

PRE PRATTLES

April 2009

ONCE AGAIN, WITH GUSTO...

At our January kickoff meeting and dinner in Batavia I proudly show of my new McClaren SLR. Yes it is a model, but it's what I can afford at this point.

Many of us wonder what is in store for our section and club in these trying economic times. It is no secret that even Mercedes sales are faltering. Last week I received a call from a Mercedes salesman from our local dealership strongly suggesting that it was time to turn in my 2004 ML350 for, perhaps, a 2009 GLK. He backed off when I indicated I was retired (no "earned" income) and was not interested in taking on a car payment, particularly in this economic downturn. This sales technique is common for dealers of the common US and Japanese marques but new, in my experience, for Mercedes Benz.

Along with Mercedes sales, club membership is suffering significantly. That effect is measure in two ways; the number of members and the number of active members. The Finger Lakes Section is enjoying relative stability in terms of the number of members but participation is falling precipitously.

So let's look at what we do know. We know that Mercedes Benz has radically changed its marketing strategy and has adjusted its product line accordingly. They have been very successfully invading the "commodities" auto market; where buyer may recognize the model, like Fusion, be oblivious that it is a Ford. In my opinion these aren't folks who will be interested in getting personally involved with a specialty car club like MBCA. So while it may be good news for Mercedes Benz it means that we have to take a fresh look at OUR marketing strategy. Perhaps Mercedes dealerships are the wrong focus.

These are just a few of my personal musings, but MBCA section presidents throughout the country are facing similar problem and drawing their own conclusions. It remains to bring these perspectives together and develop a unified, aggressive approach to revitalizing our club and its focus. You've probably heard this all before, but this time we're taking action at a special Presidents Meeting during to be held April 30th, during the Spring National Board meeting in Indianapolis. I'll be there, and I hope to carry you opinions and suggestions with me.

Meanwhile we are beginning to reap the benefits of the experience and wisdom personified in ex-officio Nation Board Secretary Roy Kuck who has agreed to apply his talents as our membership chair as well as continuing as the TriStar editor. Then there's the wonderful and experienced Judy Handzo who has taken over the dual reins as Secretary and Treasurer. We're surging forward. We need your help to make significant headway. Join us Third Thursdays (see the website or give me a call) and weigh in over a draft and a burger. We'll listen!