



# Power Houses

## The shared philosophy of IWC and Mercedes-AMG

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⌚ Beneath the bonnet of a Mercedes-AMG lies a machine constructed with utmost precision, quality control and, above all, pride. The same applies to the machine ticking away beneath the 'bonnet' of an IWC watch. The Schaffhausen brand's revived Ingenieur models reflect these shared values faithfully, in a car-watch partnership focusing on the beauty within. As *QP* discovered on a visit to the quietly efficient manufactures of both these 'engineer's brands', it is a truly Germanic affair.

The new Mercedes-AMG CLS 55 features a completely redesigned AMG instrument cluster, designed in line with IWC's Ingenieur. The typographical style, titanium shade of the watchcase and black dial are repeated in the clock, speedometer and tachometer.



(Above) The Pellaton winding system, named after the Technical Director hired in 1944 to introduce automatic winding to IWC watches. A cam attached to the rotor moves a rocking bar back and forth, moving the winding ratchet step-by-step.

(Right) The new calibre 80110 driving the Ingenieur Automatics. A special feature is the shock-absorbing system of the winding rotor, half-visible here at '3 o'clock' - a solid coil screwed-down and attached to the rotor axis.

It is said that the area around the quiet village of Affalterbach has one of the highest proportions of millionaires in Germany. Given that Germany has around 5 million registered unemployed and a prevailing culture of thrift and envy, my first reason is that they have come here to hide.

However, on a cold grey winter day, snow coating everything in a bleak antiseptic white, it is hard to imagine a more unlikely and boring place. Then as we pull up outside a new hi-tech, albeit battleship grey, building, I come up with a second reason: Affalterbach is the home of AMG, the elite brand within a brand of Mercedes.

Founded in 1967 by two Mercedes employees who, in their leisure time, worked on engines in the basement of a family home, AMG was at first in the business of tuning engines for racing.

Visitors are left in no doubt as to its motorsport heritage: one wall of the atrium is covered by giant canvas of a 1971 280 SE, with a 300 SEL 6.8 litre engine on which AMG had breathed, competing in an endurance race at Spa. It came first in its class, second overall and established AMG as a serious player.

Today, AMG builds its own engines, develops complete car variants, axles, brakes, powertrains, exhaust systems and even dashboard fascia... leaving the mother company to supply the bodies. It is in effect another car brand entirely. When you buy an AMG, you are purchasing a unique luxury product that looks pretty much like any other Mercedes, except that it goes faster. Much, much faster. An AMG version of a standard Mercedes model will as likely as not deliver half as much horsepower again. In some cases the power will be

upped by a staggering 80%. I reckon that one good reason there are so many millionaires in this part of Germany is so they can be near where their six-litre V12 twin-turbo-engined sportscars are built.

### Two great marques

The reason that I find myself in AMG-land is the recent co-branding deal struck between IWC and the elite German carmaker. The relaunch of Gérald Genta's classic 1976 design for the shock resistant and anti-magnetic IWC Ingenieur (originally launched 50 years ago), has been closely linked to activity at AMG. There was an extreme driving event earlier this year in Lapland to show that AMGs and IWCs would work in inhospitable temperatures and there is a limited IWC edition of AMG's CLS (the oxymoronic-sounding Coupé Limousine). The initial temptation is to view it as yet another watch-car partnership. There

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have been car watches before and IWC even made some under the Porsche Design label (as did Panerai, under the AMG label). However, a new style of automotive and horological partnership was forged just 10 years ago by Gino Macaluso of Girard-Perregaux, with the line of watches he made for Ferrari, which went beyond mere badge engineering.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, a steady stream of such associations has been announced. Indeed, such is the number of serious watch brands now associated with car manufacturers that I am no longer tempted to view this as a trend; rather as a mainstream part of branding strategy - an accepted way of selling more watches and allowing both the motoring and timekeeping sides of the partnership to enjoy the benefits of cross-marketing. It also allows marketing managers to prattle on about shared values of performance, attention to detail, craftsmanship, tradition or ingenuity; depending on the desired spin. However Mario Spitzner, Director of Branding, Marketing and Sales at AMG, is much more fun than his title would imply.

### One man, one engine

Spitzner has been with AMG for 16 years. When he joined, there were 100 employees assembling 200 engines. Last year, AMG sold around 20,000 cars. However, Spitzner displays none of that self-satisfied smugness one might expect from a 'brand builder' who has helped a small specialist engineering company grow 100-fold. Instead he defers to the engineers.



The signature plate on all completed AMG engines is a source of great pride to the engineer involved, and reinforces the 'one man, one engine' ethos.

AMG operates a 'one man, one engine' approach. Each man who has built an engine then signs his work - a plate with his signature is attached to the finished work. "The engine plate is a big thing for them," explains Spitzner. "It brings pride and motivation and often we get calls, letters and emails from customers who can't quite make out the name of the engineer on the plate to thank him personally because he is so happy with the car. They get gifts from customers around the world. *They* are the stars of AMG."

Although every traffic-lights boy racer and Grand Prix fan knows how fast an AMG can go, respect for the brand soars once you see how they are put together. Touring the AMG works, the similarities with a watch manufacture are uncanny. For a start, the building is on a human scale. Smallish rooms in which men work in much quieter, calmer surroundings than I have yet encountered in a car factory. To follow an engine on its journey towards completion is rather like following a movement throughout its stages of assembly and fine adjustment. As Spitzner says, "If these guys were under true pressure, then that is when mistakes might happen." A philosophy with which many watchmakers would concur.

Even the racks of gleaming components - experts scrutinising them for the smallest blemish and rejecting those not up to standard - puts one in mind of a watch factory. The moving parts of, say, the specially developed supercharger are separated by mere



(Above) The men behind the partnership: AMG's Mario Spitzner and IWC CEO Georges Kern, on the shop floor.

(Below) The new Mercedes-AMG CLS 55 'IWC Ingenieur' - an exclusive model made in co-operation with IWC, featuring a dark titanium grey paint job on exterior decorative elements that match the Ingenieur watchcase. Only 55 units of the 5.5-litre supercharged V8 car will be produced.



even the most hardened fan of the Schaffhausen watches might admit that such testing would do more harm than good to the elegant design of Gérald Genta and the engineering heritage of Herr Pellaton.

### Across the border

Hot-testing aside, Spitzner is keen to point out the many similarities he sees between the two marques and he is adamant that there is more to the partnership than 'just another car watch'. The two companies are less than three hours apart (two in an AMG), they share a common Germanic attention to detail, and engineering is high on the list of priorities of both. "I have always loved IWC," he says gesturing to the Big Pilot on his wrist, just in case the horological behemoth had somehow escaped my attention.

"As a brand, it is very purist, very technical and it has substance. That is what I like about IWC: there is substance within the products. All AMG cars are tested for high speed. A CLS will do 200 mph, with real sports-car performance and you can drive it every day. The same applies to an IWC; it is capable of far more than many wearers demand of it."

In fact, Spitzner seems rather annoyed that it has taken until 2005 for the two brands to come together. "About six or seven years ago we conducted a study and IWC emerged as the obvious choice for a partner in the field of watches. However, at the time, it was under different ownership and it is only since IWC's acquisition by the Richemont Group that we have been able to progress the idea."

hundredths of a millimetre and would be as susceptible to a piece of dust or grit as the finest manufacture movement.

Of course, some aspects of life at AMG cannot be likened to the world of *haute horlogerie*. Take the hot testing for example. While I was there, I saw an engine tested at full revs - pipes glowed molten, as orange and blue flames of 1,000°C spewed from the exhaust. Say what you like about the ruggedly constructed anti-shock and anti-magnetic Ingenieur -

After my meeting with Herr Spitzner, it was time to travel to Schaffhausen to see the IWC side of the partnership, using an AMG of course: the mighty SL. What I like about this car is that you get so much at low revs - it does not come up with that banshee-like wail of a high-revving Italian. The effect is more like an express train gathering momentum until it is unstoppable. Except in this case, AMG's huge brakes ensure that the car stops just as well as it starts. It thunders along the autobahn, insatiably consuming the kilometres and shrinking the distance between not just towns, but countries. It is a relaxed way to travel, surefooted in almost any climatic conditions.

I arrive at the border within 90 minutes and wait another 10 or 15 for Alain Zimmermann, IWC's Marketing Director, to catch up in his Audi.

I arrive outside the IWC building in the midst of a hailstorm. I open the door and my lap fills with icy ball-bearings. Yet in spite of the unspeakable weather a small knot of spectators gathers as I berth the purring supercar outside the factory. I gather that nothing much happens in Schaffhausen and the arrival of a fast car is an event that might even make the late edition of the evening paper. It would be a slight exaggeration to say that I am

hoisted aloft by a jubilant crowd and carried through the streets of this riparian town, but Georges Kern rushes spontaneously from his office to clasp me to his breast in a manly greeting while congratulating me on making the journey from Affalterbach so rapidly.

The sad thing is that I am unlikely ever to own an AMG. However, I do hope to take delivery of an Ingenieur. As soon as I saw early prototypes of this stunning watch last year, I placed an order. It is the combination of stunning design and engineering heritage that makes it just as attractive as an AMG, but rather more affordable. ○

(Left) The AMG editions of IWC's new Ingenieur collection, cased in titanium rather than stainless steel. Left to right: Chronograph AMG soft strap (£3,800) and Automatic AMG with titanium bracelet (£4,100).

(Right) Exploded diagram of the Ingenieur's anti-magnetic soft iron cage. The new calibre 80110 is screened up to 80,000 ampere/metre. In 1989, a world record was set by IWC at 500,000 A/m: an Ingenieur with an escapement entirely constructed of paramagnetic material.



Further information: IWC UK, Tel: 020 7408 5777, www.iwc.ch