

**Team(s) 2019:**

MDC-Sports (#4)

Hofer-Racing (#10)

Toksport WRT (#15)

SPS automotive performance (#16)

IDEC SPORT RACING (#17)

CP Racing (#85)

**Technical specifications****Engine:** V8, twin-turbo, 6,208cc**Power:** 508hp**Torque:** TBC**Transmission:** Six-speed sequential manual**Suspension:** Double wishbones, PKM**Brakes:** 390mm (front), 355mm (rear),

AP Racing and Brembo

**Wheels:** 18in (front and rear)**Tyres:** TBC**Weight:** 1,300kg

It was only a matter of time before we descended beneath the carbon fibre engine cover of the three-pointed star in our 'On the grid' series. Mercedes-AMG after all has been a staple of the 24H SERIES since almost the turn of the decade.

The now departed SLS AMG GT3 has three wins to its name at the Hankook 24H DUBAI, collected 10 outright podiums at the event from a possible 18, and remains to this day the only GT car to lockout the Dubai podium. On top of that, the SLS claimed seven more overall wins in the 24H SERIES during its six-year tenure, a whopping 21 outright top three finishes, and took RAM Racing and Hofer-Racing to A6-class championships in '15 and '16 respectively. We haven't even mentioned wins at the Nürburgring 24 Hours, Spa 24 Hours, and Bathurst 12 Hours as part of Mercedes' 2013 'Grand Slam'.

A tough act to follow, but the SLS' replacement – the AMG GT3 – has similarly impressed since its arrival in 2016. Of the 14 races completed in the 24H SERIES seasons from '17 to '18, Affalterbach's newboy finished all but one on the outright podium (Paul Ricard '17 still delivered an A6-Am class win). Victory at Dubai last year means Mercedes is just one short of equalling Porsche's event record. And the AMG's pace was such last year that PROsport Performance swept to both the European Championship and the Championship of the Continents in its maiden campaign with the three-pointed star. Chalk up another Nürburgring win in 2016 too.

If IDEC Group President, and IDEC SPORT RACING team principal, Patrice Lafargue has hopes of one day clinching the 24H SERIES crown for his beloved French outfit, he'd struggle to find a better charger to do so. It's the reason the team made the jump to AMG from Porsche in the first place.

# On the grid with... Mercedes-AMG GT3

Few manufacturers can boast a pedigree in the 24H SERIES like Mercedes-AMG, but could another title be on the cards? We ask IDEC SPORT RACING team owner Patrice Lafargue.



*“The Porsche is a very good car,”* explains Patrice, who began his racing career in the FFSA in 2006 and helped Oak Racing secure the LMP2-class Intercontinental Le Mans Cup in 2010. *“We won the [24H SERIES] championship in the 997 category in 2015, but we wanted to move up to the A6 category. And the Mercedes was the obvious choice.*

*“It’s true that the Porsche was more or less the emblem for Ruffier Racing”* – the team Patrice took over from namesake Jean-Claude in 2015 – *“but it was important for us to develop our own way of doing things, even if Jean-Claude still watches closely what is going on! We could have got any GT3, but we really felt the magnificent AMG GT was the way to go.”*

Unveiled at the Geneva Motor Show in 2015 just a few days before the road-going ‘GT’ on which it was based also hit the stage, Mercedes’

new AMG GT3 may share a lineage with its successful predecessor, but, oddly, little else. The new look, one “primed for attack”, was, if anything, even wider than the already broad-shouldered SLS AMG GT3, bringing with it more cavernous air intakes, a more convex ‘shark nose’, and a re-styled carbon fibre front splitter, all designed to work in tandem with a whopping rear diffuser and enormous rear aerofoil to maximise aerodynamic efficiency and produce maximum downforce.

At its base is the same aluminium spaceframe as the road-going GT, albeit one significantly more rigid and lighter than the outgoing SLS. Quite a lot lighter in fact. Throw in a predominantly carbon fibre body – including doors, ‘gaping mouth’ bonnet, front wings, side walls and boot lid – and the new homologated AMG GT3 weighs a stonking 240kg less than its 1,540kg roadgoing alter-ego, and almost 100 kilos fewer than the SLS AMG GT3 it replaces. ➔

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Form fundamentally follows function, and Mercedes is adamant that the AMG GT3 “avoids any sign of unnecessary showmanship.” That the vertical chrome strips in the new ‘Panamericana’ front grille is an homage to the classic 300 SL that won Mexico’s border-to-border road-rally endurance race in 1952 is neither here nor there.

Oddly, one component that did survive the jump twist the SLS and its successor was the naturally aspirated 6.2-litre V8, Mercedes having opted against running its new, ‘hot inside V’ 4-litre twin-turbocharged V8 in competition. The biturbo engine is more than capable – the more compact unit with internally mounted turbochargers produced 510hp in the top spec GT S from the get-go – but the decision was purely one of pragmatism from Mercedes’ top cats. The established 6,208cc naturally aspirated unit after all offers lower running costs, longer service intervals and proven reliability for AMG’s customers. With no need for an oil sump (the V8 is dry sump lubricated), it could even be fitted lower and well behind the front axle. There’s that consideration for the centre of gravity again.

“The Mercedes is an exceptional machine,” Patrice continues. “She is very fast, so you need to remain focused behind the wheel. But she is still very composed given the performance levels she achieves.”

All looked good on paper, and after intensive testing throughout 2015, the new Mercedes-AMG GT3 was ready for its competitive debut at the 2016 Hankook 24H DUBAI. Which Audi dominated. Still, from there, the new AMG GT3 finished on the podium in its second race – round eight of the 2016 VLN at the Nürburgring – before claiming the first podium of its 24H SERIES tenure at Paul Ricard. Come Dubai 2018, AMG was the benchmark once again, Hofer-Racing having claimed four class wins en-route to the outright 2017 title and Black Falcon sealing its fourth collaborative win at the Hankook 24H DUBAI to kick off the 2018 season. Mercedes’ new “challenger for victories” had shown its cards.

And what of IDEC SPORT RACING, a customer mainstay of Mercedes-AMG since 2016? Well, having wrapped up the 997-class title in 2015 as ‘Ruffier Racing’ (in the team’s debut 24H SERIES campaign no less), the rebranded IDEC SPORT RACING began its maiden season with the

Mercedes SLS AMG GT3 in 2016, the team taking its first A6-Am class win in only its second start. Incredibly, father and son Patrice and Paul Lafargue, Gabriel Abergel and Sacha Bottemanne took the car’s first A6-Am class win in only its second start.

“Our way of thinking about motor racing is that enjoying ourselves is our prime concern. That is a key principle for IDEC SPORT. But we work seriously too, and if we don’t do anything silly, we can get some good results. In 2016, the planets came into alignment!”

Things haven’t quite gone to plan for the IDEC SPORT RACING Mercedes in 2019 so far, unfortunately. At the Hankook 12H MUGELLO, the #17 AMG GT3 was felled in its first race of the season with clutch issues, while a broken ABS block and damaged suspension eliminated the Mercedes from a podium-contending fight at Spa-Francorchamps. Having missed Brno altogether, points on the board is surely a must at Portimão.

“Unfortunately we’ve experienced a few technical problems at the start of the season, so we weren’t able to fight with the leading cars. But in terms of performance, I think we have the same pace as the best cars.

“In January, we were clearly aiming for the overall podium. That was a reasonable goal, given our performances in 2018” – IDEC took outright podium spots at Imola and Barcelona en-route to 9th in the A6 class – “But after the first two races this year, we can see that it is going to be a bit more complicated. We’ll be thinking about the future and see what options we can consider.

“In a championship like the 24H SERIES, there are no secrets to running at the front. It’s down to hard work paying off. But even if you work hard, you can’t be certain to be up amongst the leaders. We’re lucky to have a very competent team, which I trust, and that helps a lot. It’s up to us to avoid making any silly mistakes out on the track.

“Things happen in a race. You can be lucky and you can be unlucky, and you can’t really explain either. We just have to try to overcome the bad luck as best we can. Let’s keep our fingers crossed that race wins will happen again this season.”

### Notable results (general)

#### 2018, November

1st 24H GT SERIES Championship of the Continents – Overall Teams’ and Drivers’  
#85 PROsport Performance (Charles Putman / Charles Espenlaub / Joe Foster)

#### 2018, October

1st 24H GT SERIES European Championship – Overall Teams’ and Drivers’  
#85 PROsport Performance (Charles Putman / Charles Espenlaub / Joe Foster)

#### 2018, January

1st outright 24H GT SERIES, Hankook 24H DUBAI  
#2 Black Falcon (Yelmer Buurman / Abdulaziz al Faisal / Hubert Haupt / Gabriele Piana)

### Notable results (IDEC SPORT RACING only)

#### 2017, March

1st outright 24H GT SERIES podium, Hankook 12H MUGELLO  
(Patrice Lafargue / Paul Lafargue / Dimitri Enjalbert)

#### 2016, March

1st A6-Am class win, Hankook 12H MUGELLO  
(Patrice Lafargue / Gabriel Abergel / Sacha Bottemanne)



➔ Full interview available on [24series.com/news](https://www.24series.com/news)