

IN GERMANY – VISITING THE MERCEDES-BENZ SUBSIDIARY OF THE LARGE CAR MANUFACTURER DAIMLER AG

The undersigned took an interesting trip to the Federal Republic of Germany in September 2019: as a member of Mercedes-Benz (MB) Club Estonia, I had an opportunity to visit on 25–28 September 2019 the Mercedes-Benz plants and museums and also other technology sites/enterprises of the German company, global large car manufacturer Daimler AG. The trip was organised by Mercedes Benz Club Estonia and the group consisted of 23 members (five of them with their own three cars).

In the early morning of 25 September we gathered at the international Lennart Meri Tallinn Ülemiste Airport and a Lufthansa flight took our delegation at 6:10 from Tallinn to Frankfurt (Main). Two comfortable MB minibuses were rented there (driven by club members) and we started off towards the south, to Stuttgart, as almost all MB plants and museums and other enterprises are located mainly within a distance of about 25–40 km around Stuttgart. The visits related to our trip programme had been planned as follows:

Day 1:

Technik Museum in Sinsheim: all cars (old and new and quite new models, incl. MB models), sports cars, racing cars (Formel-1 legends, etc.), bicycles, motorcycles, aircraft (incl. the French Concorde and the Tupolev Tu-144 of the Soviet Union), military technology, some locomotives, underwater technology, etc. were represented. Production of both European and U.S. car industry was on display.

The programme included also visiting of the IMAX 3D cinema. The excellent new documentary of Apollo 11 mission (Canada, released on 01.03.2019) was shown at the time of our visit. This was the fifth manned mission (on 16–24 July 1969) of the NASA Apollo programme which performed the first manned landing on the surface of the Moon. The 40-minute movie about the preparations for the mission, the astronauts, mission, landing on the Moon and stepping on the Moon surface and activities performed there was very interesting, captivating and human.

MB Unimog Museum in Gaggenau (different construction and agricultural machines/vehicles, incl. special purpose vehicles): the display was not extensive but varied and interesting enough. A lot of new information was received.

Day 2:

The **Kienle Automobiltechnik** restoration company in Ditzingen (family company, mainly restoration of vintage MB vehicles from the first half of the 20th century): restoration and repair works are performed almost fully so-to-say manually. Restoration of vintage cars is ordered predominantly by wealthy people from the USA, Arabic countries (sultans, sheiks, etc.), Australia and the wealthier European countries. Some restored vehicles are sold at the request of their owners (for instance, during our visit to the company a restored blue MB Coupe was on sale at the price of 2 million euros!). Since the owners of the cars are predominantly wealthy people and the restoration work requires high quality and is very expensive, the staff consists of professionals of their field who are highly qualified and well paid (e.g., the rates per hour are 154–202 euros!).

MB Museum is located in the industrial city Stuttgart: in an excellent cylindrical building with the height of 34 metres (in total nine floors: 0, 1, 2–8) – seven floors of the exposition (in addition, five mezzanine floors for the collections), everything starts

from the top (a special fast lift took visitors (only up); visitors could move between floors by walking along a spiral ramp or with an ordinary lift);

The exposition of the top floor, the 8th floor, consisted of the oldest vehicles starting from 1886 (horse carriages, bicycles, boats, railway carriages, aircraft, predecessor cars, etc.). When moving down the spiral from that floor, the exposition became increasingly younger, newer and more sophisticated/modern. The museum has about 1500 items displayed, “from the land, water and air” which show the story of the development of Mercedes-Benz through the times until now!

Day 3:

MB Kundencenter plant in Sindelfingen (manufacturing of new cars, production lines, etc.): the area of the plant with its many buildings and complexes is 2.9 ha (incl. the access roads for cars, trucks and buses, about 10 km of railroads (for the transportation of raw materials, components, fuels, etc. and shipping of cars), parking and warehouse lots, testing areas (racetracks), mini green areas, etc.). The approximate number of employees is 35 000. Nine different car models are currently produced. We were transported between plant buildings in large comfortable MB buses, the production lines were shown and explained by guides from upper floor balconies. Warehouse shelves are located between production lines and both the tools and components are transported to workplaces and assembly sites by robots along special metallic/magnetic belts installed in floors. Workers change their workplace at the assembly line for several times during each shift and perform other operations (to avoid routine). All work operations are recorded on cards and all cards related to the assembly are stored for 20 years in MB archives! Robots performed many assembly operations and it was interesting to watch them. Everything we saw cannot be described in detail, however – one simply has to see it oneself! But the impressions were excellent!

MB Classic Center, the restoration workshop in Fellbach (town, city district on the border of Stuttgart), (restoration of classical vintage cars, i.e. popular MB car models produced most): the company is controlled by the management of MB plants (on the other hand, Kienle Automobiltechnik as a family business is independent of MB although they have certain cooperation, incl. through supply with original parts). It was exciting to compare and see the two companies which perform similar work!

Day 4:

With Lufthansa: **Frankfurt (Main) – Tallinn, Ülemiste**

The MB trip to Germany in September 2019 was very exciting and interesting both for the Estonian delegation and for the undersigned. New information, quality and quantity and wonderful impressions is also what you would expect from Mercedes-Benz!

September–October 2019 at Pirita-Kose in Tallinn

Sincerely, Matti Raudjärv (Member of the Mercedes-Benz Club Estonia)