



Geoff Day (MBUSA Corp. Comm. Gen. Mgr.) remarks for 2006 Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance
Revised version submitted by Jim Koses March 8, 2006

(Show Mercedes-Benz "The Race" TV spot)

(Geoff introduced by Bill Warner?)

I. Greeting

Good evening. I hope you enjoyed that ... it's one of our newest television spots for Mercedes-Benz ... we call it "The Race." I think its historic imagery truly captures the mood for this weekend's activities.

So much of our history – and automobile history in general – is tied directly to motorsports. The auto industry is, after all, really one big race. And Amelia Island has always done an outstanding job of conveying that message. This year's program is of course no exception.

It is a genuine pleasure for me to be back again for the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance.

Along with the Ritz Carlton, Mercedes-Benz is a proud founding sponsor of the Concours, and we are thrilled to be associated with such an important and unique event.

To show our pride, we brought along one of the next classics from Mercedes-Benz ... the all-new ninth-generation S-Class for 2007.

With each new S-Class generation, Mercedes-Benz has raised the standards by which premium luxury automobiles are judged. To paraphrase from automotive history: just ask the lucky man or woman who drives one.

In a very short time, Amelia Island established itself as one of the country's premiere concours events. That's a reflection of the creativity and tireless enthusiasm of Bill Warner and his staff. Thank you, Bill, and everyone else who makes the Amelia Island concours one of the best.

Of course, Amelia Island wouldn't have become such a success if it weren't so enjoyable. Some classic automobile events seem to be celebrations of themselves. Amelia Island is a celebration of the car.

Usually, when you say a concours has "something for everyone," it really means they let anybody in. At Amelia Island, it truly means the best-of-the-best of every type of car.

What other concours has honored historic Alfa Romeo racecars and the Chevy small block ... at the same event?

What other concours can honor a NASCAR champion and present the "Best of Show" to a 1931 Bugatti ... at the same event?

All that, and Seinfeld, too!

Amelia Island is truly a car enthusiast's paradise. The "Field of Dreams" could not be more aptly named.

Auto history is filled with interesting operators and personalities crossing paths, and the Amelia Island Concours brings that to life for thousands of participants and visitors.

The location doesn't hurt, either.

And let's not forget about generosity. As I'm sure you know, the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance Foundation donates a portion of the event's proceeds to Community Hospice of Northeast Florida ... well over one million dollars since 1996.

II. Acknowledgements

Another key to Amelia Island's success is that it celebrates all types of motor racing. Not just for the beautiful historic racecars, but also for the contributions to technology – and the pure enjoyment of it all.

Race fans will definitely enjoy this year's program. First, join me in welcoming legendary racers from the amazing Can-Am series.

Forty years ago, the Can-Am unleashed racecars with astounding performance and unique technologies. What's not to love about a racing series with unrestricted displacement and horsepower? ...

... A series that even allowed Jim Hall to field a Chaparral that used a snowmobile-powered vacuum to suck the car to the track?

Ah yes, those were the days.

And once again, this year's Honorary Chairman comes from motorsports. I'm pleased to welcome one of America's true racing heroes – Mr. Johnny Rutherford.

Johnny won the Indy 500 three times – one of the few drivers to do so.

Johnny, you've got us beat by one. We won at The Brickyard twice: first in 1915 with Ralph DePalma driving a year-old Mercedes Grand Prix car that limped over the finish line with a broken connecting rod. I think there might be special door prizes for anyone here who saw that race.

We had to wait 79 years for Al Unser Jr. to deliver our second Indy 500 victory. And in 2001, Mika Hakkinen won the U.S. Grand Prix at Indy for Mercedes-Benz.

So let's call it two and a half for Mercedes.

III. Acknowledge Stanley as featured marque, Stanley vs. Benz for record

The Amelia Island Concours has developed a penchant for intrigue and diversity, and this year is no exception.

Steam enthusiasts have waited a long time for a world-class event like this to honor the cars and speed records of the Stanley Motor Carriage Company. Their wait is over.

And see? That's what makes Amelia Island so unique. What other event gives you the roar of a twelve-hundred horsepower Can Am racer and the chuffing and puffing of a Stanley Steamer?

As I mentioned, auto history is full of interesting paths crossing... and the paths of Mercedes, Benz and Stanley crossed not far from here at Ormond Beach -- the "Birthplace of Speed."

It was at Ormond that the world's budding carmakers began the time-honored one-upmanship ritual of the land speed record.

Some of the earliest records went to Stanley steam cars. In 1905, a home-made Stanley-powered car called the “Wogglebug” set a flying-mile record of 94.73 mph. But, just minutes later, that record fell to a gas-powered Napier. And just minutes after that, a Mercedes broke the record at just under 110 miles per hour. But too bad for us, because that Mercedes also broke the rules. It was over the weight limit, so no record for us that day.

But our duel with Stanley would continue.

This past January, Stanley buffs marked the centennial of one of auto history’s most significant land speed records ... a record we are celebrating at this concours, as well.

In January 1906, Fred Marriot drove the Stanley Rocket to a record at just over 127 miles per hour. That was an absolute record for all types of propulsion, and it would stand for four years.

And talk about interesting personalities. The great Barney Oldfield broke the Stanley’s record by less than four miles per hour in 1910. He was driving a 21.5-liter monster called the Lightning Benz, later known as the Blitzen Benz. Its pistons were more than seven inches across. Engineered like no other car in the world, even then!

Marriot was nearly killed when he tried to break the Benz’s record. The Rocket lived up to its name, launching into the air and smashing to the ground.

But the Stanley Rocket still holds the longest-standing, officially recognized land speed record for a steam car ... although I think Jay Leno has set some records for Stanley steamers on the Los Angeles freeways.

The Stanley Rocket replica is on display this weekend. Some of you may have been lucky enough to see it drive down Ormond Beach this past January to mark the centennial. Maybe we'll bring our Blitzen Benz to Ormond in 2010.

IV. Gas vs. steam vs. electric, the early years of “alternate power”

Those historic record runs at Ormond Beach remind us that, the early years of the automobile were also a search for the optimal power source.

The 1886 Benz three-wheeler wasn't just the first internal-combustion car. It was also one of the first alternate fuel vehicles ... Karl Benz was trying to replace hay with gasoline. The horse, as you know, is not a zero-emissions power source.

But there was a lot of resistance to “infernal” combustion, as some called it. Steamers and electrics were the early favorites. Those technologies had much more development and were more familiar.

At the turn of the century, steamers led the market in America, with electrics right behind – and gasoline a distant third. Electrics were simple and quiet, and the short range was enough for urban owners. You could even hail a clean, quiet electric taxi in New York City. Imagine that.

And then Charles Kettering pulled the plug, so to speak. Steamers were already waning, and his gasoline engine self starter sealed the fate for electrics in 1912.

But perhaps there's more to it. Even then, car enthusiasts preferred their fast machines to make big, fast noises. Electrics and steamers were just too quiet!

V. Transition to the main theme: today's quest for optimal alternate power

We can always count on history to repeat itself. Today, the auto industry is going through an historic transition. We are racing to meet new energy and environmental challenges. And so this year's concours theme of "alternate power" could not have been-better timed.

Even though internal combustion won the race a century ago, the quest for alternatives never really stopped. At tomorrow's "Parade of Power," we will see more than 120 years of interesting and unique alternate-power vehicles – including solar and even wind.

Now there's an idea ... perhaps if we could just find a way to harness some of the hot air in the car business, we would have our alternate power source!

But seriously, the Parade of Power reminds us there are always many approaches to solving a challenge.

The Benz three-wheeler replica will lead the pack, representing the beginning. At the end is a car that represents the beginning of a new automotive age -- the Mercedes-Benz F-Cell fuel cell vehicle.

And there are plenty of amazing things in between. From the Chrysler side of our family, you'll see the 1963 Turbine car. It was part of a test fleet of 50 cars lent to the public for three years to see how turbines would work in everyday driving. It was a serious and mammoth effort, with over a million miles logged.

Turbines were not the answer. Some 40 years later, Mercedes-Benz is at that same stage with the power source that carmakers agree will be the future – fuel cells. We have leased a fleet of our F-Cell fuel cell vehicles to public and corporate fleets to test real-world performance and durability. The F-Cell car that we brought to Amelia Island is on lease to Wayne State University in Detroit, where it is used as a campus patrol vehicle.

Fuel cells essentially make water from hydrogen and oxygen in a process that produces electricity. The main emission is water.

So you see, electrics are poised to make a dramatic comeback – but this time generating their own power instead of being limited by batteries. However, I would not expect a resurgence for steam cars – not with bottled water more expensive than gasoline.

Mercedes-Benz has been a leader in fuel cell development for over a decade. Our first fuel cell vehicle was a large delivery van packed with machinery. Two years ago, our NECAR 5 became the first fuel-cell vehicle to complete a coast-to-coast trip.

Today, our F-Cell achieves the packaging needed for a production car.

Fuel cell cars are coming ... soon. But before they reach showrooms, Mercedes-Benz is introducing vehicles that use another type of “alternate” fuel, one that delivers outstanding performance and efficiency ... with new technology for safeguarding the environment.

Next fall, we will bring our BLUETEC diesel technology to America. Using low-sulfur diesel fuel, the BLUETEC diesel vehicles will meet emissions standards in all 50 states. This is a tremendous breakthrough.

Performance will exceed similar gasoline vehicles, but with significantly lower fuel consumption.

However, I cannot say that the BLUETEC diesels will smoke the competition – because there will be no smoke at all, and very little competition at first.

VI. Wrap up

In another hundred years, perhaps the Amelia Island Concours will stage another Parade of Power ... it could begin with a BLUETEC diesel, with an F-Cell behind it. And maybe “Best of Show” will go to a fuel cell powered Mercedes SL!

Thank you.

