

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

VOLUME 11 NUMBER 3
MAY-JUNE 2012

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ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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COVER: A fleet of hot Volvo XC70s burns up the Apache Trail, powered by the brand's new Polestar Performance package. Photo: Joe Sage.

Photo: Greg Jarem

Photo: Joe Sage

Photo: Joe Sage

Photo: Larry Edsall

Photo: Joe Sage

Photo: Joe Sage



Spring is in the air, and summer is coming. We celebrate that inevitable fact by bringing you far afield—to the snow fields of northwestern Wyoming and to the windy and wet coast of Oregon—where we drive the complete lineup of Mercedes-Benz 4MATIC coupes and sedans, and the 2013 Ford Taurus, Flex and Mustang, respectively. These trips show us what these vehicles can do in extreme conditions, which helps to ensure they will be champions on the smooth highways of Arizona, not to mention in the occasional monsoon or blizzard we also get here. So cool off and enjoy.

We also travel to traditionally hot country—southern Nevada and central Texas. Nevada is the location for driving the potent Fiat 500 Abarth, a solidly modified performance version of the diminutive Fiat 500, and our second Las Vegas-area track introduction in the past few months. Sometimes that's just the best way to get a feel for things. Austin, Texas is the starting point for a long drive through the hill country in another Fiat-derived marvel—the new Dodge Dart, which evolves from the underpinnings of Fiat group's Alfa Romeo Giulietta, a European favorite. These two vehicles do wonders to round out the solid Chrysler Group lineup otherwise well known for its hot-selling Jeep® Grand Cherokee, law-enforcement-worthy Dodge Charger and law-bending Dodge Challenger.

We also spend several days right here in Arizona with Volvo, who wants to get one message across, which is that Volvo builds performance. Polestar, their race partner in Scandinavia for years, is now a component and aftermarket supplier more widely for the brand, and the results are about image as much as about the numbers.



We also bring you on a Route 66 journey combining Arizona's 100-year mark with Chevrolet's, in the Centennial Corvette, with **Larry Edsall**. And **Randall Bohl** takes us to the Goodguys Spring Nationals at WestWorld in Scottsdale, where he picks out a favorite.

Enjoy the ride.

Joe Sage - Publisher/ Executive Editor

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Consumers get behind the wheel of Jaguar's high-powered lineup at University of Phoenix Stadium, alongside professional race drivers

Jaguar has hit the road with its new model lineup so potential buyers can take them all for a spin. The Jaguar ALIVE Driving Experience—an 18-city US tour—pulled into Phoenix on April 13-15. The multi-day brand event was complimentary to consumers, a chance for them to experience the performance and technology of the Jaguar 2012 model year lineup. Included were the XFR sports sedan, XK, XKR-S, XJ, XJ Supercharged and XJ Supersport. World-class professional racecar drivers Davy Jones, Adam Andretti and Roberto Guerrero were seated beside participants as they drove, encouraging them to test Jaguar's performance to its limits, while teaching about safe performance driving—including handling, braking, and acceleration—on several closed driving courses. Participants received a video of their experience. In addition to the drive experience, consumers enjoyed a vehicle display of the historic Jaguar E-Type, a Jaguar technology display and a Bowers & Wilkins sound system display.

For more information on the program, which continues through fall nationwide, visit www.jaguarusa.com/JaguarALIVEDrivingExperience.



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RM LOT # 437 \$412,500

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CADILLAC ATTACKS NEW SEGMENT

New from the ground up, the Cadillac ATS starts with an all-new lightweight architecture and bodywork, which has a strong resemblance to the popular CTS. The goal is a car to compete head-to-head with cars like the BMW 3 Series and Mercedes-Benz C-Class. The rear-drive ATS sedan is built with a blend of the latest technologies and with an eye on Cadillac's continuing effort to be among the world's best driver cars. Hundreds of weight-saving techniques cut the curb weight to 3,400 pounds, the lowest in the category. The car has near-perfect 50/50 weight distribution, riding on Cadillac's first five-link independent rear suspension using lightweight, high-strength steel and a multi-link double-pivot MacPherson-strut front suspension with direct-acting stabilizer bar. ATS will have available Magnetic Ride Control real-time damping, Brembo performance brakes and all-wheel drive. Engines include a naturally aspirated 200-hp 2.5-liter four cylinder, an optional 270-hp 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder and a 318-hp 3.6-liter V6. Both a six-speed manual and six-speed automatic transmission will be offered. Fuel economy is expected to be better than 30 MPG. Prices will not be released until closer to the launch date, but it is expected to start in the mid-\$30,000 range where the BMW 3 Series starts. ▼



2013 Cadillac ATS

2013 Ford Fusion NASCAR Sprint Cup Car



FORD REDESIGNS THE NASCAR FUSION

▲ Ford is trying to put the "Ford" back into NASCAR with a new Sprint Cup car that closely resembles the new production Ford Fusion. Over the years, NASCAR Cup cars have evolved to almost a generic look, often with little resemblance to the original car they are named for. Ford took a different approach with the development of the 2013 Fusion racer. Ford Design Center staff, led by Garen Nicoghosian and Ford aerodynamicist Bernie Marcus, spent the past year doing early design development, freeing up the Ford race teams to concentrate on weekly NASCAR competition. Designers tried to mirror the Sprint Cup Fusion to the 2013 production Fusion found on showroom floors, with similar proportions, brand and design cues on the sides and a more identifiable front-end grill with the distinctive Ford Fusion look. There used to be a correlation between racecars and car sales, hallmarked with the slogan "win on Sunday, sell on Monday," and Ford is hoping to bring that back. The new NASCAR Fusion entries will be tested throughout the 2012 campaign in preparation for their racing debut at the 2013 Daytona 500 in February.

WARD'S PICKS TOP POWERPLANTS

There is probably no other automotive comparison that inspires more bragging

than the annual Ward's 10 Best Engines list. The most recent group was dominated by small gasoline engines fitted with direct injection systems, which gained popularity about 10 years ago when clean turbodiesel engines started showing up, especially in Europe. Now high-pressure gasoline direct injection is quickly becoming the optimal fuel system for everything from entry-level compacts to luxury cars and full-size pickups—proven to reduce fuel consumption and improve low-end torque, for quicker acceleration. This year's winners and applications tested:

3.0L TFSI Supercharged DOHC V6.....	Audi A6
2.0L N20 Turbocharged DOHC I-4.....	BMW Z4/528i
3.0L N55 Turbocharged DOHC I-6.....	BMW 335i coupe
3.6L Pentastar DOHC V6.....	Chrysler 300S/Jeep Wrangler
2.0L EcoBoost DOHC I-4.....	Ford Edge
5.0L DOHC V8.....	Ford Mustang Boss 302
2.0L Turbocharged DOHC I-4.....	Buick Regal GS
1.6L DOHC I-4.....	Hyundai Accent/Kia Soul
2.0L Skyactiv DOHC I-4.....	Mazda3
3.5L DOHC V6 HEV.....	Infiniti M35h

BOOKS: JAGUAR E-TYPE

Probably no other car is more thought of as the great iconic car from the 1960s than the Jaguar E-Type. When it was introduced at the Geneva auto show in 1961 England's *Daily Mail* called it "The most wanted car in the world—it will be a winner everywhere." There was nothing like

the E-Type, with its long low bonnet, which took up nearly half the car's length and covered its long, powerful inline six-cylinder engine. In his new book, *Jaguar E-Type: A Celebration of the World's Favourite '60s Icon*, well-known Jaguar historian Nigel Thorley follows the history of the celebrated Jaguar from heritage to creation and then on through its lifespan and all iterations from 1961 through 1975. Published to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the E-Type, the 184-page hardcover book (\$39.95) contains 200 color and 50 black and white photographs of everything E-Type. Published by Haynes Publishing, the book is available at books stores or from Quayside Publishing Group, at www.qbookshop.com.

BETTER, SHINIER GM BRAKE DISCS

A survey of vehicle owners indicated that four out of 10 car owners didn't like corrosion on their brake discs. So, a group of General Motors brake experts set out to fix that by changing the chemical makeup of the components, using a process that could double the life of rotors and save consumers hundreds of dollars. More than 80 percent of US vehicles are exposed to one or more environmental corrosion creators, such as acid rain,

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2013 Dodge SRT Viper



intense sunlight, snow, ice and road salt. GM brake rotor technical expert Jim Webster and his team were confident that slowing oxidation brought on by the environment was a problem that material science could solve. By superheating the rotors at 560 degrees Celsius for a day, in an oven the size of a tour bus, engineers were able to use a nitrogen-rich atmosphere to bond nitrogen atoms to the surface, hardening and strengthening the rotor. The name for this technology is Ferritic Nitro-Carburizing, or FNC, and it has most often been used to treat powertrain parts. Since its introduction on brake rotors in 2008, FNC has helped reduce warranty claims on brakes by 70 percent.

VIPER: THE RETURN OF THE SNAKE

▲ “After a gut-wrenching period of uncertainty, the Street and Racing Technology brand team is extremely proud that our hand-built-in-Detroit flagship supercar is back and ready to take on the performance car world,” said Ralph Gilles, President and CEO of Street and Racing Technology Brand (SRT®) and Motorsports, Chrysler Group LLC. The 2013 Dodge SRT Viper is indeed back, a fifth generation Viper with more power and performance, a higher level of craftsmanship, new technologies and even more creature comforts. The Viper remains a

V10 powerhouse, with its all-aluminum, mid-engine 8.4-liter V10 delivering an estimated 640 hp and 600 lb-ft of torque—the most torque of any naturally aspirated sports car engine in the world. Chassis enhancements bring 50 percent improvement in torsional stiffness, and triple-digit weight reduction results in Viper’s best power-to-weight ratio ever. Standard safety features include electronic multistage stability control, traction control and a new 4-channel anti-lock brake system (ABS). Innovative all-new interior designs bring the latest in premium materials and technologies, and the whole package is wrapped in an all-new carbon-fiber and aluminum skin—sculpted for high-speed stability and bearing a slippery 0.364 drag coefficient (Cd). Two models will be hand-built at the Conner Avenue Assembly Plant in Detroit—home for Viper since 1995. The SRT Viper GTS builds on the DNA of the SRT Viper model with more technology, like two-mode active suspension, suitable for the track or just the car’s basic extreme performance formula. With premium features and materials inside and out, the Viper GTS will compete with the best performance vehicles in the world with a wide range of creature comforts, advanced drivetrain and interior technologies. “Willed to live on by a very special group of per-

formance enthusiasts inside the company and across Viper Nation,” said Gilles, “this SRT team under our new leadership was challenged to not just continue the legendary Viper, but to create a world-class supercar that would showcase the very best we have to offer.”

MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC AT PIKES PEAK

Mitsubishi Motors Corporation (MMC) will enter their i-MiEV Prototype in the 2012 edition of the legendary Pikes Peak International Hill Climb on July 8 in Colorado. The i-MiEV Prototype is based on MMC’s all-electric i-MiEV model, the first 100 percent electric vehicle (EV) to go into mass production—and already on the road in Japan, Europe and North America, with plans to expand to other markets. The i-MiEV Prototype is to be driven by Hiroshi Masuoka, a legendary race driver who has taken on the brutal Dakar Rally 21 times, winning it consecutively in 2002 and 2003, driving Mitsubishi Pajero and Pajero Evolution models, respectively. The i-MiEV Prototype will use the same EV components as the current production i-MiEV. MMC will use data obtained through its participation in the event to enhance durability and reliability of pure EVs and plug-in

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hybrid EVs it will be bringing to market in the near future. Engineers from MMC's partner manufacturers of batteries, motors and other EV components will also be sent to the event to collaborate more closely on their technologies.

UPGRADED 2013 TOYOTA VENZA

▲ The Toyota Venza crossover receives new exterior styling, several new standard convenience features and updated option packages including the Entune™ multi-media system for the 2013 model year. Venza's aerodynamic shape has been slightly modified with a new upper and lower grille, fog lamps and rear tail-lights, complemented by a new 19-inch wheel design and three new exterior colors: Attitude Black, Cypress Pearl and Cosmic Gray Mica. The 2013 Venza is available in LE, XLE and Limited grades. LE and XLE models are available with all powertrain combinations: four-cylinder, V6, front-wheel or all-wheel drive; while the Venza Limited is available in front- and all-wheel-drive configurations, but powered by the V6 engine only. The four-cylinder Venza is EPA-rated at 21 MPG city/27 MPG highway for the FWD model and 20/25 for the AWD. Value has been enhanced and ordering simplified with the addition of many standard features in all three grades. The Venza design was

the creation of Toyota's Caltz Design studios in Newport Beach, California and Ann Arbor, Michigan—developed specifically for the North American market. Designers leaned toward a sleek crossover concept with a wide stance and sporty exterior, but with important SUV attributes such as cargo space, towing capability (up to 3500 lbs) and available all-wheel drive performance. The Toyota Venza is assembled at Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky (TMMK), in Georgetown KY. More than 70 percent of Venza's components come from North American suppliers.

HOW TO SAVE \$800 ON A NEW CAR

Through surveying more than 1400 car buyers, Jorge Silva-Risso, an associate professor of marketing at the University of California Riverside's business school, and his co-authors, Fiona Scott Morton of Yale University and Florian Zettelmeyer of Northwestern University, found buyers could save about \$800 if they find out what a dealer pays for a car, visit two dealerships, like to bargain and like to do research and price comparisons before making a purchase. The research also found that a consumer who doesn't like to bargain or do a lot of research can save \$230 by doing just two things: finding out what the dealer pays for the car and visit-

ing two dealerships. "This really shows that even the consumer who doesn't like to bargain can get the price reduced if they are informed," Silva-Risso said. "And, if they are aggressive, and like bargaining, they can save even more. My recommendation is that they arm themselves with as much information as possible and be patient in the negotiations until they find the car they like at the right price."

ROLLS-ROYCE TWO-TONES

While the launch of the Rolls-Royce Phantom Series II made headlines center stage at the Geneva motor show, a special Rolls-Royce Ghost won admirers in the company's exclusive on-stand guest lounge. Clients, dealers and media guests saw one of the first examples of a two-tone Rolls-Royce Ghost, a bespoke option offered for the first time this year, complementing the popularity of two-tone Phantom models. Finished in Infinity Black, with a Cassiopeia Silver upper two-tone, the Geneva Ghost features an interior design scheme that reflects the two-tone theme—seashell headlining, sumptuous black leather, black stained ash, steel pinstripes and lambswool floor mats. A second upper two-tone Rolls-Royce Ghost was recently commissioned for delivery to a client in the Middle East, in Baynunah Brown with Arizona Sun. A

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2013 Hyundai Elantra



gold-plated Spirit of Ecstasy and double coach-line in gold finish that design. Rolls-Royce Motor Cars celebrated record sales in 2011, with 3,538 models delivered to clients worldwide, beating the previous sales record held in 1978 when 3,347 units were sold. Nearly every Phantom sold in 2011 came with some element of bespoke personalization—unique paint, interior embroidery, champagne sets, humidors and picnic sets.

HYUNDAI TRIPLES ELANTRA OFFERINGS

▲ Just days after the Elantra sedan was named 2012 North American Car of the Year, Hyundai tripled the number of Elantra variants with the addition of two new models. First up in the spring is a slick new Elantra coupe, followed in the summer by a practical five-door GT hatchback. Both 2013 models are designed with the same “Fluidic Sculpture” theme that made the sedan such an eye-popper. Both new cars are powered by the same 148-hp, 1.8-liter four cylinder engine as the sedan. The Elantra Coupe has an estimated fuel economy of 29 MPG city and 40 MPG highway, and the Elantra GT is expected to achieve 28 MPG city and 39 MPG highway. The pair of front-wheel-drive cars are also available with either a six-speed manual or optional six-speed

automatic. The interiors of both new models have the look and feel of more expensive vehicles and offer features like a seven-inch touch screen with rearview camera display, XM Satellite Radio, navigation, leather seating and sunroof. Prices are expected to be lower than major competitors’ prices, plus they will have state-of-the-art safety equipment and Hyundai’s top-rated warranty.

FORD’S FASTEST CONVERTIBLE

The horsepower war has turned thermo-nuclear as Ford again ups the ante with the Mustang Shelby GT500 convertible with a supercharged 650-hp engine. The convertible joins the coupe with all the features that make both top models in their small but powerful niche. The new convertible shaved nearly 3.5 seconds off its lap time at Sebring International Raceway compared to the 2011 and 2012 models, and it has a track-test top speed of more than 200 mph. Keys to the improved lap times are the power boost from the new 5.8-liter supercharged V8 producing 650 horsepower, SVT-designed Bilstein electronic adjustable dampers available on the Performance Package, powerful Brembo brakes and all-new chassis tuning. The new engine is now the most powerful production V8 in the world. Similar to the coupe, the convertible will be offered with

a Performance Package that also can be upgraded to a Track Package, complete with an external engine oil cooler, rear differential cooler and transmission cooler for further durability.

GM RECORD SALES OF 30-PLUS MPG

Combined US sales of a dozen General Motors vehicles that get an EPA estimated 30 MPG or better on the highway passed 100,000 units in March, the highest total in company history. “GM’s strategic investments in four-cylinder and turbocharged engines, advanced transmissions and vehicle electrification have been very well timed,” said Mark Reuss, president of GM North America. “Three years ago, about 16 percent of the vehicles GM sold achieved at least 30 MPG on the highway. Today, that number is about 40 percent, and we have more new fuel-economy leaders on the way.” By the end of 2012, GM will have all-new or significantly freshened Chevrolet, Buick, GMC and Cadillac cars and crossovers in segments that represent 60 percent of the US light vehicle industry, including the all-new 2013 Cadillac ATS 2.5-liter and 2.0-liter turbo I-4s, the all-new Chevrolet Spark and the four-cylinder 2013 Chevrolet Malibu, all expected to achieve EPA estimates of 30 MPG highway or better when ratings are released later this year. ■



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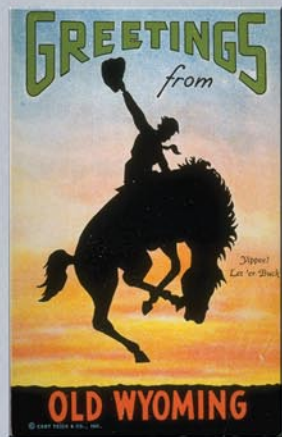
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cool control

everyday road cars that can handle extraordinary conditions

by Joe Sage



The idea of a sedan which bears the attributes of all-wheel drive, from its no-slip grip at launch, to its soft-surface traction and control, is not new. There have been all-wheel-drive cars in the mainstream marketplace for a few decades now. Most everyone knows about the Audi quattro, and that for years (and until their one sporty new rear-drive exception) Subaru has made nothing but all-wheel-drivers. It's the kind of top-of-mind image otherwise attached to the likes of Jeep®. But the image of the 4x4 as a big truck or SUV is still hard to shake. There have been other four-

wheel-drive cars, after all, and plenty of them: Fords, Cadillacs, even a Pontiac in the '80s.

Mercedes-Benz has no big 4x4 pickup in its lineup, but it does have a strong range of SUVs: from the smallest GLK, through the M-Class, GL-Class and large crossover R-Class, to the near-military-grade G-Class. These are the people-and-gear-hauling 4MATIC on-and-off-roaders, but they are only half the story. Mercedes-Benz 4MATIC all-wheel-drive technology is also available on an ever-increasing range of their sedans, coupes and wagons—in fact it is available on everything now, other

than the SL and SLK roadsters.

All-wheel drive has its pros and cons, but we are bullish on the pros. Basically, it comes down to strength and efficiency: from the moment you step on the gas, all power is transmitted to all wheels, with no slip, no horsepower lost in the ether. And it comes down to control: when you corner hard in town, or when you sweep a mountain pass at highway speeds, your grip and balance are neutral, strong and predictable. Even if you never see a flake of snow, you can appreciate the attributes of all-wheel drive in every mile you drive. And if you

Wild Wyoming winter weather lifted a little while we were at the snow track, revealing foothills (at left) but never the Tetons. Good test conditions. Clockwise from top right: Jackson, Wyoming, is the town; Jackson Hole is the valley; this was our lodging valley view. The E350 Coupe 4MATIC slices through the ice. We had extensive county roads, normally closed for the winter, plowed open for our event, and the sheriff made sure they remained ours only. The S350 BlueTEC 4MATIC adds diesel efficiency to the mix. Video crews recorded our efforts on two closed courses carved into deep snowfields. And the beast that started it all: the 1907 Daimler Dernburg-Wagen.

hit a patch of water or sand or gravel, you will appreciate it all the moreso.

The downsides? Basically, some people prefer some slip. Think smokey burnout in a Mustang. And the system will add a little weight to the vehicle.

To a degree, the benefits of all-wheel drive can be delivered through electronics on a two-wheel-drive car. Electronic stability control and other high-tech adaptations of braking and suspension can mitigate issues of traction, cornering, slip and control. (And the 4MATIC series has all of this, too.) But think about it: would you rather have to mitigate issues? Or would you rather have the engineering get it right in the first place?

Despite the strengths of all-wheel drive even on flat, dry, smooth pavement, it's easy to associate these systems with snow and ice. Thus we found ourselves in Jackson, Wyoming in February, to drive the full lineup of Mercedes-Benz 4MATIC cars in those conditions.

a century of development

Paul Daimler, the son of Daimler-Benz's founder, came up with the company's first all-wheel-drive designs in 1903, and in 1907 the Dernburg-Wagen was built for driving in Africa. A passenger car built on a truck chassis, it was truly the forerunner of modern 4MATICS. The company's lineage and credentials also include the versatile Unimog, a tractor-derived roadworthy beast with mechanically locking differentials and flexible frame.

Evolution has been careful and deliberate. 4MATIC all-wheel drive was launched in 1985 (five years after the original Audi quattro). The current 4MATIC system is its fourth generation. The mid-'80s Mercedes-Benz 300E 4MATIC—the first—had a Generation 1 system with electro-hydraulic automatically locking differentials that directed 100 percent of power to the rear wheels until any slip was detected. Generation 2 arrived about ten years later on the W210 model series, with three differentials but a much simpler system overall. Gen 2 used a 4ETS (electronic traction system) to achieve permanent all-wheel drive via application of the ABS system. Differentials in front, driveshaft and

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rear provided a 35:65 front/rear bias, and auto-locking was deleted. This was an era of significant breakthrough, as the car could now maintain full traction even with, for example, the left wheels on ice and the right on dry pavement.

Generation 3 was seven years in development. It still used 4ETS, but with faster activation (for both braking and transfer of power), worked well at all speeds and changed the bias to 40:60 front/rear, for improved driving dynamics, comfort and traction.

Generation 4 was launched in model V221, the S550 4MATIC. Unique in the industry, this evolution integrated the transfer case with the transmission, reducing friction while improving NVH (noise-vibration-hardness) measures and improving fuel economy. The system is the lightest in the industry, at about 150 pounds (early Mercedes-Benz systems were about 350 pounds, and some early competitors weighed in at closer to 600). The torque bias was also brought to 45:55 front/rear. Transfer/transmission integration allowed front axle engagement with just one gear—and no parasitic loss.

Mercedes-Benz is especially proud of the fact that their 4MATIC systems are 100 percent in-house design—including testing, development and manufacturing. “Every tooth of every gear is cut by Mercedes-Benz,” says assistant product manager Eric Linder, which he says is unique within the industry.

forty-wheel drive

Two million 4MATIC vehicles have been sold worldwide, with over half of them in the US. And the lineup is now growing exponentially.

Mercedes-Benz now offers 4MATIC all-wheel drive in ten model lines (21 models in all): C-Class, CL-Class, CLS-Class, E-Class and S-Class cars; and the five SUV lines mentioned already. This lineup-wide approach is more than enough to put Mercedes-Benz at the forefront of people’s thinking when it comes to all-wheel drive, as well it should, since the company has been producing such vehicles for over 100 years.

For 2012, new models include an S350 BlueTEC 4MATIC and CLS550 4MATIC (both available since last fall), and the E-Class and C-Class both add coupes—an E350 Coupe 4MATIC and C350 Coupe 4MATIC (both available by the time you read this, starting in April). These additions cover a wide price range, illustrating the availability of this game-changing technology. Prices start at \$44,370 for the C-Class, \$53,675 for the E-Class,

\$74,675 for the CLS and \$93,425 for the S-Class, all with 4MATIC. At the pinnacle remains the CL-Class, with the CL550 4MATIC starting at \$114,975.

The C350 Coupe 4MATIC is powered by the same 3.5-liter V6 as its rear-drive version, with 302 hp and 273 lb-ft of torque. Fuel economy is unchanged by the addition of the 4MATIC system’s cleverly minimized weight and friction, staying at 19 MPG city, 28 highway. Even at C-Class level, your buck delivers plenty of bang—not just all-wheel-drive confidence, but also high-tech control systems including Attention Assist, a HOLD feature for the Adaptive Brake system, up to nine airbags, active head restraints, automatic climate control and alloy rims, and a breakthrough seven-speed automatic transmission introduced on the last generation of the SL-Class. Optional technology includes Blind Spot Assist, Lane Keeping Assist and the Parktronic parking guidance system.

The E350 Coupe 4MATIC is powered by the same 3.5-liter V6 as the C350 Coupe 4MATIC and delivers the same 19/28 MPG city/highway. The E-Class adds Agility Control suspension to its standard equipment list, along with the PRE-SAFE® collision preemptive system introduced to the S-Class in 2006 and E-Class in 2010. These two technologies are geared toward adding impressive handling and a huge margin of safety to the inherent benefits of 4MATIC.

The third new 4MATIC coupe—the luxurious, powerful CLS550 4MATIC—has a 402-hp 4.6-liter V8 with 443 lb-ft of torque. Fuel mileage is 16/25 MPG city/highway. Standard equipment on the CLS 4MATIC includes PRE-SAFE, ABS with Brake Assist, ATTENTION ASSIST, traction control and ESP electronic stability control. Since its introduction last fall, some 35 to 40 percent of CLS sales are 4MATICs, which has helped the CLS-Class grow its markets in the Northeast and Pacific Northwest.

The S350 BlueTEC 4MATIC’s 3.0-liter clean diesel V6 puts out 240 hp and low-band torque (1600-2400 rpm) of 455 lb-ft. Fuel mileage is 21/31 MPG city/highway for the 4MATIC S-Class, delivering an incredible package of power, handling, luxury and fuel economy—and all still for under \$100,000. (Carried over from 2011 is a gasoline-powered S550 4MATIC; over 50 percent of S550 buyers go with the 4MATIC option.)

The CL550 4MATIC—top dog at some \$115k—has a twin-turbo iteration of the 4.0-liter V8, bringing horsepower up to 429 and torque up to 529 lb-ft. This impressive power is still less than the AMG version or either

V12 CL-Class (regular or AMG), but—it has 4MATIC all-wheel drive. It’s also a bargain among the CL lineup, as the other three range from about \$160,000-212,000.

winter roads of wyoming

It was a mild winter in the heart of the Rockies this year. Jackson, Wyoming, was no exception. What mild means here, though, is a ski season that ended with somewhere between 350-400 inches of snow, compared to a normal 459 inches. When you’re skiing at the Jackson Hole ski area, where snow covers boulders, creeks, stumps and whole trees in the winter, this makes a difference. When you’re driving, it still makes for quite a winter.

There are basically two kinds of roads in country like this: open, or closed for the winter. No amount of ground clearance or all-wheel drive will deal with a closed road. Nonetheless, all-wheel drive is very welcome on open roads—temperatures stay low all winter, the snow is relentless, and even clear roads are snow-packed more often than not.

Despite this being a drought winter by routinely extreme Rockies standards, we had so much weather during our stay that we never even saw the landmark Grand Teton Mountains.

Our drive consisted of several phases. We drove a variety of local roads and highways in the valley around Jackson (that valley being what actually bears the name Jackson Hole, along with the ski area). We drove a pair of carefully prepared ice tracks (packed snow with a variety of challenging shapes and surfaces). We were provided with many miles of county roads that would usually be closed in winter but had been plowed open, with great effort, to access our track and also allow for some wide-open snowpacked straightaways. And we took a two-and-a-half-hour highway loop around the Tetons, through Idaho and back to Jackson.

Every one of these cars is a winner in its own right (and we’ve covered them in other reviews). It doesn’t take a lot to explain to someone that any Mercedes-Benz is a great car. What does take a little explaining is that Mercedes-Benz is a great snow or rough-surface car. But it is. Your correspondent has lived in the northern Rockies in the past, for a number of years, and has driven in these conditions many times—in big 4x4 trucks, little rear-drive cars, performance all-wheel-drive sedans and more. We’ve also driven a number of all-wheel-drive cars in Arizona, also for a number of

Top to bottom: even in a low-snow year, standing depth was at hood level in the valley. Temperatures were near zero at night, but this C350 Coupe 4MATIC driver found some water to test, while the CLS550 4MATIC roars away in maximum luxe. This Unimog—a major source of Mercedes-Benz all-wheel-drive DNA (shown in Germany) would have been just the ticket in Jackson. The sun makes a brief appearance over the valley floor, while the highway to Idaho over Teton Pass is one hundred percent snowpacked, with no sign of recent thaw.

more recent years, though often without leaving the smooth, dry pavements of the Valley and surrounding below-Rim highways. Returning to northwest Wyoming for Mercedes-Benz 4MATIC immersion presented the best of both worlds.

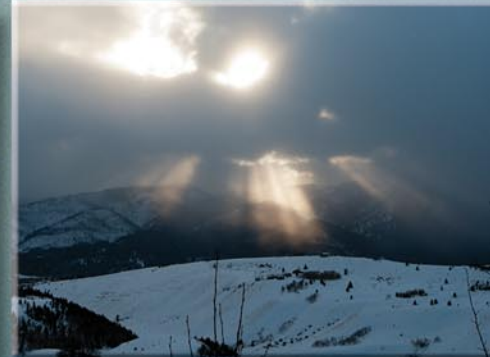
The real miracle of a Mercedes-Benz sedan or coupe with 4MATIC all-wheel drive is this: if you are so inclined, you can largely shut out the world, enjoy the luxury and comfort of your Benz, and stay secure in the knowledge that you have a highly technical vehicle at hand to protect you from what the elements will throw at you. We were able to do this throughout the valley. You can dig in and wring out all the performance the system offers. We were able to do this on the challenging specialty tracks. Or you can do a bit of both—stay on your toes, enjoy the art of driving, but rest assured you have a great tool in hand—and we were able to do this on the challenging passes to and from Idaho.

a potent package

Every model in the 4MATIC series demonstrates the benefits of a technologically-advanced all-wheel-drive system: solid, predictable handling in all conditions (including normal ones), efficient application of power through all four wheels (providing an impressive ride even at lower horsepower), and via all that, an added degree of safety and fuel efficiency (fuel efficiency is virtually identical to two-wheel-drive models, with just two out of 16 figures dropping by just one point).

The very presence of 4MATIC in the Mercedes-Benz lineup has increased overall brand sales by 20 percent. The price premium for 4MATIC is generally in the \$2000-3000 range, depending upon model.

Every Mercedes-Benz 4MATIC model is available at dealers now. And remember—winter is right around the corner. Monsoon storms arrive even sooner. And firm cornering and solid cruising are for right now. ■



Smooth and powerful...

5 Series on 4 cylinders

by Joe Sage



There is one great big piece of news in this new BMW 5 Series, and that is its small engine: a 2.0-liter twin-scroll turbo inline-4 that was even big news when installed in the little Z4 roadster (see our March/April 2012 issue).

The new 2.0-liter TwinPower Turbo four-banger was engineered specifically to replace a number of six-cylinder implementations in an increasingly fuel-frugal world. The powerful little powerplant includes high-pressure direct injection and BMW's Valvetronic intake control with a forced induction system comprising a single twin-scroll turbocharger.

Direct injection and Valvetronic equal "TwinPower," but also allows BMW to expand use of that term to some earlier engines without twin-scroll turbo (such as the non-twin-scroll 3.0-liter inline-6 turbo). Our 528i, however, does feature the brand new twin-scroll turbo.

The new 4-cylinder economizes many ways. It's smaller than the old six, and its all-aluminum crankcase saves weight. At 240 hp and 260 lb-ft, the new turbo offers more power and torque than did the normally-aspirated 3.0-liter inline-6 in the prior 2011 BMW 528i. Max horsepower comes at 5000 rpm, which is a full 1500 rpm lower than its predecessor, and peak torque arrives at just 1250 rpm. It's a potent formula you can actually feel.

Twin-scroll turbo works like this: two exhaust streams coming from two pairs of cylinders stay completely separate through the exhaust manifold and into the turbocharger, where they take a spiral path to the turbine wheel. This is engineered to produce very low exhaust back pressure at low engine rpm, for powerful rotation of the turbine blades, without delayed throttle response.

Valvetronic eliminates a conventional throttle valve system, adding variable intake valve lift control, so the combustion air mass is controlled inside the engine, for much faster response and higher efficiency. Power is run through BMW's newest 8-speed automatic transmission.

Bottom line? More power on less fuel. The 2012 528i runs 0-to-60 in 6.2 seconds (0.4 seconds quicker than the old six), while delivering 15 percent better fuel mileage: 23 MPG city, 34 highway, 27 combined.

Put all that together, and what's missing? Well, nothing. A number of vehicles are topping 40 MPG by now, but just a year ago, 30 MPG was big news. But those are vehicles with economy writ large throughout. Here, you're getting 34 MPG in a big, plush German luxury sedan. Anybody who thinks fuel mileage requirements are a recipe for compromise has not paused to see some of what is being delivered.

five series, four cylinders, our seven days

All this comes in a package with a very reasonable base price of \$46,700. The base vehicle is well equipped, with ABS, stability control, traction control, several start-off and brake tech features, auto-leveling xenon headlamps, rain-sensing wipers, two-way moonroof, full-featured audio and telecom, plus a full complement of airbags and other safety features.

Our test model was highly equipped, but still didn't break the bank. Included were a premium package (power tailgate, park distance control and universal garage door opener) for \$2250—a package we could take or leave; a sport package combining style and function (Dynamic Damper Control and 18-inch alloy wheels,

This is BMW country; here all in one place are a black 530i, 535i and 550i. Door grabs are an odd mismatch as in the 6 Series. SSR run-flat tires are there for a reason, but not without repercussions.

supplemented by upgraded seats, steering wheel and some interior and exterior trim) for \$3600; a tech package of nav and rear camera for \$1850; sport transmission for \$500 extra; and keyless entry for an overpriced \$1000 (it's included by now in many cars at half the price or less). Total with delivery was \$57,275.

We picked this car up at the airport, after a long transcontinental day, thinking of little more for our first miles than getting home. We remembered that we had not been particularly overwhelmed by power from this same new little engine in the Z4 roadster, not long before. Would it be able to cart around a big sedan? From the first mile, our logbook noted that power was just fine. Was it a matter of expectations, high for the Z4 and now lower for the 5 Series? Or was it a matter of having come to the Z4 from a V8 6 Series, but to this 5 Series from a small-bore rental car and an uncomfortable airline seat? No matter. Within a few more miles, we had noted a very comfortable and easy freeway drive, noting, in fact, that it felt like a big 7 Series. This same line of thought repeated in our notes throughout the week. The new 528i was all smooth sailing.

The new 5 Series comes with Auto Start Stop function, the same thing that has been saving gas in a Chevy Malibu for almost five years. Come to a stop light, and the engine shuts down. Hit the pedal, and it fires back up. Is it seamless? Not quite. You can shut it off, but we mastered the art of just barely letting pressure off the brake pedal, as though we were about to go for the gas, and the engine would restart in time to not have lag when the real time came, nanoseconds later.

We did note sub-ideal handling in some cases, such as a bit of wandering in a freeway lane. The car almost had a light feel of front-drive torque with a dash of electric steering, although it is of course a rear-driver. We attribute this to something BMW is doing now, that has generated a bit of a reaction from many: the tires are all run-flats, avoiding the weight of a spare tire. Why carry a spare? After all, how often does anyone get a flat anymore? Conversely, though, why therefore compromise ride feel and handling at all times, on the off chance you could have a flat? Continental is a great brand, so we can't pick on their SSR (self-supporting run-flat) tire implementation, per se. But we would still prefer to undo that decision, one way or another.

We were enchanted by many details—well-executed cornering lamps, for example—bemused by others—asymmetrical door grab designs, for example, as on the 6 Series, but not the same as the 6 Series—and annoyed by the usual few details, such as the finer points of the shift lever and parking brake controls. We don't like waiting for the power trunk and would therefore not pay \$2250 to have it.

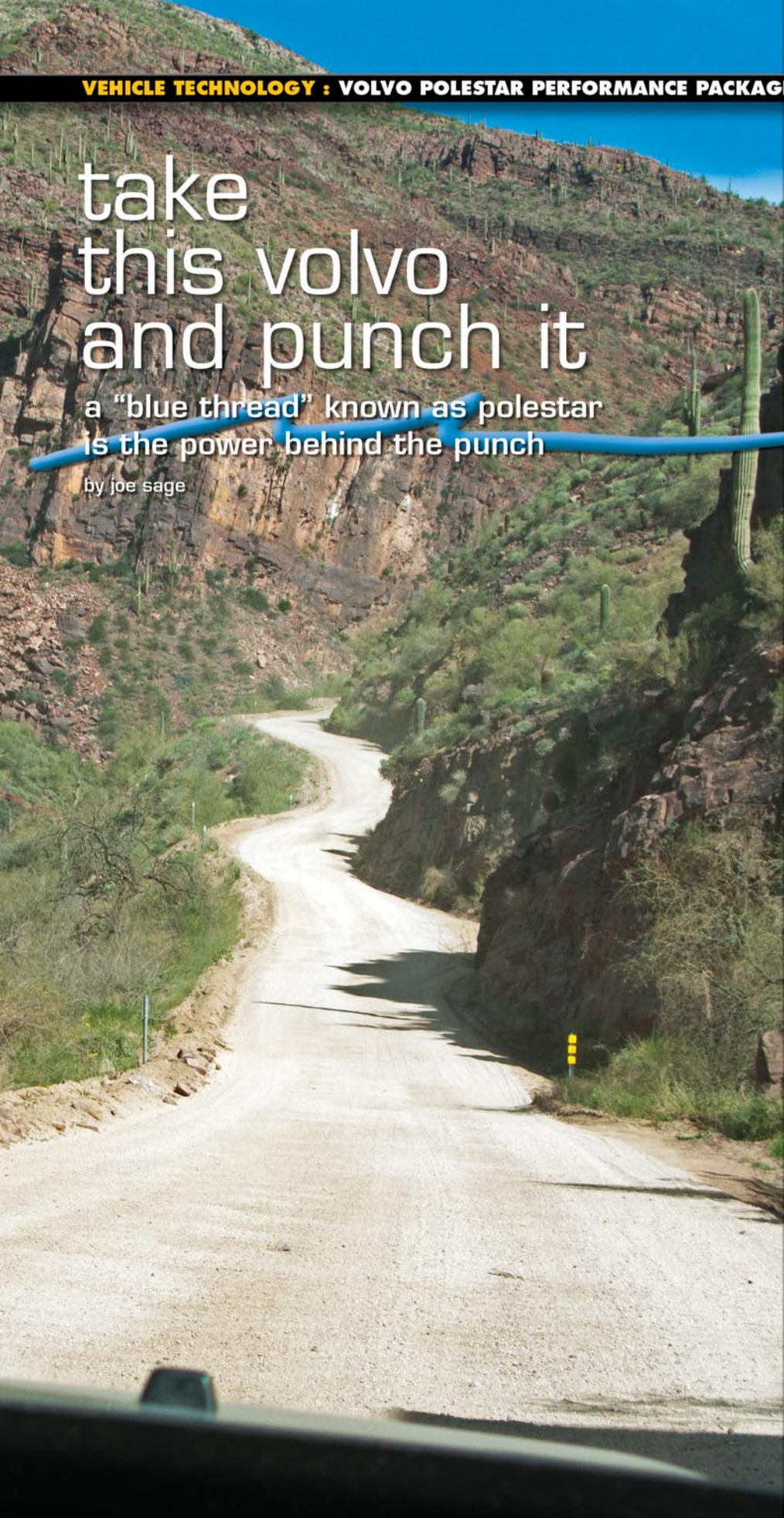
Ultimately, the enchanting details (and big picture) surely win the day. The ability of the new 4-cylinder twin-scroll turbo to unflappably handle the mission of a 5 Series is remarkable. This medium-large BMW takes a big step into the future by introducing a landmark change that you ultimately barely notice. ■



take this volvo and punch it

a "blue thread" known as polestar is the power behind the punch

by joe sage



If you haven't noticed that Volvo has gone far beyond its prior reputation of building your father's very safe family box, you haven't been paying attention. If you haven't noticed Polestar—an outfit behind racing development at Volvo since 1996—you're not alone.

Volvo and racing? Make no mistake about it. Even when your father did have a family box, Volvo was red hot in Europe, dominating on the race circuit with their "flying bricks." Today, a special C30 is the most successful Volvo race car ever. And behind it all? Polestar, of course—Volvo Cars Official Partner for sixteen years.

Last year, Volvo raced a prototype engine that was tested as the most powerful in the world. Almost one in every four cars on the road in Sweden is a Volvo, and a high enthusiast level has created a huge aftermarket there. Volvo is also the region's most common rally car. Polestar is famous for racing in Scandinavia and in Europe overall.

polestar for the people

Despite being effective on the race circuit, Polestar wasn't well known in the wider consumer market. That is ready to change in a big way, with Polestar Performance. Think AMG at Mercedes-Benz, M at BMW, quattro GmbH at Audi, and you have a rough idea.

Some nine years after Polestar's core inception, the broader, consumer-oriented Polestar Performance project was launched in 2005. Sales began in 2009, and the products hit North America by the end of 2011.

Think of Polestar Performance as a "blue thread" that connects a series of specially amped-up Volvo cars, suggests Geno Effler, VP of public affairs for Volvo Cars of North America. The cars that are connected by this thread cover much of the Volvo lineup: a series of vehicles equipped with the T5 five-cylinder turbo and several with the T6 six-cylinder turbo.

the full volvo performance range

Effler introduced us first to a tantalizing Polestar car we would not be driving—the blue C30 Polestar Performance Concept Prototype, or PCP (shown at upper right). The stock C30, with its T5 five-cylinder turbo and manual transmission, is already a favorite of ours. So what could the team do to improve it? Start with the four-wheel-drive system from a Volvo V50 wagon. Work the engine up to more than 450 horsepower. And hang on. "It's still very driveable," says Effler, "all based on standard off-the-shelf parts. More or less."

Joe Haslem, brand manager for the XC60, XC90 and C70, introduced us to the cars we would drive. The XC70 (righthand page, bottom) is in its third generation, has one of the highest owner retention rates in the Volvo lineup and has certainly outlasted its nearest former competitor, the Audi allroad, by years. With the Audi out of the field, Volvo reminds us there are some other AWD wagons available, but none with off-road capability.

The smaller and more streamlined XC60, introduced in 2009, is the best seller in the XC range. Volvo positions the XC60 to go up against the best of the Germans: the Audi Q5, BMW X3 and Mercedes-Benz GLK.

It was "hands off" the Volvo C30 Polestar Performance Concept Prototype (PCP), but hands on the rest. Here we also see the S60 T6 AWD R-Design (driven in our JanFeb 2012 issue) and the C70 Inscription with its retractable hardtop down. A quick stop on the Apache Trail, then on to the top in the Volvo XC70 with Polestar Performance.



Starting with the XC60, we encounter the complexities of the company's Polestar Performance identity mechanisms. The Polestar vehicle in this niche is the Volvo XC60 T6 R-Design. Polestar is standard in this vehicle, so it has no blue badge. You just have to know.

The XC70, on the other hand, is standard as a T6 (six-cylinder turbo) AWD wagon rated at 300 hp. Add the optional Polestar Performance upgrade, and you have 325 hp. And a blue badge.

Sort of like the XC60 R-Design, the C70 hardtop convertible has Polestar Performance tuning available in an upgraded C70 Inscription special edition, with gloss black grille, LED daytime running lights with chrome trim, large wheels, interior upgrades. Despite its being built-in in the Inscription, as with the XC60 R-Design, in this instance there is a blue badge, unlike the XC60.

And despite no PCP for the masses, there is a C30 T5 R-Design, with that manual transmission standard. But despite being an R-Design like the XC60, Polestar is an option on this one, so there is a blue badge.

If we have a blue badge absence/presence incorrect here, it underscores the point: it's inconsistent.



but you already bought your volvo?

If you have an eligible Volvo, you can add the Polestar element. This works for any T5 from 2008, or any T6 from 2011. The cost for a T5 upgrade is \$1295, which brings you a 23-horsepower gain and 37 new lb-ft of torque. For the T6, cost is \$1495 and gains are 25 hp and 30 lb-ft. The upgrade can be financed, but it is only warrantied if port-installed on a new vehicle and listed

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on the original new-car Monroney sticker.

The upgrade only takes about 10 minutes. The whole operation is basically simply a flash reprogram of the ECM (Engine Control Module). If you're starting to think there should be a 99-cent app for that, you're probably not alone, but this is a serious piece of technology, prepared specifically for the Volvo T5 and T6 engines by those who know them best, and tailor-made to work with every aspect of the vehicle's drivetrain, suspension, and overall comfort and feel. It has no impact on fuel economy. When Volvo says it's "true power, not a bolt-on solution," the point is pretty well driven home that—even if just a chip flash—this is the real deal.

Turbo boost is increased. Spark timing is re-optimized, as are fuel mixture and a few other details of already-electronically-controlled engine operation. Finally, throttle mapping is recalibrated to make the best use of the new power running through the drivetrain.

performance, safety, green and blue

Power! Performance! Volvo! The more traditional spirit of Volvo does shine through, as Polestar Performance promises to deliver the goods "in a responsible way," with safety and environmental impacts always prime considerations. They also promise to reduce warranty costs and provide positive customer experiences—through full control of the ECM, from design to installation to service—always a good reason for internally integrated add-on engineering, versus do-it-yourselfing.

Volvo brought the whole Polestar Performance line-up to Arizona this winter, so we could give them a try on a variety of roads.

hitting the dirt and the pavement

We almost had more cars than time to drive them, although we did have a generous two full days of driving time. And we had some great, hours-long routes.

The first day, we took a Polestar-upgraded Volvo XC70 on a loop that concentrated on the roughest part—the Apache Trail, from Apache Junction in the east Valley, up along a tight, sometimes mildly rough, often cliffhanging route past Canyon and Apache Lakes, to Roosevelt Lake and back to pavement on AZ Highway 188. From there, we drove up to the Beeline Highway (AZ 87) and back to the Valley. Those unpaved roads were the heart of this route, though.

You can tell by our cover photo and the lead photo on the previous page that the XC70 was very well-matched to conditions (and exuberant driving). Its low center of gravity, coupled with all-wheel-drive confidence and great traction systems, came through for us mile after mile. Exactly what we got from the extra 25 hp is hard to say. We certainly wouldn't have asked to reduce what we had, nor did we find ourselves needing more. And in traction conditions, we probably benefited from 30 more lb-ft of torque. All in all, the XC70 remains a very well-balanced tool for the job, and the Polestar Performance update is an easy choice, some icing on the cake, on top of a vehicle with a base price of \$39,100.

The second day, we took the top-selling XC60 up the Beeline past Payson, over the hills and through the woods, out on the open plains and across I-17, to lunch in Oak Creek, south of Sedona. We also deviated from

The little blue badge tells the tale—though not always. Our XC70 picked up some dust along the Apache Trail, but was not in the least bit rattled. The XC60 took us off road a little, but spent more time on the open highway. Our last round was with one out of this sea of C30s, and with the C70.

the map for a small amount of dirt time (pictured left and below), just enough to get its feel. We hit the limits of that trail pretty quickly and were glad to have the extra clearance and shorter wheelbase of the XC60, to turn around and return to the highway. The XC60, naturally aspirated and in two-wheel drive, starts at \$33,300, but moves to \$39,450 with the T6 and AWD. The R-Design version, with Polestar Performance standard plus other amenities and features, is \$43,700.

On our last afternoon, we grabbed both the C30 pocket rocket and the C70 hardtop convertible—two of our longtime favorites, with their standard 227-horse turbocharged inline-5-cylinder engines (and the C30 with its available manual). Would we spring for \$1295 to raise the horsepower to 250? Sure, why not. The C30 starts in the mid-\$20s, a bargain, though to get Polestar, you need the \$27,450 R-Design, plus the \$1295 add-on, now pushing \$30k. The C70 is in loftier terrain already, just over \$40,000, so moving to \$44,350 with performance plus a host of upgraded amenities is appealing.

Bottom line, it may be a challenge to compete with those Mercedes AMGs, BMW Ms and Audi Ss and RSs, with their many hardware upgrades, by providing what still amounts to a chip upgrade. But again, this chip upgrade is conceived from the bottom up and the inside out, so it actually makes a very strong case for enhancing all the hardware it's connected to.

The very presence of the Polestar heritage and power options brings new life and a performance halo to the whole Volvo brand. And the specific option brings some extra excitement to any model you buy, that it's available on. When you show your friends and neighbors what Volvo is all about today, your presentation will be all the better with Polestar in place. ■



FIAT'S ENGAGING BAD BOY

BY JOE SAGE



If you watched the Super Bowl this year, you've met the Fiat 500 Abarth. Their "Seduction" commercial, in which an eager young man has his lust both rebuffed and embraced on the street by a beautiful Italian woman in red and black—soon morphed into the hot little car he was actually lusting after—was one of the most popular among the game's always highly-watched ads.

On the other hand, you may have met the Abarth brand many times before. It has been around for decades, although—like Fiat itself—not in the US for some time, other than in vintage racing.

Abarth brand heritage

Everyone asks pronunciation. Is it uh-BARTH? Or A-barth? Or something else? Company representatives don't even all pronounce it the same. Some say uh-BART. Even that seems to border on the more common uh-BARTH, so that's what we go with.

There's a reason the Abarth name has remained alive in vintage circles: over 60 years of Abarth racing—45 of it with Fiat—with over 10,000 victories, 10 world records and 133 international titles.

Karl Abarth was born in Vienna in 1908 (under the sign of Scorpio, the basis for the marque's enduring logo). By his mid-20s, he had become a five-time European motorcycle champion, riding on bikes he built himself (with no factory support). But at age 30, Abarth had a near-fatal accident while racing in Yugoslavia, which hospitalized him for a year. It slowed down his racing, but gave him more time and motivation to pursue engineering. He returned to Italy after recuperating, worked for Porsche, then Italian sports car builder Cisitalia, finally in 1949 establishing Abarth & C to produce aftermarket parts—decades before SEMA. They produced tuning kits and motorcycle-race-bred exhaust systems for production cars. Abarth went for the stylish Italian high end, combining performance with signature matte black finish and chrome tips, at about three times the price of competitors.

It was a winning formula. By the end of 1950, he had over 40 workers and had sold 5000 exhaust systems. By 1962, sales hit 260,000 units. This gave Abarth the foundation to do what he really wanted to do: resume racing. He moved to the four-wheel variety, developing the Fiat Abarth 750, with which he broke record after record. This, in turn, brought attention to the brand, and by 1958—the release date of the original Fiat 500—Abarth had an agreement for distribution of cars and parts to the US.

The prime characteristic of the Fiat 500 in Abarth form remains its small size—but the surprise is in its power and poise. Actress and model Catrinel Menghia of Romania—known to millions worldwide as the beautiful Italian in Abarth's Super Bowl ad—was on hand at the Hard Rock Café in Las Vegas, to demonstrate her own power and poise.

The original Fiat 500 (or cinquecento: chink-ay-chent-o, for its 479cc engine) was just 10 feet long and weighed 1100 pounds. Karl Abarth got right on that, boosting the compression ratio, adding a Weber carb, upgrading fuel and intake systems and of course adding a sports exhaust system—doubling horsepower from 13 to 26 hp. The car looked about the same, other than wider wheels and tires and a low-key Abarth badge.

The formula today is much the same. The brand new Fiat 500 Abarth will race at Monza, Spa Francorchamp, Imola and elsewhere, while also arriving in showrooms. The car's race heritage—and capabilities—are the reason we flew to Las Vegas, then drove the car up to Spring Mountain Motorsports Ranch for a real feel of its heart and soul.

A new Abarth hits the pavement

The new Fiat 500 is less than 12 feet long, weighs about 2400 pounds and in standard form has a 101-hp four-cylinder engine that gets 38 MPG highway. The car is shorter than a MINI and gets better fuel mileage than a smart car. This non-Abarth Fiat 500 starts at \$15,500, with two other models at \$17,500 and \$19,500. Fully optioned, you can spend \$23,150.

This "new" Fiat 500 arrived in the US last year, but has already sold 800,000 copies worldwide since 2007. Sales growth in the US for the year leading up to our drive already outpaces the industry as a whole. We expect this growth to increase, as curiosity builds along with awareness. Trade-ins include other small cars—Fit, Yaris, MINI—but also bigger and more expensive cars, even pickups. Acquiring customers from other A and B-size cars is an obvious goal, but with the C and D segments ten times their size, these apparent growth opportunities have the company very excited. The ragtop version of the 500 is the only four-seat cabriolet under \$20,000. Interest is high.

People moving to the brand seek "a car I want to drive," as well as Italian style, engineering and panache. Fiat recently produced a Gucci model at \$27,500—their fastest-selling version. Coming up soon, watch for a Fiat 500E fully electric version.

The Gucci was in Las Vegas, white with trademark red and green stripes toe to tail. While that's the pretty lady in the lineup, Abarth is the bad boy—conceived to be "fast, mean, wicked and nasty," a track-ready everyday performance car.

We received our new Fiat 500 Abarth at the Hard Rock Hotel in downtown Las Vegas, headed for Red Rock Canyon park outside town, then up into the Sierra foothills for a track session at Spring Mountain Motorsports Ranch. "Drive it like you stole it," they tell us. "Drive it like a rental car." They are confident we'll enjoy its performance,



and they are also confident that while we're pushing it, we'll realize we are driving a smooth sedan suitable for every day, while getting 34 MPG.

The Abarth is all about power and durability. It starts with the Fiat 500's 1.4-liter MultiAir four, but turbocharged and twin-intercooled, boosting horsepower from 101 to 160 (a 58 percent boost, and 117 hp per liter) and torque from 98 to 170 lb-ft (a whopping 73 percent increase). A heavy-duty five-speed manual with Torque Transfer Control (TTC) powers equal-length half shafts with a 3.35 final gear ratio. This engine—built at Chrysler's Dundee, Michigan plant—was voted Best International Engine by a panel of 72 journalists from 36 countries, in 2010.

A forged-steel crankshaft has five main bearings and is counterweighted to reduce mass at high RPMs. Connecting rods are lightweight forged steel, while pistons are hard-anodized lightweight cast aluminum. Oil is shot into the bottom of each cylinder with piston-cooling jets. Compression is

KEEP RIGHT >>





9.8:1, and the car is best on 91-octane premium fuel, though 87 octane is acceptable.

Modifications inside and out amp up the already fun and sporty nature of the Fiat 500. Body effects are enhanced through front fascia, side skirts and rear spoiler. The interior has instrument and style upgrades. And the Abarth badge and scorpion logo show up in key spots—in classic Fiat-Abarth partnership manner, that is the brand name you will see.

Laps at Spring Mountain

Spring Mountain Motorsports Ranch is about an hour west and slightly north of Las Vegas, in the Sierra foothills right on the California line. The facility is a private racetrack with an 8000-sq.ft. clubhouse, pool and fitness facility, racquetball courts, shooting range and climbing wall, as well as condominiumized garages. The membership facility is also open to students, car clubs and corporate events—which would be us, in this case.

The track itself—home to the Ron Fellows Performance Driving School—can be set up in over 20

different configurations, varying from 1.5 to 3.4 miles in length, as well as two shorter kart tracks. The design includes fast sweeping corners, quick esses, off-camber turns, a surprising 125-plus feet of elevation change and four high-speed straights including a half-mile. Famous corners are replicated, such as Mosport's 5a and 5b, the Watkins Glen "Bus Stop," and Road Atlanta's Turn 1.

We ran the full configuration. We missed a group orientation lap in a van, but did that one better, by having a top instructor ride shotgun on our first pass, three laps or about ten miles, giving us point-by-point orientation at high speed. We ran with electronic stability off for the bulk of it. We did another four, solo. Top speed for the Abarth is 130 mph, and we ran at about 105. And did this car handle, in these seriously challenging conditions. Wow.

We had earlier noted a couple of instances of torque steer or light power on the freeways of Las Vegas. Driving the one-lane twisties of Red Rock Canyon, that had all faded away. Once familiar with the car's feel, and at track speeds, all we noticed was the drive, which was solid, quick, comfortable, even masterful. It's a well-equipped and well-thought-out car, but its transparent performance lets you focus on the drive. When a tool is all about function, you know you have a well-designed tool. When a sporty car is all about its sporty drive, ditto.

You've seen a performance package on any number of other cars, factory or otherwise, run the cost up by tens of thousands, perhaps doubling or tripling. Not this. The Fiat 500 Abarth comes in at just \$22,000. Options are few—basically one package for \$600 including satellite radio, alarm and automatic climate. That's for a car that is great fun and also gets the highest MPG of any performance car sold in the US—34 highway. And did track time sound fun? Abarth thinks so. That's why every customer also gets a full-day Abarth Driving Experience racetrack session with their purchase. And how about this: Hagerty Insurance has picked the Abarth as one of ten future collectibles, and it is yours for half the price of others on the list.

There are two ways to look at a car that performs so well without overly showy style. That's the attraction of a sleeper, a car that doesn't look as hot as it is, not drawing too much attention. And there's an attraction of a car that looks just like the very cool thing that it is. With the Fiat 500 Abarth, you get both. The Abarth direction is, to Fiat, somewhat like SRT is to Dodge. But basing it on the little Fiat 500, you get more of a surprise.

The Abarth is ripe for amping up its credentials through the aftermarket. In its first year at SEMA, it won the Sport Compact Class, with a huge presence already, including a 200-mph Venom with cold air intake, exhaust and boost control modifications. Something similar is expected to be available through an "Outfit Center" at dealerships, for those who don't want to build-it-themselves.

As Fiat told us in Las Vegas, with the bad boy Abarth, you get just "the right amount of wrong." The cogniscenti definitely already know about the Abarth badge. Soon everybody will. ■



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GOODYEAR

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PROUDLY LOCATED ON THE GILA RIVER INDIAN COMMUNITY.

Ian Parr is an engineer at Honeywell. His 1965 Pontiac GTO is shared with his wife Theresa and twins Jacqueline and Donovan. The car was shown at the 2012 Goodguys 3rd Spring Nationals, held at WestWorld in north Scottsdale, in March.

In the mid-seventies, when he was about fifteen, Ian Parr wanted to become a mechanic. He was lucky to have an opportunity to work with a very good mechanic—Dick Fredric—who told Ian not to become one. Fredric told Parr that no one ever expects their car to break down, it always takes too long to fix, and it always costs too much. Fredric said cars are a good hobby.

Parr took his mechanic's advice: he went to college and became an engineer, then got married, bought a house, rented it out and bought another house, then

worked on raising a family. Life was good, but in the background, he had never given up one dream: to own a Pontiac GTO (though affording it was going to be tough).

In the mid-nineties, the Parr family relocated to Phoenix from Buffalo, NY. Ian was now in a perfect part of the country to enjoy a GTO, and he knew he wanted a 1965 convertible—but it had to be something he could afford. He found a listing in *AutoTrader*, in August 1997. The car had the wrong engine—a 1963 421—was finished in primer pink and was disassembled. But it was what he could afford. He researched its Pontiac Historical Society (PHS) documentation, which showed it was built on May 11, 1965, with of course the correct 389, a 4-barrel carburetor, 4-speed manual transmission and transistorized ignition. It had drum brakes all the way around, with a 3.23 rear end. The car was originally painted in

Mayfair Maize (pale yellow), with a parchment (white) interior and a black top. This would not have been Ian's first choice of color combination, but it was a real GTO. One other thing: it was on Vancouver Island, in Canada.

So on a Wednesday night in September 1997, Parr and a friend headed north from Phoenix with an empty trailer. They arrived Friday night on Vancouver Island and stayed in the guest room at the seller's house. (As Parr told us his story, while showing his completed car at the Goodguys Spring Nationals, he noted that the seller "is a good guy!") They loaded up the GTO (along with all its parts) on Saturday morning and arrived back in Phoenix by Sunday night—exhausted but very excited.

Since the original engine and tranny were long gone, Parr decided to rebuild the GTO the way he wanted it. He had started to save up some money to pay for the

restoration, when his wife gave birth to twins, in January 1999. The car project was going to be delayed awhile. Life was still good, he recounts—and he was not going to give up his dream.

In 2002, Ian started the restoration. He had never done a restoration of any kind before, and he knew he was in over his head. He just didn't realize how far. But some very good friends—Frank Westbrook, David "DJ" Jacobs and Jeremy Jacobs—said they would get him through it. "Without their help, this GTO would not be on the road today," says Parr. "But, as they say, behind every good man is a good woman. My wife Theresa supported me through this journey, and without her support, I would still just be dreaming."

The body was removed from the frame. The frame, inner fenders, rear axle, control arms, core support and other pieces were powder coated. All the undercoating was removed, and the body was very straight. The hood scoop was opened up to be a real ram air. The body was painted Nocturne Blue (a '78-79 Trans Am color) with a red pinstripe. The interior was refinished in parchment white. The bumpers were rechromed, and all the trim was polished. The new convertible top is a blue canvas, which Parr says holds up better than vinyl in Arizona.

Under the hood is a 1971 455 V8 engine with an Edelbrock intake and Edelbrock 1903 750 CFM carb. An HEI ignition was rebuilt with MSD replacement parts. The 5/16-inch fuel line was replaced with a 3/8-inch line, and a vapor return line was added. The transmission is a Tremec TKO-600 5-speed with a 3.90 limited-slip rear end. The car has Flowmaster dual exhaust with the GTO's optional splitter tips.

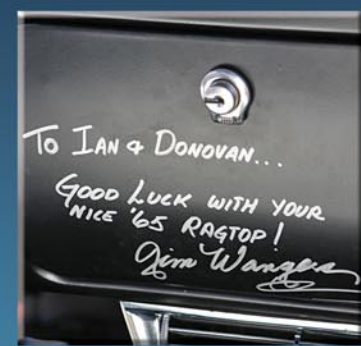
A power-assisted master brake cylinder was added, with stainless steel brake lines and disc brakes at all four corners. To upgrade handling, front and rear stabilizers were added, along with new springs and KYB shocks. The power steering unit was upgraded with a variable power steering unit. Wheels are 15-inch Pontiac Rally IIs with the red center caps.

Ian added power windows, aftermarket air-conditioning with original controls, and an original AM/FM radio with a power antenna, plus the console with vacuum gauge. Fisher Body seat belts were added, front and rear. The dash includes the Rally Gauge set, and the interior is capped off with the '65's desirable wood-grain steering wheel. Parr also added an Alpine stereo, concealed in the glove box, with speakers in the kick panels and behind the rear seat, plus a 12-inch subwoofer in the trunk. The sound system is powered by two amplifiers: a 4X50-watt amp for the interior and a 1000-watt amp for the subwoofer.

When Parr showed the still-in-progress '65 at the Pontiac Heaven event in 2006, "Father of the GTO" Jim Wangers signed the glove box. He wished Ian good luck, and Ian says he needed it—he did not finish until 2008. The final touch was a 1964 Arizona license plate with a 1965 sticker. In Arizona, if the plate number is not being used, then the MVD will let you register that plate. The odometer just turned over 4000 miles in early 2012. Parr says, "I never gave up my dream, and I have a true appreciation for the many talented individuals who bring their rides to the Goodguys Rod & Custom Association shows. We enjoy driving the GTO ... and just living the dream." ■

LIFE IS GOOD

STORY BY IAN PARR
PHOTOS BY RANDALL BOHL



ONE HUNDRED PLUS ONE HUNDRED PLUS SIXTY-SIX

Story and photos by Larry Edsall

It was as if there was no other choice. The 2012 Chevrolet "Centennial Edition" Corvette arrived just in time for the weekend when the state of Arizona began the celebration of its centennial as

the 48th and final of the contiguous United States. We had to do a road trip. Let's see... Corvette convertible... centennials... of course! The Mother Road! Old Route 66.

We left Phoenix and climbed to Payson—climbing being no challenge at all to the manually shifted 6.2-liter, 430-horsepower V8 beneath the Corvette's hood—and then on up onto the Mogollon Rim, then northeast across the Mogollon Plateau to Holbrook and its historic Wigwam Motel, where each of the 15 "rooms" is a standalone unit shaped like a Native American's teepee.

At one time, there were seven such Wigwam Villages, stretching from Kentucky to Florida and on to California. This one was constructed in 1950 by Chester Lewis, who had seen the original in Kentucky and agreed to a rights fee that gave him the building plans in exchange for installing coin-operated radios in each

teepee; the dimes inserted into those radios were forwarded as what amounted to a franchise fee. Lewis ran the village until Interstate 40 took traffic away from the Mother Road, though his children reopened the facilities in 1988. What better way to begin our Route 66 adventure than by spending a night in the Wigwam?

The sunrise was gorgeous, but the temperature didn't rise with it. Twenty-eight degrees! The top stayed up as we traveled west on the Interstate.

"Don't forget Winona," Bobby Troup wrote in his lyrics to "Route 66." We didn't. That's where we left the superslab, but after we did we wondered what had made the small cluster of homes so memorable to Troup back when he drove the road soon after World War II.

What is now called "Historic Route 66" zig-zags through Flagstaff, and then becomes little more than the I-40 frontage

The Corvette poses in Holbrook next to the Route 66 mural at Joe & Aggies Cafe (opposite page) and at the Wigwam motel (this page, bottom). Also this page: The old Mother Road and a closeup of the new Corvette's wheel design.

road—and at one point it even turns to red rock gravel as it climbs through the pine forest west of that city.

Further west, the city of Williams has time traveled itself back to the 1950s and '60s in an ongoing Route 66 celebration, which seems only fitting because Williams was the last original Route 66 downtown to be bypassed by the Interstate system. Enjoy that cruise through time in Williams, because as you head on west, you're forced back onto the Interstate for nearly 20 miles, until just east of Ash Fork.

Finally, we've reached the longest continuous remaining stretch of the original Mother Road—158 miles from just east of Ash Fork all the way to bank of the Colorado River. And not only are we departing I-40, but the weather has warmed enough for the top to depart from overhead—though we'll still make use of the Centennial Corvette's heater and seat warmers.

The Centennial Corvette

Chevrolet celebrated its 100th anniversary as an automobile manufacturer late last year. Part of the celebration included the creation of a special Centennial Edition 2012 Corvette.

The Centennial package—a \$4,950 option—provides special Carbon Flash Metallic paint with satin-black graphic racing stripes; special badges featuring a CHEVROLET 100 YEARS logo with Louis Chevrolet at the steering wheel of a racing car; crossed-flag Corvette emblems with "100" instead of the fleur-de-lis; Satin Black Centennial wheels (replaced on our test car by \$1,850 optional chrome-aluminum rims); red brake calipers, Magnetic Selective Ride Control—basically, turn a knob and you're ready for the race track; leather-covered dashboard and door panels with red stitching; microfiber suede-wrapped steering wheel, shifter and seat inserts; and embossed centennial logo on the headrests.

With black-on-black stripes, black power convertible top, and black interior,

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The new Corvette and a vintage Chevrolet pickup at the Cool Springs Station west of Kingman (above). Left, one set of Burma Shave signs. Opposite page: Mountain curves, and an historic gas station in Peach Springs.



the Centennial Corvette looks as menacing as its 430-hp V8 sounds when you nail the throttle. On the other hand, once you're up to speed and simply cruising down the highway, the car is rated at 26 MPG (16 in the city), and we averaged 27.1 on our 890-mile centennial celebration drive.

By the way, base price on the 2012 Corvette convertible is \$54,525. In addition to the Centennial Edition package and those wheels, our car was equipped with the 3LT Preferred Equipment Group, which for \$7,995 provides sport seats with power bolster and lumbar, heat and memory; a power convertible top; tilt and telescoping steering column; Bose premium audio with nine speakers, navigation, XM satellite radio (which we keep tuned to channel 5, listening to the same songs as Route 66 travelers in the 1950s, CD player and Bluetooth hands-free cell phone connection; head-up display—a wonderful feature that projects information such as your speed and how many g's you pulled in that last turn onto the inside of the windshield so you don't have to divert your eyes from the road—and a net in the trunk for smaller cargo items.

Speaking of the trunk, with the top down there's still 7.5 cubic feet of cargo, but think duffel bags not hard suitcases for your weekend trips.

The Mother Road

Route 66 dates to the 1920s. John Steinbeck's Joads and others who fled their

farms and their homes in the face of the Dust Bowl traveled west on what the author called "the Mother Road" in the late 1930s. Originally rutted gravel, by 1938 the road was paved all the way from Chicago to Los Angeles. While the Joads and their ilk may not have enjoyed the drive, others no doubt got their kicks, as Troup wrote, along the way, especially after World War II had ended and Route 66 became the route to California and its sunny promise of prosperity.

The road and the promise it represented for a post-war America searching for its future even took top billing over two young stars and their new Corvette in the *Route 66* television series, aired by CBS from 1960-'64.

But people couldn't get to California—or anywhere else for that matter—quickly enough. Everyone, it seemed, was in a hurry to find the future.

The Interstate highway system took care of that. Instead of kicks along the way, Route 66 communities were kicked aside as Interstates 10, 15, 40, 44 and 55 took traffic off city streets and took money out of local businesses. By 1972, Route 66 had lost its official designation as a federal highway. Tourist traps became ghost towns.

The Mother Road was gone, but she was not forgotten, at least not for long. Eager for her embrace, her children and grandchildren would return. Towns along

the route celebrated the road that linked them. Businesses were reborn. Tourists came again, this time not merely to travel through on their way to the golden west but to linger as they tried to hold on just a little longer to their own youthful innocence and the promise the road had represented, the potential of new life, renewed life, out West.

There was a time long before dash-mounted CD players and satellite radio when in-car entertainment meant playing license plate bingo or reading the Burma-Shave signs spaced poetically along country highways.

Dinah doesn't... Treat him right... But if he'd shave... Dinah-mite!... Burma-Shave.

Signage restrictions along the Interstates didn't allow for such frivolity, and even if they had, the faster speeds of travel would have ruined the pace of reading. As it was, Route 66 across northern Arizona wasn't part of the original Burma-Shave campaign, which ran from 1925-1963, because there was too little traffic to justify the expense. And yet, they're here now, placed by old road preservationists at various spots along the historic road between Ash Fork and Kingman.

Some are whimsical: *Cattle Crossing... Means Go Slow... That Old Bull... Is Some Cow's Beau... Burma-Shave.*

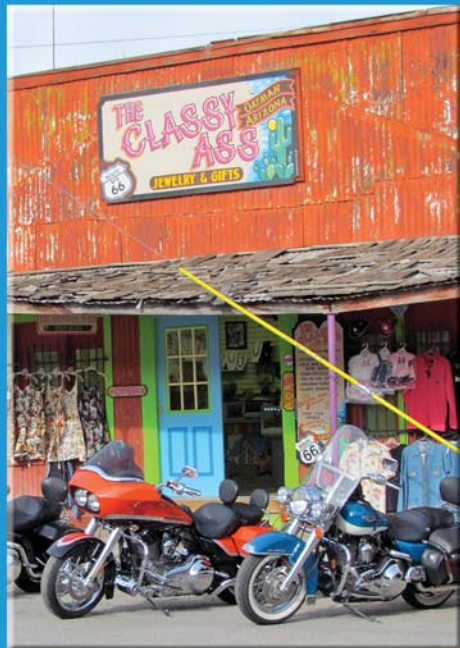
Others are more serious: *Thirty Days... Hath September... April, June... And the Speed Offender... Burma-Shave.*

Seligman is the last town for the next 80 miles with both an Interstate exit and a Route 66 heritage. Though much smaller than Williams, Seligman and its businesses also celebrate their historic Route roots, with brothers Angel and Juan Delgadillo playing important roles in the route's revitalization.

From Seligman, the old road heads northwest across the high desert, past the Grand Canyon Caverns, where you can descend into a limestone cavern more than 200 feet underground. A few miles on, the road turns southwest and goes through Peach Springs, where, if you're driving something more suitable for off-pavement travel than our Corvette, you can pay a small fee and drive north on a trail that ends at the Colorado River, making this the only place you can drive to the river within the Grand Canyon.

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Clockwise from above: A sign on the road assures you're on the right road. Racer Louis Chevrolet gained fame on the race track, and the car that bears his image would please his racy nature. Speaking of nature: Oatman is known for its wandering burros. Sometimes called the jack ass, an Oatman emporium proclaims that even an ass can have class.



The road loops south through Valentine, turns back northwest through Hackberry and past its famed Hackberry General Store, then turns southwest again at Antares for a 20-mile run into Kingman, where you end up on Andy Devine Avenue, so named because Kingman is the home town of the portly, rasp-voiced cowboy actor perhaps best known for his role of Jingles, sidekick in *The Adventures of Wild Bill Hickok* television series.

Beyond Kingman, the road runs flat through the Sacramento Valley until the topography takes a dramatic turn as you approach Cool Springs and work your way up through Black Mesa to Sitgreaves Pass.

The road is narrow, curves are tight and the drop-offs may have you holding your breath—and wondering how people drove this route back in their Model Ts. In the days of sputtering engines and gravity-fed fuel systems, some cars had to be driven up the hills in reverse, a skill perfected by local residents who were paid by the tourists to get their cars safely across the pass.

The Corvette has no trouble negotiating these hills, but at one point near the Gold Road Mine the downhill switchback is so tight and steep that the chin spoiler

scrapes along the pavement.

And soon we find ourselves at a dead stop. We've arrived in Oatman, an old mining town (also where Clark Gable and Carole Lombard spent a night on their honeymoon) famous for the wild burros that roam its streets and for the Wild West history it relives by staging gunfights right there in the middle of the road for tourists. We arrive just as such a shootout is about to take place, and have great seats for the show as it unfolds right in front of the Corvette. In fact, after taking pictures of the shootout, some folks turn and take pictures of our car!

Beyond Oatman we descend into Golden Shores in the Mohave Valley and drive along the tamarisk trees and the shoreline of the Topock Marsh.

The historic route rejoins the Interstate to cross the Colorado River into California. We do as well, but not to cross the river. Instead, we head east, though only for a few miles, before turning south toward Lake Havasu City, where we drive the Corvette back and forth across London Bridge before continuing south to Parker Dam, which was completed in 1938 and was responsible for turning some 20 miles of the Colorado River into Lake Havasu.

After crossing the dam, we follow California 62 south along the river bank for 16 scenic miles to Earp, named after the US Marshal who retired here and worked his many mining claims in the nearby Whipple Mountains.

From Earp, a bridge takes us back to Arizona, where AZ 95 and then 72 lead us across the Cactus and Ranegras plains to Hope, which from what we can tell was named because locals hoped its location on the coast-to-coast highway, US 60, would lead to a business boom. It did not. Nor did the opening of Interstate 10 just a few miles south appear to benefit yet another town, New Hope.

From 1922-'66, US 60 was a coast-to-coast highway, running from Virginia Beach to Los Angeles. The Cactus Derby auto races (1908-'14) from LA to Phoenix blazed Route 60's western-most trail. Later, US 60 was the route people drove when they traveled between Phoenix and LA.

Though it has retained its official U.S. highway designation despite losing its traffic to I-10, there are no historic markers, no shiny Burma-Shave signs, no song, and no kicks along its gritty right-of-way. ■

Where the roads are dry and the cars are slick.

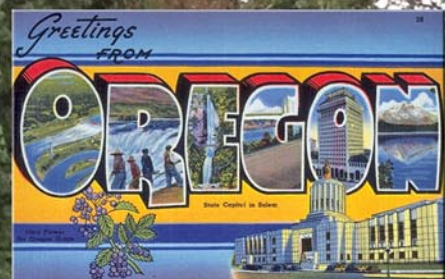


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pony, bull and box

THREE NEW FORD LINEUPS: MUSTANG, TAURUS AND FLEX

BY JOE SAGE



2013 Ford Mustang California Special



Ford had enough big news brewing that they pulled three of their hottest items into one big session—a couple of days in northwest Oregon, on rainy, snowy, sleety, windy days, trying out their updated 2013 Ford Taurus, Flex and Mustang—quite a few Mustangs, in fact.

The Mustang next year—model year 2014—will be much bigger news, as a highly-anticipated (and well concealed to date) completely new generation comes to life. The current generation of “retro” Mustangs, since 2005, has been very successful—and, to our eye, has possibly had its style just about perfected for 2013. A few Shelby iterations have gotten it right, along the way, but it basically has taken till now for the front end sheet-metal to look as the original concepts suggested. Bravo.

ford family of fine mustangs

Ford delivers “a steed for every need,” in the words of chief Mustang engineer Dave Pericak. Mustang has always excelled at being—in varying guises—all things to all people, a trait that precious few politicians or cars can pull off. Whether a fun little six-cylinder for a twenty-something single, or an all-to-the-wall supercar, the brand delivers, and most amazingly, none of these has ever detracted from the attraction of the others.

The Mustang can become any owner’s dream, and is ripe for customization. This is not necessarily of the wild SEMA or even Shelby variety, but can involve just the standard book of options. Ford has had over one million potential customers custom-building their new Mustang on Facebook since last fall—the most “likes” of any car.

Pericak calls the Mustang “the most iconic car in Ford’s history.” Iconic is a word that gets used too often and too freely for some people’s taste, but it’s hard to dispute in this case. Yet the Mustang never rests on its laurels. Over just the past three model years, they have brought us a new engine in the 2010 Shelby GT500, a 5.4-liter muscled up to 540 hp and 510 lb-ft of torque,



then a 2011 GT500 knocking off over 100 pounds and hitting 550 hp. In 2012, we saw a new V6 boasting record fuel mileage: 31 MPG; an updated version of the venerable 5.0-liter bringing the best of both worlds, with 412 hp and 26 MPG; and the enhanced 5.0-liter (302 cu.in.) V8 in the reborn Boss 302, at 444 hp (see our March/April 2012 issue). By last year, even a regular ol’ Mustang GT would deliver 412 hp.

For 2013, the base price of that GT is under \$31,000, compared with just over \$42,000 for the Boss (or just over \$54,000 for the Shelby GT500). For max affordability, the base V6 Mustang starts at just \$22,895. Best of all, that GT is now matching the Boss 302, at 420 hp, while the Shelby now runs speeds over 200 mph on its 5.8L, the most powerful production V8 in the world.

There is quite a selection of new Mustangs for 2013, but they all benefit from this year’s new laurels. The front bodywork we admire is not all for show: the new fascia applies downforce that makes this the most aerodynamically well-planted Mustang ever produced. The body also benefits from functional hood louvers (on the GT), body-colored rocker panels—and no plastic. Lighting is distinctive, coming or going, with HID headlamps, two LED strips up front (plus LED fogs on the GT),

and all-new LED taillights (with that classic Ford touch, sequential turn signals). To keep the design clean, and to benefit from the attributes of these new light sources, the center brake light shifts from red to white when the car is put in reverse.

Wheels are new, with lots of options. Cloth and leather Recaro seats are available across the lineup. Cars are available in both manual across the full line, as well they should be, and automatic on all but the Boss 302 or Shelby GT500. Ford is proud of the 6-speed SelectShift automatic: upgraded to mimic the kind of control a good manual driver can exert, with gears held longer for quicker acceleration.

Dashboard electronics are plentiful but not overdone. A 4.2-inch LCD screen in the instrument panel puts a wealth of performance information at your fingertips, including not only speed and RPMs, but also a gauge mode with familiar trip and temperature readouts, and on Premium models, a set of Track Apps displaying G-forces and even a Christmas tree timer—dragstrip-style—for your own controlled launches. Audio is new: a 370-watt 8-speaker 6-channel system, or a 550-watt 9-speaker

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2013 Ford Taurus SHO



7-channel. In fact, the sound is so powerful, Ford had to reengineer the door handles to handle the vibrations.

There are some very strong packages available for 2013: a factory-installed Track Package on the Mustang GT, a Performance Package for the V6, a California Special Package for the GT Premium model (keeping alive one of the best option names from Mustang in the '60s and, as then, easily distinguished by its off-center running horse grille emblem), and a Laguna Seca Package for the Boss 302 (available, among other things, in School Bus Yellow or black-on-black).

Speaking of colors, a parking lot full of new Mustangs on a gloomy Portland morning will perk you right up: with colors like Race Red, Gotta Have It Green, Grabber Blue or that School Bus Yellow, they leave behind a world too full of black, white and seven shades of grey.

There was nothing gloomy about our time in the Mustangs, even when the sky was grey and the roads were wet. We comfortably drove through suburban hills until we reached winding mountain two-lanes and really let 'em out. The day was capped off with straightaways near the airport, more fun for some than others, once the police caught wind of how hot these cars are. We drove the 5.0L California Special with 6-speed manual most of

the day, and gave the automatic a challenging workout on those straightaways before wrapping things up.

taurus reaches its stride

Chief Taurus engineer Bill Gubing starts out by telling us about the big Ford sedan's powerplants: not one but two EcoBoosts—a 2.0-liter inline four, and a 3.5-liter V6. There is another 3.5-liter V6, too, non-EcoBoost. Not every drivetrain combination is possible, but the pairings are so logical, we foresee very few buyer conflicts. The standard V6 is available with either front-wheel or all-wheel drive, has 288 hp and 254 lb-ft of torque, and gets 19/29/23 MPG (city/highway/combined) with FWD or 18/26/21 with AWD. The twin turbo EcoBoost V6 comes only in the potent Taurus SHO with AWD, and while it pumps power up to 365 hp and 350 lb-ft of torque, it has only a one-point loss in fuel mileage across the board for an all-wheel-driver: 17/25/20 MPG (city/highway/combined). A 5 percent loss in fuel mileage for a 27 percent boost in power is a trade we'd happily make (although we remain a little surprised at the 3- or 4-point loss in highway mileage with AWD). But wait—there's that other EcoBoost. The four-banger is only available with FWD, but comes close to traditional V6 power, at 240 hp

and 270 lb-ft of torque (or with regular fuel, 231 hp, same torque). Fuel mileage has not been announced by the EPA yet, but tests so far indicate 31 MPG. Not bad at all for a large, heavy, comfortable American sedan.

For our drive from Portland to the coast, we chose the same one we'd probably buy: the Taurus SHO with EcoBoost V6. Its AWD was an excellent choice, as we had quite a bit of weather to deal with, and the car handled its additional power with no problems, only benefits. Those who drove the same route the day before—up in elevation from the inland city to Cannon Beach—had encountered a very wet and heavy spring snow. Most of that was gone, but our drive added wind—lots and lots of wind, estimated in the 60-to-70-mph range. A good time to be hugging the ground and gripping the pavement in a nice, solid car like the 2013 Ford Taurus.

And speaking of what we'd probably buy, that powerful AWD Taurus SHO with V6 EcoBoost starts at \$39,200. An AWD standard V6 Taurus Limited starts at \$33,000. The base SE model with that standard V6 and FWD starts at \$26,600. It's a reasonable price spread for the differences among the models, and given what you get, they're all bargains. Think comfort and style that could rival the Germans, but for \$20-30k less. As Gubing says, the Taurus has moved distinctly from being a commodity item for years, to being an aspirational vehicle.

The Taurus looks similar to its predecessor, but is clearly recognizable by its new grille, similar to the new Ford Fusion (and to the Evos concept car, which many consider a clue to the 2014 Mustang). Changes are thorough, however. The wheels, hood and projector beam headlamps are new. Inside, "everything you see or touch" is new or upgraded, says Gubing. Inside and out, adjustments have been made to fit and finish, fine-tuned down to the half-millimeter range.

Ford's declared target for all their new styling and engineering is the Audi A6. Have they achieved that? Don't shop the segment without finding out for yourself.



2013 Ford Flex Limited

As Ford themselves say, over the past few years, while Taurus has gone from once being a midsize sedan to full size, it has also gone from being a low-key "sleeper" to being arguably a standout—very much differentiated from the rest of their lineup and from the competition.

the firm and flexible flex

Ford engineer Tom Ozog is the first to admit that the Ford Flex is perfect for "people who want to stand out from the crowd." The magic of the Flex has always been that for a vehicle with basically a fundamentally boxy and mundane format, it has always been a real eye-catcher. The 2013 model will catch a few more eyes than ever, with its distinctive grille treatment. We're a little surprised that Ford has so many front sheetmetal treatments evolving so quickly right now—from the wide silver bars of the past few years, through last year's Focus (and this year's Escape) look, which was stated to be a benchmark but has already been changed in the Focus Electric, to the new Fusion/Taurus/Evos look. Meanwhile, the new Flex is in a world of its own. When we first saw it at the LA Auto Show last winter, it reminded us of the Frozone character in the Pixar film *The Incredibles*, or Cyclops from *X-Men*. But let's not forget that those characters were both very cool.

Ford's large utility vehicles—including Flex and Explorer—have had sales growth of 34 percent over the past two years, the segment's number one sellers. The huge profile of the Explorer brings customers in, who then discover the Edge and the Flex. With its three-row, seven-passenger layout and huge cargo space, Flex quickly wins over a lot of families.

The Flex itself has huge drawing power. It has the most loyal customers in the whole Ford lineup—67 percent of buyers trade to Flex from within the brand—and it draws massive numbers of new ones: 55 percent of Flex buyers are new to Ford. Demographics are interesting, too: 20 percent of sales are in California, home of



the woody wagon so many years ago, and 45 percent of sales are to women. This is also a vehicle where the MyFord Touch system is highly popular—JD Power and Associates studies indicate it's a big reason people buy the Flex (even though it's available on other models).

The Flex comes with either of the same two V6 engines as its platform-mate Taurus for 2013: the 287-hp standard 3.5-liter or the 365-hp EcoBoost. The EcoBoost four is not available on this one, so far.

An Appearance Package on the midgrade SEL or top grade Limited adds a black painted roof and mirrors, 20-inch aluminum wheels with black details, plus a range of interior upgrades (including gloss black details on the steering wheels). This is a very classy and cool look, all the more when coupled with tinted windows in Arizona.

Handling has received special attention in the new Flex, centered on its electric power-assisted steering (EPAS) system, which Ford states gives 25 percent better steering response than a BMW X5. Steering feel is hard to sum up in one number, but this makes a point.

Our drive in the 2013 Ford Flex was from Cannon Beach on the Oregon coast, up into the high country and via snowy, slushy, icy mountain roads back to Portland. We chose the EcoBoost V6 Limited and loved it. The Flex

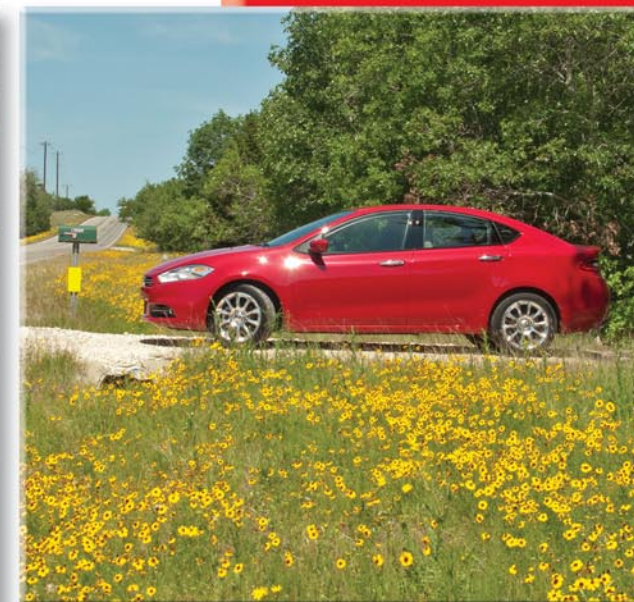
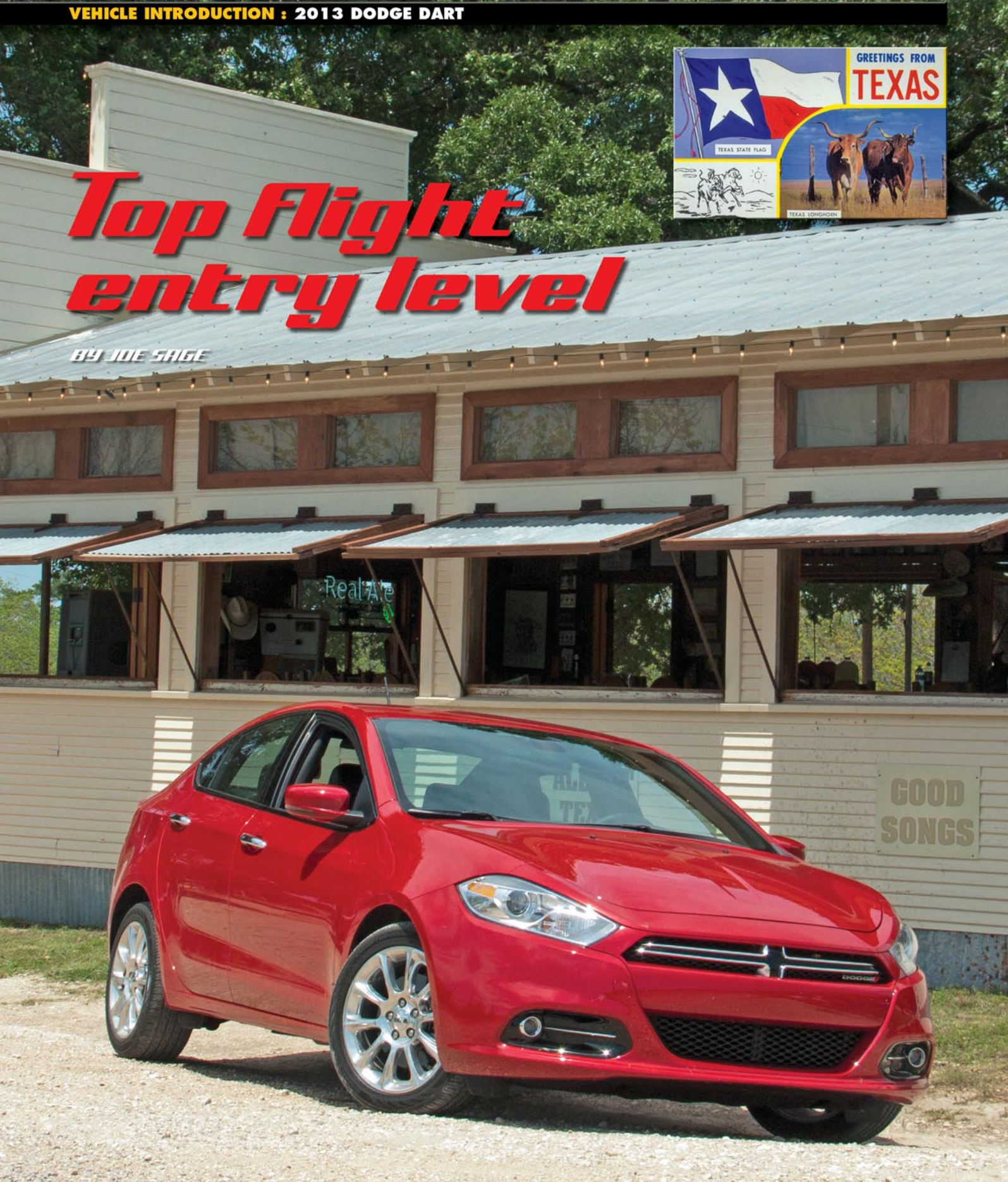
can look a mile long, when you discover it for the first time. But, after all, it's built on the same platform as the superb-handling (and SVT-ready) Taurus. And it does have room. We were an army of two that day, but the Flex seats seven. When so populated, cargo capacity behind the third row is 20 cu.ft. Knock down the third row, and cargo exceeds 40 cu.ft.; and with the middle row also down, it exceeds 80 cu.ft. There are a lot of seven-passenger vehicles available, but matching the fuel economy, road-hugging stance and overall volume of the Flex is tough. And as Huey Lewis and the News said long ago, it's hip to be square.

three fine fords ready to rock

We drove our Taurus, Flex and multiple Mustangs during some of the nastier but more exhilarating weather the Pacific Northwest can throw at you. We drove them on smooth open highways at speed, and in traffic on tight maneuvers. Every one is well suited to its mission—and would be equally delighted to spend its life on the dry, open roads of the Sonoran Desert, or on long hauls into the high country or on the highway to San Diego. Each one of these Fords hovers toward the higher end of its respective scale. It's great terrain to explore. ■

Top Flight entry level

BY JOE SAGE



If you've always wanted to own a brand new Alfa Romeo, this is finally your opportunity. The new Dodge Dart is the first vehicle to bear full fruit from Chrysler's new ownership by Fiat. By definition an entirely new Dodge, the Dart is at its core the highly successful Alfa Romeo Giulietta. It means the reignition of "Dodge fever," says Richard Cox, director of the Dodge brand at Chrysler Group LLC. Watch for six all-new or completely redesigned Dodges over the coming year, part of 16 vehicles Chrysler is introducing overall. This comes on the heels of a highly successful 2011, with Chrysler Group sales up 39 percent, with 290,000 incremental new customers, and all Dodge models showing double- or even triple-digit growth.

Despite these great numbers, Dodge knew they had a product gap in the compact segment—the fastest-growing segment there is. Compacts and midsize cars together equal one third of the market. The company studied the competition—mostly 4-door sedans—and found them to be "bland," to use Cox's word. Enter Alfa. The stylish Alfa Romeo Giulietta—and now the Dodge Dart—"shatters the perception of compact," says Cox. Dodge wants its small-car owners to be proud, not embarrassed, so they are delivering what Cox calls "a cool world-class car that just happens to be a compact."

Dart is not the only Giulietta spinoff. Overseas, the Fiat Bravo and Lancia Delta are also cousins. The Dart is a sedan, 12.5 inches longer than the Alfa hatchback.

Dodge Darts galore

Any European car hitting US shores will typically get new powertrains, suitable to our own regulations, as well as to our different driving habits, habitats and styles. The 2013 Dodge Dart will be available with no fewer than three engines and three transmissions. Not every transmission is available with every engine, but it's just the beginning of their explosion of choices in this new car: add four variable front grille/fascia treatments, 14 different interior combinations, half a dozen wheels in three sizes, and a dozen paint colors, multiply those out, and you actually have over 30,000 possible combinations before you even hit the option list. Count every-

thing, and there are over 100,000 ways to customize and personalize your new Dart. Dodge wants each owner to be able to "take pride in your ride." Pretty sweet from a car that's only going to set you back less than \$20,000. The options provide value and choice. For example, an 8.4-inch center stack screen comes for just \$595—the largest screen in the class, and it's not bundled with anything else you may not want or need.

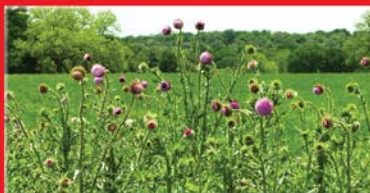
They've given the car such attention to detail, inside and out—stitching, upscale wheels, best-in-class interior room—that they confidently compare it with the Mercedes-Benz C-Class, but at half the cost or better. Do a quick search online, and you'll see Daimler-Benz CEO Dieter Zetsche marveling at the Dodge Dart in January, at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit. Dodge loves these photos.

The Dart claims more horsepower and more torque than competitors from Honda, Toyota and others. There are four models currently, with two more coming. Today, you can choose from the base SE, the SXT, Rallye and Limited. SE prices start at \$15,995, SXT at \$17,995, Rallye at \$18,995 and Limited at \$19,995. Next fall, watch for a fuel-sipping Aero model and a more potent R/T with 184 horsepower (up from 160) plus sport suspension, dual exhaust and 18-inch wheels.

The Dart is built on a strong and versatile platform. It's so strong and so versatile that the company has built a 600-horsepower all-wheel-drive rally car Dart that's faster than an F1 racer, hitting 0-to-60 in just 1.9 seconds. That's one wicked cool cousin to have in the family of your under-\$20k car.

The frugal cousin will be the Aero. This car's noble purpose stems from requirements imposed by the government when they lent money to Chrysler during the big Detroit shakeout: they must produce at least one 40-plus MPG car. This Dart will reportedly have the 1.4-liter MultiAir turbo that's available in other Darts (built by Chrysler in Michigan and also used in the Fiat 500), a 6-speed manual and weight-shaving tricks throughout. You can come very

KEEP RIGHT >>



close to Aero mileage now with the 1.4L turbo and manual, at 39 MPG highway.

You may have noticed mention of a manual transmission on the frugal versions, but it's available widely throughout the Dart lineup. Dodge says a 20 percent take rate on manual "proves there is demand," which is music to our ears.

Driving the hill country

Dodge Dart style begins right up front, with an in-your-face split-crosshair grille treatment. Projector-beam foglights and headlamps are included on all trim levels. Rear sheetmetal reflects a combination of Dodge muscle heritage and other models in the current lineup, evocative of the Challenger and Charger, though in narrower form. One of the many variables mentioned earlier is the grille treatment, which includes the upper and lower openings, the bar between, and a connecting area to the headlamps. Put it all together, and this variable can give you quite a range of style, with options for chrome, body color or black crosshairs, and body color or black in the solid areas.

Behind the grille is Dodge's first-ever active grille shutter system, which closes airflow in the lower intake at highway speeds for better aerodynamics.

As we contemplate a parking lot full of new Darts, about to choose one for our drive from downtown Austin into the hill country, we are struck by just how cool this small car appears, with its aggressive front, its large wheels, black leather and red highlights, and recall how many times we've wondered why these very cool smaller cars you can get in Europe are not available here. Well, now they are, and here it is.

It's a tough choice between the Tigershark and the 1.4-liter MultiAir Turbo. Both have 160 horsepower, but the 2.0L has less torque: 148 lb-ft versus 184 lb-ft for the turbo. (The R/T will get its additional horsepower from a 2.4L Tigershark.) We start with the 1.4L turbo—figuring it's the bigger news, and having enjoyed it in the Fiat 500 Abarth elsewhere in this issue. We swap

Attention to detail is everywhere in the Dodge Dart, inside and out. Options include engines and front appearance. Below and upper left are a sampling of grille combinations. The hill country was abuzz with bees and blossoms, and it just wouldn't be Austin if Willie Nelson himself hadn't shown up next to our hotel for the dedication of a statue in his honor.

for the 2.0L after lunch. There is not a huge difference in driving, which is about 90 percent Texas hill country and 10 percent within the Austin city limits, but the 1.4L turbo does have advantages by the numbers: higher torque and higher fuel economy (27/39/32 city/highway/combined, versus 25/36/29 for the 2-liter). Both have a base price of \$19,995.

Dodge says that although the Dart is classified as a compact car, it has a midsize interior. As we settle into our 2013 Dodge Dart Limited with the Tigershark 2.0-liter engine, we don't dispute this. It's a fine fit for two over-six-footers. Dodge has paid close attention to fit and finish inside, as well as material choices, surfacing, color and class-exclusive technological features. It's quite a cockpit for such an affordable car—sculpted, with a "floating island" bezel, 7-inch TFT display plus analog gauges, lots of ambient lighting—and available in 14 different combinations of cloth, leather and even denim. The gauges are easily customizable via four steering-wheel-mounted buttons. Bonus: the use of a vertical climate control system from Fiat has freed up space for a huge glovebox.

Our 2.0L is red over black leather, has the 6-speed manual, and adds the Uconnect Touch voice command system with 8.4-inch screen, plus a premium group and tech group (these aren't fully defined, as these are pre-production cars), backup camera, and blind spot plus rear crosspath detection systems, for a sticker of \$23,665 (plus destination). The 1.4L turbo is similar, but also adds Garmin navigation, Sirius/XM satellite radio and Travel Link, HID headlamps and nine Alpine speakers with subwoofer, coming in at \$25,160. The difference of just \$1495 for all those other features underscores the simplicity and affordability of Dart's option list.

Our drive included everything: freeways and interstates, hours' worth of beautiful two-lane country roads and highways with decent hills, curves, even a little bit of gravel at lunch. The Dart was great on all of it.

The Dodge Dart is scheduled to start showing up in dealerships by the end of June. It intends to compete with Hyundai Elantra, Chevy Cruze, Ford Focus, Honda Civic and Toyota Corolla. That list includes a few others that have been recently reenergized, too, but do not shop the category without including the Dodge Dart. It's an aggressive segment, and the new Chrysler Group brings an aggressive solution to the game. Dodge has thrown a Dart at this game board, and they have very definitely made a point. ■



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By a couple of years ago, Ford had found itself in the enviable but challenging position of having some vehicles that were big hits—in this case, the Explorer and Escape—whose designs, though solid and hugely popular, were getting a little long in the tooth. The new Escape was shown at auto shows over this past winter and is hitting the streets as you read this, while the Explorer was revealed more than a year ahead of that. We drove the Explorer in depth at its launch in the hills east of San Diego in late 2010 (see *Down and Dirty in Ford's Crown Jewel*, in our January/February 2011 issue). We drove it again for a week, here, late this winter.

The redesign process had involved very thorough investigation of the customer base, which revealed no intense off-roading and less towing—of lighter

loads—than anticipated. Thus the new Explorer tows 5000 pounds, enough for 99.6 percent of their customers, which helps deliver an SUV that costs less, weighs less, handles better and achieves higher fuel economy. The all-new 2011 Explorer also added 80 horsepower and a third row, all for \$1100 less than the old-model 2010. That couldn't leave you asking for much of anything else, it would seem.

Engines include a powerful standard 3.5L V6 and, for top fuel economy, a 2.0L EcoBoost™ inline-4. Each engine has its own six-speed automatic transmission—with a SelectShift™ for the V6. Though Ford had said the EcoBoost I-4 delivers V6-like power, joining the lineup soon will be a 3.5L EcoBoost V6 (the engine that is now outselling the V8 in Ford's top-selling F-150 pickup).

All your dreams don't necessarily come true in one machine. Fuel mileage for the Explorer can be as high as 20/28/23 MPG city/highway/combined, with front-wheel drive and the four-cylinder EcoBoost. If you want four-wheel drive, however, you must also get the V6, and estimated mileage drops to 17/23/19. (If you want a V6 without 4WD, it's a notch higher: 17/24/20.) We look forward to the V6 EcoBoost and its numbers. Meanwhile, we probably wouldn't get an Explorer without 4WD and the tow package, but if you're doing flat-land family business with it, the EcoBoost will give you very good fuel mileage for a three-row SUV. Max capability or max mileage, but not both—not an unusual tradeoff.

The base Explorer starts at \$28,870. The XLT upgrades the transmission and other features and

The complete package.

Explorer settles into its niche nicely.

By Joe Sage



starts at \$32,345. The Limited—our test model—adds a raft of amenities and starts at \$37,855 as a front-drive V6. The 4-cylinder EcoBoost starts at \$38,850—a price premium for fuel economy (and coming with a drop in horsepower, though a rise in torque), and you cannot get four-wheel drive with the 4-cylinder. An Explorer Limited 4WD (with the required V6) starts at \$39,885.

That base price for the Limited includes body-colored grille, fog lamps, power mirrors, keyless entry, extensive interior upgrades, Ford's SYNC system, 390-watt 12-speaker Sony audio and a lot more. Our test model added more and topped out at \$46,560 (see sidebar).

At the time of Explorer's launch, we received presentations from quite a few of Ford's third-party tech suppliers and called it "a one-vehicle consumer electronics show." This turns out not to be completely a plus. Our logbook for the week revealed quite a few instances of frustration with [a] several of the features and [b] the owner's manual, which, for instance, has 73 pages about how to set the seat. (This comes up in the logbook for issues we wrestled with concerning seating, audio, locks, lights, the message center and so on.) It's a recurrent theme not unique to this vehicle, but one can only hope that longer-term actual owner orientation is less frustrating than the one-week variety we typically do.

Our other notes were about size. Your correspondent is over six feet tall and has logged many a happy mile in full-size 4X4 pickups, yet we repeatedly noted that this vehicle is huge. Compared with its predecessor, it seems to have moved halfway to the Expedition. It's hard to put your elbow on the window or armrest, it's so wide—though you may keep the windows closed a lot, as wind buffeting was very strong from about 30 mph up.

For performance and handling, we take you back to our Southern California mountain obstacle course, from the launch. Our courses at that time included a particularly rough two-track trail, run at slower speeds, then faster—in total comfort. Hill Descent kept us from heating up our brakes and dumping ourselves in a creek, where most



vehicles would have been. The Explorer easily passed through a long, deep water trough, never seeming to have any risk of stalling due to depth or drag. Traction settings were tested in a large "mini-Sahara" sand pit, where the Sand mode gives even a less experienced driver total control. There are additional settings for Mud and Snow.

There are a lot of vehicles in the \$45-50k range, but they aren't likely to offer anything that the Ford Explorer Limited does not, really, since it comes complete with style, comfort, performance, operational economy, and very complete features and capability. Our only caveats are that the electronics are overdone, that it's a bit large (if the new Escape were a scaled-down Explorer, as we had hoped, that would be an answer), and that we would have to choose between fuel economy and four-wheel drive. Overall, we dare you to find anything missing. Maybe just that EcoBoost V6 engine, arriving soon. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE.....	3.5L V6 Ti-VCT
Horsepower/Torque	290 hp / 255 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	6-speed SelectShift™
DRIVETRAIN.....	4WD
BASE PRICE	\$39,855
OPTIONS: Equipment Group 302A: Voice-activated navigation, luxury seating, powerfold third row, power liftgate, BLIS inflatable rear seatbelts, blind spot monitor, active park assist, adaptive cruise and collision warning, rain-sensing wipers, HID headlamps..*	\$5310
	*(This package is now \$5600.)
Tow package	\$570
DESTINATION CHARGE	\$825
TOTAL PRICE.....	\$46,560

THE INSIDE TRACK: BRIEFS & RUMORS



2013 Buick Encore

■ **Buick** will expand its lineup early in 2013 with the all-new Encore luxury small crossover. About the same size as an Audi A3 or a Scion xB, the Encore follows Buick's global design language with waterfall grille, chrome accents and surrounds, portholes on the hood and painted lower panels. Add blue-accented projector-beam headlamps and standard 18-inch painted aluminum wheels. Inside, a flowing instrument panel wraps symmetrically into the door panels. Dark and light tones in the cabin are accented with ice blue ambient lighting. The small Encore offers 18.8 cubic feet of storage behind its split-folding rear seat or 48.4 cubic feet with the rear seat folded. Available in front- or all-wheel drive, the Buick Encore is powered by a 140-hp Ecotec 1.4L four-cylinder turbo with six-speed automatic transmission. Buick's "active" QuietTuning technology should make the Encore one of the quietest vehicles on the road.

■ Barely a year after the unveiling of the 2+2-seater BMW i8 Concept, **BMW i** is presenting a second variant, an open-top two-seater. Like its Coupe sibling, the BMW i8 Concept Spyder combines lightweight design with the eDrive high-performance plug-in hybrid drivetrain. Compared with the Coupe, the BMW i8 Concept Spyder has a slightly shorter wheelbase and overall length. Its carbon-fibre-reinforced plastic (CFRP) Life Module is an extremely lightweight passenger cell, while Drive Modules are made primarily from aluminum components.

■ **MINI**, wanting to reveal its new Roadster model in an alluring, mischievous way, chose a prime location just a block away from the Kodak and Grauman's Chinese Theatres on Hollywood Blvd., with a display promising "Live and Exotic Topless Thrills 24/7" at the MINI Roadster Peepshow Spectacular. MINI masked all the windows for a 25-day long series of fleeting, revealing shows, each triggered when a passing spectator pressed one of the "peep" buttons on the display, rolling back a window blind and unveiling the MINI Roadster as it rotated slowly on a turntable, complete with a disco ball, music and smoke.



BMW i8 Concept Spyder

■ **California** has announced a \$120 million settlement with NRG Energy Inc. that will fund a network of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations across the state, with at least 200 public fast-charging stations and an additional 10,000 plug-in units at 1000 locations across California. The settlement comes on the heels of a California Air Resources Board (CARB) update to their ZEV program in January requiring battery, fuel cell, and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles to account for up to 15 percent of California's new vehicle sales by 2025, some 1.5 million zero-emission vehicles.

■ **Dunlop** has launched its Sport Maxx Race tire in Spain, specially designed to help some of the world's fastest cars perform on some of the world's most challenging race tracks, while ensuring they are able to deliver their drivers back home without the need to change tires. The new tire is developed to fit the needs of some of the most high-performance cars on the road today including the Mercedes-Benz SLS and C63 AMG Black Series, Audi TT RS and R8, Porsche 911 GT3 and the BMW M5.

■ **Lexus** has unwrapped a striking new hybrid 2+2 sport coupe that shows the future design direction for Lexus, and an emphasis on driver-focused vehicles. Penned by the Toyota Calty design stu-



Lexus LF-LC Hybrid concept

dio in Newport Beach, the new LF-LC Hybrid concept redefines the Lexus look, with avant-garde beauty and an emphasis on advanced technology—while remaining within reach of typical premium buyers. The LF-LC follows new Lexus design language with a bold interpretation of the signature Lexus spindle grille and rear architecture. Curves blend into dynamic angles, creating a display of lines, shadows and corners. The mesh pattern of a deep-framed grille and functional air intakes in the bottom corners of the fascia fuse style and functionality. The interior of the concept combines cool tech ambience with soft textures and organic shapes, for a driver-focused synergy of form and function. The front-engine, rear-wheel-drive LF-LC features Advanced Lexus Hybrid Drive, for both driving performance and fuel efficiency.

■ **Volkswagen** Group of America, Chattanooga Operations has announced the creation of an additional 800 new jobs at its Tennessee manufacturing facility. The positions are needed as they continue to ramp up capacity to meet customer demand for the new US-produced Passat. This comes on top of an announcement earlier this year of 200 additional jobs at the Chattanooga plant, bringing the total new jobs in 2012 to 1000. "Our plant was designed to be flexible in order to respond to market demand and I'm proud that we've achieved this so quickly," said Frank Fischer, CEO and Chairman of Volkswagen Chattanooga.

■ With the electric drivetrain system of the SLS AMG E-CELL, **Mercedes-Benz** is providing yet another glimpse of its latest project, in development since 2010. Four synchronous electric motors located near

the wheels, providing a peak output of 392 kW and torque of 880 Nm, provide the SLS AMG E-CELL with its driving dynamics. A carbon-fiber transmission tunnel, which also serves as the monocoque housing for the high-voltage battery modules, is structurally integrated into an aluminum body shell and firmly bonded to it. The lightweight fibre composite materials have their origins in the world of Formula 1. A small-series production run of the powerful zero-tailpipe-emission super sports car with electric drive is expected to be launched into the market in 2013.

■ **Nissan** CEO Carlos Ghosn announced in Yokohama in late March that the company plans the return of the Datsun brand, as a complement to the existing mainstream Nissan and high-end Infiniti brands. Datsun will aim at emerging markets, where people today are relying on motorcycles and old or primitive new cars. The new Datsun will be "a modern, affordable car," says Ghosn, "something that people will be very happy to own, a product that is generous, giving them exactly what they want, and at an affordable price." Ghosn says he sees no risk for the company, only opportunity.

■ After 10 years, **Penske Racing** is returning its two-car NASCAR Sprint Cup operation to Ford Racing beginning with the 2013 Daytona 500. Recognized as one of racing's all-time great teams, Penske most recently spent nine seasons with Ford from 1994-2002, posting 27 wins and 33 poles among three drivers. In addition, its teams finished in the Top 10 48.6 percent of the time (228-of-469 starts). The organization first raced with Ford in 1976 and 1977, before coming back in 1994. In total, through 524 NASCAR starts (509 Cup Series and 15 Nationwide Series) with Ford, Penske Racing teams earned 28 victories (27 Cup Series and one Nationwide Series) and 42 pole positions (36 Cup Series and six Nationwide Series).

■ **Electric** vehicle charging stations are popping up nationwide in an effort to push Americans to invest in the new technologies. Many states are giving a monetary incentive as well—an additional tax break. Almost 30 states currently have



Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG E-CELL

some kind of electric vehicle tax incentive, with Colorado's one of the most generous for electric cars and plug-in hybrids. Coloradans buying a qualifying car will



receive a \$7,500 federal tax break and another \$6,000 from the state, for straight savings, or allowing them to spring for a more luxurious car for the same price as a lower-end model. ■

UPCOMING FEATURES

Copperstate 1000 Road Rally



Photo: Joe Sage

Cadillac XTS launch



Monterey and Pebble Beach Preview



Photo: Joe Sage

Nissan GT-R



Photo: Joe Sage

Radar Rally



Photo: Brenda Priddy

Porsche Cayenne S



LeMay—America's Car Museum Grand Opening



Photo: Joe Sage

Ford Focus Electric



Rockford Fosgate 24/7



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STAR RACING YAMAHA
SUPERCROSS
IT'S WHO I AM 24/7



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