

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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NEW CARS:

ASTON MARTIN DB11 /
BUICK LACROSSE /
CHEVROLET EQUINOX /
LAND ROVER DISCOVERY /
MERCEDES-AMG GT ROADSTERS /
VOLVO V90 CROSS COUNTRY /
AND INTERNATIONAL AUTO SHOWS:
GENEVA / NEW YORK / SHANGHAI

MOTORSPORTS:

NASCAR RESULTS

ROAD TRIPS:

**RV PARKS TOUR
NELLIE E SALOON**

**AUCTION AND
CONCOURS NEWS
AND MORE**



Mercedes-AMG GT C Roadster



Machismo elegante

AMG's second in-house build stakes out competitive turf by Joe Sage

Daimler has been rebranding their AMG models. What until a couple of years ago would have been a Mercedes-Benz C43 AMG is now called Mercedes-AMG C43, and so on, amping up the spotlight on the AMG high-performance division. (It also parallels badging a specialty S Class as Mercedes-Maybach.)

This creates simpler, stronger naming of the GT cars—Mercedes-AMG GT rather than Mercedes-Benz GT AMG, with the focus on GT as the key model name. Or lineup, really. As surely as Mercedes-AMG has become a semi-freestanding sub-brand, the Mercedes-AMG GT lineup within it grows and grows.

It started at the Paris show in 2014. As the sun set on the multi-hundred-thousand-dollar Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG 563-hp gullwing supercar, the first sports car developed completely in-house by AMG, it rose on their second—the 2015 Mercedes-AMG GT S Coupe.

GT S and then GT two-seat hardtops quickly begat an uptuned GT R version by mid-2016 as a 2017 model. And at the Geneva show this spring (also in this issue), a Mercedes-AMG GT Concept four-door wowed the crowd with its 816 hp and under-three-second zero-to-60

time, but also its “intelligent electrified drive,” with a powerful gasoline V8 up front and electric motors specific to the rear wheels.

Mercedes-AMG was simultaneously creating two new open-air two-seat GT and GT C Roadsters, which they shipped to Arizona so we could be among the first to drive them. Spring in Geneva is nice, but driving these on our mountain highways would be even better.

The Mercedes-AMG GT takes on a variety of competitors in mindset, from Jaguar F-Type to Porsche 911. The 911 is most often invoked by third parties, and comparisons are all over the map. But while 911 used to hit a very specific spot in the automotive matrix, today we have regular, Turbo, Carrera4 and Targa, plus S models of each and Cabriolets of most, before you even touch on Boxster/Cayman. The Mercedes-AMG GT lineup seems quite focused by comparison, and still leaves plenty of room in the stable for the two-seat SL.

Mercedes-Benz SL and Mercedes-AMG GT both are stylish and loaded with creature comforts and technology. We might think of the retractable-hardtop SL as more luxury-oriented but with a full dose of performance, and the

Mercedes-AMG GT as more performance-oriented but with a full dose of luxury.

The Mercedes-Benz SL comes in four flavors (two are AMG) with 3-to-6-liter V6, V8 and V12 biturbo engines from 362 to 621 hp that can bring its 182.3-inch-long, two-ton-or-more bulk to 60 mph in 4.9 to 3.9 seconds.

The Mercedes-AMG GT Roadster comes in two flavors, both bearing a 4-liter biturbo V8 with either 469 or 550 hp. Though that's fewer horses than the SL63 or SL65 AMG, the 178.9-inch-long GT Roadster can bring its lithe 3683 to 3825 pounds to 60 mph in 3.9 to 3.7 seconds.

The numbers can start to make you crazy, and a comparison with 911 becomes even more endlessly intertwined and may not even serve a purpose. The best thing is to just get your hands on the new Mercedes-AMG GT and look deep into its own soul.

Tip to tail, the aluminum spaceframed-and-bodied Mercedes-AMG GT shows its muscle, starting with a Panamericana-inspired grille and instantaneous AIRPANEL active air louvers up front to optimize aerodynamics and performance. Wide but taut rear body styling emphasizes where power hits the ground—on the GT Roadster with 19-inch wheels all around and tires two inches wider in the rear; and on the GT Roadster with three-inch-wider 20-inchers in the rear—through a limited-slip rear differential (electronically con-

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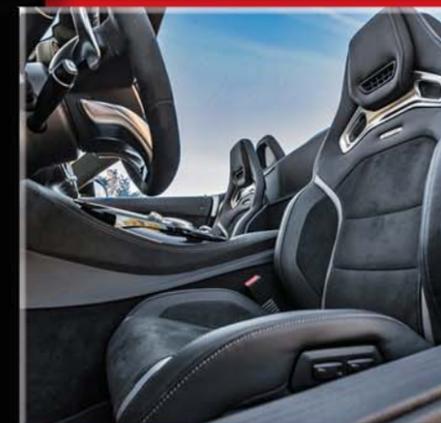
SPECIFICATIONS TO DATE

ENGINE4.0L twin-turbo direct-injection V8
HP/TORQUEGT roadster469 hp / 465 lb-ftGT C roadster550 hp / 502 lb-ft
COMPRESSION	.....GT roadster .....10.5:1.....GT C roadster .....9.5:1
TRANSMISSION	.....7-speed DCT dual-clutch
SHIFT MODES	.....GT roadster .....C, S, S+, I.....GT C roadster .....C, S, S+, I, Race
DRIVETRAIN	.....RWD
REAR DIFF	.....GT roadster .....mechanical limited-slip.....GT C roadster .....electronic limited-slip
STEERING	.....Electromechanical speed-sensitive rack & pinion sport power steering with non-linear ratio. GT C adds active rear axle steering.
STRUCTURE	.....Two-seater w aluminum spaceframe, aluminum body, reinforced bodyshell with cross-member behind seats for fixed roll-over protection. First-ever production use of combined sheet molding compound (SMC) and carbon fiber for trunk lid. Three-layer soft top (available in 3 colors) with magnesium-steel-aluminum substructure opens or closes in 11 seconds up to 31 mph.
SUSPENSION	.....GT roadster: AMG Sport suspension. F: aluminum double-wishbone, anti-dive, coils, stabilizer; R: aluminum double-wishbone, anti-squat and anti-dive, coils, stabilizer. .....GT C roadster: F: add electronic three-stage control, AMG Ride Control w adaptive damping; R: add active rear-wheel steering, AMG Ride Control w adaptive damping.
ZERO-TO-60 MPH	.....GT roadster .....3.9 sec.....GT C roadster .....3.7 sec
TOP SPEED	.....GT roadster .....188 mph.....GT C roadster .....196 mph
BRAKES FRONT/REAR	.....GT roadster .....14.2"/14.2" .....GT C roadster .....15.4"/14.2"
WHEELS FRONT/REAR	.....GT roadster .....9x19, 11x19.....GT C roadster .....9x19, 12x20
LENGTH	.....GT roadster .....178.9 in.....GT C roadster .....179.2 in
WHEELBASE	.....103.5 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....GT roadster .....37.7 ft.....GT C roadster .....37.6 ft
WEIGHT	.....GT roadster .....3683 lb.....GT C roadster .....3825 lb
POWER-TO-WEIGHT	.....GT roadster .....7.85.....GT C roadster .....6.95
FUEL CAPACITY	.....17.2 gal
MPG (early Euro spec and Euro test figures):	
(urban/ex/comb)	.....GT roadster .....19/30/25±
(urban/ex/comb)	.....GT C roadster .....16/26/21±

INCLUDES: Nappa leather interior w waterfall diamond stitching. AMG Performance seats available w Airscarf neck-level heating and seat climate control (or incl w standard-fit AMG sport seats). AMG Track Pace app and COMAND system with stats and social media connex; audio w external coupled subwoofer using entire interior as a woofer via aperture in right rear wheel arch connected to bodyshell.

GT C ADDS: Active rear-wheel steering, electronic limited-slip rear differential; AMG Ride Control sport suspension w adaptive damping; 2.2" wider rear fenders, wider track, more traction; larger compound front brake discs; enhanced interior with Nappa leather, AMG nappa leather performance wheel, Dinamica microfiber, embossed console emblem, AMG instrument cluster with red highlights and speedo to 220 mph; additional Race mode; AMG performance exhaust.

PRICINGT.B.D.
(Note: Mercedes-AMG GT S Coupe base\$131,200)



trolled on the GT C Roadster) with active rear-wheel steering to boost the car's catlike grip in the twisties. The body is reinforced and includes a behind-the-seats crossmember for rollover protection. Rear deck lid material is manufactured with a lightweight combination of sheet molding compound (SMC) and carbon fiber, the first such use in a production vehicle. The GT Roadster's motorsports-derived suspension adds AMG Ride Control adaptive damping suspension on the GT C Roadster.

The soft top is a three-layer build, providing a quiet top-up cockpit, and its structure is a lightweight magnesium-steel-aluminum build that retains the car's low center of gravity. Top up or down—done with a pushbutton in 11 seconds either way, up to 31 mph—the Burmeister surround sound audio system (standard on GT C) is powerful and clear, using the bodyshell as a woofer that fills the cabin. And top up or down, the car's AMG Performance exhaust note—tuned to your selected drive mode and/or infinitely variable through its own settings—rolls through your body from your core to the grin on your face.

Under the hood is the GT Roadster's heart: a handcrafted 4.0-liter V8 biturbo, which has its two turbochargers not outside the cylinder banks, but rather in the V between them, delivering instantaneous response and lower emissions via optimum air flow to close-coupled catalytic converters. The engine in the GT C Roadster has been uptuned for an additional 81 horsepower.

These horses run through a seven-speed dual clutch transaxle with a high first gear and lower top gear, providing powerful acceleration and quick response to high-speed maneuvers. There are comfort, sport and sport-plus drive modes, as well as an individual program setting.

We tended to stay in sport-plus during our romp to Prescott, Jerome, Cottonwood and Sedona, because, well, sport. Power was always fully and evenly distributed, and while pushing the performance envelope considerably, it's easy to tell there is still as much headroom as you could ever want.

As part of the brand shift, fully nine vehicles now comprise a Mercedes-AMG 43 family, and all nine were also here for the GT Roadster launch event. For about a two-hour spin through Tonto National Forest to Saguaro Lake on our last morning, we grabbed the Mercedes-AMG C43 Cabriolet. It was a good coda to the greater message: AMG as a sub-brand is coming on strong. ■

