

Mercedes-Benz Magazine

> The new SL proves less can be more



Sportier, lighter and more efficient than the model it replaces, the new Mercedes-Benz SL takes the dynamic sports car dynasty into a sixth generation and an exciting new future.

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> Exhibition with a cutting edge



Many of the world's finest diamonds are to be placed on public display at Buckingham Palace this summer as part of a sparkling exhibition celebrating Her Majesty The Queen's 60-year reign.

> [Find out more](#)

> To protect and serve



For an increasing number of high-profile celebrities and top executives around the world, dogs are not just pets, they are highly-prized personal protectors.

> [Find out more](#)

> New star on the automotive landscape



Setting trends instead of following them; combining technology and design to satisfy needs long before they're even expressed. Those are the hallmarks of true creative genius, and the criteria Mercedes-Benz has satisfied in a single, extraordinary creation – the new A-Class.

> [Find out more](#)

> Drive of your life



So you want to be a racing driver? But if the opportunity came to test yourself on the track in one of today's most successful high performance race cars, how good would you be?

> [Find out more](#)

> Laureus world sports awards



Ahead of a significant sporting summer, many of sport's greats gathered in London to celebrate this year's Laureus award-winners. This year's Laureus World Sports Awards was hosted in London with a star-studded ceremony at Westminster City Hall.

> [Find out more](#)

> Cool running



While the spacious new B-Class Sports Tourer offers superb new levels of performance and agility, it was designed with more than just the driver in mind.

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> Royal appointment



In Diamond Jubilee year, what better way to celebrate the Queen's 86th birthday, on Saturday April 21st, than an evening of musical pomp and majesty with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra?

> [Find out more](#)

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To protect and serve

For an increasing number of high-profile celebrities and top executives around the world, dogs are not just pets, they are highly-prized personal protectors. But, as with their human security counterparts, special qualities, intensive training and the ability to balance power with control is everything.

Canine elite

We leave London before dawn and follow the M4 to its penultimate junction some 200 miles later, high in the South Wales valleys. Our destination, A1K9, is not your average dog training centre. While “dog obedience” courses are offered, its core business is the highly specialised training of bespoke personal protection dogs.

The only things that the company's MD Charles Wall loves as much as his dogs are his vehicles. Pulling up outside the main offices we slot our Mercedes G 350 between a smart and a BRABUS styled Vito Dualiner. Being a bit of a van geek, I take a peek inside. A van can tell you a lot about someone and this one tells me two things. Firstly, that inside, Wall has a pair of dogs clearly performing sentry duty, and secondly, judging by their vicious sounding growls and snarls, they are not about to welcome strangers. I back off.

Minutes later, over a cup of tea indoors, Wall is explaining more about his business when a gorgeous Dutch Herder trots in. The animal tenses fractionally as it spies photographer Richie Hopson and myself and Wall casually drops the word “friends” as he greets the animal. The dog looks at me quizzically, ambles across, licks my hand and then potters over to Hopson indicating it would like its stomach tickled.

“This was one of the pair in the van you feared might rip you limb from limb two minutes ago,” says Wall, reading the surprise on my face. The scenario encapsulates in a nutshell what Wall and his team at A1K9 do. Their dogs are impeccable family pets on the one hand, very serious protection animals on the other.

“In the main our customers are medium-to highnet-worth individuals,” Wall explains, which is understandable when dogs can cost anything from £6,000 to £30,000. “These are folks who are concerned, for whatever reason, that they, their families or their property may be targeted.”

Well, their home security systems could always be beefed up, I suggest. “Alarms are unreliable,” says Wall, “and quite easy to bypass. Alarms, gates and cameras also need installing, which means someone knows how they work, information that could be sold to the highest bidder. These products alert you when people are breaking in but they don't stop them. A dog can alert you and detain an intruder if required.”

But the dog must be as much a pet as a protector, which begs the question; can a dog really be a deterrent one minute, yet happily play with the kids the next? “It's like my SL 65,” Wall tells me. “Just because it has 600 hp doesn't mean it has to do 200 mph everywhere. We're very careful with the dogs we select. We pick them for



> [The G-Class](#)
View the G-Class



> [The Vito Dualiner](#)
View the Vito Dualiner

their abilities and, using our unique methods, we teach them to defend when they need to. Training lasts a year or more, and is still ongoing after that until the dogs are matched to a customer. If the customer has specific requirements – for example we've just supplied dogs to two families who have autistic children – we tailor the training accordingly."

Even when the client collects their dog, the process continues with a minimum two-day handover period. The real proof of the pudding is the company's 16-year history supplying dogs to wealthy and influential people worldwide (there are currently A1K9 dogs in 31 countries around the globe), any one of whom could no doubt put Wall out of business in a heartbeat should one of his animals so much as put a claw out of place. Instead, business has never been brisker and many existing clients, plenty with young families, are now requesting second dogs.

Company director Nigel Batt bought his dog a couple of years ago after being spooked by an armed robbery. "The police helicopter hovering above my house as the police cars flooded the lane outside was the defining moment," he explains. "I'd spent two years looking for my house, it was perfect, but I wasn't comfortable there after that. I was apprehensive about a dog at first, but it has transformed things for me. I have absolute trust in him."

Bite suit

We head out to one of the training fields where Wall puts a couple of dogs through their paces, leaping gates, crossing bridges and launching themselves athletically over barrels. Then I'm asked to don the bite suit, a protective outfit of heavy hessian featuring enough padding to stop a truck, that's used to hone the dog's attack and release skills. It's the "release" part that many people forget, Wall reassures. Without an "off" switch to complement the "on", a protection dog would constitute more risks than rewards.

The suit is as hot as Hades, but as Wall releases Lana to come rocketing towards me all teeth and honed aggression I wouldn't swap it for all the Armani suits in Christendom. The hit, as the 30-kilo canine cannons into me is fearsome, and quite apart from being knocked sideways, it's obvious immediately that without Lana's permission I'm not going anywhere. When Wall calls her off she lets go instantly, returning swiftly to his side as though nothing had ever happened.

Power, control, agility, civility, all in one package. Very impressive indeed.

*Words: Warren Pole
Photos: Richie Hopson*

► a1k9.co.uk

