Mercedes-Benz or Freightliner, German built, assembled in the USA
New and exclusive tricks

Just as this issue was headed to press, we headed to South Carolina, for an in-depth look at the Daimler Trucks facility near Charleston, where Sprinter Vans are assembled for both Mercedes-Benz and Freightliner. It's an innovative plant with an innovative plan, set up to avoid huge import duties by having the trucks originally built in Düsseldorf, Germany, knocked down into separate powertrain and body packages, shipped separately, then reassembled in South Carolina. The buyer receives the original German build, at an incremental cost that's only a fraction of what full-unit import and duties would have been.

Also innovative is the Sprinter itself.

Features we had hands-on time with included factory four-wheel-drive—an electronically-controlled mechanical transfer case system that can handle the toughest construction site, backwoods terrain or snowy road—a standout among its competition as a factory-built feature.

Next is their electronically controlled and mechanically responsive Crosswind Assist tech-nology—tested against 90-to-100-mph cross-winds generated by some good ol' South Carolina and Florida swamp jet boats.

And we took these tall vans, with hundreds of pounds of high-mounted weight and outriggers for system-off demo, at high speed through very tight and sudden emergency swerves, to show off their Adaptive ESP yaw controls to their fullest.

There is a new 161-hp standard 4-cylinder turbodiesel engine and 7-speed transmission, with up to 18 percent better fuel economy (high 20s MPG), as well as a 188-hp V6 turbodiesel and 5-speed powertrain (mid 20s MPG).

The cabin is completely reworked for function and functional comfort, with advanced telematics and a variety of cargo layouts offering as much as seven feet of vertical interior space.

There is also a huge upfitters program, and several of these folks—from Airstream to more task-oriented solutions—were also on hand for demonstrations and test drives.

Check our next issue for complete details. ■