, they seem to feel especially at home. While some find their insistent chirring enchanting, others say the little creatures kick up an unholy racket. Marie Bertola, who welcomes us at the château, says she’d never want to be without the sound. “The cicadas are characteristic of Provence,” she tells us as she leads us through the grounds in front of the historic main house. With its sandstone-coloured buildings, its vineyards, its lavender bushes, and the mistral drifting gently across the land, the château, too, embodies the spirit and aesthetic of Provence.

The strictly geometric garden we’re now strolling through, however, is more reminiscent of Versailles. It’s home to an intricately clipped, evergreen hedge maze (which also appears in the hotel’s logo) and to parkland made for wandering beneath cypress trees. The CLE’s clean lines – we parked it here at Marie Bertola’s express

By the time we reach Château de la Gaude, another sound has joined the chorus. It will dominate the soundtrack of our drive from here on: cicadas



The evergreen hedge maze sits directly in front of the château's historic main house.

invitation – echo the clarity of the garden's own lines; its cool MANUFAKTUR alpine grey uni contrasts with the warm sandstone of the main house, the green of the cypresses, and the reddish-brown of a nearby sculpture.

And then there's art: scattered across the vast grounds are several larger-than-life sculptures by Philippe Pasqua and César Baldaccini, while the rooms are hung with large-format paintings by artists such as Robert Combas and John Perello. "Our guests appreciate the exclusivity of the hotel, the luxury, the restaurants, and the art," Marie Bertola tells us as she shows us the sprawling wine cellar (the château grows its own grapes and produces three cuvées), "but we also want them to feel at home. That's our aim whenever we welcome someone here."

We, too, feel welcome at once. The hours at the château slip by in a flash – but like a beautiful summer's day, our stay must eventually draw to a close. We're pulled onward; Provence is waiting. Lavender, to be precise.

VALENSOLE

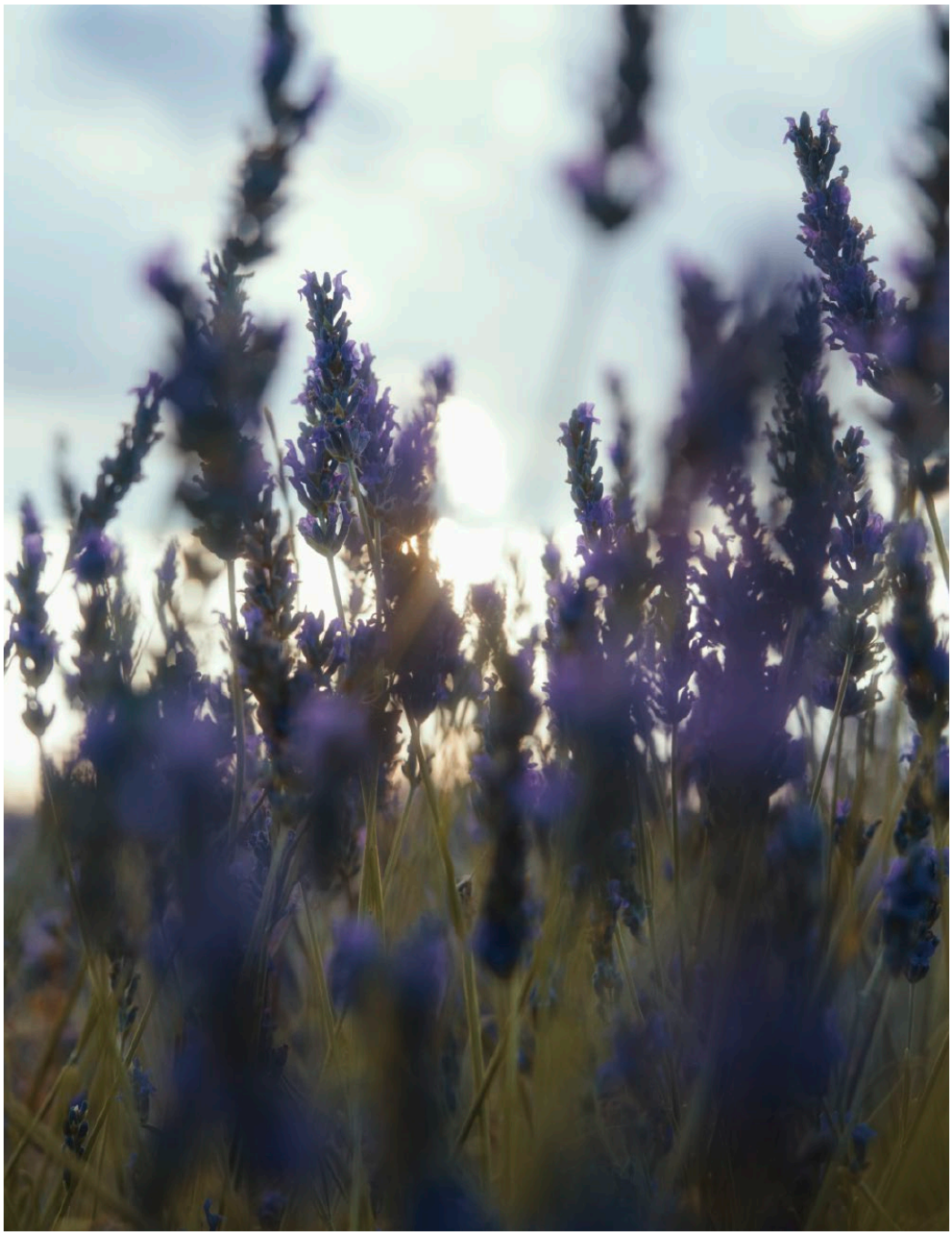
Like the cicadas, lavender belongs to Provence, as much a part of the region's flora as its cypresses and olive trees. Its scent is intense, almost tangible – and, thanks to the open roof, we can already smell it on the drive to Valensole. Ahead of us unfolds a panorama that feels almost familiar. After all, who doesn't know those images of endless lavender fields, of neatly tended rows of small purple plants stretching to the horizon? Provence, it's fair to say, is a string of perfect photo spots – and the fields of Valensole, that particularly picturesque French plateau, are no exception, which is precisely why they're so popular with tourists.

Anyone who passes the iconic lavender fields (which really do stretch to the horizon!) and stops there should expect to run into fellow travellers. Some admire the scenery from the roadside; others wander into the fields themselves. All of them are chasing a piece of the Provençal summer – or, more precisely, a picture.

As the sun sinks lower, the sky turns more golden and the colours across the fields grow more intense. We park by a small bistro stand, beside which tourists are dining at the edge of a field where young lavender is growing. You'd struggle to get any closer to a classic







You'd struggle to get any closer to a classic Provençal summer's day

Provençal summer's day. Only the cicadas have fallen silent by now – come evening, once the heat of the day fades, it grows too cold for them.

LES AGNELS

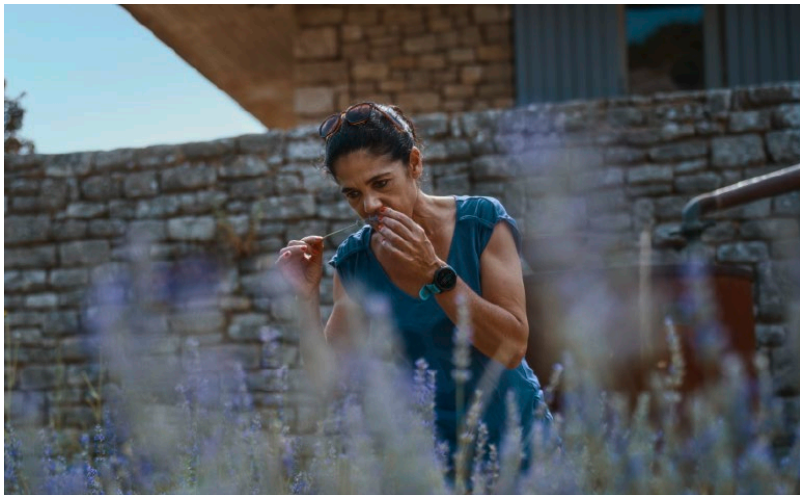
We want to learn more about Provence's symbiotic relationship with what is probably its most famous plant. So the next day, we drive to the Les Agnels distillery deep in the Luberon, a family business that has been extracting everything it can from lavender – quite literally – since the 19th century. A piercing whistle shrieks across the courtyard, and the smell of lavender is even more intense than before. A fresh load of lavender has just arrived. Steam is fed into the huge green still and through the plants to extract essential oil. The resulting floral water retains the plant's properties in diluted form. The Agnel family have sold both products for five generations.

Corinne Russo greets us. A close friend of the Agnel family, she knows their story as well as she knows the story of lavender itself. "It's the scent of my childhood. We used it for everything – for the laundry, to treat small wounds and insect bites, around the house," she tells us. We've settled in the shade of a tree; Russo serves cold drinks infused with floral water, and talks. About the region's barren soils, where fruit and vegetables never wanted to thrive, but wild lavender did. And about resourceful farmers who, in the 18th century, turned necessity into virtue. They harvested the lavender on the slopes of the surrounding mountains and sold it on to Grasse, the perfume capital. Especially prized was so-called true lavender, which only grows above roughly 600 metres and is considered a very important basis for the perfumers. High demand led to the rationalisation of production – and to the ruler-straight rows of fields that define the image of Provence today. "In the old days, when the farmers still went up into the mountains, they distilled on the spot, using a mobile still," Russo tells us. Today, several tanks, metres high, stand on the distillery grounds; a cart with a copper kettle once used for the purpose now serves only as a display piece.

Véronique Agnel greets us. In 2015, she took over running the distillery, having already converted cultivation and production to organic standards. She values the tradition of the company and the wealth of experience











Summer is a special time in Provence: “We spend a lot of time with friends, we dance, we listen to music, we play pétanque. It’s easy to enjoy life here”



The mountain village of Saignon is largely car-free – only residents are permitted to drive through its narrow lanes.

her family has built up – but she also looks ahead, constantly working to modernise production. She's set up a small lab where she can produce the tiniest quantities of essential oils, experimenting with new plants and shrubs, developing new essences. She wants to stay curious – and inventive.

We chat briefly before she has to move on. Summers are demanding for farmers like the Agnels. Alongside the distillery, they produce and sell products made from the essential oils, and organise events such as aromatherapy sessions, excursions to the nearby fields, or exclusive dinner parties set amid the lavender. Even so, summer in Provence remains a very special time, Corinne Russo insists. "We spend a lot of time with friends, we dance, we listen to music, we play pétanque. It's easy to enjoy life here."

LUBERON

The drive through the Luberon feels just as easy. With the roof down, we pass sunflower and lavender fields far less crowded than those on the Valensole plateau. The Luberon – a limestone mountain range in Provence – captivates with its untouched wildness, its jagged cliffs and wild gorges, but also with its picture-book roads winding elegantly through the hilly landscape. The mountain village of Saignon looks as though it were invented solely as the backdrop for a French film – a fortress turned to stone, utterly unmoved by the passage of time. We park our car at the entrance to the village and explore Saignon on foot. The climb to its highest point is worth it: below us glows a triptych of fields in purple, green and gold.

Gordes, too, our final stop on this journey, looks like a Provençal postcard come to life. It's hardly surprising the village has been named one of the most beautiful in France. Beneath its historic château, houses of pale sandstone nestle against the hillside, seeming to glow in the evening sun. We pull into a panoramic car park that offers the best view of the village, and let our eyes – and our thoughts – wander. Provence is France straight out of a picture book: velvety-soft, purple-blue, but at times also rugged and bare and earthen. Above all, though, it's like a sprawling tableau of a summer that seems as if it might never end. And, we have to say, there's no better way to take it in than with the roof down.


CLE 200

STAR MOMENTS AT THE WTA TOURNAMENT IN BERLIN

Texts by Valerie Präkelt,
Bernadette Winter and Lutz Schilling



When rising star and Mercedes-Benz brand ambassador Coco Gauff, along with tennis icon Serena Williams, head to the Berlin Tennis Open, you know the capital has tennis fever. Mercedes-Benz, the new partner of the Women's Tennis Association (WTA), marked the partnership with a match like no other: a round court with three nets went up at the women's grass-court tournament, with three players competing against each other at once. And what did the court look like from above? A Mercedes star, of course.

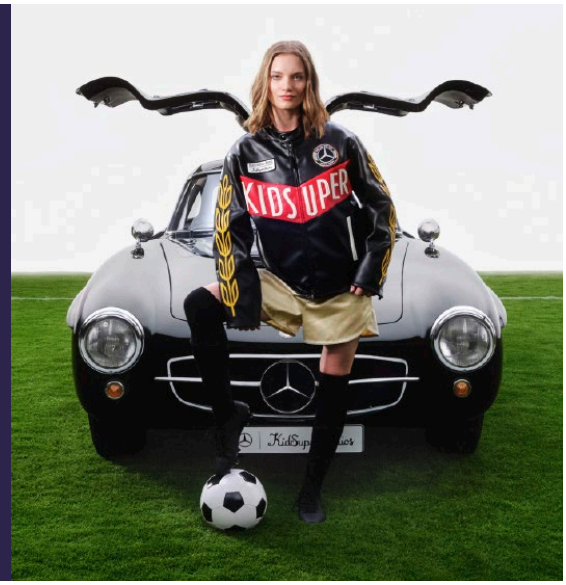


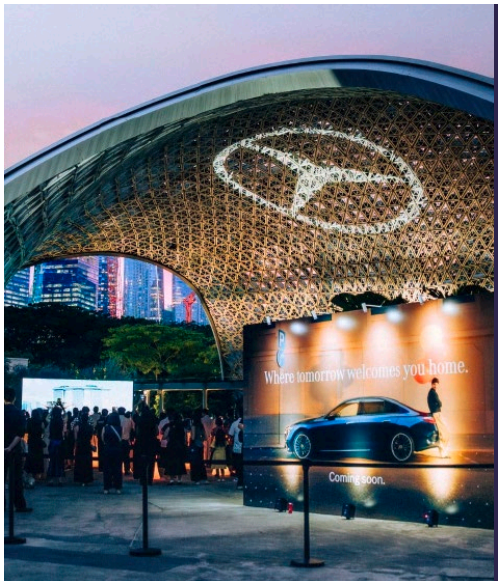
BEYOND COMPETITION: ROLLING WORKS OF ART ON ONE OF ITALY'S MOST BEAUTIFUL LAKESHORES

With its villa architecture, landscaped gardens, Alpine backdrop and Italian flair, Lake Como provides the perfect setting for staging legendary cars as rolling works of art. On its shores, Mercedes-Benz created an extraordinary highlight at the FuoriConcorso classic car event: from the world's first car to a DTM icon, and from the Silver Arrow to the latest hypercar, the brand presented a journey through 140 years of innovation in motorsport. Highlights included Rudolf Caracciola's 1937 Silver Arrow W 125, the 300 SLR that carried Stirling Moss to a record-breaking Mille Miglia win in 1955, and a gold-coloured AMG One from 2022, built with drivetrain technology derived from Formula 1.

KICK IT LIKE KIDSUPER

When 140 years of Mercedes-Benz innovation meets global football culture and the creative vision of KidSuper founder Colm Dillane, something remarkable happens. At the heart of the collaboration are seven nations with a storied football history. Mercedes-Benz and KidSuper tell a story combining legendary title wins with iconic cars from the brand's history. Each pairing links a defining moment with a Mercedes-Benz model from that era. For Germany, the choice fell on the "Gullwing", the legendary 1954 Mercedes-Benz 300 SL Coupé, the year Germany won its first World Cup. Whether menswear, casualwear or accessories, Dillane's pieces pick up the designs of the flags and cars in patches, embroidery and other details.





WELCOME HOME

In 2026, Mercedes-Benz will open new Brand Spaces in 18 cities across four continents, including Los Angeles, Munich, Budapest, Bucharest, Copenhagen, Delhi, Prague, Seoul, Singapore, Stockholm, Tokyo, Toronto and Warsaw. They're always right in the middle of city life, always embodying the brand promise "Welcome home". The idea behind the Mercedes-Benz Studios is as compelling as it is consistent: customers, the curious and the fans meet the brand where they go about their everyday lives. These brand spaces aren't showrooms in the traditional sense, but places to experience and connect to the brand, where visitors can attend talks or exhibitions and immerse themselves in 140 years of brand history. After all, 2026 marks "140 Years of Innovation", the anniversary that commemorates Carl Benz's first patent for an automobile.

Photos: Mercedes-Benz AG

“WE BELIEVE IN THE UNIFYING POWER OF SPORT”



Interview by Katalina Farkas | Photos by Mercedes-Benz AG

Mercedes-Benz and the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) have entered a partnership making waves well beyond the world’s tennis courts. We spoke to Christina Schenck and Andrea Petković about what makes this collaboration so special

Ms Schenck, last December a murmur ran through the sporting world when it emerged that Mercedes-Benz and the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) had entered a long-term partnership. What makes this sponsorship so special?

Christina Schenck: Sports sponsorship has always played an important role in our brand communications, even before the WTA partnership. We believe in the unifying power of sport, and in bringing athletes together with our customers and fans. But our partnership with the WTA goes well beyond classic sponsorship. We share a set of values; this is a partnership between equals. Tennis stands for innovation, excellence and inspiration: exactly the values our brand has stood for over the past 140 years, and intends to keep upholding.

The WTA Tour takes players all around the world. True to our brand promise, "Welcome home", we want to give players a sense of home, connection and belonging on that journey. The tour also lets us create experiences worldwide, inviting our customers and bringing fans of the brand into those experiences. So the partnership matters just as much globally as it does locally.

Ms Petković, as a former professional player, what does this partnership mean to you?

Andrea Petković: The partnership matters enormously to us, of course. I wish women's sport didn't need this kind of backing at all. But even if women's tennis is ahead of some other sports, we still need partnerships like this to show that women's tennis holds its own against men's tennis on a global scale. And we want to keep growing. We haven't achieved everything we set out to in tennis, especially in women's tennis. For that, we need partners like Mercedes-Benz. This partnership is simply perfect, I couldn't have dreamed it up myself.

And it's not just me who feels this way. I've spoken to so many players, including Coco Gauff, who is now a Mercedes-Benz brand ambassador herself. The players are genuinely excited, and that's not always how it goes.



CHRISTINA SCHENCK
Christina Schenck heads Digital & Communications and Investor Relations at Mercedes-Benz. She calls the WTA partnership a "perfect match".



ANDREA PETKOVIĆ
Andrea Petković reached as high as world No. 9 and ended her professional playing career in 2022. She has written two books about her career. Since 2026, she has served as official Mercedes-Benz brand ambassador for tennis.

If I can let you in on a secret: players usually just want to play tennis, nothing else interests them much. But this partnership made real waves, people were even talking about it in the locker rooms. That's rare, and it says a lot about Mercedes-Benz.

The partnership is set up for the long term. Why does that matter to Mercedes-Benz?

Christina Schenck: We're pursuing a clear strategy here. Andrea, you already touched on it: we want to grow together over the long term. We'll be present at more and more tournaments. This year it's around 30; next year it'll be 38. And now we can develop formats together that are built around experience, rather than classic brand presence like a star in the net. We're already looking forward to the Australian Swing at the start of 2027. The two 1000-level tournaments in Miami and Cincinnati will also be exciting platforms [Editor's note: 1000-level tournaments are especially prestigious, as the winners receive 1,000 ranking points], places where we can create lasting memories.

We already tested this at the Berlin Tennis Open, where we set up the "Mercedes-Benz Signature Court", playable from three sides, which drew a lot of attention [see also Lifestyle, page 58]. And in Madrid, we had oversized tennis balls displaying the joint WTA and Mercedes-Benz partner logo. Those are strong images that stay with people. And it's genuinely a lot of fun developing this further with the WTA, together with brand ambassadors like Andrea, who know the world of tennis inside out.

Women's sport used to be more of a niche topic; now it's growing everywhere. Was its potential underestimated?

Christina Schenck: I think in most sports, what women are capable of was underestimated for a long time. Now media attention is growing almost everywhere. For us, it's exciting to support that growth and help make it a given that women get the same attention as men.

"These stories can be applied to so many areas of life, because the players are important role models, for the next generation too"

CHRISTINA SCHENCK

Of course there are differences, and of course the leagues don't need to be mixed, but the drive to perform, the discipline on court, that's exactly the same.

And then there are the personalities and the people behind it all, who tell stories that reach far beyond sport. That matters to us too: what drives them, what motivates them? These stories can be applied to so many areas of life, because the players are important role models, for the next generation too. Through this kind of visibility, we also want to build the confidence of young women. We tell them: "You have so much in you. Take your chances, you can do this." Those are simply great stories that inspire us, and that we're glad to be part of.

Ms Schenck, did you have a connection to tennis, or to sport in general, before this partnership?

Christina Schenck: My own tennis career was really quite short. I played with great passion as a child, but it never came close to a professional career.

I still enjoy playing, I just never have enough time. Since my children play tennis, the sport is still very much part of our family life. Beyond that, I like watching sport in general, especially the ones built around individual



performance. What I find particularly fascinating is the chance to start fresh after every set, win or lose.

Ms Petković, you obviously know professional life all too well. Why does tennis lend itself so well to telling us something about people, about pressure, ambition, fear, worry? What is it that comes together out there on the court?

Andrea Petković: Christina already hinted at it: tennis is the ideal sport for drawing that kind of parallel with life. You have to fight your way through, rely on yourself, be independent. I think that also paints a strong and important picture for and of women: that they can rely on themselves, on their own strength and intelligence. I think that's one thing tennis teaches us.

The other thing matters just as much: sometimes you get lucky, sometimes you don't. It's the same in life, and yet you have to find an inner resilience to deal with it. You have to be grateful when luck goes your way and the net cord lands on the other side. But you also have to accept it when your opponent's ball catches the line, even though you were sure it was going out. You accept it, and you keep going.

Maybe the most important thing of all is this: tennis is a sport that runs from 1 January well into November. If you want, you can play a tournament every single week. In the moment, every tournament feels like the most important tournament of your life. But if you lose, the next one starts the following week. You get the chance to start again, to do things differently, to do better. And if you win, you need the humility to leave it behind, so you don't walk into the next tournament overconfident. Because then you lose in the first round, and everyone else already knows it. They won't leave you floating on cloud nine, they'll bring you straight back down to earth.

Ms Schenck, are there parallels between elite sport, tennis, and working in a company?

Christina Schenck: Absolutely. What you learn in tennis carries straight over into the world of work. In tennis, you're always facing different opponents with dif-



A grand appearance: Mercedes-Benz brand ambassador Coco Gauff also hit a few balls on the “Mercedes-Benz Signature Court”, which was set up for the Berlin Tennis Open.

“You have to fight your way through, rely on yourself, be independent”

ANDREA PETKOVIĆ

ferent strengths. It’s exactly the same in business. You don’t operate alone, but within an environment where you constantly have to recalibrate and stay ready to act. You have to keep taking on new perspectives, and you can’t let that throw you off balance. That takes mental strength, self-reflection, and a willingness to keep questioning your own strategies. Just as important is the ability to look at things from a different angle and stay open to new perspectives. And what I find especially important: motivating yourself again and again, whatever setbacks or challenges you’re facing. That flexibility, that resilience, is essential for success.

Ms Petković, you ended your active career in 2022, after 16 years as a professional. Looking today at women’s tennis, its commercial growth, and the ever-growing attention it’s getting, attention that’s spreading into other sports too, like basketball, what does that stir in you?

Andrea Petković: It genuinely makes me very happy. But what makes me even happier is this: tennis is no longer the lone giant that people kept pointing to whenever the conversation turned to women’s sport. That put enormous pressure on us: the women had to win their matches, but ideally also say the right things and single-handedly save the world at press conferences. Everything always got tied back to tennis.

Now it’s wonderful to see women’s football grow so much, or women’s basketball in America getting more media coverage than some men’s sports and really pushing its way to the front, with incredibly high viewing figures. I live in New York, so I see it firsthand: the arenas sell out every single time the women play.

For those of us in women’s tennis, and I come from that world myself, it feels like it’s grown five- or sixfold since I was still playing. Social media has jumped on board too, they see the beauty and the strength in women’s sport, especially in women’s tennis.

As a result, prize money has gone up too, something people don’t always think about, but for a lot of


GLC



MERCEDES-BENZ C 400 4MATIC electric
Combined energy consumption*: 18.5–14.1 kWh/100 km | Combined CO_2 emissions*: 0 g/km | CO_2 class*: A

people it's a symbol of where women's sport stands. When prize money is low, people quickly assume the sport isn't worth much. But because prize money keeps rising, and women can increasingly make a real living as professional athletes, that's taken on real symbolic power worldwide.

Ms Schenck, looking back in ten years' time: how would we know that women's tennis has truly reached a new level thanks to partnerships like this one? Does that show up purely in the prize money?

Christina Schenck: Prize money is certainly part of it, because that only happens with greater visibility. The real question is: how can we, as a global brand, keep supporting that, what contribution can we make? That includes the fact that tennis produces role models for the next generation. We want to inspire people to get excited about the sport. If we manage that, if we can help drive it, something lasting will follow.

Andrea already said it earlier: it has to become a given that women's tennis, and women's sport in general, is simply part of elite sport. Prize money comes back into play here, but it's also, above all, about recognition, visibility and social relevance. We want to contribute to that, we want to support it. And if, in a few years, we look back and see that we helped move that development forward, that would be a great success for us.



Play Every Day with MR MARVIS' Autumn/Winter collection. Try a new look with The Moleskin Chinos and The Straight Fit Chinos or discover favourite trousers like The Cords and The Flannels. Round out your wardrobe with our timeless shirts, pullovers and outerwear. Made in Portugal. Shop the collection now on **mrmarvis.com** or visit us in one of our stores.

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IN FULL SWING

Text by Katalina Farkas
Photos by Matthew Jones





Olajuwon Ajanaku is challenging what golf looks like. He's doing it with a logo – and a story that happens to be entirely his own

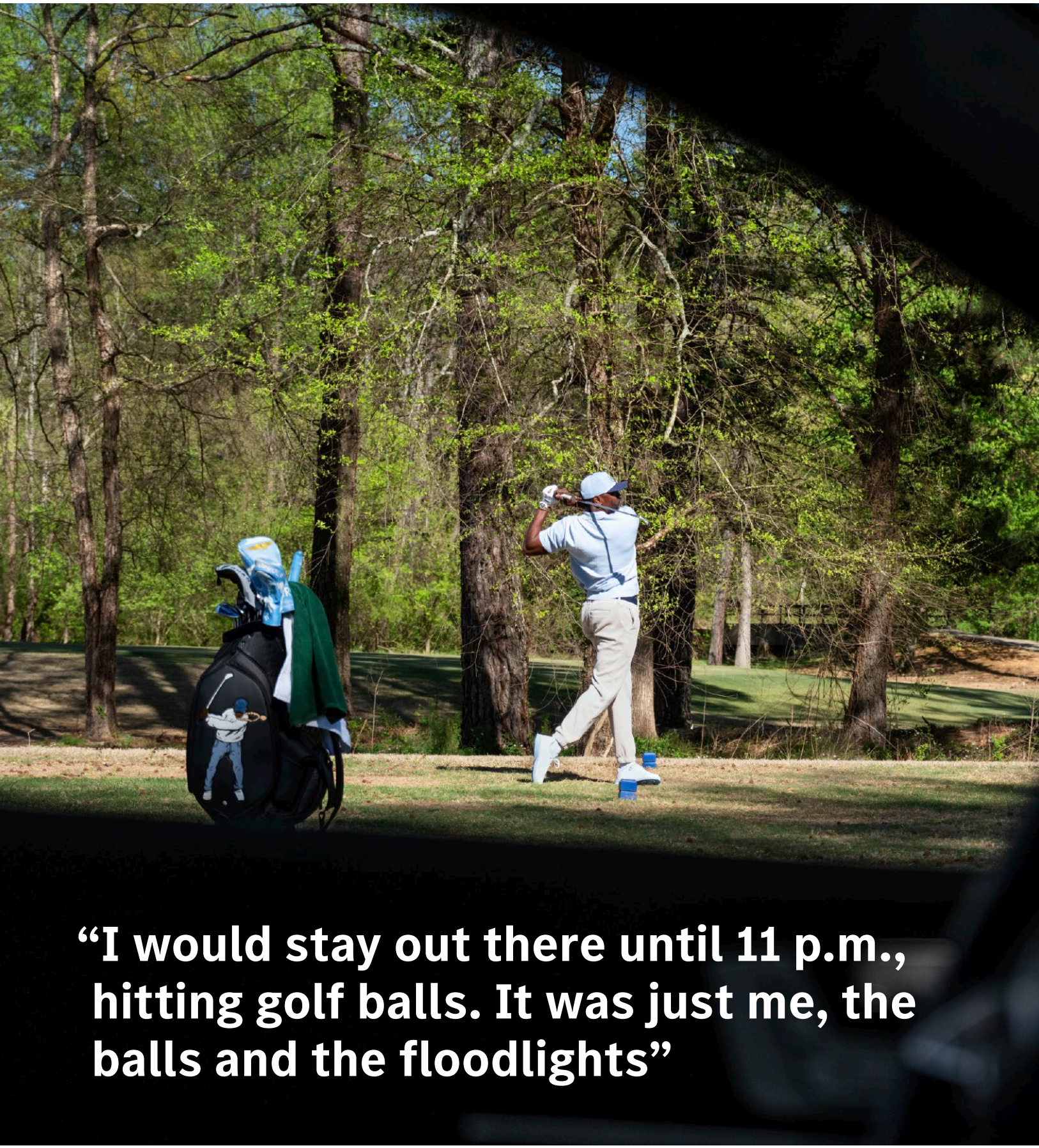
You can tell, the moment you arrive, that Sugar Creek Golf Course in southwest Atlanta is that kind of place. That kind of place where people just happen to know each other. Richard – tall, unhurried, behind the counter of a clubhouse that has never tried to impress anyone – knows your name, your handicap, and probably your swing. Outside, golfers of every age slow their carts when paths cross, trade a few words, weigh in on each other's drives. From the highway nearby comes a steady hum of traffic, broken only by that clean, particular crack of metal finding a ball.

Olajuwon Ajanaku – cream khakis, blue cardigan – isn't touching a cart today. He pulls his black 2026 Mercedes-Maybach GLS 600, the luxury SUV introduced in 2019, straight up to the driving range, hauls a monogrammed golf bag from the boot, strolls to the tee mat, positions himself – back straight, knees slightly bent – takes a breath, and sends a series of powerful drives out into the air. You can tell he has repeated that very motion thousands, if not tens of thousands, of times. And that he feels at home here, at Sugar Creek Golf Course. Parking a blacked-out Maybach – the Night Series wheels bearing the characteristic Maybach emblem – directly at the tee box? That happens with the club's blessing. And Richard's, of course. Again: This is the kind of place where people just happen to know each other.

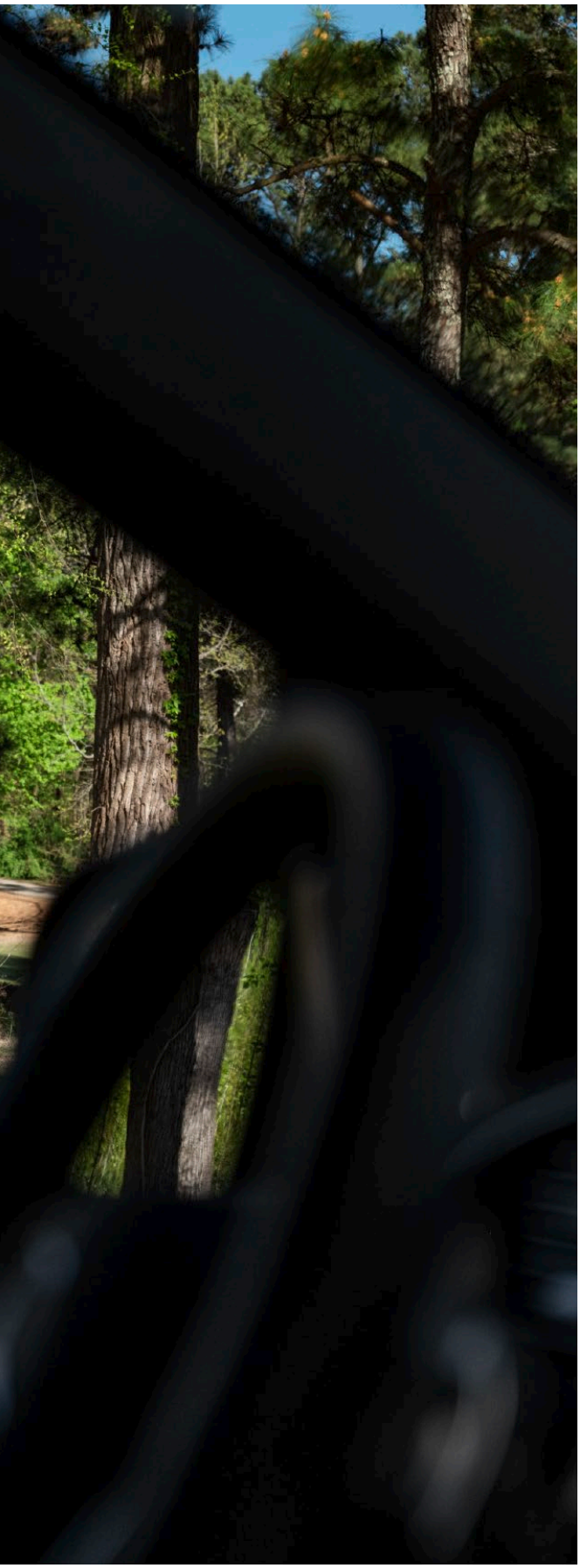
HOME GROUND

On top of that, Ajanaku and Sugar Creek Golf Course go way back. The 37-year-old – a professional golfer, entrepreneur and founder of Eastside Golf – grew up just down the road. His first swings came through an open living room window ("Out of the open window! You couldn't miss or the ball's probably gonna hit something. So I never missed"), and Sugar Creek became, in time, his real classroom. Public, unpretentious – but all the more instructive


EXIT
MAYBACH



“I would stay out there until 11 p.m., hitting golf balls. It was just me, the balls and the floodlights”



for it. “There were hustlers that I learned from,” he recalls with a laugh. What he remembers most, though, is simply being out there. In every spare hour that he had.

“I used to practise there through rain, sunshine. It’s cold, it’s hot. They had to tell me to come inside because it’s thunder. I would stay out there until 11 p.m., hitting golf balls. It was just me, the balls and the floodlights. And I didn’t have no Maybach. And when it’s time to leave, I would leave, turn the lights off and lock the gate on the way out. I used to hit so many balls, I used to make my hands bleed. Only way I know how to work: if you want something, you’ve got to work hard for it, or you don’t really want it.”

AN EXPENSIVE DREAM

His ambition pays off, as do the countless drives: after high school, Ajanaku lands a golf scholarship to Morehouse College – the renowned historically Black men’s university in the heart of Atlanta, a place that has produced graduates as influential as they were history-making. What he absorbs there goes well beyond any syllabus: “I learned that no matter how you look, goals can be attained. There is always a way. You’re going to be more than what people think.”

He studies accounting and finance, but golf remains the real obsession. His team – one of the best in the college’s history – wins the PGA Minority Collegiate Golf Championship by 20 strokes, competing against 50 colleges nationwide. After graduation, he goes after a professional career the only way he knows how: caddying, washing cars, whatever it takes to cover the entry fees. He pushes until his mother draws the line – sending his dreams into the rough, at least for the time being. “I was 22 years old, and it was literally the last time me and my mom got in an argument. She was like, ‘It’s about that time you get a job.’”

He listens, if reluctantly. His mother had worked three jobs while he was at Morehouse, among them buying and selling gold as her third job. What follows is a quintessentially American career: Atlanta, Cincinnati, Detroit, a string of sales roles that winds up with him brokering loans for trucks and heavy machinery, a VP promotion on the horizon. It’s stable and respectable, a career in the making. And yet – the pull of the golf course never quite goes away. The desire to play professionally is still there. So is the problem of how to pay for it.

“But I knew it’d be hard to find sponsors,” Ajanaku continues. So he decides to take matters into his own hands. He founds Eastside Golf – a clothing brand named after the Atlanta neighbourhood where he grew up – with a simple plan: sell clothes, fund tournaments. He designs







a logo and shows it to his old college friend Earl Cooper, who tells him: “You need to put that on a t-shirt.”

The logo shows him, in full swing, hitting a golf ball. “Jeans, sweatshirt, Cuban chain, it’s me. How I see myself on the golf course.” The chain is a quiet nod to his mother – the gold trader who made everything possible. Once it’s finished, he irons it onto a shirt, puts it on, and takes it to the streets. “I went to Downtown Detroit, walked around for a bit, and got stopped maybe 100 times in two hours. ‘Who are you, what’s that logo, where can I get it?’ So I knew I had something.”

He sets up an online store – and packs and ships the first 3,000 orders from his apartment, each one with a handwritten thank-you card. Sweatshirts follow, then caps, later shoes. Through countless conversations with investors, retailers and distribution partners, he sharpens his sense of what Eastside Golf is – and what it isn’t. He keeps developing the brand, curious and hungry, taking something from every piece of feedback. Collaborations follow, then prominent partnerships – among them Mercedes-Benz, which signs him as a brand ambassador. Today Eastside Golf sells sportswear and streetwear, is stocked in major retail chains, and has a store in Tokyo. And Ajanaku competes on the APGA Tour, the circuit built to bring golfers from underrepresented backgrounds to the highest levels of the sport.

MORE THAN A LOGO

He drives the Maybach with no small amount of pride – to Sugar Creek just as much as to the elite tournaments of the APGA. Obsidian Black metallic, gleaming rims: automotive proof that his plan – and the countless hours he put into it – worked. “And also, you can fit a lot of golf bags in the boot,” he adds with a laugh. That the man who used to take the bus to this golf course now pulls up in a Maybach is a story unto itself.



Morehouse College students



He drives the Maybach with no small amount of pride – to Sugar Creek just as much as to the elite tournaments of the APGA. It’s automotive proof that his plan worked



The Maybach, though, is only the second most important symbol he carries. The first is on his clothing: the logo. It might have been quickly sketched once, but it carries a clear message. It shows him, a Black golfer, mid-swing. Early on, many read a cultural statement into it, seeing the brand as part of urban Black culture. Ajanaku never saw it that way: “I’m just making a brand that looks like me.” The fact that the man in the logo is Black? As unremarkable to him as the question of why Olajuwon Ajanaku plays golf, or the fact that he is a successful entrepreneur today. “Growing up in Atlanta, I’ve found a way to show what excellence looks like. And no matter who cares or what, we’re just gonna continue to show what excellence looks like.”

Call him an activist, though, and you’d be wrong. He simply wants to play golf – and invites everyone else along for the ride. Literally: he organises Community Days, renting out courses for the day, bringing in food trucks, offering free lessons. Up to 700 people show up, families and kids among them. Wherever they come from, they’re welcome. He compares it to a gumbo pot – the traditional Southern dish where everything goes in and everyone belongs. He is also a donor and mentor to the Morehouse College golf team, bringing them back, always, to Sugar Creek where it all began for him.

Later in the day, driving across the course – its paved paths today hosting, for once, a black Mercedes-Maybach SUV (“People keep stopping me everywhere to ask about the car!”) – Ajanaku steps out repeatedly to hit for the camera. Again and again, long after the perfect shot has already been taken. “This is my dream,” he says, a brilliant blue sky above him. “This is why I started the entire company.”

ON THE SWEETER SIDE OF LIFE

Text by Katalina Farkas
Photos by Lina Grün





Candy floss, sheer delight and a small taste of weightlessness: a theme park is an invitation to reclaim the lightness of childhood for a day.

MERCEDES-BENZ GLB 250+ electric

Combined energy consumption*: 18.4–15.8 kWh/100 km | CO_2 emissions total combined*: 0 g/km | CO_2 class*: A



For a moment, it feels like flying. Not for long, admittedly. A few milliseconds later, the carriage is already racing back down the steel track: a sharp left bend with a slight climb is followed by a spin on its own axis, then a full stop. Your body can barely keep up with so many changes of direction, each one buys you tiny bursts of weightlessness that send you flying and, for a moment, let you forget everything else.

Delighted shrieks from the seat next to you. It occurs to you that there's probably nowhere you're more purely present than on a roller coaster – in our case, the Wodan-Timburcoaster, a wooden rollercoaster at Europa-Park in Rust, southern Germany. Followed swiftly by another thought: isn't it a little crazy that people climb willingly, and full of anticipation, into a vehicle that will fling them across a wooden structure at 100 kilometres an hour?

Blissfully unsteady, you step off the ride a few seconds later. Your legs are still shaking with adrenaline, your head is spinning as fast as the nearby chain carousel, shaped like a giant mushroom, rising and falling in time to a Viennese waltz.



A WORLD OF CHILDLIKE JOY

Welcome to the theme park, that magical adventure playground for people of every age, a parallel universe of nostalgic rides, splashing water flumes, giggling screams and candy floss as light as air.

The world's oldest amusement park opened in Denmark in 1583. In 1884, the brave first ventured onto the world's first roller coaster, built on Coney Island in New York. Today, seven million people visit Europa-Park every year, making it one of the most popular theme parks in the world.

The reason isn't hard to find: in a world that's otherwise fairly predictable, where everyday life often lacks variety, the park's themed worlds and countless rides offer a small dose of escapism. Controlled adventure, a hint of thrill, measured out just right.

There's also a far more important, far lovelier reason: theme parks conjure nostalgia. Europa-Park unlocks a world most of us have long since lost access to simply by growing up – the world of childlike joy. It spans 950,000 square metres, and it comes with a standing invitation: get yourself over to the sweeter side of life, and quickly.


Ich hab
Dich lieb





Kaisers



READY, STEADY – RISK IT!

Getting there is easy enough. Park the electric Mercedes-Benz GLB 250+ in the car park. If your battery has less charge left than your own kids do by this point – and they'll be practically buzzing with anticipation – pull in at one of the many charging points instead. Either way, it's just a few steps into the riot of colour beyond.

Fountains splash, and you find yourself walking through a set, a bright, cartoonish backdrop glowing in the loveliest colours, one that holds a different memory for everyone. For one person, the painted fibreglass figures of the historic horse carousel might quietly summon fairy tales long thought forgotten. For another, the water flume might bring back the joy of leaving soggy footprints all the way to the next ride. And the sight of candy floss instantly conjures that sugary, mouth-watering taste that's probably a shared childhood memory across generations.

There's something genuinely magical about what a place like this does to you. Long grown out of childhood, memories you'd sworn were lost come flickering back, spreading a cosy warmth – not unlike the various strains of fairground music spilling from hidden speakers all over the park, tunes you feel like you've heard a hundred times over. Being an adult has its advantages, of course (see the comfortable family car parked just outside Europa-Park). And still, it's nice to now and then be reminded of the lightness with which you once stumbled through life as a small person. Back when the worst-case scenario – full meltdown, by toddler standards – was a toppled ice cream.

ONE GIANT WHERE'S WALLY OF A PARK

Where to look next? Children ricochet through the park like pinballs, whipped up on adrenaline, dopamine and sugar. The chair-o-planes! The ice cream stand! Tin can alley! A theme park is one giant spot-the-detail picture, a vast machine oiled to perfection, thousands of tiny cogs meshing together so visitors have a wonderful time. It isn't only the cogs doing the meshing, either: Europa-Park



employs around 5,500 people, and not just front-of-house staff – musicians, mascots, VR operators, industrial climbers. Working like a well-rehearsed ensemble, they create a place where you can shed the worries of everyday life at the entrance, like a coat at the cloakroom.

THE DREAM JOURNEY CONTINUES, IN THE GLB

Evening approaches. Officially, there's a closing time. Unofficially, some rides stay open until even the very last person in the queue has had one more chance to be flung into weightlessness.

Afterwards, some head back to one of the six four-star hotels attached to the park. Most, though, drift back towards the car park, carrying perhaps a prize from the duck pond or the tin can alley, but certainly a goodie bag full of pure happiness. It helps if the boot is big enough for both.

Back at the GLB, in the lengthening shadows of the roller coaster, from which no more screams now carry across, one more childhood memory surfaces: the cosy exhaustion that settles in after a long day of adventure. Or the child seat in the back, that feels like it has been waiting for you. Even if you didn't realise it at the time, or couldn't quite appreciate it: how nice, that back then there was nothing much left to do but fall asleep as fast as possible. To keep dreaming the day a little further. And, in your sleep, to wander on a little longer through that vast, teeming world.



“I HAVEN’T COME CLOSE TO KNOWING ALL THE RACETRACKS IN THE WORLD”



Photo: Mercedes-Benz AG

As told to Bernadette Winter

When a safety car takes to the track in motorsport's top tier, Bernd Mayländer is behind the wheel, leading the field. He explains why it still puts a smile on his face, even after doing it more than 500 times

My personal Mercedes-AMG moment begins right before a Formula 1 race starts. I sit in my company car – the safety car – in the pit lane, running through things once more with race control, checking the fit of my helmet. I can hear the engines howling on the grid. Then the lights go out, signalling it's go-time. Adrenaline starts to flood through my body.

My career as a safety car driver started rather by chance – I trained as an industrial clerk. I started out with karting, then from 1995, moved into touring cars and sports cars, including racing for Mercedes-Benz in the DTM. In 1998, I competed in the FIA GT Championship in the legendary Mercedes-Benz CLK GTR. At the San Marino Grand Prix in Imola in 1999, Charlie Whiting, then Formula 1's race director, called me. He asked if I wanted to become the safety car driver for Formula 3000 the following year.

Before the season, I prepare myself physically and mentally. I row, jog and cycle. It helps my body adjust more quickly to different time zones. On the Wednesday before a race weekend, I walk the track, and sometimes drive it slowly too. The track test starts on Thursday and runs for over an hour. On the other days, I usually drive a few laps early in the morning. This year is a special one, though. Not only because Mercedes has supplied the Official FIA F1 Safety Cars for 30 years now, but also because I'm getting a new company car: the Mercedes-AMG GT 63 PRO 4MATIC+.

Home, to me, is wherever my family is. My hometown is Schorndorf, east of Stuttgart, where Gottlieb Daimler was also born. Home means a great deal to me. I need familiar surroundings to switch off and recharge. The Remstal is wine country. My grandfather had vineyards here too. I started out making wine as a hobby myself, and it's since grown into a small business.

I haven't even come close to knowing all the racetracks in the world. There's still plenty to discover. But even the tracks I know well never get boring, because each one brings its own challenges. In racing, there's real excitement in testing your own limits and those of the car. That's one of the reasons I roll out of the garage with a grin on my face whenever I head to the track. If that ever stopped being true, I'd have to take a good look at things. But I'm a long way from that.

MERCEDES-AMG GT 63 PRO 4MATIC+

Combined energy consumption*: 14 l/100 km |
Combined CO_2 emissions*: 319 g/km | CO_2 class*: G

DID YOU KNOW?

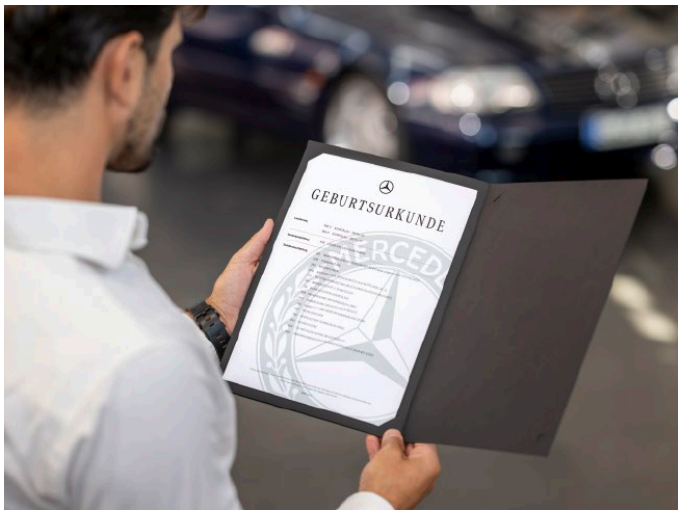
How well do you know the brand with the star? Discover remarkable facts and insights from the world of Mercedes-Benz

SAFETY FIRST



MERCEDES-AMG GT 63 PRO 4MATIC+ | Combined energy consumption*: 14 l/100 km | Combined CO_2 emissions*: 319 g/km | CO_2 class*: G

Whether it's George Russell or Kimi Antonelli, when the safety car rolls onto the track, even Formula 1's biggest stars have no choice but to fall in line behind it. Since the 2026 Hungarian Grand Prix, a particularly powerful model from the GT family has been waiting in the pit lane, ready for action: the Mercedes-AMG GT 63 PRO 4MATIC+. With its eight-cylinder engine producing 450 kW/612 hp, this high-performance car is perfectly equipped to keep things safe in critical situations – whatever the weather, since the 14th Official FIA F1 Safety Car with the star is also the first to feature all-wheel drive. The brand has now been keeping motorsport's top tier safe for 30 years, since 1996. And for more than a quarter of a century, a racing legend has been behind the wheel too: Bernd Mayländer has driven the safety car since 2000, and at the 2026 season opener in Melbourne, he completed his 500th Grand Prix. Read more about Bernd Mayländer on page 86.



A BIRTH CERTIFICATE FOR CLASSICS

Cherished Mercedes-Benz classics sometimes become true members of the family over the years. Now, that emotional bond can be officially documented too: for the first time, a birth certificate is available for most Mercedes-Benz passenger cars built between 1986 and 2010. Drawing on historical factory records, the birth certificate documents the vehicle's original condition at delivery. It creates a reliable link between past and present, complementing the existing range of vehicle documentation. The birth certificate is printed on high-quality paper and delivered in a specially designed presentation folder, and can be ordered online from the Mercedes-Benz Classic Store.

Find out more about the birth certificate for classics at **go.mercedes-benz.com/Birth_Certificate**

TODAY'S TALENT, TOMORROW'S STARS

Invest thoughtfully, provide targeted support, and know when to let go – trusting that a rising young talent will grow into something great. That, at its core, is the principle behind the Mercedes-AMG PETRONAS F1 Team's Junior Programme. Since 2016, the programme has given drivers more than just a place on the grid in one of the many junior categories. It offers them a supportive environment, guidance, and, just as importantly, helps them believe in their own potential. The 2026 season shows that this approach works: graduates George Russell (GB) and Kimi Antonelli (I) form the F1 team's driver line-up, while Fred Vesti (DK) and Doriane Pin (F) complete the team as third driver and development driver.

Find out more about the history of the Junior Programme at **go.mercedes-benz.com/Mercedes-F1-junior-programme**



Photos: Mercedes-Benz AG

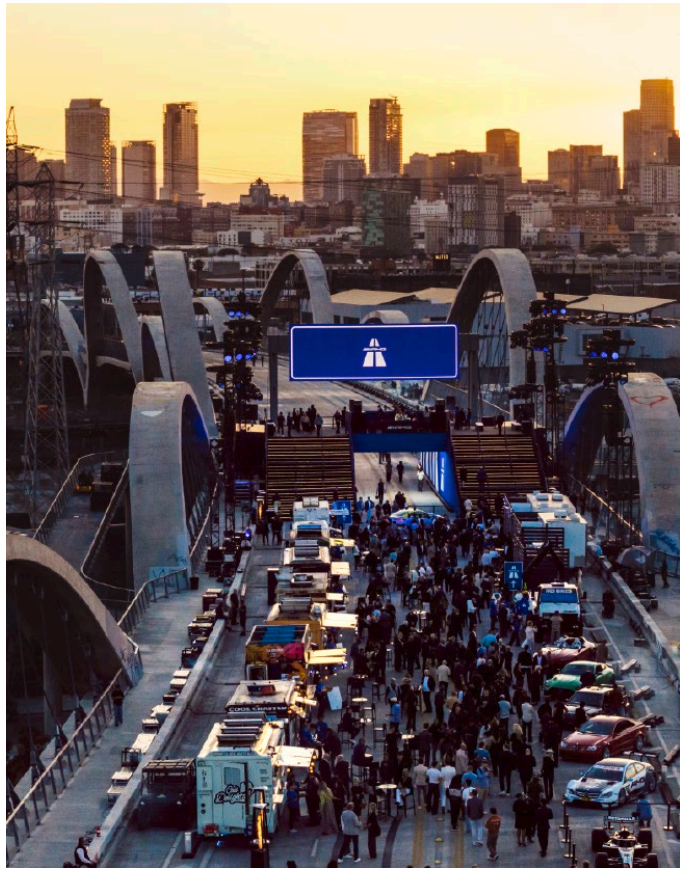


MERCEDES-AMG GT 63 4-DOOR COUPÉ

Combined energy consumption*: 20.9–17.9 kWh/100 km | Combined CO_2 emissions*: 0 g/km | CO_2 class*: A

Sunset Boulevard, Mulholland Drive, or Pacific Coast Highway – Los Angeles has some of the most famous roads in the world. And yet it's missing one: the autobahn. So Mercedes-AMG brought its own. The world premiere of the new Mercedes-AMG GT 4-Door Coupé fused 1,169 hp, the dream factory and German engineering like never before – for one night only

Text by Florian Siebeck
Photos by Mercedes-Benz AG



Their names are promises made of asphalt. Los Angeles has turned its famous roads into collective longing machines, where visitors have been test driving their fantasies of a new life for decades. All it takes is finding yourself on Highway 1, and the show begins: motels, villas, diners and palm trees, standing there, backlit, as if their sole purpose were to serve strangers' yearnings. And then you're sitting there, at an exit towards the Pacific, believing for one brief moment that life really could be that simple.

But Los Angeles is always both things at once: dream and imposition, heaven and hell, film set and commuter route. The big roads are called freeways, which is somewhat misleading, since there's rarely anything free about them except the view of everyone else's taillights. Everyone seems to need to be somewhere else at the same time, somewhere that's presumably no less crowded. Still, the California sun bathes the city and all its contradictions in such warm light that you forgive the Golden State everything. Am I driving or am I dreaming? In California, you can never quite be sure.

When it comes to automotive freedom, there's one thing that Los Angeles is actually missing, though – an autobahn. Or rather, it was missing one, until Mercedes-AMG simply brought one downtown. A stretch of the 6th Street Bridge, the setting for Hollywood classics and blockbusters alike, not far from the place where America got its very first freeway, became a German autobahn for one evening – complete with the promise-laden road sign that lifts every speed limit – for the world premiere of the new Mercedes-AMG GT 4-Door Coupé.

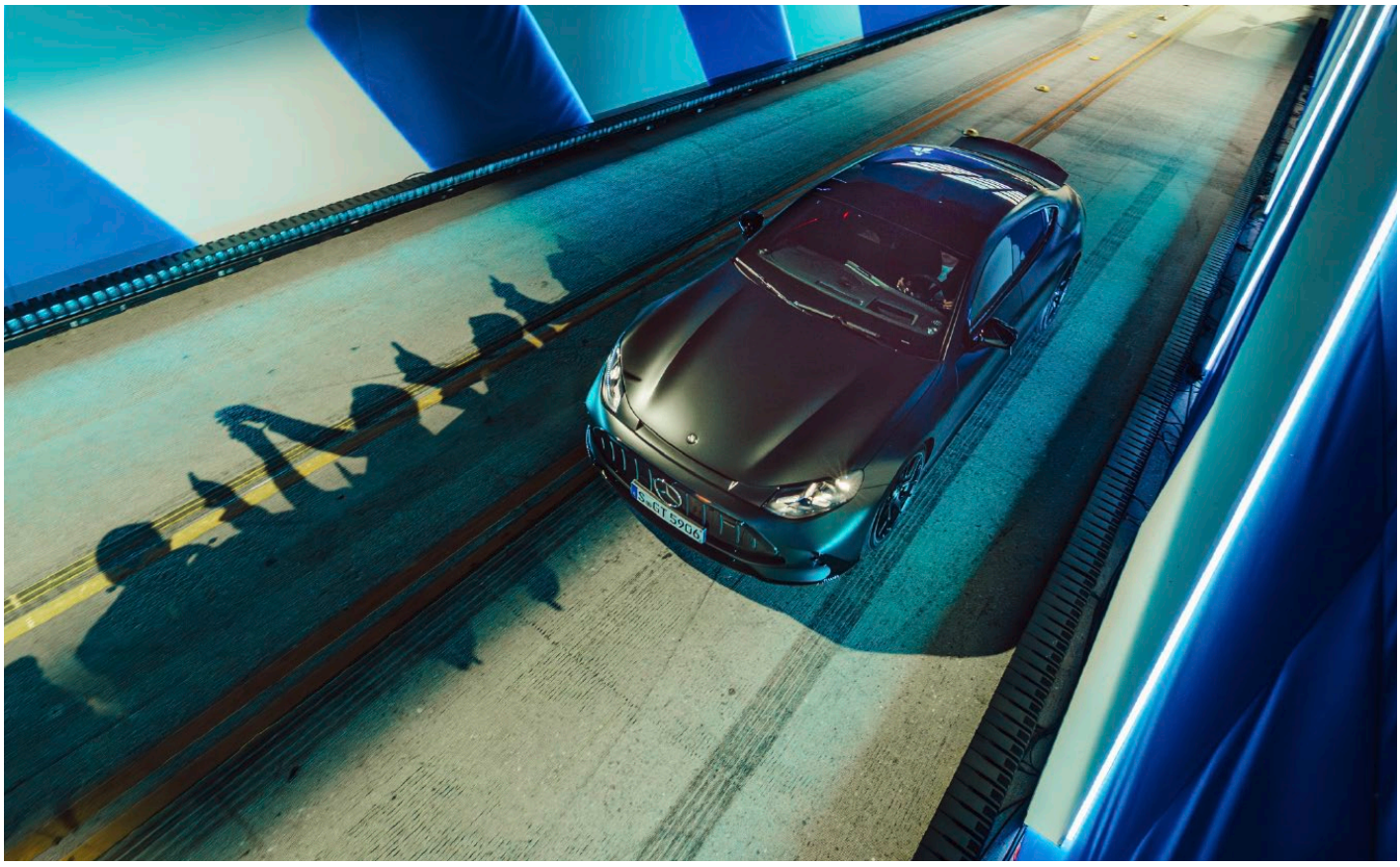
The autobahn isn't, as commonly assumed, a German invention. The first one opened in Italy in 1924. But the Germans have undoubtedly made it famous. Where else can you take "free driving" so literally? Almost nowhere else in the world are people allowed to drive as fast as they are in Germany. A curious privilege that, on certain stretches of the autobahn, remains part of automotive freedom to this day.

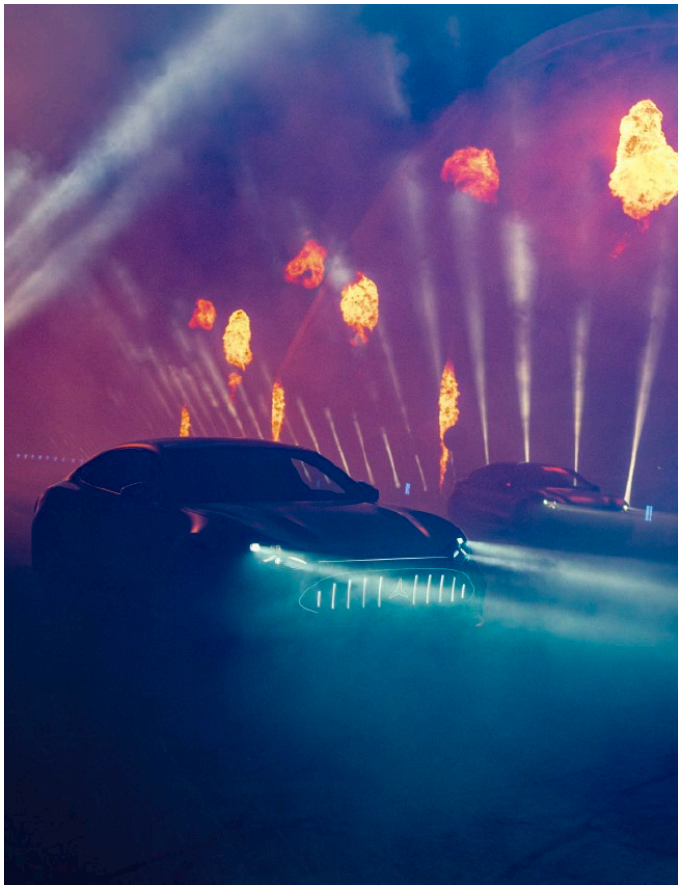
"A vehicle this powerful deserves a road without limits," said Michael Schiebe, former AMG chief and now a member of the Mercedes-Benz Group AG Management Board for Production, Quality & Supply Chain Management, in Los Angeles. In other words: A car like the Mercedes-AMG GT 4-Door Coupé, which sprints from a standstill to 100 km/h in 2.4 seconds and to 200 km/h in 6.8 seconds. Three axial flux motors and a high-performance battery, delivering up to 1,169 hp, make that possible, autobahn ready indeed. That this electric powerhouse leaves even highly tuned sports cars in the dust is something Mercedes-AMG had already proven last year with the Concept AMG GT XX on the Nardò test track: once around the world in eight days, over 40,000 kilometres, 25 new world records. The best possible rebuttal to the myth that electric cars start fast but tire just as quickly.

"The concept car showed what is possible. Now the production EV brings that exact feeling to the road for the first time," Michael Schiebe promised. Formula 1 drivers George Russell and Kimi Antonelli sent the sports car hurtling down the historic bridge after a spectacular burnout between fountains of flame.



"Autobahn" instead of race track – Formula 1 stars on the 6th Street Bridge in Los Angeles: George Russell, Toto Wolff and Kimi Antonelli.






AMG
S GT 5901

The soundscape resembled a V8 so convincingly because its natural sound was replicated down to the smallest detail, from acceleration to gear changes, including simulated torque interruptions. “It genuinely feels like a V8 to drive,” said George Russell. “I was doing over 250 km/h (155 mph) – the limit here is normally 56 km/h (35 mph).” He laughs. “I think we were slightly over.”

The 6th Street Bridge, closed exclusively for the world premiere, likely experienced something that night its construction history probably never accounted for: a speed record unlikely to be broken again anytime soon. Sustained performance, precise dynamics, maximum thrill: for a few minutes, Los Angeles got to find out exactly what that much-talked-about automotive freedom smells like. Warm rubber and hot asphalt. And just a touch of megalomania. “A great car isn’t just defined by kilometres per hour, but by heartbeats per minute,” Michael Schiebe affirmed. And sometimes, that means relocating an autobahn to Los Angeles.

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MERCEDES-AMG GLC 53 4MATIC+ COUPÉ

Combined energy consumption*: 9.7–9.2 l/100 km | Combined CO_2 emissions*: 221–209 g/km | CO_2 class*: G

The car park was closed to public traffic for the duration of the shoot.



GET MOVING

Text by Lutz Schilling | Photos by Carolin Unrath



Sport is everywhere today, but its origins are, surprisingly, anything but sporty: the word traces back to the Old French “desport”, meaning distraction, pleasure, a simple way of passing the time

In Middle English, this became the shorter “sport”. Then, as modern competitive forms like football, rowing and athletics developed into organised sports in 19th-century England, the word made its way into most other languages, becoming one of the most well-travelled words in the world (very sporting of it) and even finding its way back to its roots, into French, as “le sport”.

Whether sport is mainly about competition, fitness, killing time or simply enjoyment is something every active person can decide for themselves – the main thing is to keep moving. On the following pages, you’ll find ideas for exactly that, along with outfit recommendations from the AMG collection. Joining us for the ride: our sporty companion, the Mercedes-AMG GLC 53 4MATIC+ Coupé.



TRAINING TOGETHER
Training together spurs you on, keeps you motivated and turns exercise into a social experience. That makes moving not just more effective, but more connecting too.



WARMED UP AND READY
A cold start raises the risk of injury and holds back performance. It's only once you've warmed up that muscles, joints and circulation reach proper operating temperature. A few minutes of dynamic warm-up is all it takes.


AMG






AMG







STAY STRONG
With weights, machines and equipment for every muscle group and every fitness level, the gym lets you steer your training with precision. That's how progress becomes controlled and measurable.

Find these and other Mercedes-Benz items, along with further details, at
go.mercedes-benz.com/AMG_Collection

AMG T-Shirt Unisex (Art. no.: B67960107), **AMG Water Bottle** (Art. no.: B66959826), **AMG Cap** (Art. no.: B67960039), **AMG Socks** (Art. no.: B66959663), **AMG Weekender Bag** (Art. no.: B66958984), **AMG Men's Blouson** (Art. no.: B66958939), **AMG Men's Hybrid Vest** (Art. no.: B66959689), **AMG Women's Hybrid Vest** (Art. no.: B66959697), **AMG Sweatshirt Unisex** (Art. no.: B66958938), **Men's Grand Court Sneakers** (Art. no.: B67960235), **AMG Roll-top Backpack** (Art. no.: B66956785)

MB.DRIVE ASSIST PRO

A DISCREET ASSISTANT

Text by Robert Göring



Rome, São Paulo, LA or Beijing: these cities may seem like worlds apart, but when it comes to traffic, they're really not that different. Buses, scooters, vans, pedestrians, cyclists and cars form a mobile, barely containable mass that pushes through urban streets day and night. Some stick stubbornly to a single lane, as if running on rails, while others switch lanes every few seconds. Traffic lights, road signs, and pedestrian crossings demand constant attention and focus. When things get tight, the golden rule of city driving is to stay calm.

Staying calm is exactly what MB.DRIVE ASSIST PRO helps with. The system combines driver assistance with navigation and supports the driver on a completely new level, from pulling out of a parking space to arriving at the destination, through city traffic, across junctions, when changing lanes and on the motorway. This advanced SAE Level 2 support, internally referred to as "Level 2++", steers and guides discreetly and intuitively, without ever taking control away from the driver.

A HIGH-PERFORMANCE ONBOARD COMPUTER

MB.DRIVE ASSIST PRO takes on tasks for the driver without taking over the driver's role. Hands always stay on the wheel, while the water-cooled high-performance computer provides all the power needed to hold distance and lane, accelerate, or scan the surroundings in every direction. The onboard computer processes up to 254 TOPS, that's 254 trillion operations per second, all dedicated to handling even complex traffic situations smoothly and safely. Around 30 sensors keep constant watch over the traffic, issuing steering commands, regulating speed and recognising red lights.

The Mercedes-Benz Operating System forms the foundation for this new generation of software-defined vehicles, using precisely coordinated cameras, radar and ultrasonic sensors to build a continuous picture of the real environment. The high-performance computer matches this data against navigation and driving strategy and translates it into motion: careful merging, gentle braking and confident acceleration all ensure a natural, controlled flow of driving.

MB.DRIVE ASSIST PRO is already available in China, with a US market launch planned for the end of 2026. The system is also set to launch in selected cities in Germany by the end of 2026, before rolling out nationwide from 2027.

THE ROAD TO AUTOMATED DRIVING
Automated driving is divided into five levels. As the level rises, the car takes on more of the driving, until, at the very top, the human is relieved of responsibility altogether. With “Level 2++”, Mercedes-Benz is already at the threshold of Level 3, the stage at which a car can take control on its own for the first time.



Find out more about MB.DRIVE ASSIST PRO at
go.mercedes-benz.com/MB-DRIVE-ASSIST-PRO

Photos: Mercedes-Benz AG

5 Tech-Facts
THE NEW ELECTRIC MERCEDES-BENZ C-CLASS

1 Athletic on the road: 360 kW, 800 Nm and 0 to 100 km/h in 4.0 seconds make the electric C 400 4MATIC the sportiest C-Class ever, with all-wheel drive, optional AIRMATIC air suspension and rear-axle steering.

2 Distinctive appearance: The illuminated, iconic radiator grille stages every unlock, lock and charging moment, underlining the coupé-like silhouette with its low front end and flowing rear.

3 Powered up: Up to 762 kilometres[1] of range (WLTP) and, thanks to 800-volt technology, up to 325 kilometres[2] of charge added in just ten minutes.

4 Electric, thought through to the end: 470 litres of boot space plus a 101-litre front trunk, and up to 1.8 tonnes of towing capacity, make the new C-Class a confident everyday hero.

5 Cutting-edge tech: The 99.3 cm (39.1-inch) MB.UX Hyperscreen is the largest screen ever fitted in a Mercedes-Benz, kept permanently up to date through over-the-air updates via MB.OS.



MERCEDES-BENZ C 400 4MATIC electric
Combined energy consumption*: 18.5–14.1 kWh/100 km | Combined CO_2 emissions*: 0 g/km | CO_2 class*: A

[1] Actual range depends on numerous factors, in particular individual driving style, ambient conditions, battery ageing, auxiliary consumers such as climate control, special equipment, tyres, load and route profile, and may therefore differ from the stated WLTP value.

[2] The stated additional range (WLTP) after 10 minutes was determined using maximum DC charging power in accordance with ISO/SAE 12906 under the conditions described therein.

Vehicle scanner
HIGH-TECH SERVICE CHECKS

Just a gentle burst of acceleration, then a few metres gliding along at walking pace: drive through the illuminated arch of the vehicle scanner at a Mercedes-Benz service appointment, and at first, you'll notice nothing at all. Behind the scenes, though, some serious technology is at work. Within seconds, the high-resolution 360-degree 4K camera system captures the entire exterior of the vehicle under seamless lighting. Up to 150 images per scan ensure that scratches, dents and wheel damage are picked up even outside the driver's direct line of sight. The tyre tread and windscreen condition can also be analysed. The image data is then evaluated using AI, through XENTRY Vehicle Detector, software developed in-house. This lets the service technician discuss the vehicle's condition with the customer immediately after the scan and offer tailored recommendations. The result: a service process that's more efficient, more transparent and more convenient for everyone involved.





AMG Race Engineer

DRIVING FEEL, À LA CARTE

For most drivers, how much dynamic performance a sports car delivers – and how vividly you feel it – comes down to taste. The new Mercedes-AMG GT 4-Door Coupé has an answer to that: the AMG RACE ENGINEER. Instead of serving up one fixed setup, it lets you fine-tune performance to your own preference. Three rotary controls on the centre console do the work: “Response” dials the electric motors from smooth and comfortable to sharp and aggressive; “Agility” shifts cornering behaviour from gentle understeer to controlled oversteer; and “Traction” fine-tunes slip across nine settings. Behind it all, a high-performance chip ties every drivetrain and dynamics system together. The result: 860 kW (1,169 hp), served exactly to taste. Call it a menu for anyone who wants to build their own idea of driving fun.



MERCEDES-AMG GT 63 4-DOOR COUPÉ
Combined energy consumption*: 20.9–17.9 kWh/100 km | Combined CO_2 emissions*: 0 g/km | CO_2 class*: A

Photos: Mercedes-Benz AG



The Basque Country has been drawing surfers from around the world since the 1970s. It's easy to see why: wild Atlantic waves roll in beneath green hills, with fishing villages and long beaches scattered along the coast. We set off to explore it in the new VLE – a true local

Text by Katalina Farkas | Photos by André Tillmann

HANG LOOSE



MERCEDES-BENZ VLE 300 electric
Combined energy consumption*: 20.9–18.4 kWh/100 km | Combined CO_2 emissions*: 0 g/km | CO_2 class*: A



Early in the morning, they're already there, heading towards the waves. Dozens of surfers in wetsuits, colourful boards tucked under their arms. The sea is green today, and although the sky is still grey, you can see them smiling nonetheless, their bare feet on the sand. They're all looking for the same thing. And no, it isn't the perfect wave. It's that brief moment when the ocean decides whether or not to let them play along.

Anyone who surfs, or wants to learn, figures out one thing fast: there's no point arguing with the ocean. We'd love to control it, but we can't. It's about reading the water, waiting for the right moment, and then seizing it. Sure, a good board helps you catch a wave, glide across the surface for a few seconds as if flying, or ride through a barrel. Technique matters just as much. But at the end of the day (or the morning, rather), it's the wind, the tides, and the whims of the Atlantic that call the shots.

Back in the seventies, the biggest names in surfing were already drawn to Zarautz, the small coastal town where we've parked our fully electric VLE on the promenade today. We're watching the surfers, getting to know the region. "People came here from all over the world back then," says Adur Letamendia, "from Australia, from the USA." They travelled the French Basque Country and northern Spain, all the way down to Portugal and Morocco. They came to Zarautz for the waves, and stayed for the people. "Pro surfers were always coming and going at our house," Letamendia recalls. "They taught me English, and much more!"

The prominent visitors to the Letamendia household were no coincidence: in 1973, Adur's father, Iñigo Letamendia, joined forces with a group of friends to build surfboards. Not necessarily to make money from it. Above all, they wanted to have fun and ride good boards. That's how Pukas was born. Today, it is one of the most significant surfboard manufacturers in the world.





The VLE’s rear offers plenty of room for dreams and stories. And, of course, for Adur Letamendia’s surfboards too.



Surfing opened a window into another world back then, says Adur Letamendia – at a time when Spain was otherwise largely closed off. The international visitors brought their own knowledge of shapes and materials, their worldliness, and their openness. The Basque friends who founded Pukas contributed their culture, their hospitality, and their particular connection to the sea. Adur Letamendia is certain: "Pukas owes its success to the combination of international influences and local culture."

While Iñigo Letamendia and his friends built the first surfboards, Adur's mother Marian sewed bikinis, initially for the surfers' girlfriends. "Pukas is surfboards and bikinis," says Letamendia. For him, it goes without saying that his mother was far more than a seamstress. "Basque women are strong. They've always held endless power."

Then there's Zarautz itself, which has had its own distinct influence on the surfboards. The relaxed vibe of the place, shaped by the roar of the sea, but also its setting: nestled among green hills, with an endlessly long sandy beach, and the wild waves out front. Good surfboards are rarely built far away from the sea. Anyone who crafts them needs to see how the waves change, how children ride their first waves, and how experienced surfers argue about shapes. All of that happens in Zarautz every day. "It's like being at a trade show every day," says Adur Letamendia. The coast is the test lab.

"The best board is the one that makes you happy"

ADUR LETAMENDIA

THE PERFECT PLACE TO BUILD SURFBOARDS

The clouds hang low today over the green hills so characteristic of Spain's Basque Country. Northern Spain is rougher than the south; the coast often drops steeply into the water. The region is interesting for surfers because the Basque coast lies directly on the open Atlantic. As a result, swells arrive there regularly – wave trains that often form far out at sea during Atlantic storms and carry energy over great distances. This is said to shape the



people of the region too. They may seem a little gruff at first, but are all the warmer once you get to know them.

The perfect place, then, to build surfboards. He opens the gates of the Pukas factory for us, a place where modern manufacturing and decades of craftsmanship meet. The air smells of lacquer and resin, and the sound of sanders hangs in the air. Among white blanks, men and women in respirator masks stand bent over the boards, working centimetre by centimetre on curves, edges, and fin boxes. Here, boards are still shaped, sanded, and finished by hand, in the very spirit that once drove Iñigo Letamendia and his friends. The difference is that while the company remains family-owned, it now employs around 100 people.

Adur Letamendia compares the process to baking bread: the ingredients may be simple, but quality and experience make the difference. As does the very personal taste of the customer: “The best surfboard is the one that makes you the happiest,” says Adur Letamendia. “The cool thing about those products is they need to make the customer feel absolutely in love.” That, he says, is true of a surfboard just as much as a car like our VLE. “You are really having fun in the ocean, travelling with the board. It’s almost like a car, too. The car usually takes you to places. It’s something that you really have a different relationship with, because you’re going to experience life.”

To experience life. We leave Zarautz and head along the coast road towards Bilbao. The VLE, unsurprisingly, fits the rugged landscape particularly well: plenty of room for surfboards, luggage, and the stories you pick up along the way. It’s no surprise the car is built right here, in Vitoria, in the Basque Country. Designed as a grand limousine, one that would fit seamlessly into the sophisticated streets of nearby Bilbao, the VLE cuts an equally good figure on the coast road, even with two surfboards in the back.


S VE 678E




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THE MOODS OF THE ATLANTIC

The Basque Country's specific location means the weather is a mixed bag, to say the least. One moment there's a fine drizzle, ten minutes later the sky clears. Wisps of fog hang in the valleys while light already flashes over the sea again. Not ideal for holidaymakers who just want to lie on the beach. For the surfers who deliberately head for the Basque Country, it's part of the deal.

The coast road towards Bilbao promises driving pleasure at the highest level. The comfortable seats, the rear-axle steering and the powerful motor all help. The whisper-quiet electric motor lets the sound of the sea take centre stage. It's easy to just keep driving here, losing yourself in the landscape.

The road hugs green slopes, winds through small fishing villages, past meadows where sheep or cows graze, and past the typical Basque farmhouses with their whitewashed walls and red timber beams. Around every bend, the sea comes into view, only to vanish again minutes later behind dense forest or a hill. In places the coast drops sharply into the Atlantic, in others it's broken up by small coves where fishing boats bob on the water.

We pass the small town of Getaria, then Zumaia. Further west, rugged rocky coastlines alternate with wide beaches, until the landscape opens up around the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve, a mosaic of salt marshes, river mouths and green hills. At some point, we can see the outskirts of Bilbao. Tempting as the city may be, with its many museums and cafés, we leave it behind us today. Our destination lies a little further north, where the roads narrow again and the Atlantic sets the pace: the Moana Eco Surf House.

BACK TO WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

We park our VLE outside the Moana Eco Surf House. Its obsidian black paintwork glints in the sun like the rugged, wet rocks of the Basque coastline. On the grounds, a modern timber building awaits us, sitting naturally within the lush green landscape. You hear the sea before you see it again.

"What I love most about surfing is that, at its core, it never stops being a game"

PATXI PARDIÑAS

Patxi Pardiñas grew up in the Spanish Basque Country. After travelling the world, he opened the Moana Eco Surf House in the place that means the most to him: home.



Patxi Pardiñas didn't simply open this place: he spent years conceiving it. He used to work in the skateboard industry and travelled the world, getting to know new cultures. But the more places he saw, the clearer it became to him what he had at home. "I realised this region offers a balance that's incredibly difficult to find anywhere else," he says. "You have the ocean, the mountains, forests, incredible food, culture. Everything is close by."

Moana grew out of this realisation. First in a traditional Basque farmhouse, later as a newly built Eco Surf House. It's long since been about more than just teaching people to surf. "We've always tried to create a complete experience, where surfing is the starting point, but not the only focus." Spa, yoga, good food, hikes, excursions along the coast. The ocean remains the focal point, but never the only reason to come here.

Of course, surfing always brushes close to cliché. Lifestyle, community, freedom – those are terms that feel a little worn out. And yet it would be presumptuous (and also difficult) to dismiss them as clichés here. Perhaps because Pardiñas never lets them sound like advertising slogans. "What I love most about surfing is that, at its core, it never stops being a game," he says. After all, we all still carry within us that child who simply delights in gliding over something: down a hill on a skateboard, down a slide, or on a wave. Athletic ambition comes later. "At the end of the day, what continues to inspire me is something much simpler: the feeling of riding a wave and being fully present in the moment."

Perhaps that also explains the magic of the Basque Country. It's not just Mundaka with its legendary left-hand wave. Not just Zarautz, Getaria, or the small coves in between. It's the mix. "It's not only about the waves," says Pardiñas. The steep cliffs, the forests, the fishing villages, the food, and the people are all part of it too.

In the evening, the sun appears once more, just before sinking into the Atlantic. We unload the VLE. The boards are still lying in the boot; sand from Zarautz trickles from the mats. The Atlantic roars, as enchanting as it is wild. Tomorrow we'll throw ourselves into the waves once more – with the best of hopes that the ocean will let us play along.





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FUN INSPIRES. JOY ENDURES.

Text by Lutz Schilling

Fun and joy may sound alike, but they are fundamentally different. Here's what sets them apart, why only one can sustain us over time – and what optimism has got to do with it

Words like twins: seemingly alike, but entirely different in character

We all know the type: the colleague who seems to have fun and enjoy whatever he does. He turns up at the office every morning in a good mood, relaxed and easy-going by the coffee machine, always ready to listen, and comments on the moves during a game of table football. When the meeting starts, he is full of constructive suggestions and ideas that move the project forward.

Or think of the woman at the tennis club, delighted with her new racket and the extra control it gives her. She is full of motivation, setting one personal best after another, qualifying for the final, celebrating every point as if it were already the championship.

TWO WORDS, TWO WORLDS

"Having fun and enjoying what you do." There's an image that comes up inside our heads when we hear those words. And everyone recognises the feeling from their own experience. So why do we use these two words – so similar, yet not identical – as though they meant the same thing? They're like twins: seemingly alike, but entirely different in character. Fun is the spark that lights us up. Joy is the ember that keeps us warm.

It's when they come together that good things start to happen: both fun and joy are essential to success and satisfaction. Fun takes the weight out of an activity; it helps us to get started. It makes us feel light and happy, comes from outside, entertains us, and motivates us in the moment. But fun doesn't last. It can fade as quickly as it arrives.

Joy, on the other hand, comes from within, from finding meaning in a task and achieving goals. It carries us through professional or sporting challenges, and helps us push through the hard stretches, even when things hurt. It drives our personal growth. It lasts, and it brings deep satisfaction. It also gives us lasting contentment and emotional stability.

WHEN THE FUN STOPS: JOY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

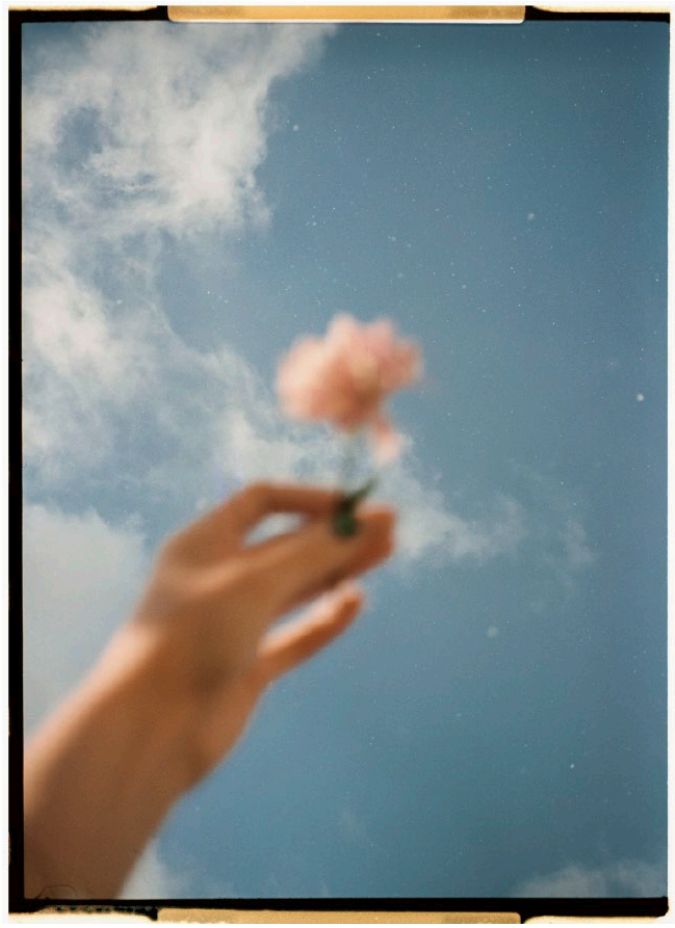
At work, once a project gets serious and the deadline draws near, there's no time for table football or a relaxed chat by the coffee machine; when stress levels are high, fun tends to leave the workplace. But if you know that the project will ultimately improve the customer experience – say through new hospital software or a component that boosts efficiency – the joy of purpose carries you through the challenge. The feeling of having built or delivered something lasting and meaningful creates a sense of satisfaction, even once the fun has long since faded. At work, joy comes from making an impact: from knowing that your effort makes a visible difference.

We see something similar in sport. Joining a summer running club is great fun on those warm, sunny evenings, with friendly company, a cool new kit, and a cold drink together afterwards. A few months later, the November rain won't let up and the training plan calls for a long solo run, even though it's five degrees Celsius outside. Halfway through the run, the knees start to ache, motivation hits rock bottom, and the fun factor is precisely zero. And yet the runner keeps going. Why? Because they feel joy in their own strength and the discipline to keep going. They know: "I'm growing through this. My body is getting stronger." When they get home soaked but happy and turn on the hot shower, what they feel isn't some fleeting amusement but deep satisfaction and a quiet, unshakeable joy at this small victory over themselves.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM CHILDREN

And what about children? Watch them for a while and you notice they have a superpower most of us adults have lost. A child needs no reason and no benefit to feel joy. Children don't question joy – they are joy. A glittering pebble on the pavement, watching an ant for hours, or

Photo: Florian Maas/Stills



This childlike joy – joy in its purest form – is a gift of the moment

jumping into a muddy puddle with wild determination – any of these is enough. A child does these things for their own sake, completely absorbed in the here and now. When children feel joy, it burns bright and unfiltered: they shriek, they jump, they clap their hands, their little faces lighting up. This childlike joy – joy in its purest form – is a gift of the moment, nothing more and nothing less.

As adults, thankfully, we can bring this pure form of joy back to life. You see the "child within" at classic car shows, where a successful man in his mid-fifties stands in quiet awe, eyes shining, before a chrome-glinting sports car from the 1950s, doors lifted skyward like wings. In that moment, the constraints of age fall away. The adult filters drop, and pure, childlike delight takes over. Psychologists call this the "inner child", and every one of us carries this playful side within. It's there when a grown woman feels a flutter in her stomach at the sight of an old fairground carousel, or when we secretly balance along a fallen tree trunk on a walk through the woods.

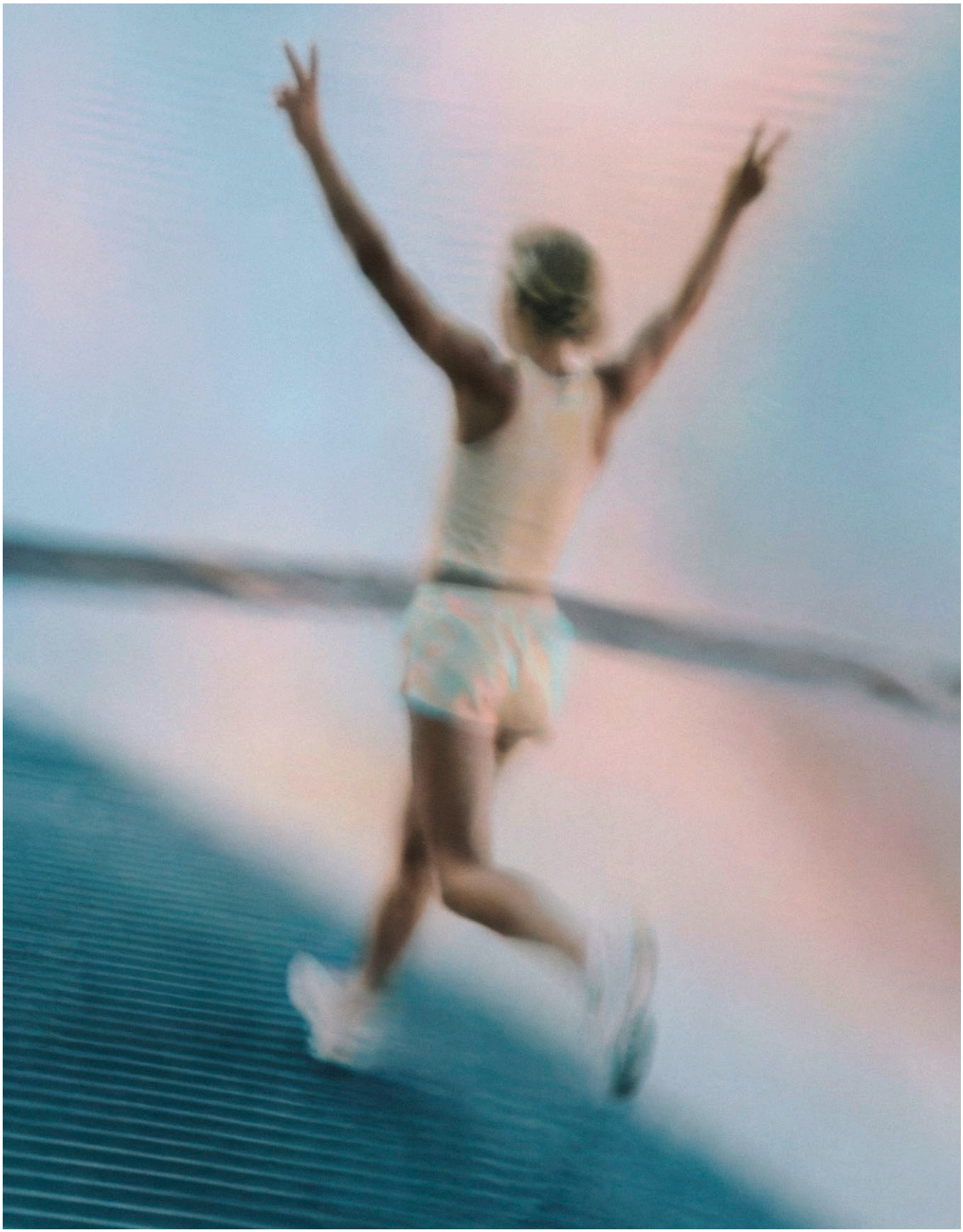
This inner child matters, especially in adulthood. It's our built-in safety valve, a reminder that we don't always have to optimise everything or do things in service of some greater goal. It lets us play without reason now and then, throw ourselves fully into that long-planned family trip to the theme park, and let the world delight us, no questions asked.

THE KEY TO A FULFILLING LIFE

In the end, it all comes full circle: bringing both fun and joy to what we do is part of what makes a fulfilling life. We shouldn't underestimate fun. It's the spark that gives us lightness, that pushes us to try new things, and that, through our inner child, lets us laugh freely again and again. But to really arrive in life, at work or in sport, we need joy, too. It's the steady ember that keeps us warm when everyday life turns uncomfortable, and gives us the strength to grow through challenges.

Out of this interplay emerges something valuable: optimism. Once we've learned to find meaning in our work, or to feel our own strength in sport, we naturally start looking ahead with confidence. We stop fearing the next hurdle, because we know what it feels like to clear it. Someone who carries the ember of joy within them, and lets their inner child throw off the occasional fresh spark, knows something important: life doesn't have to be easy, but it can be pretty wonderful.

Photos: Tru Collective/Stills, Riley Erickson/Stills



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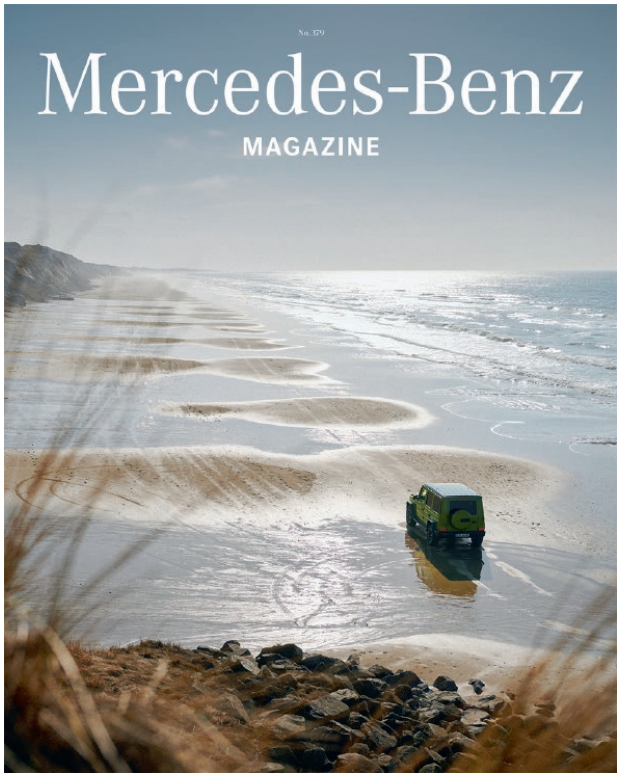

Driving on the beach is a Danish specialty with historical roots. By law, vehicles are allowed to use certain beaches as public roads. Jutland's west coast is especially known for this tradition, thanks to its flat beaches and firm sand that can bear a vehicle's weight.

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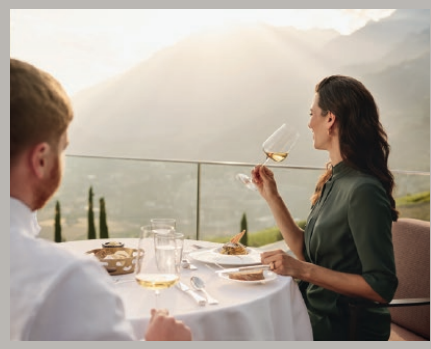

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300 “ADENAUER”: A SPIRIT OF NEW BEGINNINGS ON FOUR WHEELS

A symbol of new beginnings. Technically groundbreaking and unmistakable on the road, the Mercedes-Benz 300 of 1951 – better known as the “Adenauer” – helped shape the international image of the newly established Federal Republic of Germany. It also laid the foundations for the modern luxury limousine bearing the three-pointed star

Text by Christof Wenig

Few people have had a car nicknamed after them. Even fewer politicians can make that claim. One of those select few: Konrad Adenauer, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1949 to 1963. His name is so closely tied to the Mercedes-Benz 300 that the luxury limousine is still known by the unofficial nickname “Adenauer” to this day. And yet the Chancellor never held a driving licence. Rumour has it he chose the Mercedes-Benz partly because, ever the statesman, its size allowed him to keep his hat on when getting in.

Adenauer rode in six different “300s” during and after his time in office. Even when travelling abroad in Europe, or at his holiday retreat on Lake Como, he supposedly refused to be without his official car.

AN OPTIMISTIC SPIRIT OF THE AGE, EXPRESSED IN A NEW KIND OF LUXURY

Given its role at the heart of government, the “Adenauer” soon became a familiar sight in the worlds of business and high finance. It also found its way into the garages of Hollywood stars and prominent figures from the worlds of art and music. Unveiled in April 1951 at the first International Motor Show in Frankfurt, the limousine offered much more than stately elegance. As Mercedes-Benz’s new flagship, the 300 combined an imposing presence with forward-looking engineering – setting the standard for the brand’s flagship models for decades to come.

The history of the Mercedes-Benz 300 is one of continuous innovation. Its central lubrication system was followed by features such as a brake booster, automatic transmission and power steering. In 1958, luxury took another step forward when Mercedes-Benz introduced air conditioning for the first time. It cost an additional 3,500 Deutschmarks – roughly the price of a brand-new small car at the time. From 1956 onwards, an extended-wheelbase version was also available at Chancellor Adenauer’s request, giving the 300 an even more imposing presence – particularly on the red carpet.

In many ways, the “Adenauer” captures the spirit of the young Federal Republic: modern technology, easier operation and genuine comfort. It helped define the modern luxury limousine at Mercedes-Benz and stands as another milestone in the brand’s 140-year history of innovation.

Discover more about the most iconic vehicles in the brand’s history at the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart, including the “Adenauer”: **go.mercedes-benz.com/Adenauer_EN**

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