

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

VOLUME 14 NUMBER 6
NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2015

EVENTS, AWARDS AND DRIVES

AUCTION AND CONCOURS NEWS | PIR NASCAR INFO
ARIZONA INTERNATIONAL AUTO SHOW INFO
TAWA TEXAS TRUCK RODEO AWARDS
ACTIVE LIFESTYLE VEHICLE AWARDS
RUN TO THE SUN NORTHWEST ROAD RALLY
GUMMINS ENGINE PLANT | AUDI | FIAT | FORD
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ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

news & features

November-December 2015

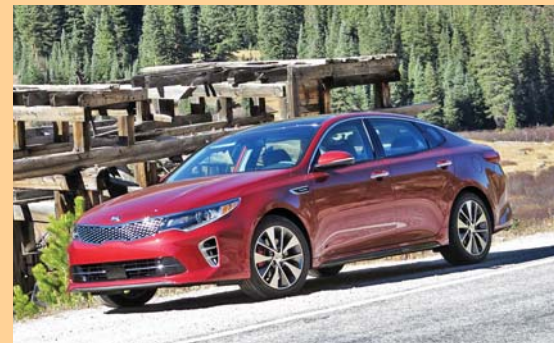
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COVER: The outgoing 2015 Audi R8 V-10 Spyder quattro dazzles in the desert. Skipping the 2016 model year, Audi has recently revealed the 2017 R8. **Photo: Joe Sage.**



Lights, camera, action. Road trips, vehicles and events are at our core, with plenty in this issue and more on tap shortly. As this issue wraps, we're preparing to cross the upper Great Plains in the all-new 2016 Chevrolet Camaro, a five-state drive from the Twin Cities, through both Dakotas into Wyoming and on to Utah, driving day and night with stops at landmarks and oddities. It's part of a 16-leg, 48-state drive, and we've chosen the longest route because, well, road trips, vehicles and events are at our core.

But right now, we have two road trips in the Colorado Rockies, one in the new Platinum trim level Ford Explorer and one in an all-new yet reassuringly familiar Kia Optima. We also fly to Seattle for our second turn in Run to the Sun, a 25-vehicle no-trophy road rally through the Cascades and Olympics. And we fly to San Antonio—a quick shot along the Mexican border above El Paso and Juarez—to participate in the Texas Truck Rodeo, where highly coveted annual Truck, SUV and Crossover awards are determined. A side trip to Indiana prepped us for the rodeo, as it's the home of Cummins Engine, who builds a powerful new light-duty diesel engine for a new full-size pickup entry, the Nissan Titan XD.

Closer to home, we have results of this year's Active Lifestyle Vehicle Awards, plus information on the upcoming Arizona International Auto Show, NASCAR at PIR—plus major news as IndyCar comes to PIR in 2016—and seven events during Arizona's world famous auction week in January—six benchmark collector car auctions and the Arizona Concours d'Elegance—plus results of Barrett-Jackson's Las Vegas auction event.

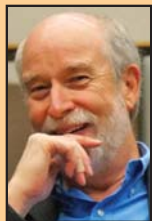
We also have a variety of local drives and impressions, from a mix of SUVs and crossovers, to sedans and hatches small and large, simple and luxurious, a new dual-purpose midsize van from Mercedes-Benz, and our cover car, the smooth, sexy, road-devouring Audi R8.

Enjoy the ride.

Joe Sage

Publisher/ Executive Editor

Photo: Brenda Priddy



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Arizona International Auto Show: Thanksgiving Weekend

The 2016-model Arizona International Auto Show hits the Phoenix Convention Center this Thanksgiving weekend, with hundreds of the latest cars, trucks, crossovers and more. See the newest vehicles, sit behind the wheel, experience the latest in-car technology and even take a test drive—right at the show. The show will have a dazzling collection of luxury, sports and family cars, utilities, vans and trucks, plus electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles, all with manufacturers' representatives on hand to answer questions.

DATES AND TIMES

Thursday, Nov 26 (Thanksgiving).....9am - 7pm
 Friday, November 27.....9am - 9pm
 Saturday, November 28.....9am - 9pm
 Sunday Family Day, November 299am - 7pm

TICKETS

Adults (13 and over).....\$11
 Seniors (62 and over).....\$ 7
 Military (with any DOD ID).....\$ 7
 Children (7-12).....\$ 7
 Children (6 and under).....free
 Sunday Family Day (12 and under w/adult)....free

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The Arizona International Auto Show is owned and presented by the Valley Auto Dealers Association (VADA) and produced by Motor Trend Auto Shows, LLC, the nation's largest auto show producer. ■

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CHASE ACROSS NORTH AMERICA

Phoenix International Raceway will host the Quicken Loans Race For Heroes 500 on Sunday, November 15, the final Eliminator (next to last) race of the 2015 NASCAR season. Under the Chase for the Sprint Cup format, the 312-lap, 500-km Sunday race in Phoenix is the last of the Eliminator round of the Chase for the Sprint Cup and determines the final four drivers who will fight for the championship the following weekend at Homestead-Miami. In all, there are four races over four days, Thursday through Sunday, November 12-15.

NOVEMBER RACE WEEKEND

The PIR fall race has been a fixture on the NASCAR schedule since 1988. Regular pricing, with tickets starting at \$25, runs through Monday, November 10, when walk-up pricing goes into effect. There are four sections, with three or four tiers in each, plus hillside seating, so you have fifteen options for the big race. Many seats sell out well before race day, so don't delay.

KURT BUSCH BREAKFAST

Kurt Busch, driver of the No. 41 Haas Automotive Chevrolet and 2004 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series



Champion, kicked off the Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup during PIR's second annual Breakfast With Champions as part of NASCAR's "Chase Across North America" on September 16 at the Heard Museum with 75 invited guests and local media. Busch and veteran motorsports broadcaster Ralph Sheheen discussed the format and increased pressure on drivers and teams each week during the 10-race Chase, in particular at the Quicken Loans Race For Heroes 500 at PIR. Las Vegas native Busch shared his picks for which drivers will advance through each round of the playoffs and why he thinks his team will take the Championship title. This is his ninth overall and third consecutive appearance in NASCAR's 10-race playoff. Coming into the semifinal race at PIR in November, Busch had made 25 career Sprint Cup starts in Phoenix, with one win, six top-five and 14 top-10 finishes here.

NASCAR 101 AT UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Up and coming NASCAR stars Brian Scott and Ben Kennedy headlined PIR's NASCAR 101 on the Main Mall at the University of Arizona on Tuesday, October 6, holding a Q&A with KIIM-FM DJ Porkchop, flanked by the PIR show car and pace cars. Scott, Kennedy and PIR representatives had earlier participated in a panel discussion with sports management students at the Eller College

of Business. The drivers explained the business side of NASCAR, including sponsorships and brand activation. Scott is in his third year at Richard Childress Racing as driver of the No. 2 Chevrolet Camaro in the NASCAR XFINITY Series. A native of Boise, Idaho, Scott has five top 5s in his sixth season in the series. Driver of the No. 11 Toyota Tundra for Red Horse Racing, 2014 NASCAR Camping World Truck Series Rookie of the Year Kennedy is great grandson of the legendary Big Bill France Sr. He has one pole win this season and three top-5s. Kennedy will race in the 150 on Friday, and Scott in the 200 on Saturday.

OPEN TEST SESSION

NASCAR held an open testing session at PIR on Wednesday, October 14, with nearly 1,000 race fans in attendance, as some of the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series' best participated, including Chase for the Sprint Cup Contenders Kurt Busch, Jeff Gordon, Matt Kenseth, Brad Keselowski, Ryan Newman and Martin Truex Jr. Series competitors Jamie McMurray and Ricky Stenhouse Jr. also took part in the session. The testing session is the last chance for teams to gather data on track before the Quicken Loans Race for Heroes 500 on November 15. With a new testing format, drivers like Kenseth understand the importance of time on the track. "This is an

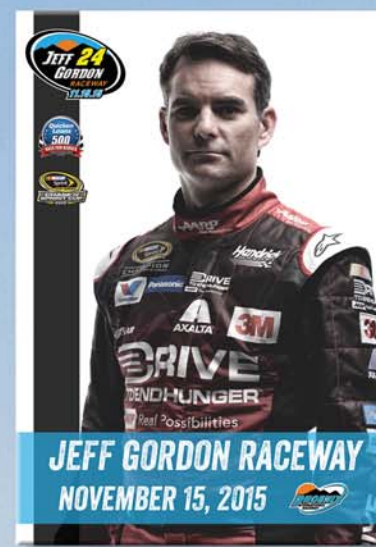
- THU NOV 12 Casino Arizona 100, NASCAR K&N Pro Series-West race
- FRI NOV 13 Lucas Oil 150, NASCAR Camping World Truck Series race
- SAT NOV 14 XFINITY Series 200, NASCAR XFINITY Series race
- SUN NOV 15 Quicken Loans Race for Heroes 500, NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race



important track," said Keselowski. "That's why we're here. You look at this race last year. Of the eight drivers that had a chance of winning a championship, all eight had to run well here to have a shot of going to the next round. So no one was locked in, coming here. I would expect that that could happen again." Fans were asked by PIR to make a \$5 donation to Phoenix Raceway Charities for admission to the testing session.

"JEFF GORDON RACEWAY" FOR A DAY

This season is Jeff Gordon's last, and this is his last NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race at PIR as a full-time competitor. In his honor, PIR will be officially renamed Jeff Gordon Raceway for Sunday, November 15, the first time a track has been re-



named during a NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race. Gordon has four career wins at PIR, three in NASCAR races. Each win represented a significant moment in PIR's history. PIR will release five Jeff Gordon trading cards with key moments from his 24-year career at PIR. Some of each will be randomly distributed to ticket holders, via mailings and at the gates during race weekend. Trading locations on the Fan Midway will let fans work on complete sets. PIR is also posting 24 Moments of Greatness on social media channels, singling out favorite Jeff Gordon highlights, leading up to the race weekend. Fans can buy Fanatics licensed sports apparel online and on race weekend. On Sunday, a special Jeff Gordon Raceway logo will be used throughout the facility. Gordon will continue his career as a race analyst with FOX.

EVERCLEAR PRE-RACE CONCERT

On the morning of Sunday, November 15, popular rock group Everclear will perform a pre-race con-



cert in the fan midway area at 10:30am, free to all fans with a grandstand ticket for the race.

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 15 RACE DAY

The Quicken Loans Race For Heroes 500 begins at 12:30pm. Plenty of food, drink, music, entertainment, VIP sightings and more will keep you busy, so get there early. TV coverage will be provided by NBC and radio by Motor Racing Network.

2016 SEASON TICKETS

Season Tickets for 2016 range from \$99 to \$512. Season Tickets offer substantial savings off individual ticket prices—up to 70% off in select seating areas; no service fees (a \$10 savings); PIR's new ZOOM PASS—just show and go; dedicated customer relations managers (and a toll-free number); ability to buy additional tickets at Season Ticket prices; first crack at seat upgrades; special event invitations; an exclusive e-newsletter; and a free race weekend program.

MARCH 2016 NASCAR AT PIR

Plan spring break at NASCAR, March 11-13, with Sprint Cup Series Qualifying on Friday; the Axalta Faster. Tougher. Brighter. 200, NASCAR XFINITY Series Race on Saturday; and the Camping World 500, NASCAR Sprint Cup Series Race on Sunday. (Dates tentative.) Ticket packages are on sale now.

TICKETS

Tickets are available online at PhoenixRaceway.com, by calling 866-408-RACE (7223) or in person at the PIR ticket office. ■



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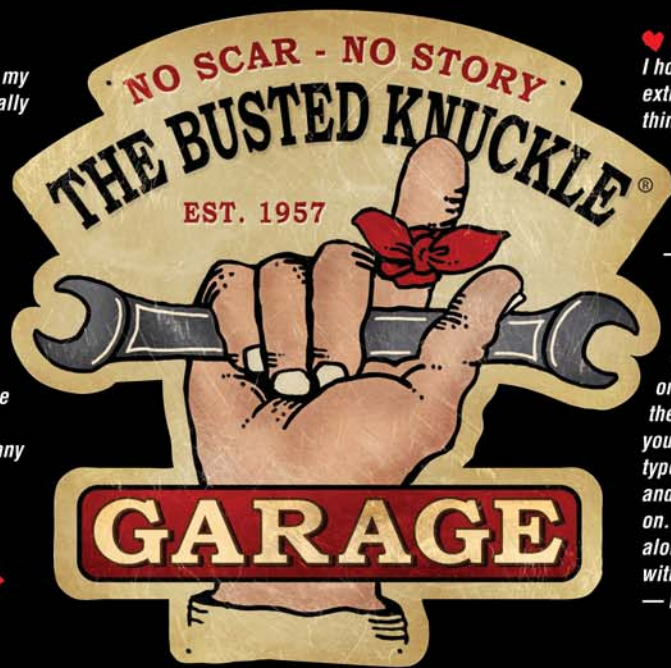
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♥ We have received our goodies and my husband just loves everything, especially me for getting him such cool stuff. I'd have to say we will be lifetime customers, oh ya!! Thank you Greasemonkeys.

— Sincerely, Pam

♥ I just had the most wonderful buying experience! I can't tell you how impressed I am with the service I received. I only hope my father asks for something from The Busted Knuckle Garage for Christmas so I can do business with such a wonderful company once more.

— Cheers! Michelle



♥ First, let me be the one thanking you! I honestly cannot remember such extraordinary customer service. You may think I'm overstating, however, I assure you I am not. I wish you and all your "greasemonkeys" a great day, and know that thanks to you I also will have a great day.

— Thanks again, "JR" Jean

♥ I am the proud wife a very hard working mechanic, so naturally I fell in love with your products. Not only are your products awesome, but the service and the people are too! As you know Greasemonkeys have only two types of friends; other greasemonkeys and people who need something worked on. I very much intend to pass the word along about how great it is to do business with the Busted Knuckle Garage.

— Many thanks! Jackie B.

Check out these three Hot Sellers!



BKG Canvas Tool Bag

Papa got a brand new bag! This HEAVY DUTY zippered canvas bag is the perfect tote and storage bag for tools, detailing kits and all around general car guy stuff. Complete with a pocket divider inside and a handy, comfortable shoulder strap. A generous 25" L x 6" W x 10" H.

Was \$34.95 / Now \$29.95

SKU: 10-BKG-2044



Miniature Desktop Toolbox

Made in the USA! Do you grow uncomfortable when no toolbox is in sight? Have one on your desk and clean up the clutter! HEAVY DUTY powder-coated, 24 gauge steel, bent and spot-welded as an authentic replica of the ones pros use. Toolbox red with Busted Knuckle Garage logo. Deep storage bin, felt lined floor, grooved rubber mat top. (Drawer faces are stationary.) 9" W x 4" D x 5" H, about 3" deep inside.

Was \$49.95 / Now \$44.95

SKU: 10-BKG-64



Magnetic Finger Tool

Give someone the Finger! Give one to yourself! When you can't afford to drop it—this snug and stretchy glove slips on your finger and turns it into a pro tool. Powerful fingertip magnet to hold or retrieve any small metal object with precise control. Start fasteners in tight places. Jay Leno and his mechanics use this at his Big Dog Garage. The ultimate "why didn't I think of that" item!

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PIR ADDS INDYCAR



PHOENIX GRAND PRIX TO RUN SATURDAY APRIL 2 UNDER THE LIGHTS

PHOENIX, OCT-26 2015 — The Verizon IndyCar Series will race at Phoenix International Raceway in 2016, taking place under the lights on Saturday night, April 2, 2016.

"IndyCar has such a loyal and dedicated fan base in the Valley," says PIR president Bryan R Sperber, "and we look forward to bringing the fastest racing action in America and the biggest stars in open-wheel racing to Phoenix next spring."

The Phoenix Grand Prix will be the second race in the 2016 schedule for the Verizon IndyCar Series, following the season opening race at St. Petersburg FL on March 13. The highlight of the 2016 Verizon IndyCar Series schedule will be the 100th running of the Indianapolis 500 Mile Race on Sunday, May 29, with the season finale on September 18 in Sonoma, California.

The 2016 Verizon IndyCar Series season "is marked by the return of several storied venues, including Phoenix International Raceway," said Mark Miles, CEO of Hulman & Company, the parent of INDYCAR and the

Indianapolis Motor Speedway. "Legendary Indy car names like Foyt, Unser, Andretti, Ruby, Rutherford, Sneva, Mears, Castroneves and Kanaan have all won at PIR in the past. It is an integral part of our sport's rich heritage, and we are quite pleased to have this great mile oval back on the schedule going forward."

PIR opened in 1964 and served primarily open-wheel racing until NASCAR made its debut in 1977. The track hosted Indy car races from 1964-2005, with many of the greatest names in racing history competing here.

Four-time Indianapolis 500 champion AJ Foyt won the inaugural pro race at PIR and captured a total of four checkered flags here; fellow four-time Indy 500 winner Al Unser has a track record six open-wheel wins at PIR; and four-time Indy car season champion Mario Andretti captured the last race win of his legendary career here in 1993.

Four Indianapolis 500 winners were in attendance at the announcement, including two-time winners Al Unser Jr. and Arie Luyendyk, 1983 champion Tom Sneva and 2004 Indianapolis 500 winner Buddy Rice. Also in attendance were 1992 Indianapolis 500 Rookie of the Year Lyn St James, 1998 Indianapolis 500 pole sitter Billy Boat, retired open-wheel driver P.J. Jones, and one of

the brightest young stars in the Verizon IndyCar Series, Josef Newgarden.

"I am so happy to see the Verizon IndyCar Series returning to Phoenix International Raceway," said Unser Jr., who is tied for seventh on the all-time Indy car victory list with 34. "It was always one of my favorite tracks, even though I never was able to win a race there in 19 tries. Dad won there six times and Uncle Bobby won four, so the Unser name still has quite a legacy at PIR. Indy cars always put on a great show at PIR over the years and I know they will again in 2016."

The Phoenix Grand Prix is the second of three race events at PIR in 2016. The Camping World 500 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race weekend runs three weeks earlier, March 11-13, and NASCAR returns to Phoenix for the semifinal race in the 2016 Chase for the Sprint Cup November 11-13, 2016.

Tickets for the Phoenix Grand Prix have already gone on sale, ranging from \$35-70, and each ticket includes Pit Road access. Kids' tickets are \$10. Active duty military and veterans also receive discounts. Tickets are available online at PhoenixRaceway.com and by phone at 866-408-RACE (7223). ■



Porsche electric four-seater concept: 600 hp, 300-mile range, 15-minute recharge

Revealed at the Frankfurt Motor Show, the Porsche Mission E is the first all-electric four-seat sports car delivering over 600 hp from its 800-volt drive system, with a zero-to-62 mph acceleration time under 3.5 seconds and hitting 125 mph in under 12 seconds. The car's 300-plus-mile driving range can be refreshed to 80 percent full charge in about 15 minutes. The drivetrain is race-proven, using two permanent magnet synchronous motors similar to those used in this year's 24 Hours of Le Mans winner and 1-2 finisher, the Porsche 919 hybrid; its lap time on the Nürburgring is under the eight-minute mark. Porsche states that unlike today's electric drive systems, this system can develop full power even after multiple accelerations at short intervals. A demand-based all-wheel-drive system with Porsche Torque Vectoring automatically distributes torque to the individual wheels, augmented by an all-wheel steering system. Developmental and conceptual instrumentation includes operation of controls via eye-tracking and gestures—some even via holograms. A freestanding, low-profile driver's display has five circular instruments, classic Porsche, but these are displayed virtually using OLED technology. The instruments are organized by driver-relevant themes of Connected Car, Performance, Drive, Energy and Sport Chrono. An eye-tracking system detects which instrument the driver is viewing. A steering wheel button then activates the menu for that instrument. The display also follows the driver's seat position and body attitude: if you sit lower, higher or lean to one side, the 3D display reacts and moves with you, eliminating situations in which the steering wheel blocks your view of instruments. Driver or passenger can use a touch display on the center console to access detailed menus for other systems. ▼



Porsche Mission E concept

Hyundai Vision G Coupe concept



"RESPECTFUL LUXURY" FROM HYUNDAI

▲ Hyundai revealed the Vision G Concept Coupe in August at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance and to media at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Hyundai designers centered their work on the notion that one doesn't need to shout to be noticed and respected. As a nod to the self-sufficiency of the driver, doors open automatically, as if by a valet. The concept includes Hyundai's 420-hp 5.0L Tau V8, named to Ward's Ten Best Engines list three times. This latest version of the Tau V8 benefits from an optimized intake runner length, enhanced timing chain for reduced friction and NVH, low-torque exhaust manifold, increased compression ratio and upgraded multiple-injection mapping. These enhancements combine to produce a flatter torque curve, high power, low emissions and superb efficiency

FCA UPGRADES PENTASTAR V6

The highly recognized 3.6-liter Pentastar V6 engine from Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) is reengineered for model year 2016, with fuel economy improvements of more than six percent, torque increased by more than 14.9 percent at engine speeds below 3,000 rpm, two-step variable valve lift (VVL) benefitting fuel economy, cooled exhaust-gas recircula-

tion (EGR) for greater efficiency and knock-free operation at higher loads, and an upgraded variable-valve timing (VVT) system. Torque is boosted via a new intake manifold and longer runners, while the compression ratio is raised to 11.3:1. High-tumble intake ports and shrouded combustion chambers combine with eight-hole fuel injectors for optimized atomization. Multiple friction-reduction features combine with redesigned components, reducing overall engine weight despite added content. The engine will debut on the 2016 Jeep Grand Cherokee. All US versions will be E15-compatible.

ELECTRIC SPORTS CAR SOUNDS

Roland Corporation and GLM Co., Ltd., have announced an agreement to co-develop a neo-futuristic driving sound generation system for GLM's electric sports car. This collaboration between electronic musical instrument maker and the manufacturer of Japan's first mass-marketed electric sports car will be designed using Roland's SuperNATURAL synthesizer technology, used by Herbie Hancock, Jimmy Page, George Duke and many more. The new driving sound system for GLM's ZZ model will use this same technology to produce sonically rich studio-quality sounds. The system will have the ability to change with each

driver's real-time driving situations, such as acceleration, deceleration or motor load variances on sloping roads. As electric sports cars become more popular, some drivers appreciate quieter electric motors, while driving sounds are still favored by others, especially drivers of high-performance vehicles.

BENTLEY AUSTRIAN MOUNTAIN LODGE

Bentley Motors has opened its first-ever mountain lodge in Kitzbühel, Austria, opening its doors for the first time to welcome European dealers and a select group of VIPs and local residents. Nestled in one of the most exclusive spots in the Alps, the full-service luxury hideaway chalet is available for private bookings for customers and friends of the brand. A Bentley is available at all times for guests to pursue everything from fishing, hunting and horseback riding, to skiing, tennis, golf and spa treatments. The historic building was originally a forester's lodge and dates back to 1919, the same year that Bentley Motors was founded. The Bentley Lodge is located right at the foot of the famous Hahnenkammrennen downhill ski race course and just 500 yards from the Kitzbühel City Center. The lodge can be booked at bentleymotorslodge.com.

KEEP RIGHT >>



ECOBOOST SHELBY GT PACKAGE

▲ Shelby American is expanding its global vehicle lineup with a Shelby GT version of the popular 2.3L EcoBoost 2015-2016 Ford Mustang. “Ever since Ford announced that its terrific new Mustang would be available worldwide, requests for Shelby versions of the car have rolled in from across the globe,” said Joe Conway, Co-CEO of Carroll Shelby International and CEO of Shelby American. “Since the majority of Mustangs that Ford offers in many of those countries will be the EcoBoost model, our team has been developing a Shelby GT model for the nimble new turbo-charged four-cylinder car, as well as the V8-powered GT. This package was specifically developed for the recently announced network of Shelby Mod Shops that will stretch from Europe to South Africa, China and Australia.” The Shelby package is added to an EcoBoost Mustang a customer has purchased, with a Ford Performance handling pack upgrade, engine tune and a throatier Ford Performance exhaust. The result is over 335 horsepower on 91 octane fuel, with significantly improved handling. The \$23,995 starting price (not including the base EcoBoost Mustang) includes performance upgrades to the suspension, a new ex-

haust, and bigger wheels and tires. The car shares some of the treatments from the V8 version of the Shelby GT, including a carbon fiber front splitter, hood, rear spoiler and rocker panel. Additional performance options are available, including even more aggressive brakes, stronger half shafts, brake ducts and more cooling. More information is available at Shelby.com. Deposits are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

ADA COMPLIANT MOBILITY VAN

Vantage Mobility International (VMI) of Phoenix has produced the first commercial-use, ADA-complaint Toyota Northstar E360—the only wheelchair-accessible van featuring a side-entry, in-floor ramp built for commercial use. VMI’s new Commercial Division will initially offer the ADA Northstar E360 through select dealers across North America. VMI has been building consumer-focused mobility vehicles for three decades—innovative side-entry, in-floor-ramp minivans that offer unobstructed entrance and convenient passenger boarding. The E360 deep floor drop offers the tallest door opening and the most interior space for wheelchair maneuverability. These benefits are combined with a Toyota Sienna chassis for the new ADA Northstar E360. VMI’s commercial vans will be available to retirement

centers, taxi drivers and other transportation companies through select VMI dealers across the US and Canada.

AFFORDABLE 20-MPH E-BIKE

The VEXA500 electric bike is determined to bring a greener, more affordable form of transportation to the US, jam-packed with features at a crowd-funding price of just \$549. No pedaling is required to start the 3-speed eBike, and you can hit up to 20 mph. Its saddle will seat two riders, holding up to 350 pounds. Hydraulic front forks handle potholes and bumpy roads. The eBike has two fold-down storage platforms—a brand exclusive—and is complete with headlight, taillight, brake light and audible blinking turn signals. Safety and security features include a chain guard, battery lock and built-in alarm system and key fob. The VEXA500 has been available for purchase on Indiegogo since August for \$549, a significant \$446 discount from its \$995 market retail value.

KIA HISPANIC SCHOLARSHIPS

Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) member colleges and universities are home to more than two-thirds of all Hispanic college students in the US. Kia Motors America (KMA) and HACU re-

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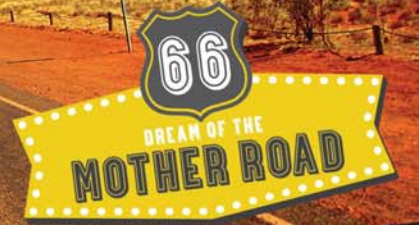
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Greetings from



Jaguar F-PACE



cently announced the recipients of sixteen \$4,000 scholarships. To be eligible, students must maintain a 3.0 grade point average and be enrolled at one of the more than 400 national HACU member institutions. Recipients for the 2015-2016 school year included Elizabeth Altamirano of Arizona State University. "There is no more important investment than in our students, the future of the nation," said HACU President and CEO Antonio R. Flores, "and we are proud to partner with Kia to recognize their achievement and support their educational development."

FIRST JAGUAR COMPACT LUXURY SUV

▲ The all-new 2017 Jaguar F-PACE, designed by the same team as the C-X17 concept vehicle, applies the flexibility of Jaguar Lightweight Aluminum Architecture to key dimensions such as wheelbase and track, while delivering the proportions and elegant lines of a Jaguar, from LED taillights and muscular rear haunches, to a sleek roofline and short front and rear overhangs suggesting agile response. Twenty-two-inch wheels are optional. The performance five-seater uses advanced high strength steel in areas such as the rear floor, joined using more than 2,600 self-piercing rivets, 238.8 feet of structural adhesive and more than 560 spot-welds. The resulting torsional stiffness

matches that of the all-new XF sedan and, together with an advanced suspension system, is key to its blend of ride, handling and refinement.

MONTEREY TRACK FUTURE

Sports Car Racing Association of the Monterey Peninsula (SCRAMP) vice president Dennis Farber read the following statement of appreciation into the minutes of the Monterey County Board of Supervisors meeting in September: "I'm here to thank the board of supervisors, on behalf of SCRAMP, for contemplating an open and public process with regard to a new concession agreement for the management and operation of Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca. We at SCRAMP are very proud of our 58-year legacy. At the same time, we have heard the county's concerns and they will be addressed in our upcoming proposal. Thank you and we look forward to working with you going forward." A member of the county board of supervisors had stated recently in the media that it was considering an open and public process to determine whether SCRAMP or another entity would be awarded the concession agreement to manage and operate Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca. SCRAMP built the raceway in 1957 and has managed and operated the facility ever since. Mazda Raceway

Laguna Seca annually hosts five major events, including the Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion in August. Also in September, International Speedway Corporation (ISC) of Daytona Beach FL decided to decline submitting a rumored proposal to take over operations and management of Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca.

DRIVERLESS CARS IN AUSTRALIA

South Australia has introduced laws allowing for trials of driverless cars on open public roads. One trial set for Adelaide's Southern Expressway in early November did not require legislative change because the road will be closed. But a bill introduced in September will allow autonomous vehicles to be run on trial basis on open public roads in the southern state. The Motor Vehicles (Trials of Automotive Technologies) Amendment Bill provides exemptions from existing laws. "This legislation will facilitate public road testing, unlike many other countries which offer only selected roads or small, restricted geographical areas," said Transport Minister Stephen Mullighan. Safeguards in the legislation include requiring companies to submit detailed trial plans for government approval. Companies will need "sufficient insurances" to protect the public, with penalties still applying if tests breach road laws beyond the scope of the trial. ■



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Barrett-Jackson

8th Annual Las Vegas Auction

Sept 24-26, 2015: Mandalay Bay Hotel & Resort

98 percent sell-through, \$26.9m sales, \$750k charity

Barrett-Jackson delivered a 98 percent sell-through rate at Las Vegas this year, with sales totaling more than \$26.9 million and \$750,000 raised for charity. Automobilia sales totaled \$720,000 from 357 lots, a new Las Vegas record for the auction company.

Charity sales

Barrett-Jackson always includes significant sales for local and national charities, to date raising nearly \$85 million. Three charity cars sold for charity at Las Vegas (shown at right) were:

▼ 2013 Chevrolet COPO Camaro #005 (Lot #3000). A limited production of 69 cars produced in 2013 commemorate the original number of ZL-1 COPO Camaros made in 1969. COPO—Central Office Production Order—was a special-order system used by dealers in the late '60s to build high-performance models found nowhere else. The legacy started in 1969, when the first Camaro drag racing specialty car was designed to compete in NHRA's Stock Eliminator and Super Stock classes. This later-gen COPO Camaro has a 425-hp 427 V8 and is built to NHRA specs, with solid rear axle and full chrome-moly roll cage. Sound insulation and power options have been deleted to optimize weight. The winning bidder is also receiving tours of both Hendrick Motorsports and the NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte NC, plus four Hot Passes via Hendrick Motorsports. Not street legal, the COPO Camaro brought in \$115,000 to benefit the Fisher House Foundation.

▼ 2015 Chevrolet Camaro Z/28 (Lot #3001). The most track-capable Camaro ever produced, this has a hand-built LS7 427 V8 with 505 hp and 481 lb-ft of torque, mated to a Tremec TR6060 6-speed manual gearbox. A wide array of other track features include high efficiency cooling, fully integrated aerodynamics, Brembo carbon-ceramic disc brakes and race-proven spool-valve dampers. Fewer than 2,000 fifth-generation Z/28s were produced, 2014 and 2015 models combined, and



this is the very last one. The car raised \$135,000 to benefit the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

▼ 2016 Chevrolet Corvette C7.R Edition Z06 #001 (Lot #3002) is a road-going, track-capable homage to the Corvette Racing C7.R race cars, in signature yellow with coordinated exterior and interior accents. The Z06 C7.R Editions will go on sale late this year. This car is VIN #001 of only 650 (500 for the US market) and includes the Z07 Performance Package with carbon ceramic brakes. The Corvette brought \$500,000 to benefit the

Detroit-based College for Creative Studies.

Sky Commuter Aircraft

This static-display-only craft caught our eye. Designed and built in the mid-1980s and dated 1990, the Sky Commuter Aircraft was a far-forward look into the future of personal transportation by Boeing engineers in Arlington, Washington, with its \$6 million development cost funded by about 60 investors. Three prototypes were built, but only this one survived. A gas-assisted electric Lexan

bubble canopy allows two people to enter, either of whom could control the craft via a center-mounted joystick and two control pedals on each side of the cabin. A concept only, the Sky Commuter does not have an actual propulsion system, but the design called for a turbine engine pushing a helicopter-style driveshaft spinning three horizontal 3-foot fans, one up front and two in the rear—able to take off and land on virtually any surface, including water. Exhaust would be routed out the tail, producing thrust for forward motion. The craft sold for \$71,500 with no reserve.

Top five sales

▼ 1968 Chevrolet Corvette L88 (Lot #738). This two-owner car had 24,760 miles and its original build sheet still glued to the gas tank. It has a period-correct 427/430hp L88 engine, M22 Rock Crusher 4-speed and 3.70 rear end. The car, originally white, had been repainted with lacquer paint in red. It has a rebuilt motor, original leather interior and its original spare tire has never touched the ground. The prior owner had the car for 38 years. Sold at no reserve:.....\$330,000

▼ 2005 Ford GT (Lot #711) with 550-hp supercharged 5.4L V8 and 6-speed Ricardo transmission is capable of zero-to-60 in 3.3 seconds. This car includes all four available factory options: stripes, wheels, red calipers and McIntosh stereo. It also came with both sets of original keys, fobs and original showroom sales documents. 2,081 actual miles. Sold at no reserve:.....\$291,500

▼ 1966 Ford Fairlane 500 R-Code (Lot #743). Number 53 of only 57 produced, this car was documented with three factory build sheets and original owner's manuals. Rotisserie restored, this is the only 427 Fairlane to win the Platinum Challenge award at the Muscle Car Nationals. All 57 R-code Fairlanes were identically built. It has an R-code 427 side oiler with race car package (medium-riser with factory dual Holleys), 4-speed Toploader transmission, 9" 3.89 ratio posi-traction, front disc brakes, transistor ignition, original lift-off hood and radio delete, in Wimbledon White with black upholstery. With only 23 miles on the restoration, it has been in a private museum for 18 years. Sold at reserve, the car achieved a world record for auction:.....\$275,000

▼ 2012 Falcon Series 1F7 VIN #001 (Lot #724, shown). Built by Falcon Motor Sports in Michigan, this car has a body of carbon fiber/Kevlar panels, painted Sunset Orange. The chassis is aluminum/carbon fiber/Kevlar. The LS7 427ci with Lingenfelter performance components makes 620 hp and 600 lb-ft of torque. The car is 44" high, weighs 2,800 pounds and includes two pieces of custom luggage. Sold at no reserve:.....\$198,000

▼ 1962 Chevrolet Corvette 430 Custom Convert-



ible (Lot #742, shown) is an original-body custom Resto-Mod with Schott Mach V wheels, powder-coated frame, DANA 44 rear end, 4-wheel disc brakes and custom touches galore, powered by a 430-hp 6.2L small-block LS3 GM V8 with 4-speed overdrive. The absolutely exquisite body, including all new chrome, is completed in deep black contrasted with a bright red Al Knoch custom interior (specially built to adjust for tall drivers). This vehicle is one of those truly rare Resto-Mods with just enough custom build to make it unique,

but with all the brand-name components, engine and drivetrain to ensure durability, drivability and dependability. Sold at no reserve:.....\$192,500

Up next for Barrett-Jackson

- The 45th Annual Scottsdale 2016, January 23-31, at WestWorld in Scottsdale, Arizona.
- Barrett-Jackson's first auction in the Northeast will take place at Mohegan Sun in Uncasville, Connecticut, June 23-25, 2016.
- www.barrett-jackson.com ■

Precious metals tour



We drive southwest Colorado's gold and silver country in the new 2016 Ford Explorer Platinum

by Joe Sage



Rimrock Drive climbs dramatically into Colorado National Monument, overlooking the Grand Valley. • Animal art in the streets of Grand Junction. • Our Explorer's 18.6-gallon tank, at an estimated 22 MPG highway, could take us over 400 miles. Our total trip was just over half that. • Though Dinosaur National Monument is farther north, along US 40, the Grand Junction area is also major dinosaur country.

The Ford Explorer is in its fifth generation, 25 years into its segment-defining and -dominating lifetime. We dubbed the current version, when introduced as a 2011 model, Ford's "crown jewel" in our original launch report. Gen five was a complete rework, moving the Explorer from body-on-frame to unibody construction and adding a wide-ranging complement of advanced technological handling aids, some you would find on any high-end modern roadgoing vehicle and some very specific to the Explorer's very serious off-road capabilities.

EXPLORER 2016 • The Ford Explorer has had incremental changes over the prior six model years, adding technology and creature comforts. The 2016 Explorer can be recognized by its new grille and fog lights in a new lower front fascia that evokes the style of a new F-150. In the rear are LED taillights and dual exhausts.

The newest Explorer is already continuing the model's trophy-bagging heritage, having recently captured the SUV of the year title at the influential Texas Truck Rodeo (see elsewhere in this issue).

There remain three engine options—a standard 3.5L V6 and a 3.5L EcoBoost V6, while this year's upgrade from 2.0L to 2.3L EcoBoost four provides a 40-hp, 40-lb-ft bump (to 280 and 310) and 28 MPG highway fuel mileage.

Towing and 4WD are now available for base four-cylinder models, although they tow just 3000 lb (Class II), compared with 5000 (Class III) for the V6. Highway fuel mileage varies from 22-24 for the six-cylinder engines with either AWD or FWD, to the four-cylinder EcoBoost, rating as high as 28 MPG highway.

PLATINUM • Two Explorer models, base and XLT, start the lineup at just under and just over \$30,000. Limited and Sport versions come in at just under and just over \$40,000. For 2016, Ford adds a line-top-



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Cones? Mud? The well-suspended Explorer seemed capable of taking on either. The power of a hundred locomotives? Not by the numbers, but the 365-horse V6 EcoBoost hauls its 4890 lb around powerfully and efficiently. • A tunnel on US 550 as evening approached. • Colorado's dry high country climate has preserved the historic Smith cabin.



ping Platinum trim level to Explorer, starting just a hair above \$50,000.

The first Platinum F-150 showed up in 2010, Platinum Super Duty pickups shortly thereafter, then the big Expedition SUV last year. We drove the 2015 Expedition Platinum last winter and fell for it in a big way, calling it the penultimate Ford—short of ultimate not in style or features, but only because it had been a 4x2 and because you can buy a longer Expedition EL.

Explorer Platinum adds enhanced active park assist, adaptive cruise control, lane-keeping, hands-free liftgate and intelligent 4WD with terrain management.

Front and rear 180-degree cameras with washers—great for backing out of parking (and seen earlier in the year on the new

Ford Edge)—are available at the Sport level and are standard on Limited and Platinum

Platinum includes a new 10.1-inch digital instrument cluster, a real wood heated steering wheel with leather wrap, ash wood, brushed aluminum and leather wrap surfaces throughout, and much faster smart-charging USB ports.

The Platinum model also claims an industry first, as Sony brings its home audio theater acoustics to the road in a 500-watt, 12-speaker system.

HEADING SOUTH • In line with Ford's current "Go Further" slogan, our spin in the 2016 Ford Explorer Platinum was part of a successive-leg road event that started in British Columbia, worked its way north into Alberta, down through the Rockies, and ultimately into New Mexico.

Our leg would take us through some of the best of what Western Colorado road tripping has to offer, starting in Grand Junction and finishing just north of Durango, at the Purgatory Resort.

The Colorado River feeds from Grand Lake, in Grand County, down to Grand Junction in the Grand Valley, where it joins the Green River and continues as the Colorado through Utah, then cutting the Grand Canyon in northern Arizona before feeding ultimately into the Sea of Cortez in Mexico. Why all the Grand names? The Colorado River was indeed once the Grand River, or at least a long stretch of it was. As western expansion congealed, the Rio Grande—which also starts in Colorado—called dibs on the river name, but all the other names remained Grand—although Grand Junction is known to many as simply Junction.

We had pretty free rein between our start and finish points, with one primary route laid out for us but the option of taking any number of stated or unstated alternatives.

We began the day with our first side trip, into Colorado National Monument, a spectacular 20-plus-thousand-acre park just outside Fruita, west of Grand Junc-

tion, where the river has spent eons cutting through layers of sandstone, granite and other minerals. A ranger presentation detailed each rock layer and where else each layer crops up throughout the West. We drove back into Grand Junction, a small city of 60,000 (or nearly 150,000 including its fringes) at 4593 feet above sea level, and from there headed south on US 50 to Montrose.

TAKE THE LONG WAY HOME • Side trips and alternatives turned out to be a good idea, as US 550 between Ouray and Silverton—the historic Million Dollar Highway—had experienced a major washout last winter, reducing it to one cliff-hanging lane (at best) for miles and completely closing it to traffic for six hours a day.

Knowing we had time to kill before that most challenging stretch of road reopened for the night, we grabbed a random gravel road winding its way in the general direction of Utah, a great chance to see how our Explorer Platinum did on unpaved curves at free-spirited rancher pickup speeds. It was powerful and sure-footed at all times.

We discovered historical cabins preserved in the high desert climate of the Escalante State Wildlife Area—one where bricklayer Harry Walker raised four sons, and the cabin and corral of Civil War Captain Henry A Smith, a frontier tombstone carver who also carved his initials into the local red rocks. Then back to the highway.

At Montrose, US 50 heads back northeast, wrapping around Grand Mesa, while our route, US 550, originates there and heads due south. US 550 originally went as far as Durango, but has long since been extended to Bernalillo NM, north of Albuquerque (where in fact the following legs of the overall drive would be headed).

East-west mountain passes conquering the Rockies are dominant in Colorado. US 550 is one of only two major north-south highways on the Western Slope. Highways often follow rivers in Colorado, as those have already found (or created) the paths of least resistance, and that would be the case with much of our route. (A



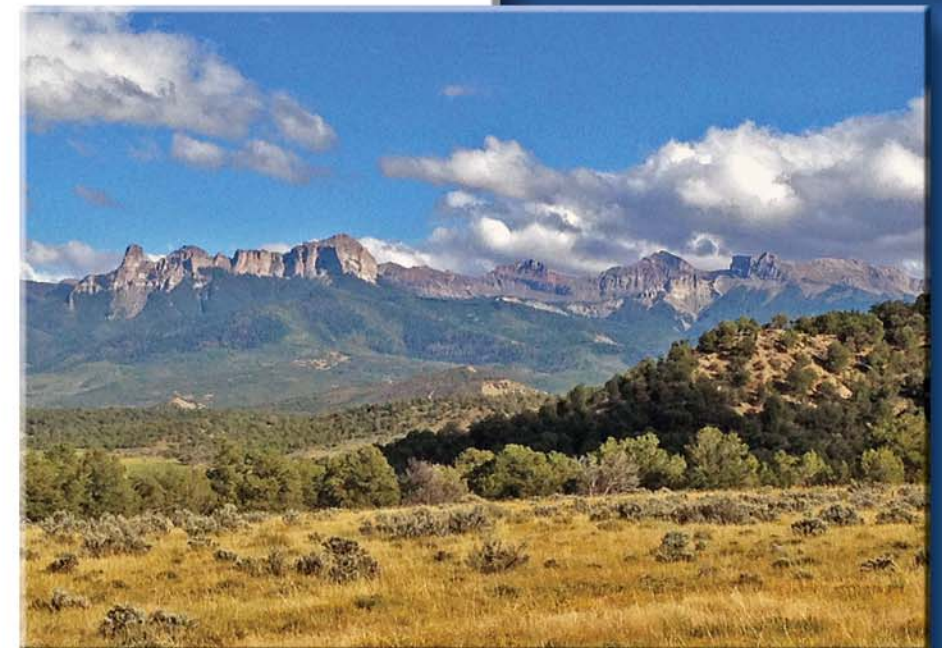
downside to this is the hazard of deer and elk crossing to their water source, particularly around dawn and dusk, when driving visibility is at its worst.)

Ouray, Silverton and Durango bracket the most spectacular part of the drive, the Million Dollar Highway—a driving and sightseeing destination in its own right, reaching an elevation of 11,018 feet.

At Ouray (elevation 7792 feet), we would be stuck at the northern end of these Million Dollar passes until road rebuilding let up for the day. That was more opportunity than problem, as this charming historic Western town has plenty of dining and browsing options even in



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Downtown Ouray was our last stop before climbing up Red Mountain Pass as US 550 reopened for the day (or more accurately for the night). • Our last stop with any lingering light was in Silverton, a benchmark on the Million Dollar Highway and north end of the Durango and Silverton narrow gauge.

the off season. We stopped for a bite.

We had bounced around various plans to circumvent the highway with off-road routes, some of which are notoriously the toughest anywhere. The Explorer could tackle the majority of these handily, but was shiny and new, and we wanted to return it that way. More to the point, these were “shortcuts” that would take far, far longer. US 550 would still be our best bet.

Flag crews on US 550 went into action at about sundown, with miles of backed-up traffic crawling through, one way at a time, as a bit of rain mixed with snow spattered our windshield. The last of Colorado's spectacular but brief high country fall colors faded with the light.

The Million Dollar nickname bemuses today, when one mile of two-lane road can cost one to five million—or twenty or more million in terrain such as this. Legend suggests the name may have nothing to do with road building costs, but rather how much gold ore and dust is scattered through the highway's cuts and fills.

The ore idea sounds reasonable, since this is one of the heaviest areas of mineral extraction in Colorado. In fact, we were here just weeks after a retaining dam had burst, sending millions of gallons of highly toxic, vivid orange, tailing-tainted water down the normally scenic and wildlife-rich Las Animas River, on into the Navajo Nation in Arizona, en route to Lake Powell through a succession of tributary feeds.

By the time we rolled through, the river was much clearer (if not actually cleaner), although several creeks feeding it were just as toxically colorful on a normal day.

Silverton (elevation 9320 feet) was our next stop, a town with so much character it has been designated a National Historic Landmark District. This is the northern terminus of the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad. Less romantically, it claims mine pollution remediation as one of its major modern industries.

Our final 22 miles threaded over Molas Pass (10,910 feet) in the dark, as we vowed to return someday in daylight. Our destination was Purgatory Resort (base elevation 8793 feet) for a quick bite before bed.



In the morning, we grabbed a shuttle through Durango (elevation 6512 feet) to the airport for the 50-minute-or-so flight back to Phoenix, so quick it made us realize why so many friends and colleagues dash off to Durango regularly in summer.



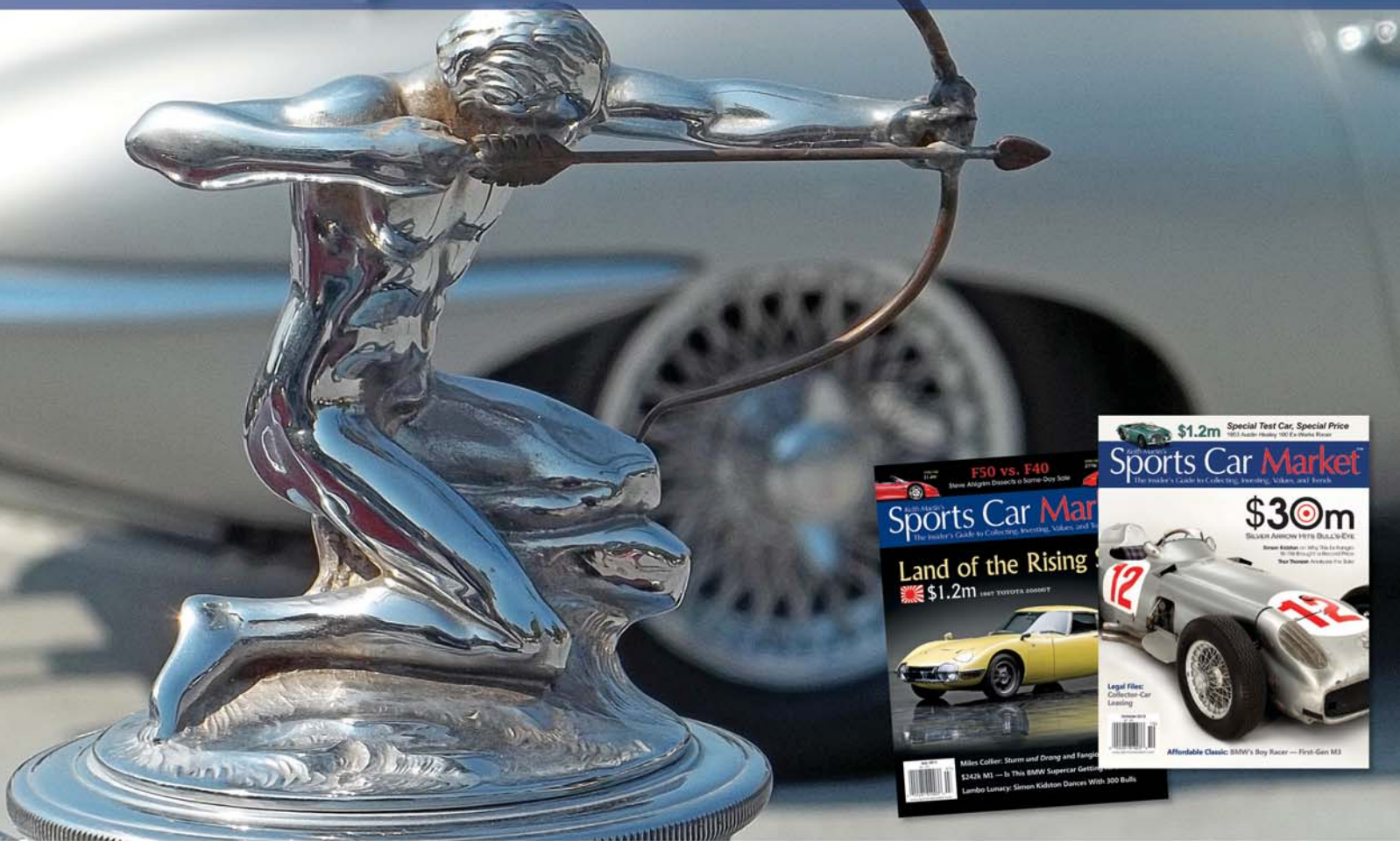
TOP FLIGHT • This was a trip we would love to repeat and expand upon. And for a combination of capability, comfort and style suitable for rough road to mountain town to resort, it would be hard to beat the Explorer Platinum as a chariot of choice.

Choosing the Explorer Platinum over the \$30-40,000 models would only depend upon your budget. But would you choose it over a luxury SUV at \$60 or \$80 or even \$100k? You very well might. ■



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The 3rd Annual Arizona Concours d'Elegance

Arizona Biltmore Resort, 24th and Camelback
 Sunday, January 24, 2016

The third annual Arizona Concours d'Elegance, an exclusive celebration of fine automobiles in an intimate setting at the historic Arizona Biltmore Resort, will be held on Sunday, January 24, 2016. This event has become a great starting and focal point for the annual Classic Car Auction Week in the Scottsdale/Phoenix area.

HONORED GUEST : Andrea Zagato, chief executive of Carrozzeria Zagato, will be an honored guest at the January 2016 event, which will spotlight Carrozzeria Zagato with its own featured class: Coachwork of Zagato. One of the most famous and esteemed Italian design houses, Zagato will be honored at the Concours d'Elegance on January 24 with an expected dozen examples of expressive automotive designs from this Milanese company.

The appearance of chief executive Andrea Zagato, the third generation of his family to lead Zagato since its founding in 1919—with his wife Marella, who is the granddaughter of Renzo Rivolta, founder of ISO Rivolta of Bresso—will give Concours participants more perspective on this important design firm, viewing the artistry of its illustrious past while learning more about its present and future. Andrea and Marella Zagato (photo above right) have worked together to return Carrozzeria Zagato to prominence on the world stage, reacquiring the historic Zagato premises outside Milan and embarking on a long-term restoration to create a new corporate structure.

FEATURED CLASSES : The event has announced three featured classes for 2016: in addition to Coachwork of Zagato, two others have been designated: Duesenberg; and Exceptional Cars of Great Britain. The three featured classes will join more than a dozen standing classes that will be judged during the Concours, culminating in Best of Show.

Among the lineup of Duesenbergs is an extremely rare short-wheelbase 1935 Duesenberg SSJ (shown above) with impeccable celebrity history, originally owned by Hollywood mega-star Gary Cooper. The sporting convertible,



from the Revs Institute for Automotive Research, Inc. collection in Florida, is one of only two “super-short” wheelbase SSJs produced by Duesenberg. The other was loaned by a local dealer to another Hollywood leading man, Clark Gable, who was a close friend of Cooper’s and wanted to drive a car like his.

The Gary Cooper SSJ, serial number 2594, was built on a 125-inch wheelbase rather than Duesenberg’s customary 142.4- or 153.5-inch lengths, giving the distinctive car a rakish and sporting appearance behind the bold signature Duesenberg grille. The supercharged straight-8 engine was rated at 400 hp, with a top speed of more than 130 mph.

The flamboyant SSJ models continued the evolution of the famous Duesenberg J, the crowning achievement of engineer and designer Fred Duesenberg. The massive luxury cars were created by Duesenberg at the urging of EL Cord, who bought the bankrupt company in 1926 and wanted to build the greatest automobile ever produced. The grand and powerful Duesenberg J was introduced in December 1928 and quickly became the favored mount of the world’s most wealthy and famous people.

Another prized entry in the Arizona Concours Duesenberg Class will be the renowned 1935 Duesenberg Model SJ Speedster known as the Mormon Meteor, which the legendary Ab Jenkins drove to a number of land speed records on the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah.

MAKE YOUR PLANS : Potential entrants in the 2016 Arizona Concours d'Elegance are encouraged to submit their vehicle for consideration at www.arizonaconcours.com.

An Arizona Concours mobile app can also be downloaded from the website. For those planning to attend, make your plans early, as Concours tickets are limited and lodging will be in great demand.

The Arizona Concours d'Elegance has a selection of men’s and women’s hats, shirts and jackets available online—great gifts for the holiday season. Visit: www.arizonaconcours.com

The Arizona Concours d'Elegance benefits Make-A-Wish Arizona, the founding chapter of the national organization that grants wishes for children facing life-threatening medical conditions. More than \$70,000 was raised to fund future wishes during the 2015 Arizona Concours. ■

60x3

Volvo initiates a major lineup changeover with three cousins familiar, semi-familiar and transformed | By Joe Sage

Volvo Cars is benefitting from a recent investment of \$11 billion, with which they are developing an entirely new lineup of luxury vehicles. We flew recently to Sausalito, just north of San Francisco, to meet three of the latest models.

These three fall under a new 60 Series collective handle, and each brings something in particular to the game. Included were the S60 Inscription, a new lengthened and upgraded version of

the S60 sedan; a V60 Cross Country wagon; and an all-new variant, the S60 Cross Country sedan.

The 60 Series is expected to comprise fully 75 percent of Volvo sales next year. There are some interesting variables among the three, against the competition, and within each model's options.

There would be a lot to experience, and with the roads of Marin and Sonoma Counties at our fingertips—up Highway One along the coast, then over the hills and through the woods to the Wine Country, plus a complete autocross session at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds in Santa Rosa (by our own hand and also right-seating with the pros)—we were sure to experience it all very well.

Volvo S60 Cross Country

Volvo studied consumer data—not focus groups, but actual data from purchasers—and concluded that a significant number of buyers were moving from luxury sedans to small crossovers for their ride height, both to gain a more commanding driv-



2016 VOLVO S60 CROSS COUNTRY T5 AWD

ENGINE	.....2.5L 20-valve inline-5 turbo
TRANS/DRIVE	.....6-spd auto w quick shift / AWD
POWER/TORQUE	.....250 hp / 266 lb-ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....7.9 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....37.4 ft
TOWING CAPACITY	.....3500 lb
WEIGHT	.....3913 lb
MPG	.....20/28/23 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	.....\$43,500
OPTIONS INCLUDED: Harman Kardon premium audio, rear camera, full range of electronic driving aids, heated fr/r seats/windshield/wheel, speed sensitive steering, wood inlays, 19" matte black inlay wheels.	
TOTAL AS TESTED	.....\$48,390

Volvo S60 Cross Country



ing position and view of the road, and to have more utility for basic weekend forays to parks, active sports sites, snow country and the like. But these same people bemoaned the loss of a lockable trunk, desirable during the majority of their time in urban and suburban areas.

The basic S60 sedan body fulfills these goals, but the S60 Cross Country is built to a new height with 7.9-inch ground clearance, is recognizable by the rugged matte black wheel arches of other Cross Country models, and is augmented by such features as hill descent control. It's an attention-getting mix, though not an entirely unprecedented idea. The BMW X6 fills a similar niche, although at about 50 percent higher cost and with a more distinctly SUV look and feel. Then there was the AMC Eagle in the 1980s, most often sold as a wagon but available as a sedan and even a coupe (and popular with police departments at the time, for all the same reasons of utility and security).

The S60 Cross Country comes in one flavor: T5 AWD, with Volvo's beautiful 2.5-liter five-cylinder turbocharged engine—a favorite of ours in everything from the petite C30 to the C70 convertible in recent years, and a close match to the engine that put Audi quattro on the map—and all-wheel drive.

With its light weight, tight turning circle (with-in two feet of a MINI) and familiar sedan cabin and amenities, the S60 Cross Country drives like any other medium-performance sedan. You will not feel even crossover-distance from an SUV or truck experience. Yet when a rugged dirt road stands between you and your favorite fishing or hiking spot, it will not stand between you and your mission. Its zero-to-60 time of 6.7 seconds matches top performance cars from just a few years ago. The S60 Cross Country boasts a 3500-pound tow capacity, but then so does the standard S60 sedan. It does round out this package most appropriately, however.

The base price is \$43,500 and includes stability control, torque vectoring traction control, 160-watt 8-speaker audio and a healthy set of features in the Sensus 7-inch infotainment system. We were surprised to find common inclusions such as adaptive cruise, lane departure, blind spot, cross traffic and collision warnings only on the options list. On the plus side, though, this means those who just turn those off do not have to buy them (although Volvo's full stop collision system is one of the best). If you do option up, the package costs are low: \$1550 for one (which also includes Harman Kardon premium audio, worth more than the package total) and \$925 for another. Heated seats and related features add another \$1550, and these are a must for just about anyone.

Put it all together, and you have a fully outfitted luxury-trimmed car that's more distinctive than



Volvo V60 Cross Country

average and considerably more useful, delivering both elegance and ruggedness.

Volvo V60 Cross Country

The Volvo V60 wagon entered our market in 2014 and the V60 Cross Country a year and a half later as a 2015.5 model (the S60 sedan also received a 2015.5 update). Notice that the V60 Cross Country is not the XC60. It starts with the V60 wagon and meets the concept of the long-running XC70 half-way (the XC70 being more of a departure from the original XC90 SUV, but at more of a car height and in more of a carlike body). From a buyer consideration standpoint, the new relativity makes a lot more sense in a lot more cases.

If everything about the S60 Cross Country just sounded appealing, but you prefer a wagon form—or, in fact, more of a sexy European shooting brake design—here's your beast. Performance and handling are basically identical, but you have 43.8 cubic feet of cargo space, compared to 12 in the sedan version. Legroom remains the same front and rear. Fuel mileage is also the same, although while the exact same weight as the sedan (surprisingly enough), the V-model is not as quick, hitting 60 mph in 7.0 seconds.

Unlike the one-trim S60 Cross Country, there are two V60 Cross Country models. Both have the T5 five-cylinder turbo and AWD, but a Platinum trim adds \$3650 to the sticker and delivers such things as Harman Kardon premium sound, accent lighting and full convenience and technology packages, included. Perhaps this is why the first option package on our test V60 CC ran \$3650,

2016 VOLVO V60 CROSS COUNTRY T5 AWD

ENGINE	.....2.5L 20-valve inline-5 turbo
TRANS/DRIVE	.....6-spd auto w quick shift / AWD
POWER/TORQUE	.....250 hp / 266 lb-ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....7.9 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....37.4 ft
TOWING CAPACITY	.....3300 lb
WEIGHT	.....3913 lb
MPG	.....20/28/23 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	.....\$41,000
OPTIONS INCLUDED: Premium audio, electronics, heated features as on S60 CC tested, plus accent lighting, keyless, dual child bolster seats.	
TOTAL AS TESTED (BASE MODEL)\$49,775



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when it is in fact very similar to the \$1550 package on our S60 CC, although the V60 group does include another item or two. If you're shopping between the S60 CC and the V60 CC, this may prove a bit baffling. If you're shopping just one of them, it won't. In either case, you have the overall welcome choice between a relatively simplified premium car or one that is fully tricked out but still holding its price in the \$40s.

Volvo S60 Inscription

When the Volvo S60 launched a decade and a half ago, it boasted very competitive rear legroom. Flash forward, and competition has become pretty stiff—not only among larger German and Japanese premium models with "L" (long) versions, but increasingly in midsize and compact competitors. Some people prefer the shorter wheelbase, for everything from garage space to parking to tight maneuvers. Some don't even particularly need more room in the back. Hence the appeal of an optional wheelbase, rather than just stretch and bloat applied to the existing model. Add an emphasis on luxury, and this is the fundamental basis of the S60 Inscription.

Rear legroom is increased by three inches, and occupants enjoy contoured seats (while they reflect upon walnut wood inlays, upgraded accent lighting, an interior air quality system and window shades—power rear and manual rear sides).

There are both front-wheel- and all-wheel-drive versions of the S60 Inscription. The front-driver has electronic power steering, and the AWD model has speed-sensitive steering. Only the FWD has an auto start-stop feature. The AWD model hits 29 MPG highway, compared with 37 for the front-driver. We'd normally gravitate toward all-wheel-drive, but that's a huge fuel mileage difference, and electronic driving aids might make up the difference in most cases.

There are two trim levels—Premium and Platinum—which combine with the drivetrain options to present four models ranging over just a \$4500 price spread. All have the same model-specific wheels and a tasteful bit of chrome. We drove a base model (Premium FWD) in California, which gave us the full experience, even Harman Kardon premium sound and other Platinum-included features, which had been added as options.

Global Scandinavians

The Volvo S60 Inscription represents a significant first in the US. People have wondered for a decade or more when the first Chinese cars might hit our shores. Well, surprise. This beautiful Scandinavian is our nation's first Chinese car. While other US Volvos are manufactured in Sweden and Belgium, this one comes from one of their three



Volvo S60 Inscription

Chinese plants, in Chengdu, not surprising considering Volvo Cars has been owned by China's Geely since Ford spun off the brand in 2010. But this is Volvo's first Chinese build exported to the US.

A modern, largely robotized automotive factory is a mostly closed ecosystem and turnkey "product" in its own right (premium German brands have been building behind the former Iron Curtain for years now). Volvo points out that they "can design, build and run a plant (anywhere) without a local partner." They challenged us to spot any differences in our S60 Inscription. We did not. The engineering and factory are one thousand percent Swedish and are producing one thousand percent Swedish cars, regardless of the factory location.

Volvo is not only expanding production to China. They broke ground for their first US factory this fall, which will begin production in 2018. Located in Berkeley County, South Carolina (near the port of Charleston), the half-billion-dollar facility will have capacity to produce 100,000 vehicles per year. It's slated to become the global production source for the next S60 Sedan, currently under development at the home office in Gothenburg, Sweden, plus another model to be announced later.

The South Carolina factory will provide 2000 immediate jobs, 4000 over the longer term and an estimated 8000 additional jobs due to its impact on the surrounding economy, good for almost \$5 billion a year in total economic impact.

Volvo roots its brand in Scandinavian engineering, style and heritage. They have been enjoying double-digit growth in the US recently, and as the new XC90 SUV takes home one award after another—and these intriguing new 60 Series models arrive—their future here looks bright. ■

2016 VOLVO S60 INSCRIPTION FWD

ENGINE.....	2.0L 4-cyl turbo
TRANS/DRIVE.....	8-spd auto w quick shift / FWD
POWER/TORQUE.....	240 hp / 258 lb-ft
TURNING CIRCLE.....	40.7 ft
TOWING CAPACITY.....	3500 lb
WEIGHT.....	3433 lb
MPG.....	25/37/29 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE.....	\$38,700
OPTIONS INCLUDED: As on S60 CC, V60 CC tested.	
TOTAL AS TESTED (PREMIUM).....	\$45,925
Base price Platinum FWD.....	\$41,700
Base price Premium AWD.....	\$40,200
Base price Platinum AWD.....	\$43,200



Taking recreational fun seriously

Active Lifestyle Vehicle of the Year Awards reflect real world usage

Historic San Marcos Golf Resort in Chandler hosted the Carspondent.com Active Lifestyle Vehicle of the Year (ALV) Awards program in its 12th year this fall. Built in 1912, the authentically restored 103-year-old architecturally rich resort sits in what is now the heart of historic old town Chandler. ALV was previously held at Local Motors in Chandler, but both they and the event needed more space this year. The new home base handled event activities, dining and overnight accommodations in one location, with restaurants and shops within walking distance.

This also led to improved drive routes—a mix of city and freeway driving in a home town atmosphere. Off-road driving moved from the prior Local Motors rock course to a desert location.

On Saturday, October 17, elite and recreational athletes drove and rated a list of crossovers, SUVs, trucks and other vehicles catering to active lifestyles. This is the heart of ALV: a group of athletes, celebrities and active lifestyle enthusiasts act as a valuable focus group for automakers and industry experts alike. For manufacturers, it's a chance to gain a seal of approval from the very consumers they're marketing to, augmenting the

results from events judged by automotive media.

Nearly 100 journalists and athletes drove on a variety of street, freeway and off-road courses to get a feel for how each vehicle performs within one of six categories, variously grouped by value, luxury, on- or off-road duty, also with family and urban lifestyle categories. Vehicles were entered by Audi, Buick, Chrysler, Fiat, Ford, Dodge, GMC, Jeep, Kia, Lexus, Mercedes-Benz, Mitsubishi, Nissan, Scion, Toyota and Volkswagen.

Athlete judges scrutinized livability features such as seating and cargo capacity, plus overall versatility for activities such as camping, sports and road trips. An awards ceremony was held at the San Marcos Golf Resort on Saturday afternoon. Winners in the six judged classes were:

- BEST VALUE ON-ROAD** ...2016 Mitsubishi Outlander
- LUXURY ON-ROAD**2016 Mercedes-Benz GLE
- BEST VALUE OFF-ROAD** ..2015 Ford F-150
- LUXURY OFF-ROAD**2015 Jeep Grand Cherokee
- BEST VALUE FAMILY**2015 Ford Edge
- URBAN**2015 Kia Soul

This year's event instituted a new electronic scoring system, faster and more data-rich. Consumer metrics will be more comprehensive and more

useful for manufacturers than ever.

For the Kia Soul, this was a fourth consecutive award in the Urban category, while both Ford and Mitsubishi were new to the winners' circle.

Two new presentations took place the prior evening at an athlete welcome dinner.

Friday had been a media day, with local and visiting national jurists. Participating members of the Phoenix Automotive Press Association (PAPA) compared a list of contenders and presented a new Best of the Southwest award to just one vehicle that met a complex list of practical and subjective considerations. The PAPA Best of the Southwest award went to Jeep Grand Cherokee (which went on to win the Luxury Off-Road ALV category the next day).

A new Denise McCluggage Memorial Scholarship—celebrating the life of a beloved and gifted automotive colleague and long-time member of the ALV jury panel—was sponsored by XPEL Technologies and presented to an outstanding student of automotive engineering or design. The Denise McCluggage Memorial Scholarship was presented to engineering student Maeve Ribas.

ALV is a privately run Phoenix-based event. ■



(Top) Catching the event buzz. • Vehicles (L-R, t-b): Mitsubishi Outlander, Mercedes-Benz GLE, Ford F-150, Jeep Grand Cherokee, Ford Edge, Kia Soul. • Event cofounder Nina Russin and retired Arizona Cardinals defensive tackle Bernard Wilson present awards to (L-R, t-b) Trevor Dorchie for Jeep, Shमित Choksey for Kia, Alex Fedorak for Mitsubishi, Diedra Wylie for Mercedes-Benz and Jason Camp for Ford.





MAKE ROOM

Nissan tackles the full-size pickup segment head-on with a new truly full-size Titan, and the Cummins diesel engine is one big card up their sleeve.

By Joe Sage

The full-size pickup segment is the most loyal there is. It's as close to a zero-sum game as the industry has, where strong loyalists must be converted to any new arrival. Knowing this, Nissan is upping their game in a big way. And Cummins is a key part of the game plan.

Nissan has had a Titan pickup in the US since 2003. But whereas it was larger than their mid-size (once compact) Frontier, it has not been 4x8-plywood-large like Ford, Chevy/GMC or Ram. Or Toyota Tundra, which itself used to be less-than-full-size, but upped its game and its size in 2007.

Ford F-Series rules the market, with upper-30-percent share (with its EcoBoost V6 turbo selling well), to Chevy/GMC's combined lower-30s. Ram has moved above 20 percent (with big sales for its EcoDiesel V6 turbo). Tundra comes in at 5 or 6 percent, but the smaller Titan had dropped in the past decade or so from about 3 percent to less than one percent. It was time for a bold move.

As a new full-size Nissan Titan launches, one of its boldest moves is also one of the boldest moves for Cummins Engine. The first new big Titan—the Nissan Titan XD—will be powered by an entirely new Cummins 5.0-liter V8 turbodiesel. For Nissan, a smaller player with a shorter lineup, this provides the fuel economy of a turbo with the work capability of a big diesel V8. It's one solution occupying a very sweet spot.

This is a new move for Cummins, who specializes in heavy-duty trucks (and ships and trains). The new V8 for Nissan shares 70 percent of its parts with the powerful heavy-duty Cummins V8, the one capable of towing 30,000 pounds or more in the heaviest models from some of the competition. Titan with its quiet, chain-driven, smaller 5.0L Cummins turbodiesel V8 is expected to tow more than 12,000 pounds (a preproduction estimate).

The engine puts out 310 hp and a powerful 555 lb-ft of torque from a low point of 1600 rpm. This is run through an Aisin heavy-duty 6-speed automatic and an electronic locking rear differential.

The first model—built in Canton, Mississippi and promoted as “American Titan”—will be a

The Titan's V8 is being built in the totally revamped historic Cummins Engine Plant in Columbus, Indiana, which Cummins calls “the oldest new plant we've got.” • At founding Cummins VP J Irwin Miller's home and gardens, we fired up founder Clessie Lyle Cummins' 1936 Cadillac, which he converted to diesel to first make the rounds pitching his new technology. • The Cummins Foundation, among the Top 10 organizations in the US for architecturally significant places, has for decades paid the fees for the world's greatest architects to design the civic buildings in Columbus, a showpiece town of 80,000.

crew cab 5-passenger model (or six with a bench front seat), available with rear- or four-wheel drive. Wheels range from 17-inch to 20-inch, and steering is a strong recirculating ball high-capacity system. The truck sits atop double-wishbone front suspension with stabilizer bar and a rigid axle leaf spring rear suspension with twin-tube shocks. Brakes are four-wheel hydraulic power ventilated discs, 14.2 in front and 14.4 in the rear.

The Nissan Titan XD includes every feature you are wondering about and plenty you hadn't even thought to ask—LED lights front and rear, puddle lamps, step rails and easy cabin access, quiet and strong laminated side glass. Occupants enjoy advanced seating, remote-start dual zone climate, supplemental heater and air filtration. Infotainment includes dedicated NissanConnect navigation, mobile apps and services, and 12-speaker Rockford Fosgate premium audio.

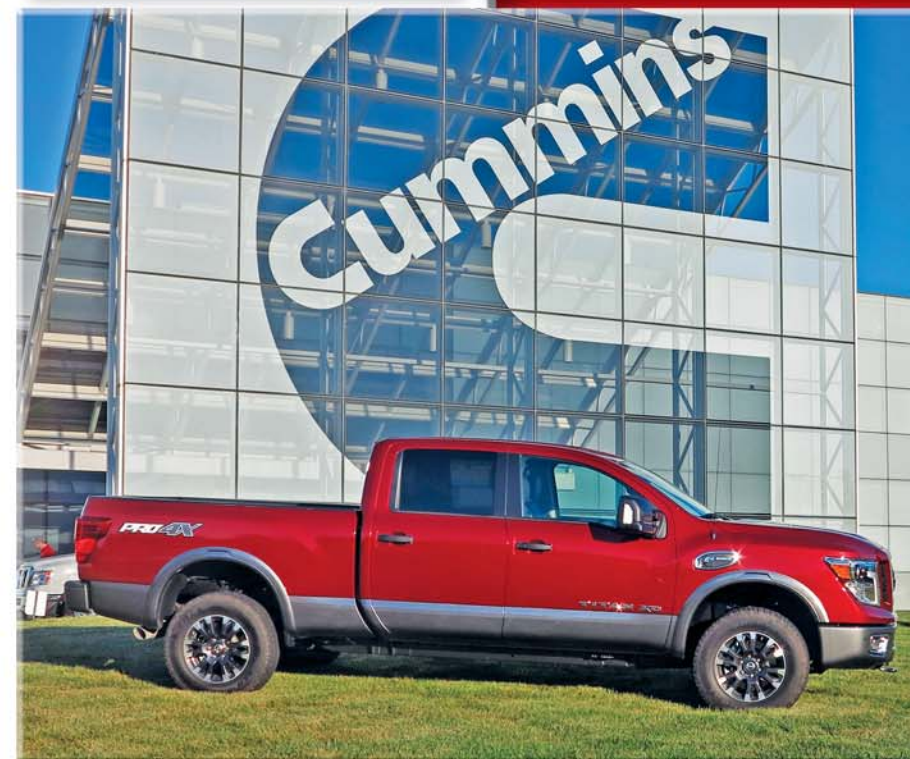
The tailgate operates firmly with a dampener and two-way assist. The bed includes 120V outlets, a fold-out flat floor, LED rail lighting, lockable in-bed storage, sprayed-in bedliner and an integrated gooseneck hitch receiver.

Electronic aids include Nissan's spectacular 360-degree perimeter cameras plus a rear monitor with trailer guides, moving object detection, front and rear sonar and blind spot warning, plus a tow/haul mode with downhill speed control. One novel feature any hardened trailer-tower will love is an available trailer light check from inside.

We were shown pre-production versions of the new Nissan Titan XD during our Cummins tour, and we were allowed to get in them, poke around under them and so on, but we did not run them.

A few weeks later, we were able to drive the Nissan Titan XD at the Texas Truck Rodeo, where it won the coveted Truck of Texas award (see elsewhere in this issue). Driving impressions are under strict embargo until later in November.

But we can tell you this. With the combined formula of hardware, layout and features of the truck, Nissan is delivering the goods. It's a tough market to crack, and they know it, but they are dead serious and bringing everything they have to the game. Things bode well for the Nissan Titan XD with its Cummins V8 diesel. ■



Dual duty daily driver

by Joe Sage

There is a new van explosion on the streets of America as of late. Ford first brought us their global little Transit Connect and has now added the big Transit van (new to the US, but actually in its fifth generation), relegating the ubiquitous Econoline to history. FCA (Fiat Chrysler) has brought us both the Ram ProMaster and ProMaster City (rebadged and somewhat reskinned Fiat Ducato and Doblo vans, also around for about 35 and 15 years, respectively, in the rest of the world). GM is slow to the game, recently rebadging the smaller Nissan NV200 as a Chevrolet City Express, while the big Chevy Express and GMC Savana soldier on some two decades into their lifespan. Nissan has been selling their big NV van (1500, 2500, 3500) for several years in the US, joined recently by that smaller NV200 under its own Nissan badge.

As Mathias Geisen, general manager for vans in the US, puts it, Mercedes-Benz was “14 years ahead of the curve.” Sprinter vans have been here since the dawn of the millennium, though badging has evolved, with Sprinter first badged in the US as Freightliner, then (in the DaimlerChrysler era) your choice of Freightliner or Dodge.

History from there can get complex. In short, Daimler took over the van products, through and lingering past the DaimlerChrysler split. Passenger versions built in Germany could be imported easily into the US, while cargo vans were built there, disassembled, shipped with different portions aboard separate ships and reassembled in Ladson, South Carolina, to avoid a 25 percent duty known as the chicken tax (see our facility tour and test drives in our Nov/Dec 2014 and Jan/Feb 2015 issues).

Last spring, Mercedes-Benz announced a new Charleston, South Carolina factory will be built starting in 2016, where the next-generation Sprinter will be built.

Sprinter falls behind Ford and GM in overall US big van sales, while long defining the eye-catching Eurovan niche. Now we have a smaller Mercedes-Benz van.

TWO SIZES: The whole idea behind two van sizes may seem obvious. Some people need a bigger one and some need a smaller one. But a basic commercial plan involves one customer buying plenty of both. Ford’s naming scheme illuminates this, though it was confusing at first in our market, as they introduced the Transit Connect several years before the Transit.

The basic idea is to carry goods from origin to depot in a big Transit, then from depot to customer after, well, connecting to a Transit Connect small van network.

Ram has delivered this same formula straight out of the gate, as has Nissan. GM is dabbling in it with Nissan’s help.

For 2016, Mercedes-Benz introduces the Metris van to North America—known globally as the V-Class, or the Vito in cargo form, Viano in passenger form and Marco Polo as a camper van. There is no Freightliner-badged Metris planned as of now.

TWO FLAVORS: America loves trucks, and that love extends to vans. One look at a commercial Sprinter van, and people want to know if they can have one with windows for their own road trips. Sprinter is available this way, plus has a thriving, sanctioned third-party conversion network, with Airstream, Midway and Morgan Olson (see our Jan/Feb 2015 issue).

For the new Metris van, the factory (in Spain for now, but also moving to South Carolina) will be churning out both cargo and passenger versions, showroom ready.

We flew to LA to drive the new Metris.

MEET THE METRIS: The Mercedes-Benz Metris van is built for duty first, which any truck lover should appreciate. Thus the passenger version’s interior is relatively spartan, by luxury brand expectations, though nicely higher-end by truck stan-

2016 MERCEDES-BENZ METRIS VAN

ENGINE.....	2.0L 4-cylinder turbo
TRANS/DRIVE.....	7-spd auto w paddles / RWD
POWER/TORQUE.....	208 hp / 258 lb-ft
WHEELBASE.....	126 in
LENGTH/WIDTH/HEIGHT.....	202.4 / 75.9 / 75.2 in
TURNING CIRCLE.....	38.7 ft
CARGO BETWEEN WHEELS.....	50 in x 111.5 in
CARGO VOLUME.....	186 cu ft
PAYLOAD.....	cargo 2502 lb / passenger 1874 lb
ROOF LOAD.....	331 lb
GROUND CLEARANCE.....	3.8 in
GVWR.....	6724 lb
TOWING CAPACITY.....	4960 lb
GCWR.....	11,684 lb
FUEL.....	91 octane recommended (87 acceptable)
MPG.....	22/25/23 cargo / 20/23/22 pp (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE (CARGO).....	\$28,950
BASE PRICE (PASSENGER).....	\$32,500

dards. With a starting price of \$28,950 in cargo form, this is the lowest-priced Mercedes-Benz in the US. The passenger model starts at \$32,500. (There is a luxury V-Class globally, but not here for now.)

Metris is almost three feet shorter than Sprinter, about four inches narrower, and almost two feet lower in height. Classified as a midsize, it’s larger than Ford Transit Connect or Nissan NV200 by some 45 to 50 percent cargo volume and claims higher payload in the 54-73 percent range. Cargo and payload specs are closest to the interim Dodge Caravan-based Ram C/V Tradesman, falling between FCA’s newer ProMaster and ProMaster City vans.

A wide range of options bring additional function, creature comforts and style points to cargo or passenger versions. You can replace standard fabric seating with leatherette for just \$200 (\$70 cargo).

Metris specs are very competitive and versatile, ready for a builder’s 4x8 sheets or a weekender’s just-about-5000-pound boat, though ground clearance is less than most.

If interested in buying for personal use, don’t expect the posh cabin of an S-Class. Do expect the satisfaction of a stylish and nicely-equipped vehicle with a significant level of utility. And expect plenty of curiosity and envy when you pull up at the soccer match, club or boat ramp.

Mercedes-Benz—at some 800,000 units per year, the world’s largest commercial vehicle manufacturer—emphasizes this is not a minivan. It’s a commercial vehicle—a cargo van or a useful shuttle in passenger form. But it could fit nicely in your garage. And it’s surely also ripe for luxe conversion.

The new Mercedes-Benz Metris van is available for order now, with production beginning before the end of 2015. ■



A new kid rides into town

Texas Auto Writers' influential annual comparo produces a few surprises by Joe Sage - photos © Raven Studios

The TAWA (Texas Auto Writers Association) Texas Truck Rodeo is one of the most prominent, respected and influential competitive vehicle events among those presented by national and regional automotive media associations. Though the awards carry "Texas" in their name, they are much broader in scope. In fact, trucks being trucks and Texas being Texas, having the Lone Star State in their names inherently reinforces the fact that these are the truck awards of all truck awards—of huge significance and consequence.

Arizona being Arizona, trucks are also very big here. Participating in the Texas Truck Rodeo is fun, but also a very useful tool for us, to make sure we're up to date on every development in this field. And it's a focused opportunity to interface with the top engineers and executives behind the machines—all part of a great couple of days on a beautiful Texas ranch, with top-notch Texas barbecue at the dinner bell.

Such events provide a good time behind the wheel but are also serious business. The Texas Truck Rodeo is held in the Hill Country outside San Antonio, where many trucks are built and even more are tested, as are the tires they bear. As Ford truck group marketing manager Doug Scott told us, this is "one of the three big ones, along with the *Motor Trend* and North American Truck of the Year awards."

Texas set records again this year, with 72 different vehicles from 21 brands entered in 17 award categories—primarily breaking down by pickup truck, SUV and crossover, with subsets for luxury, off-road or heavy duty use, plus a commercial vehicle category. Add in several display vehicles and a few duplicates to increase driving opportunities, and 88 trucks had been shipped in, at tremendous effort and expense, to await judgment.

The Steel Market Development Institute returned as title sponsor, as the use of high-strength steel grows (along with that of aluminum) for reduced weight and increased safety. Michelin, BF Goodrich and XPEL protective coatings also sponsored.

Entrants at Texas do reflect many of the same as the North American Truck of the Year Awards, the finalists for which are announced about the same time. And although all the judges at both events are free thinkers, America does love a winner, so it's hard to imagine a trophy in Texas might not provide a little more traction and gain more respect (after all, presidential primary thinking is upon us) as that event approaches its final decisions, to be announced in Detroit in January.

The Texas Truck Rodeo presents four major category awards, choosing one standout vehicle each as Truck of Texas,



SUV of Texas and CUV of Texas, plus a broader winner as Truck Line of Texas.

There are also winners in 17 individual vehicle categories and three special feature categories.

As the sun rose above Knibbe Ranch on the first drive day, some 69 journalist drivers grabbed a quick but hearty breakfast—and their tally sheets—then headed out to the competition courses.

Automotive media members would attempt to drive every vehicle, then judge them within a range of parameters. Selections and sequence are grab-as-you-can. Each vehicle and driver's departure and return times are recorded by barcode.

The toughest vehicles tackle a long and thorough off-pavement course, with rough surfaces, ultra-steep descents and ascents, deep natural water crossings, extreme rock climbs, sudden drops, the works. Others would hit the hills and curves of neighboring Texas Hill Country two-lanes. A special area provided heavy-duty towing comparisons, also often run on the road.

Judging is complex and can end up tight, so scoring has algorithms whereby a first place vote receives three points, second receives two and third receives one, multiplying the value of the higher votes.

In principle, this could create the occasional oddity in the outcome, whereby a

(Top to bottom) Truck of Texas the new 2016 Nissan Titan XD (which also missed the Full-Size Pickup crown by just one-tenth of a point). • SUV of Texas Ford Explorer. • Crossover of Texas Volvo XC90. • Ford won the full Truck Line of Texas award including pickups (F-150 shown), commercial and utilities.

The Truck of Texas trophy, for the new Nissan Titan XD with Cummins Diesel, is received by regional communications manager Steve Parrett, senior VP of US sales, marketing and operations Fred Diaz, and senior manager US regional communications Wendy Orthman. • Utility marketing manager Eric Peterson accepts the SUV of Texas trophy for Ford Explorer; Ford also won the full range Truck Line of Texas award. • National media relations manager Russell Datz accepts the Crossover of Texas trophy for the Volvo XC90—a triple champion, also winning the Luxury Crossover crown and the features award for connectivity for its Sensus Connect system.

second- or third-place finisher could theoretically receive the most pro-rata votes and the trophy. As participating judges, we could review detailed results, though, and didn't see any instances of this. What it does provide is a way to break a tie, which does happen from time to time.

The winners of the overall top dog awards—Truck, SUV, Crossover and Truck Line of Texas—are as follows:

Title Awards

TRUCK OF TEXAS

- Nissan Titan XD (Cummins Diesel)

SUV OF TEXAS

- 2016 Ford Explorer

CUV OF TEXAS

- 2016 Volvo XC90

TRUCK LINE OF TEXAS

- Ford F-Series

Those are always the first to grab headlines, the longstanding Truck of Texas award most of all. But there are twenty

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Photo: Joe Sage

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additional trophies presented, as follows:

Category Awards

PICKUP TRUCKS

- Midsize pickup: 2016 Toyota Tacoma TRD Off-Road and TRD Sport and Limited
- Full-size pickup: 2016 Ram 1500 Rebel
- Luxury pickup truck: 2016 Nissan Titan XD Platinum Reserve
- Heavy duty pickup truck: 2016 Ram 2500
- Off-road pickup: 2016 Nissan Titan XD Pro-4X

CROSSOVER UTILITY VEHICLES

- Compact CUV: 2015 Jeep Renegade Trailhawk
- Mid-size CUV: 2015 Nissan Murano Platinum
- Full-size CUV: 2016 Hyundai Santa Fe Limited AWD
- Luxury CUV: 2016 Volvo XC90 T6

SPORT UTILITY VEHICLES

- Compact SUV: 2016 Jeep Cherokee Trailhawk and Limited
- Mid-size SUV: 2014 Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited Diesel
- Full-size SUV: 2015 Dodge Durango RT AWD and Citadel AWD
- Compact luxury SUV: 2016 Land Rover Discovery Sport HSE LUX
- Mid-size luxury SUV: 2015 Jeep Grand Cherokee Summit 4x4
- Full-size luxury SUV: 2016 Lexus LX 570
- Off-road utility vehicle: 2016 Jeep Wrangler

COMMERCIAL VEHICLES

- Best commercial vehicle: 2016 Mercedes-Benz Metris cargo and passenger van

FEATURE AWARDS

- Best technology: Ford Pro Trailer Backup Assist
- Best connectivity: Volvo Sensus
- Best powertrain: Nissan 5.0L V8 Cummins Diesel and Aisin transmission

We had good exposure to quite a few of these already. We had recently visited the Nissan Titan XD's Cummins Diesel engine plant in Indiana. We had driven the new Ford Explorer a few hundred miles in western Colorado, the Mercedes-Benz Metris at its Southern California launch and the Volvo XC90 at its Northern California launch. We drove a number of similar vehicles during Mudfest, the NWAPA Outdoor Activity Vehicle of the Year Awards, a few months earlier. We had tried Ford's Pro Trailer Backup Assist during their Silicon Valley megatrends event and Volvo's new Sensus user interface at the launch of their new S60 and V60 models. There is a lot to cover in Texas, and all of that helps.

The manufacturers choose very carefully, and they put massive effort into having all this equipment and personnel in one place at one time for us. Every vehicle is prequalified as worthy of a win. We had many favorites and many we'd happily take home—who knew an 18-and-a-half-foot \$70,000-plus Lincoln Navigator L Reserve was so nimble and quick? And how could you not want a Ram 1500 Rebel, after pounding it through the toughest circuit with a play-by-play on its features (with all its extra capabilities, it trades off not one drop of fuel economy or roadworthiness) from Chief Engineer Elizabeth Krear?

As with *Time* magazine's Man of the Year award, the deciding factor is not (necessarily) what is "best," but what is most significant. The new 2016 Titan XD moves Nissan into the truly full-size pickup realm for the first time, noteworthy indeed, though it was also very well received on its own merits. Nissan had pulled out all the stops to build us a few pre-production trucks, and drive impressions are under embargo until mid-November, but the trucks will start arriving at dealerships en masse in December. (Nissan Titan

A feast of pickups, Jeeps, SUVs, crossovers and commercial vans included the 2016 Toyota Tacoma TRD (Midsize Pickup winner); Ram 1500 Rebel (Full-Size Pickup winner); Jeep Renegade Trailhawk (winner of Compact CUV, while the Cherokee Trailhawk won Compact SUV); new 2016 Hyundai Tucson (a close second to the Renegade, and smaller sibling to Full-Size CUV winner Hyundai Santa Fe); 2016 Land Rover Discovery Sport HSE LUX (Compact Luxury SUV winner and a standout at Mudfest in the Pacific Northwest last spring); and Mercedes-Benz Metris (winner of the Commercial Vehicle category in both cargo and passenger form, with passenger shown here).

and RAM Power Wagon were in fact tied for the separate Off-Road Pickup award, but in a category of five entrants, Titan received more second-place votes, a tie-breaker that earned them that trophy.)

Fred Diaz, senior vice president of sales, marketing and operations USA for Nissan North America, said, "Of the hundreds of thousands of miles driven during the development of the all-new 2016 Titan XD, the miles driven by the truck experts of the Texas Auto Writers Association were the most critical miles driven to date as we prepare to launch our new truck. This prestigious Truck of Texas award gives us tremendous validation heading into the Titan XD launch in December. We are humbly honored to accept this award."

It was unusual to not have Ram among the title awards. Last year, Ford F-150's newsmaking new aluminum construction was enough to wrest the Truck of Texas trophy away from the Ram 1500 EcoDiesel after prior consecutive wins in the Texas Truck Rodeo and many other wins in other events. Ram did well throughout the category awards, however, with win, place or show positions in six categories, including two wins and a tie for a third win.

GM was another surprise. Chevrolet pickups garnered second in one category and third in another, while GMC had none—this despite a notably enthusiastic media response to their new Chevrolet Colorado and GMC Canyon midsize pickup introductions earlier this year.

It all comes down to the ballot box and math. We sometimes find surprises as the trophies are presented, but when the results are fully scrutinized, their combination of objective and subjective considerations seems reassuringly consistent.

This event itself is certainly a winner, and we are already looking forward to next year's TAWA Texas Truck Rodeo. ■



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OPTIMIZED BY JOE SAGE

It's hard to think back just five years, to the introduction of the stunning third-generation Kia Optima, from a company at the time known for its little Rio, Forte and Soul, a time before the full-size Cadenza and luxury K900.

Midsized sedans are the largest segment in the US, representing one out of every seven sales. The segment overall has taken a dip in 2015, but not Kia. Optima sales continue to climb, even in a market where most gains have been dependent upon truck sales.

You don't mess with success. But you do strive for continuous improvement. Kia is a master at both. Witness recent new generations of Soul and Sorento—both completely new models, yet both remaining immediately recognizable. Kia has applied their magic again with the fourth-generation 2016 Optima.

WE FLEW via Denver to Aspen, Colorado, where we could drive the new Optima on a combination of high mountain passes, full of unmatched twists, turns, climbs and drops, two-lane mountain valley highways, and Interstates with scenery as stunning as the rest.

Our route took us over Independence Pass (summit 12,096 feet, surrounded by 14,000-foot-plus peaks), through historic Leadville, to a sandwich stop in Vail Village (where moose were roaming free that day), west on I-70 through Glenwood Canyon, a highway engineering showpiece along the Colorado River through spectacular Glenwood Canyon—then back through the Roaring Fork Valley to Snowmass, where our day had begun.

Winter here is so extreme that Independence Pass will simply close for the season.

And snow can start early—as early as Labor Day. We were lucky this fall day, with clear blue high country skies, dry pavement and the last vestiges of Colorado's brief but beautiful fall colors in the aspen groves.

THEY DON'T brag of Optima as a "3-killer." They don't even bill it as a sports sedan. But they could. Our SXL's 260 lb-ft of torque delivered 245 hp to the ground with all the power we needed, as we maximized both speed and control through tight turns and rapid elevation changes (without guardrails, in most cases, to accommodate both snow removal and rock slides). Rack and pinion steering has column-mounted electric boost, rather than rack-mounted, with great hands-on feel.

Kia hired Albert Biermann, previously BMW vice president of M engineering, in fall 2014. He has made his mark, starting with the Optima's new four-point suspension geometry and construction. The Kia Optima is in fact central to the brand's increasingly successful motorsports strategy.

We bore down, and the drivetrain and

exhaust delivered a satisfying soundtrack.

Pushing the Optima's sporty character could shortchange its value as an autobahn cruiser, which they also don't brag about. But again they could. Our open highway miles felt as swift, comfortable and luxurious as they might in a long-wheelbase premium German sedan at three times the price.

Also delivering a satisfying soundtrack was the 630-watt Harman/Kardon Quantum-Logic Surround 10-speaker premium audio system, with ClariFi technology that recreates a digital source's original dynamics. This is included in the SXL and available in other higher trims, while the already highly impressive Harman/Kardon Infinity system remains in midlevel cars. As usual, Harman helps Kia deliver a stunning system, included, that might cost half again the price of this car to match in many premium models.

A FULL complement of driving technologies, including ABS and EBD, traction control, electronic stability control, stability management and hill start assist are standard inclusions across the full model lineup. Our car

KEEP RIGHT >>

2016 KIA OPTIMA

OPTIMA LX 2.4, EX 2.4

ENGINE.....	2.4L 4-cylinder GDI
POWER/TORQUE.....	185 hp / 178 lb-ft
WEIGHT.....	LX 2.4: 3219 lb
.....EX 2.4: 3362 lb	
FUEL ECONOMY.....	LX 2.4: 25/37/30 city/hwy/comb
.....EX 2.4: 24/35/28 city/hwy/comb	
BASE PRICE.....	LX 2.4: \$21,840
.....EX 2.4: \$24,890	

OPTIMA LX 1.6T

ENGINE.....	1.6L 4-cylinder GDI turbo
POWER/TORQUE.....	178 hp / 195 lb-ft
WEIGHT.....	LX 1.6T: 3224 lb
FUEL ECONOMY.....	LX 1.6T: 28/39/32 city/hwy/comb
BASE PRICE.....	LX 1.6T: \$23,990

OPTIMA SX 2.0T, SXL 2.0T

ENGINE.....	2.0L 4-cylinder GDI turbo
POWER/TORQUE.....	245 hp / 260 lb-ft
WEIGHT.....	SX 2.0T: (w/o, w pano snrf) 3494-3594 lb
.....SXL 2.0T: (w pano snrf) 3594 lb	
FUEL ECONOMY.....	SX 2.0T: 22/32/26 city/hwy/comb
.....SXL 2.0T: 22/32/25 city/hwy/comb	
BASE PRICE.....	SX 2.0T: \$29,690
.....SXL 2.0T: \$35,790	

TRANS/DRIVE.....	6-spd auto / FWD
BRAKES.....	LX, EX 12.0 vent, 11.2 solid
.....SX, SLX 12.6 vent, 11.2 solid	
WHEELBASE.....	110.4 in
LEGROOM FRONT/REAR.....	45.5 in / 35.6 in
HEADROOM FRONT/REAR.....	39.8 in / 37.8 in
TURNING CIRCLE.....	35.8 ft
CARGO VOLUME.....	15.9 cu ft
FUEL.....	87 octane regular



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was a top trim SXL, which also comes standard with blind spot detection, lane departure warning, rear parking sensors, rear cross traffic alert, front collision warning and autonomous emergency braking. These are all optionally available on the SX, and about half are options on the others.

Electronics also include both Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, delivering messaging, nav, phone and other operations through your smartphone. There is also breakthrough wireless charging—just set your phone on the console—for phones with inductive technology (Android as of now).

EVERY MODEL includes Driver Mode Select, with Normal, Sport and Eco settings. All perform well. We used Sport in that thin air, to maximize twists and turns, as it changes shift points and tightens the steering ratio.

There are three engine choices in the new Optima, as charted on the previous page. They may sound familiar, but are reengineered with 66 percent new parts and entirely new turbochargers. LX and EX trims get a naturally-aspired 2.4-liter GDI, while SX and SXL models have a more powerful 2.0-liter turbo, which is also a little thirstier, though still delivering highway fuel mileage in the 30s, as they all do.

New to the Optima is a 1.6-liter turbo with a big boost in torque over the 2.4L (almost 200 lb-ft) delivered hand in hand with a 39 MPG highway rating. This winning combo is the second-lowest priced Optima in the lineup (LX 1.6T). Intriguing.

Our SXL had the same six-speed automatic the whole lineup has with one exception: the LX 1.6T has an equally intriguing seven-speed dual clutch transmission. (This model was not there that day.)

Across the lineup, you will find hot-stamped satin metal finishes and matte black elements from the premium K900 sedan, new and distinct LED taillights, an all-new instrument panel with a stronger horizontal plane, a heated D-shaped steering wheel, more premium soft touch surfaces, including leather and quilted Nappa leather—more luxury and a premium feel throughout.

Rear passengers get their own USB ports, and front and rear can enjoy an available panoramic sunroof (included on SXL, optional on EX and SX).

Special attention has been paid to the front seats, with a new steel frame, four layers of foam—and now adjustable passenger seat height.

The new model uses advanced materials—a 100 percent increase in high-strength steel and a 150 percent increase in ultra-high-strength steel—to create a stronger, tighter, lighter structure (torsional rigidity is increased by 58 percent) and a cabin three and a half cubic feet larger—within a car that's just a half-inch longer, about an inch narrower, a half-inch less high, on a half-inch

shorter wheelbase, and which has shed 40 pounds. The new Optima claims class-leading specifications for front leg and headroom, rear leg, head and hip room and cargo capacity.

EVEN WITH our top line SXL model, everything that made our Colorado day great can be all yours in the mid-\$30s. Or you can get most of it starting in the low to mid \$20s. Even the base model at \$21,840 has added a wide range of standard features, while keeping the entry price the same.

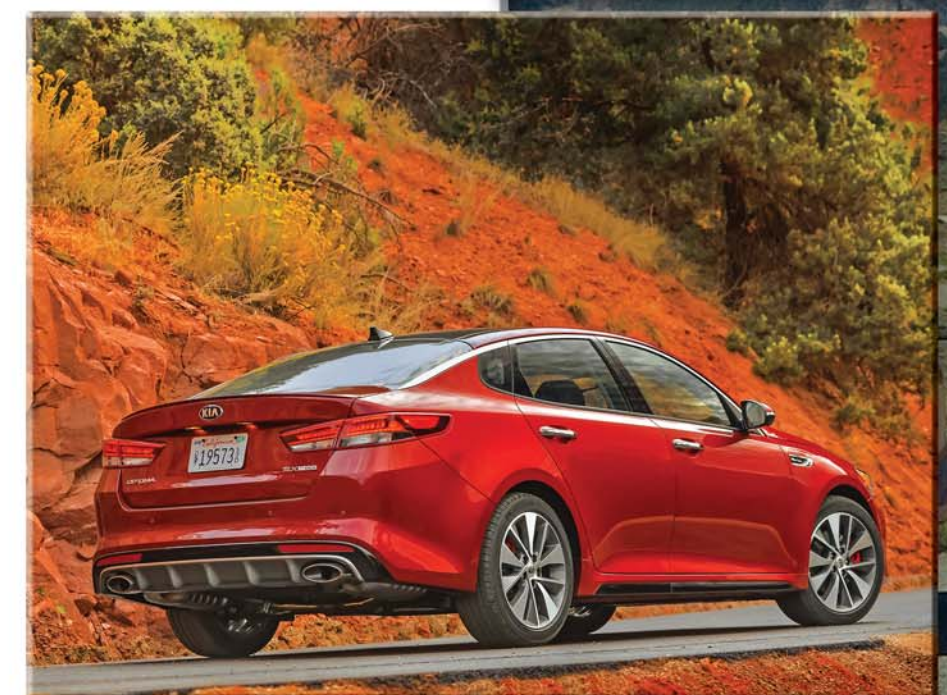
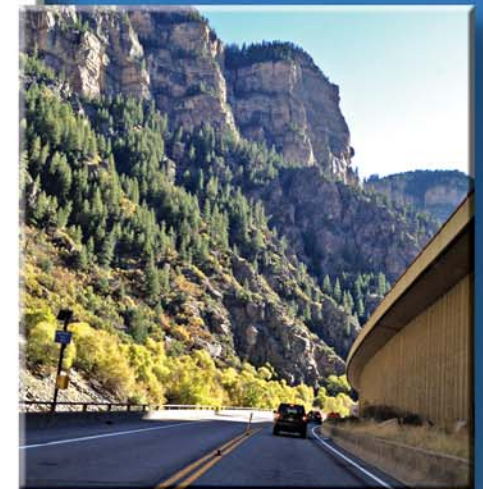
And all models still come with the famous Kia 10-year, 100,000-mile warranty program.

As fast as Kia has been growing its market share (along with its JD Power quality ratings, moving from dead last in 2001 to now second only to Porsche), the Kia Optima has been its top-selling vehicle for three years running. Optima is their first vehicle to sell over 150,000 units in a year.

They expect this to stay on track, with a lot of gains coming from current midsize sedan owners at trade-in time. The ownership and replacement cycle is longer than average in this segment, so they expect a lot of people—with outdated ideas of what Kia offers, based on their last shopping a decade or more past—to discover something new and, as they say, delighting.

The discovery process will be helped along by an entertaining new series of Optima ads starring NBA great Blake Griffin—and the Optima—"in the zone," which we previewed in Aspen.

Kia Optima is so popular in the US, and sales so strong, its production has been domestic since the prior generation three model. Optima is built at the KMMG (Kia Motors Manufacturing Georgia) plant in West Point GA, along with the Sorento. ■



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SPECIAL EVENTS : SCOTTSDALE/PHOENIX AUCTIONS JANUARY 2016



Photo: Joe Sage

Arizona Auction Week

★ NOTE LATER DATES THIS YEAR: JANUARY 23-31, 2016

Barrett-Jackson

45th Annual Collector Car Auction Event
Saturday, January 23 - Sunday, January 31, 2016
WestWorld - Frank Lloyd Wright Blvd at AZ Loop 101 - Scottsdale

Barrett-Jackson is the granddaddy of them all, hitting its 45th year for 2016. Last January, Barrett-Jackson once again broke their own records, with sales over \$130 million, as they sold 1,611 cars to a record number of bidders over 10 days. Figures were boosted considerably by sale of the Ron Pratte Collection—their largest consignment ever—which in itself raised \$40.44 million in vehicles and automobilia combined. Automobilia sales nearly tripled prior world records, with some 2,000 pieces bringing over \$6.55 million. Vehicles sold for the benefit of local and national charities raised \$8.6 million, with celebrities from Sharon Stone to Jeff Gordon boosting the excitement. For 2016, an Early Bird All-Week Pass is \$150 for an adult, \$100 for senior, military or student with ID (gate prices are not yet published). Daily tickets are available, with prices varying day to day, as well as full day to evening, from \$7 to \$48 per single day for Early Birds (more at the gate), with special rates for seniors, military, students and kids. ▼ Barrett-Jackson hosts annual auctions in Scottsdale, Palm Beach, Las Vegas and recently announced a new one in the Northeast. www.barrett-jackson.com

Bonhams

5th Annual Scottsdale Auction
Thursday, January 28, 2016 (viewing Tuesday-Thursday, January 13-15)
Westin Kierland Resort & Spa - 6902 E Greenway Pkwy - Scottsdale

The fifth annual Bonhams Scottsdale Auction returns to the Westin Kierland Resort & Spa, promising something exceptional from among the world's finest motorcars. Last January, a stunningly beautiful, fast and historic 1966 Ferrari 275 GTB Competizione crossed the block at Bonhams, selling for \$9,405,000, a new world auction record for the model, one of the most valuable cars ever auctioned in Arizona and just a hair's-breadth shy of being top seller for the week. Despite a rarified atmosphere, we have seen some tantalizingly affordable purchases here, perhaps because Bonhams is newest among the high-strata auctions here. The Bonhams catalog, including entry, was \$330 last year; this year's price has not been announced. ▼ Bonhams—since 1793—hosts a wide variety of auctions of many types, worldwide, throughout the year. www.bonhams.com

Gooding & Company

9th Annual Scottsdale Auction
Friday-Saturday, January 29-30, 2016 (viewing Weds-Sat, January 27-30)
Fashion Square - 4700 N Scottsdale Rd, corner of E Highland Ave - Scottsdale

Gooding & Company works the top end of the hobby with a focus on "best-of-category" vehicles. Gooding often has the highest single sale of the week, but last year did not, though they did sell eleven cars in seven figures and set 25 new auction records during their two-day sale totaling \$51.5 million, with a 90 percent sell-through rate. The 114 cars they sold (out of 126) averaged a healthy \$451,900 each. Jay Leno donated his personal 2008 Dodge Challenger SRT8 for charity, raising \$565,625 for the USO—\$360,000 from the winning bid plus over \$200,000 in donations from other bidders and attendees. General admission to the viewing and auction is \$40 per person. An auction catalog for \$100 admits two to the viewing and auction. Children under 12 attend for free. For bidders, \$200 includes a catalog, admission for two to the viewing and auction with reserved seats (as available). ▼ Gooding & Company is the official auction of Pebble Beach Concours and has an auction during Amelia Island. www.goodingco.com

RM Sotheby's

17th Annual Automobiles of Arizona
Thursday-Friday, January 28-29, 2016 (preview Weds-Fri, January 27-29)
Arizona Biltmore - 2400 E Missouri Ave - Phoenix AZ 85016 - (24th and Camelback)

For 2016, RM Sotheby's will again run a two-day Arizona sale. Last January was RM's strongest performance in Arizona to date, generating \$63.7 million in sales, a nearly 40 percent increase over 2014. The 2015 event also featured the most valuable automobile sold in Arizona auction history (beating Bonhams by a hair): a 1964 Ferrari 250 LM selling at \$9,625,000. RM's 2016 Arizona sale will present more than 100 blue-chip automobiles from the world's most notable marques, from pre-war classics to significant sports and racing cars and contemporary supercars. Admission to the preview is open to the general public. The auction is limited to bidders and consignors only. Bidder registration includes the catalog and admission for two for \$200. ▼ RM Auctions is the official auction of Amelia Island Concours and hosts auctions worldwide. www.rmauctions.com

Russo and Steele

16th Annual Sports & Muscle in Scottsdale
Thursday-Sunday, January 28-31, 2016 (preview Weds-Sun, January 27-31)
180601 N Scottsdale Rd and E Mayo Blvd at AZ Loop 101 - Scottsdale

Phoenix-based Russo and Steele features American muscle cars, classic European sports cars, and hot rods and customs. Last January's event generated roughly \$20 million, with some of its most notable successes in European sports cars. Russo had emphasized a strength with Porsche 911s, Jaguar XK120 roadsters, and early Mercedes-Benz 300SL roadsters, for each of which they emerged with the top sale out of all six auctions here last year. Russo's number one sale of a 1957 Mercedes-Benz 300SL roadster at \$1.43 million beat three similars at Bonhams and RM. Their sale of a 1974 Porsche 911 2.7 RS for \$305,500 beat 911 sales from RM and Gooding. And among early '50s Jaguar XK120 roadsters, Russo's \$143,000 sale of a 1953 model beat Gooding and Barrett-Jackson. Russo's week also includes a charity gala, memorabilia auction, seminars and panel discussions. General admission is \$20 for one day, \$55 for three days or \$80 for five days. Bidder registration is \$200. ▼ Russo and Steele hosts annual auctions in Scottsdale, Newport Beach and Monterey. www.russoandsteele.com

Silver Auctions

19th Annual Fort McDowell AZ Auction
Thursday-Saturday, January 28-30, 2016 (check-in begins Weds Jan 27)
Fort McDowell Resort & Casino - (AZ 87 Beeline Highway, north of Fountain Hills)

Silver Auction grows each year as an alternative where thousands of buyers and sellers can find real cars, real deals and a lot of fun. While the average car sold at most of the other auctions is well into six figures, the average at Silver is about \$15,000. Attend Silver as a bidder, and see what strikes your fancy. There's something for any budget—except no seven-figure car you would never dare drive. Head there with \$5000 or \$50,000 in your pocket and come out as a happy new owner. Visit their website and skim the list. Some may be replicas, tributes or not quite accurate originals, but that's all part of the fun (and the value). Admission is \$20, children under 12 free. ▼ Silver is the only one with multiple events in Arizona, returning in March and in November. Other auctions are in Oregon, Idaho, Washington and the Dakotas. www.silverauctions.com

Precision power

A 550-hp midengine V10 supercar with German build and quattro all-wheel drive for \$175k is hard to beat. by Joe Sage

Audi has had quite an ascendancy over the past couple of decades. The brand started to garner attention (and respect, and a technological niche) in the US with the introduction of the high-dollar quattro coupe in 1980. The first S car appeared in the early '90s, the first RS not long after. These have been halo cars for the brand, but some of the strongest halos shine over Audi's R8 Le Mans racers. So in 2007, they introduced the most extreme halo car to ever grace regular Audi showroom floors: the production model Audi R8.

We have driven many Audis many times, but amazingly enough, this was our first time in the R8. We had had a chance to drive the R8 on the track at Sonoma (then Infineon) Raceway a few years back, but schedule complications got in the way. It had seemed a little daunting. We've driven many a fast car on many a fast track, including several easily surpassing the R8's 525 hp and without even the same level of precision likely to be found in the low slung, road-gripping Audi. At any rate, any trepidation was misplaced.

Have you ever dreamed about (or taken possession of) a million-dollar McLaren or

Bugatti Veyron supercar? Or thought about one of the Italian brands, where your favorite models are in the \$500-600,000 range? (Or checked the classifieds, crossed your fingers and wondered what a used one at half the price might deliver?)

Two minutes behind the wheel of the Audi R8, and you may never think about any of those again. Despite weighing in just shy of two tons, this precision-crafted magic carpet ride gives you powerful, stylish thrills with total confidence and control.

The heart of the R8 is its top-spec V10 engine with a silicon crystal-embedded aluminum alloy block, forged steel rods and five-bearing forged steel crankshaft, aluminum alloy head, aluminum pistons and high-strength cast aluminum crankcase. A chain-driven DOHC has continuous intake and exhaust adjustment, and lubrication is via a dry sump system. The car does rate a gas guzzler tax (and requires premium fuel), yet emissions are rated LEV2.

Brakes are 14.4-inch front and 14.0-inch rear ventilated wave discs, but you won't think about them much: the R8's 3,957 pounds will stop on a dime—although for \$9,900, you can add a ceram-

ic brake package. Steering is a strong and sure road-feedback hydraulically assisted rack and pinion system. Turning circle is almost 39 feet, yet this powerful big sports car always feels nimble.

You have a couple of choices for your driving soundtrack. One is a fine 465-watt, 10-channel, 12-speaker Bang & Olufsen sound system (ours eschewed its 6-CD changer for an iPod cable).

The other is an optional, new-for-2015 Sports Exhaust System (V10 S tronic only). We had been advised not to miss its dramatic exhaust effects, so we started out with them on. We soon turned them off. This car is plenty dramatic in its own right, and the smooth, deep growl of its chain-driven V10 should satisfy any automotive soul. The optional system adds fuel pops and throttle gooses as you decelerate, regardless of our own pedal work or lack thereof—kind of an automotive autoerotica. If you value showing off a bit, the system's \$2500 is negligible on a \$186,050 car. But if you value a bit more stealth in an already showy machine, well, we left it off, and any time we tried it again, we turned it off again.

New for 2015 were three paint colors: a particular silver, a particular grey, and this stunning Sepang Blue—\$650 well spent (although copper-tinted Samoa Orange would have a great Arizona look to our eye). Brake calipers are available in red, which at \$700 might be a good addition.

The interior is a knockout. There is a trend this



year toward quilted interiors in luxury and premium cars, and whereas we might expect that to be too elegant for a balls-out supercar, quilted seats and doors work great in this R8, as one of the variables among over a dozen available interior trims. The seats are very comfortable, as are the bolsters once seated, though they are tall and firm and demand respect while getting in and out.

The seven-speed dual-clutch S tronic—a joy to drive, even for those who love manuals—incorporates an automatic park feature. The full algorithm is complex, involving gear selections, ignition switch position and time factors. Basically, it sets and releases itself, in the right conditions. In its own right, it's an interesting solution; if you drive multiple vehicles, it could be disquieting.

The rear third of the car is fully occupied by its big V10 engine. Under the hood up front is what looks at first like a particularly small cargo well. But we were surprised to find it gobbled up any 'round-town errand packages with room left over. Whether it holds all the luggage you and a cohort may desire for a road trip will depend upon your particular luggage and your packing skills. If you fly with reasonable carry-on, you can handle this.

The R8 is almost awkwardly long in its mid-engine rear flanks. The designers knew this, and on the Coupe it was mitigated with "the blade"—a feature so distinctively different, it turned that liability into an asset. On the Spyder, there is no blade, but rather a big, deep scoop—a cleaner solution, even if less distinctive. (An all new 2017 R8—see sidebar—will have a new kind of blade, a carbon fiber scoop, equally applicable to Coupe or Spyder, plus a coordinated inset at the rear of the Coupe's window opening.)

The R8 has considerable front overhang, but surprisingly good clearance. There is no chin spoiler, just a nose, and rear overhang is almost nonexistent. In routine maneuvers around town, through various dips and troughs, with just a normal amount of care we had no issues. In fact it's a lot better on speed bumps than a great many other things we drive that are certainly more conventional. It's that lack of a front lip. No doubt

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	5.2L FSI direct fuel injection V10
HP/TORQUE	525 hp / 391 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	S tronic 7-speed dual clutch auto
DRIVETRAIN	quattro full-time AWD
ZERO-TO-60	3.6 sec
TOP TRACK SPEED	193 mph
TURNING CIRCLE	38.7 feet
WEIGHT	3957 lb
MPG	13/22/16 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$175,100
SEPANG BLUE PEARL EFFECT / BLACK ROOF	650
DIAMOND STITCH FULL LEATHER PACKAGE	4750
SPORT EXHAUST SYSTEM	2500
AUDI MUSIC INTERFACE / IPOD CABLE	100
GAS GUZZLER TAX	1700
DESTINATION CHARGE	1250
TOTAL	\$186,050

they've achieved top aerodynamics without it, and certainly better drivability. The suspension is very firm and comfortable, even on a speedbump.

There are ten ways to buy an R8: three engines; Coupe or Spyder; and 6-speed manual or 7-speed dual-clutch S tronic. The engines are either a 430-hp V8 or a 525-hp V10, plus a 550-hp "V10 plus" (the plus available only as a hardtop). Thus ours is the top-performing open car.

A V10 plus Coupe claims a zero-to-60 time of 3.3 seconds with S tronic (or 3.7 with the manual, reinforcing that idea that the auto is just fine). Our 525-hp non-plus V10, with a couple of hundred extra pounds as a convertible and with S tronic, claims 3.6 seconds. (The V8 runs over 4 seconds, though it costs almost \$40,000 less. Fuel mileage in the V8 is about the same: one point better with a manual or one point worse with S tronic. The 550-hp V10 plus adds \$20,000 to a Coupe.)

We guarantee this is a vehicle you look back at admiringly after you park it. One reason this car wins our hearts and minds over some significantly pricier exotics is its obvious German precision build quality, as well as its fit, finish and features. This is all apparent within the first mile or two. Another reason that's apparent after the first day or two is that the Audi R8 is astonishingly simpatico as a daily driver. And on the open road? Oh, yes. ■

This marks a brief goodbye, as the 2015 Audi R8 wraps up its run. There will be no 2016 model, but come spring we'll see its first major rework: the second-generation 2017 Audi R8, first shown in Geneva last March.

The new car's 5.2-liter FSI V10 will come in two flavors—one with 540 hp, hitting 62 mph in 3.5 seconds with a top speed of 200.7 mph; and a V10 plus model with 610 hp and zero-to-62 in 3.2 seconds on its way to 205.1 mph. The top model has a dry weight of 3205.5 lb, 110.2 lb lighter than before, despite quite a few added features, via an all-new body shell and space frame of aluminum and carbon fiber reinforced plastics (CFRP), weighing just 440.9 lb.

The new car is about the same size, though its width is up by 1.6 inches.

The race-derived interior has new steering wheel satellites for traction programs and sports exhaust. A free-standing 12.3-inch display shows navigation plus replaces analog gauges.

Ten standard paints are joined by a camo green matte, and blade colors can be freely mixed and matched.

In addition, an Audi R8 e-tron elec-



tric model will follow, with a reengineered lightweight composite rear body. And sharing about 50 percent of parts with the production car will be a second-gen R8 LMS race car. ■



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VEHICLE IMPRESSION : 2016 FIAT 500X EASY FWD

Well-rounded and lookin' sharp by Joe Sage

We drove the highly anticipated Fiat 500X—cousin to the also completely new Jeep Renegade—at its launch event in California, after having been enticed by its clever “little blue pill” Super Bowl advertising—and found it to indeed be a potent little package.

The 500X shares basic platform, engines, 9-speed automatic and fuel-saving rear axle disconnect with the Renegade. The Fiat is available with AWD (ours was a front-driver) but is not intended for off-road duty. Which is fine for its purpose.

This under-3000-pound subcompact utility has nice ergonomics and a solid feel. As with the Renegade, you anticipate that it will be small, but sitting inside, you find a spaciouly comfortable cabin that looks and feels no smaller than many a one-segment-larger compact crossover.

There are five trim levels for the 500X, ranging from \$20,000 to \$27,100; this “Easy” model is the second one up, which makes it the most affordable one with the 180-hp 2.4L Tigershark engine, with AWD available, and with FCA’s much-better-

than-most Uconnect® infotainment system (with a base five-inch touchscreen, upgradeable). Easy also gives you 12 paint options, compared with the base Pop’s five. It’s a great place to start. (And after those Super Bowl ads, the Easy jokes just kind of write themselves.)

You can add AWD for \$1900, which we would do, just to have, though we noticed no front-drive downsides around town. You can add or upgrade many other details, but the model walk is so well conceived, it’s just as easy to move up the lineup.

The 9-speed is smooth and efficient—we would see our indicator in 7th gear very quickly. Its 180 hp will not win high performance faceoffs, but an effective manual shifter mitigates this, as does the vehicle’s Sport setting.

The Fiat 500X is a strong contender. In fact, it’s a finalist for North American Truck of the Year (as the definition of truck has been broadened considerably). A winner is crowned in January. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	2.4L 4-cyl MultiAir2 Tigershark
HP/TORQUE	180 hp / 175 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	9-speed automatic
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
CARGO CAPACITY	18.5 / 50.8 cu ft
TURNING CIRCLE	36.3 ft
TOW CAPACITY	not recommended
WEIGHT	2967 lb
MPG	22/31/25 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$22,300
EASY COLLECTION 2	1500
CONVENIENCE GROUP	Dual-zone climate, heated seats, 8-way power driver’s seat, heated wheel, wiper/deicer, ambient lighting, cargo cover.
SAFETY GROUP	Backup camera, rear park assist, blind spot monitor, rear cross path detection.
DESTINATION CHARGE	900
TOTAL	\$24,700



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VEHICLE IMPRESSION : 2016 KIA SORENTO SXL AWD

Refreshing BY JOE SAGE

There are basically two scenarios in the automotive new model year realm: the midcycle refresh or the all-new vehicle. The 2016 Kia Sorento is all new. Thus there is linguistic irony in the fact we find it refreshing, literally and figuratively. Kia has developed a fine lineup, and they are masters at not throwing out the baby with the bath water when they redesign a top seller. Everything that made the prior generation Sorento a huge success is immediately recognizable in the new version, yet every detail has been tweaked and refined. Highly refined.

Kia Sorento has a broad lineup, with three engines (a four, a turbo four and a V6), five- or seven-passenger configurations (V6 models are seven-passenger, as is one four-cylinder), and eight engine/trim level combinations. All are available with FWD or full-time AWD. Towing capacity is 3500 pounds for most, 5000 pounds for the AWD V6 models, or 2000 pounds for two entry models with naturally aspirated four. It works out to 15 starting prices, from \$24,900 to \$43,100.

Our example is a turbo four in top SXL trim, with AWD. (There is some overlap: an SXL V6 AWD costs \$1300 more, or with FWD is \$400 less, while the V6 drops MPG 2-3 points, raises HP by 50 though drops torque by eight,

adds about 100 pounds of weight and offers that 5000-lb tow capacity). The V6 also adds features, such as rear seat climate control.

This is one lineup where all these choices make things easier, not harder. The 2.0L turbo proved itself a perfect balance of power and economy, as we were neither double-dating nor towing a big boat up I-17 this week.

We did have Kia's typically wonderful Infinity 10-speaker sound system. Our notes about interior and exterior fit and finish were extensive during our week, summed up by finding a great many delights and truly nothing lacking. Storage solutions abound, as do connectivity options. Controls are accessible, thorough and never in conflict. The rear camera and surround view are top notch.

Styling overall is so cohesive, you can take it in at a glance, yet there are individual details you'll discover and appreciate over time.

Suspension on bumps, troughs and other urban hazards was solid and smooth. The V6 may rate a comparison drive, but the 2-liter turbo felt plenty potent whether in normal, sport or eco drive modes. We dare say the Kia Sorento in this top trim level compares favorably with vehicles at ten or twenty thousand dollars higher. And you can enter the model for a lot less, too, if so inclined. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	2.0L 4-cyl GDI turbo
HP/TORQUE	240 hp / 260 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	6-spd auto w Sportmatic
DRIVETRAIN	full-time AWD, lockable center diff
SEATING CAPACITY	5-passenger
TURNING CIRCLE	36.4 ft
APPROACH/DEPARTURE ANGLES	16.9 / 21 degrees
TOW CAPACITY	3500 lb
CARGO CAPACITY	11.3 / 38.0 / 73.0 cu ft
WEIGHT	4004 lb
MPG	19/25/22 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$41,700
MERLOT NAPPA LEATHER SEATS	n/c
SXL TECHNOLOGY PACKAGE: Xenon HID heads, lane departure warning, forward collision warning, electronic parking brake, surround view monitor, adaptive cruise control	2500
DESTINATION CHARGE	895
TOTAL	\$45,095



Our logbook contained great detail, but may be summed up by this: "This is just a remarkable vehicle...damn hard to beat. If you were assigned to find a flaw in this thing, good luck."

Run to the Sun

Twenty-five one-of-a-kinds *By Joe Sage*

Washington State has the kind of variety anyone might seek for a drive: dramatic mountain roads, coastal twisties, rain forests, high elevation straightaways and historic stops. Run to the Sun—an annual two-day event of the Northwest Automotive Press Association (NWAPA)—takes full advantage of this variety.

The media group comprises members mostly from Oregon and Washington. Last year's event—our first time participating—was in Oregon.

This year, we met near Sea-Tac Airport (between Seattle and Tacoma), heading to Mount Rainier National Park one day, then onto the inner reaches of the Olympic Peninsula the next.

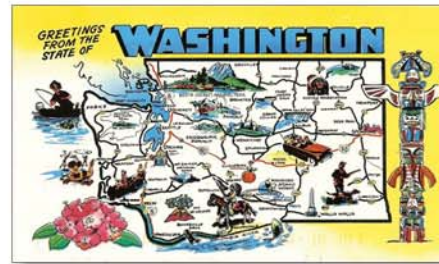
This is not a competitive event. No winners are chosen, no trophies are presented. We don't have to keep detailed track of drive experiences or rank features on a scale. We can simply take it all in.

The event features just under two million dollars' worth of machinery, from a Kia or Hyundai at \$21,600 or so, to a Viper at \$126,085, to a \$382,825 Rolls-Royce. Each model has its own superlative, chosen as a chance for each builder to show off. A Dodge Charger will certainly be a Hellcat, the Miata a Club Edition, that Veloster an R-Spec, a Honda Accord a performance coupe and so on.

There are exactly 25 drivers, exactly 25 cars and exactly two days to get the job done—no time for milling around and deciding what to drive next, a time-waster at most comparative driving events. For Run to the Sun, each driver is charted out against the list of cars, with every driver having the same well choreographed sequence, but each with a different opening movement, melody, crescendo and finale. Our list—our symphony—is shown at right, continuing on two pages.

DAY ONE. Our show started off with a bang, in the Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat. This well known and well-loved 707-hp all-American, billed as the world's fastest sedan, had the most horsepower of any. Equally at home on the track (we've driven it at Summit Point Motorsports Park in West Virginia) or the road, such easy daily driver road manners are rare in a top-performance model.

Comfortable and spacious though the Charger was, we then moved straight to the lap of luxury, the most expensive vehicle in the lineup, the new Rolls-Royce Ghost II. With about \$100k in options, you can easily think of the other things just that add-on price could buy, including three or four various desirable cars on this list. But that's a differ-



ent kind of thinking from the typical Rolls-Royce buyer, who can of course probably buy those, too.

For half that dough, though, you can buy our third car. The once separate Maybach marque has reappeared as the ultimate S-Class—the Mercedes-Maybach S600 (named similarly to current Mercedes-AMG models). In addition to power and luxury, this super luxury sedan offers another feature valued by many a Rolls-Royce buyer—enormous rear seat space, an attribute often sought by rider-owners with chauffeurs, but detracting in no way from the owner-driver experience.

Our next six cars—combined—cost some 20 percent less than the Rolls, at base prices, or 42 percent less as optioned. It takes all six to equal a bit more than twice the Ghost's individual horsepower, but each one's weight is far less. None of that is the point in choosing among them, but it underscores the fact that there is a lot of fun on tap in each of these, with five out of six starting below \$30k (or just a hair above in one case).

The Alfa Romeo 4C Spider is pricier but is unlike any other, from its extreme light weight to its particularly sexy Italian lines to its midengine

KEEP RIGHT >>

Run to the Sun Day One had fourteen cars, with thirteen swap stops along the way. We worked our way roughly east from Sea-Tac Airport (elevation 433') to Auburn, south to Alder Lake Park (1200'), east to Ashford County Park (1800'), entering Mountain Rainier National Park with a stop at the National Park Inn at Longmire (2700'), then continuing to the historic Paradise Inn (5400'), our lunch spot with this view of Mt Rainier (14,409' elevation)—the turnaround spot for our return via Enumclaw.

Day 1: Mt Rainier

- 1: Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat 2015**
707hp 6.2L V8, RWD
▼ BASE\$62,295
▼ AS DRIVEN\$66,175
- 2: Rolls-Royce Ghost Series II 2015**
563hp 6.6L aluminum-alloy DFI V12, 8-spd electronic automatic trans, RWD
▼ BASE\$286,750
▼ AS DRIVEN\$382,825
- 3: Mercedes-Maybach S600 2016**
523hp 6.0L V12 biturbo, 7-spd auto, RWD
▼ BASE\$189,350
▼ AS DRIVEN\$204,635
- 4: Fiat 500C Abarth Cabrio 2015**
157hp 1.4L 16v turbo 4-cyl, 6-spd auto, FWD
▼ BASE\$26,595
▼ AS DRIVEN\$32,975
- 5: Mazda MX-5 Miata Club 2016**
155hp SkyActiv 2.0L 4-cyl, 6-spd man, RWD
▼ BASE\$28,600
▼ AS DRIVEN\$33,120
- 6: Alfa Romeo 4C Spider 2015**
237hp 1750cc turbo intercooled 4-cyl mid-eng, 6-spd Alfa TCT twin-clutch/paddle, RWD
▼ BASE\$63,900
▼ AS DRIVEN\$73,395
- 7: Hyundai Veloster R-Spec M/T 2016**
201hp 1.6L GDI twin-scroll turbo 4-cyl, 6-spd manual B&M Racing shifter, FWD
▼ BASE\$21,600
▼ AS DRIVEN\$22,570
- 8: Kia Forte Koup SX 2015**
201hp 1.6L 4-cyl turbo, 6-spd auto, FWD
▼ BASE\$21,590
▼ AS DRIVEN\$26,435
- 9: Honda Accord EX-L V6 2D Coupe 2016**
278hp 3.5L 24v V6, 6-spd manual, FWD
▼ BASE\$30,925
▼ AS DRIVEN\$31,745
- 10: Nissan Maxima SR 2016**
300hp 3.5L V6, Xtronic transmission, FWD
▼ BASE\$37,670
▼ AS DRIVEN\$38,750
- 11: Acura ILX Tech Plus A-Spec 2016**
201hp 2.4L 4cyl, 8-spd dual-clutch, FWD
▼ BASE\$34,890
▼ AS DRIVEN\$35,810
- 12: Buick Regal GS AWD 2015**
259hp 2.0L turbo 4-cyl, AWD
▼ BASE\$39,810
▼ AS DRIVEN\$44,670
- 13: Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution MR 2015**
291hp 2.0L MIVEC 4-cyl turbo, 6-spd TC-SST twin-clutch Sportronic, AWD
▼ BASE\$38,995
▼ AS DRIVEN\$41,805
- 14: Subaru WRX STI Series HyperBlue 2016**
305hp 2.5L DOHC intercooled turbo 4-cyl, 6-spd manual, AWD
▼ BASE\$38,995
▼ AS DRIVEN\$39,790

KEEP RIGHT >>



Car thumbnail photos: Doug Berger / NWAPA • Pine cone photo: Didier Descouens

placement—now in convertible form. Its cousin, the Fiat 500C Abarth cabriolet, follows much the same formula, but with front-wheel drive, quirkier styling, a bit less horsepower and a significantly lower price. We've driven both on the track in hardtop form, and both proved to be equally stunning (and great conversation pieces) on the road.

Mazda has never made anything but friends with its MX-5 Miata, and the smaller, lighter, faster gen-four 2016 model is no exception. To make a splash, they created a Launch Edition and this Club Edition, with larger wheels and—when equipped with a manual as ours was this day—a limited slip differential, Bilstein shocks, beefier shock tower braces, front air dam and rear spoiler. And the whole thing is still under \$30 grand.

The least expensive on the list, just ten bucks apart, were special Hyundai Veloster R-Spec and Kia Forte Koup models. You can option either one a bit closer to the other, but we did enjoy the manual transmission and racing shifter in the Veloster, and its final build added little to its cost.

Honda brought a semi-sleeper—an Accord, sure, but in coupe form (and bright red), with a 278-hp V6 and 6-speed manual, as well as sharp new styling. This Honda does deliver in this trim.

Nissan's all new Maxima, billed as their four-door sports car, is also a bit of a sleep, achieving 300 hp. Under a highly styled new skin is Nissan's trademark combination of premium features and intuitive controls—all under \$40 grand.

Four more performance sedans rounded out our first day, and "sedan" understates most of them. The Acura ILX is a decent car, though its combination of 201 hp and a mid-to-upper-\$30s price are pitted against some stiff competition this day.

The final three were all-wheel-drivers, and as we descended Mt Rainier, this only enhanced our

enjoyment. Buick has been transformed, and the Regal GS earns the spot it seeks on the 3-Series-killer list. Mitsubishi EVO and Subaru WRX STI defined the hot sedan segment and always deliver in spades. The EVO is being discontinued, so get your order in quickly—perhaps for the performance-bumped GSR-based Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution Final Edition. The MR we drove here actually costs more, but has a 6-speed twin-clutch instead of the other models' 5-speed manual. Or know that the WRX STI is not going anywhere.

DAY TWO, over to the Olympic Peninsula, had flatter roads and fewer cars, though some of the hottest of the hot. Our first seven averaged 481 hp. Add in the eighth, the four-cylinder Mustang, and the average is still 458, underscoring Ford's bragging point that Mustang is the first to offer 4-, 6- and 8-cylinder versions, all at 300 hp or more.

We had another strong start, in the Lexus RC-F Coupe. Our run was largely down I-5, through the snaking feeder highways of downtown Tacoma, then along old town's waterfront, not really a performance run. Such are the straws we draw.

Cadillac's ATS is of note for its manual transmission, its chassis (the basis for next year's new Camaro) and in this case for its V trim. This is not your uncle's Cadillac. Another 3-killer.

We had driven both Mustangs before and love 'em both. You can't beat the power and sound of the V8, yet we looked forward to driving the EcoBoost four again. Before we'd get to it, we would run through exactly 2000 hp from just four cars totaling \$377,175 (\$94,294 average).

Nissan's mastery of ergonomic, user-friendly yet aggressively exciting driver interfaces is tops in the 370Z. The NISMO's modest power bump carries the car's 3398 pounds very well.

A Jaguar F-Type R Convertible was a group favorite in 2014. This year we had the lighter R Coupe, which weighs a bit less even than the 370Z, but with 200 more horsepower on tap (but of course at almost three times the price).

Our first time behind the wheel of the 2015 Corvette Stingray is in a convertible, which adds Z51 performance suspension, while our sample also added a 2LT package, magnetic ride control, performance data recorder and 8-speed automatic plus a couple of other details. It runs \$75 grand, yes, but can beat European supercars for fun per dollar, or maybe even overall.

We broke form with the Viper—the second-most-powerful in the group, after the Hellcat. An off the cuff offer led to us letting one of the professional performance drivers on hand take a turn behind the wheel. Right seat time with a superb driver is always well worth it. As we've already learned ourselves, on road and on track, a modern Viper is a precision handling thrill ride.

Moving to the four-cylinder Mustang from the Viper may sound unfair, even cruel, but it wasn't. The EcoBoost continues to impress us, delivering well beyond what's expected—and it also sounds great, just in a different way from a V8.

AND OOPS, IT'S A WRAP. This all took us through car 22 out of 25—just three to go. We had driven the Scion FR-S a few years back for a week in Arizona, but another spin would be good. We were enthusiastically looking forward to the Volkswagen Golf R, a coveted high-performance compact quattro cousin with almost 300 hp, four doors and a price under \$40 grand. And we had not been exposed to an Acura RLX.

But time ran out. At our 22-23 swap stop—which admittedly was taking a little longer, as the

Day 2: Olympic Peninsula

15: Lexus RC-F Coupe 2015

467hp 5.0L 32v V8, 8-spd sport direct transmission w paddle shift, RWD
 ▼ BASE\$62,400
 ▼ AS DRIVEN\$74,560

16: Cadillac ATS-V Coupe RWD 2016

464hp 3.6L V6, 6-spd manual rev mtch, RWD
 ▼ BASE\$62,665
 ▼ AS DRIVEN\$75,775

17: Ford Mustang GT Coupe Premium 2015

435hp 5.0L V8, 6-spd manual, RWD
 ▼ BASE\$36,300
 ▼ AS DRIVEN\$46,085

18: Nissan 370Z NISMO Tech 6M/T 2016

350hp 3.7L DOHC 24v V6, 6-spd synchrorev manual, RWD
 ▼ BASE\$45,490
 ▼ AS DRIVEN\$46,835

19: Jaguar F-Type R Coupe 2016

550hp supercharged V8, 8-spd auto, AWD
 ▼ BASE\$106,600
 ▼ AS DRIVEN\$128,695

20: Chevrolet Corvette Stingray Conv Z51 2015

455hp LT1 6.2L V8, 7-spd manual w/rev matching, Z51 suspension, RWD
 ▼ BASE\$64,000
 ▼ AS DRIVEN\$75,560

21: Dodge Viper GTC 2015

645hp V10 SFI, 6-spd manual, RWD
 ▼ BASE\$94,995
 ▼ AS DRIVEN\$126,085

22: Ford Mustang I-4 Coupe Premium 2015

310hp 2.3L EcoBoost 4-cyl, 6-spd man, RWD
 ▼ BASE\$29,300
 ▼ AS DRIVEN\$37,485

23: Scion FR-S 2016

200hp 2.0L boxer 4-cyl, 6-spd manual, RWD
 ▼ BASE\$25,305
 ▼ AS DRIVEN\$28,544

24: Volkswagen Golf R 2015

292hp 2.0L TSI DOHC 16v turbo 4-cyl DI, 4Motion AWD w 5th-gen Haldex
 ▼ BASE\$39,090
 ▼ AS DRIVEN\$39,910

25: Acura RLX Sport Hybrid AWD ADV 2016

310hp 3.5L V6, 377 total incl hybrid, 7-spd dual-clutch, AWD
 ▼ BASE\$65,950
 ▼ AS DRIVEN\$66,870



Run to the Sun Day Two had eleven cars, with ten swap stops along the way. The first few legs ran through towns with heavy traffic and a big of construction. But ultimately, our route offered us one thing we do not have in Arizona—salt water coast, and plenty of it, surrounded by tall evergreen forests, with the peaks of the Olympic Range on the horizon. At right, we stopped for lunch at My Girl Drive-In & Museum in Kingston; the Tacoma Narrows Bridge was our connector to and from.



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VEHICLE IMPRESSION : 2015 FORD FOCUS 5-DOOR HATCHBACK SE

The car, defined

BY JOE SAGE



Ford names so many of its vehicles with F-words and E-words, it's easy to lose track. It's easy to stay, uh, focused with this one. The compact Focus falls alphabetically between the subcompact Fiesta and midsize Fusion.

If cars did not exist and someone did a clean sheet design of just one in 2015, this might be what they'd come up with. It's solid, stylish, fun to drive, well outfitted, affordable to buy and economical to operate. The same could be said about others, but it's a feeling that stuck with us for our week with this personal-size Ford. This particular hatchback in SE trim will not leave you needing much else, though you do have options.

There's also a sedan. There are basic trim levels of S, SE and Titanium (ours is the middle one, the SE), as well as sporty ST and even sportier RS models. Most have the same 2-liter four-cylinder as this, although a few can be had with a one-liter EcoBoost three-cylinder. All weigh between 2907 and 2948 pounds. There are automatic or either 5- or 6-speed manual transmissions, varying by

body, engine and trim.

With almost 45 cubic feet behind the front seats (and four-door convenience), the Focus hatch will gobble up your chores all day long. We give the stylists high marks from the Fusion family face through the flow of lines from roof to rear, to the compound curvature of the taillights.

MyFord Touch remains cumbersome and distracting for many functions. A full-time user can adequately conquer its annoyances, but there is a SYNC 3 system on the way. It will not roll out on all models at the same time, so keep it out of your timing and decision processes for now—mostly.

The Ford Focus is a neat and tidy package with a mildly aggressive presence. Handling is nimble and tight. It appeals widely across age, budget or demographic lines. It's stylish enough to make you appreciate its lines, curves and creases on your own, while just simple and subtle enough to not shout out its popularity and ubiquity. ■

SPECIFICATIONS AS TESTED (2015)

ENGINE/TRANS/DRIVE	.....2.0L 4-cyl / 5sp man / FWD
POWER/TORQUE	.....160 hp / 146 lb-ft
TURNING CIRCLE	.....36.0 ft
CARGO CAPACITY	.....23.8 cf/2nd row, 44.8 cf/1st row
WEIGHT	.....2920 lb
MPG	.....26/36/30 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	.....\$18,960
EQUIPMENT GROUP 201A:	.....1995
BLUE CANDY METALLIC TINT CLEARCOAT:	.....395
MYFORD TOUCH PACKAGE:	.....1495
REVERSE SENSING SYSTEM:	.....255
DESTINATION CHARGE:	.....825
TOTAL	.....\$23,925

Tidy styling details in the Ford Focus deliver a nifty little piece of slightly curvaceous origami.





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Mid December through early March
Steamboat Springs, Colorado

VEHICLE IMPRESSION : 2015 MERCEDES-BENZ E400 COUPE

Head turner

By Joe Sage

There is no shortage of E-Class sedans, nor CLS four-door sedans, nor C-Class coupés in this neck of the woods. There have long been a lot of CLK coupes, as well, but in 2009, the E-Class Coupé effectively replaced that. We may think this E-Class Coupé is a familiar E-Class but in coupé form. Or we may think this is a familiar Mercedes-Benz coupé but in E-Class size. Unlike the E-Class sedan or wagon, the coupé is actually based on the C-Class chassis, giving it a sportier profile and stance. From any angle, it seems they have hit upon a magical combination of elements: everywhere we went, we received an inordinate number of oohs, ahhs and compliments.

The car's beauty is more than skin deep: it's a smooth driver, generating ample power from its 3-liter biturbo V6 run through a 7-speed automatic. Its cabin and controls are state of the art premium in every way. And they deliver all this for \$53,350 base, an attractive price for all it includes. Ours, done up with a healthy list of attractive options and packages, topped out at \$66,300, bringing a

car with style, spirit and content on a par with some costing about 50 percent more. The difference is its medium size, but that's the most popular, so this is actually more benefit than tradeoff.

Models and engines have evolved through this generation, currently comprising this E400 (also available with 4MATIC all-wheel drive) and the E500 with a 402-hp 4.7L biturbo V8. The overall lineup is complex—and the E-Class is due for a new-gen reveal in Detroit in January—but this particular 329-hp, 29-MPG, red leather sport seat power-and-trim combo hits a sweet spot.

Nitpicks: the innovative shifter may strike some as simple and/or distinctive. It strikes us as unintuitive and complex, requiring active thought and a better line of sight to use effectively in a panic situation. The cupholders block quite a few center stack controls, if they contain cups. The backup camera seems to require having the radio on.

All in all, this car is a pleasure to drive, and if you have the kind of neighbors whose heads need turning, the E400 Coupé will do the trick. ■



2015 MERCEDES-BENZ E400 COUPÉ

BASE PRICE	\$53,350
OBSDIAN BLACK PAINT:	720
RED/BLACK NAPPA LEATHER:	1370
BLACK ASH WOOD TRIM:	n/c
SPORT STEERING WHEEL:	n/c
HEATED-VENTED SEATS:	450
KEYLESS ENTRY/START:	650
UNEXPLAINED SPECIAL ORDER LINE ITEM:	250
PREMIUM NAV/AUDIO PACKAGE:	3430
LIGHTING PACKAGE:	1500
SPORT PACKAGE: wheels, pedals, seats	1490
LANE TRACKING PACKAGE:	875
PARKING ASSIST PACKAGE:	1290
DESTINATION CHARGE:	925
TOTAL	\$66,300



THE INSIDE TRACK: BRIEFS & RUMORS

2015 Scion xB 686 Parklan Edition



As the **Scion** xB ends its run, Scion has partnered with snowboard technical apparel company 686 to create the xB 686 Parklan Edition, featuring Cocoa Bean Metallic paint with red line accents in the front, rear and side mirrors; 16-inch alloy wheels with stamped 686 logo; and black-out badges, side mirrors, rear license plate garnish and door handles. A functional slopeside attitude includes a driver's side zippered storage pocket, zippered seat back pockets, and all-weather floor and cargo mats. A custom INNO Cargo Box and Roof Rack system is available. A total of 686 of these special edition models will be priced at \$19,685.

Checker, famous for their taxicabs in the past, has announced plans for two second generation vehicles: a Sport Pickup Crossover reminiscent of the classic Chevrolet El Camino or Ford Ranchero and an Aerobus six-door, twelve-passenger sedan model with four full rows of seating. The car will have a flex-fuel V8 or diesel option, full steel frame and composite body panels, four-wheel coil springs, rear-wheel drive with an AWD option, new electronic instruments and heavy duty climate control, rack and pinion steering and four-wheel disc brakes. Checker vehicles will be manufactured in the US with anticipated build beginning in fall 2018. Find more info at checker-motorcars.com. The company will also offer retrofit kits for existing cars.



Checker

Volvo Cars of North America has broken ground in South Carolina for their first US factory, capable of producing up to 100,000 cars per year. It will be the global production home of the all new S60 Sedan, currently under development at headquarters in Sweden. American-built S60s—plus another model yet to be determined—will be exported globally through the Port of Charleston. Volvo US sales increased by double digits this summer, with global sales up across car lines. Volvo estimates the factory will employ up to 2,000 people over the next decade, 4,000 in the longer term, and will contribute an estimated \$4.8 billion in total annual economic output. The first cars are expected to roll off the assembly line in late 2018.

The **Zipcar** car sharing network has launched at more than 100 new colleges and universities for the new school year. Zipcar now operates on more than 475 campuses in North America, including Arizona State University in Tempe and the University of Arizona in Tucson with a variety of vehicles available on demand. Zipcars are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with gas, insurance and 180 miles per day included. A long-standing alliance with Ford provides discounted Zipcar membership and driving rates. The duo also gives back to the college community through a “Students with Drive” grant program—awarding student groups which have demonstrated their ability to drive change in their local community and beyond—donating over



Zipcar on campus

\$625,000 in cash and credit toward Zipcar reservations since 2011. Zipcar is available to university students age 18-plus with a good driving record. For complete information or to join the program, visit zipcar.com/universities.

Mazda North American Operations has announced an all-new dealership design, dubbed “Retail Evolution,” with natural materials and an open concept floorplan to convey an upscale look and a



Mazda Retail Evolution

feeling of business transparency. Styled in black and white with chrome Mazda signage, the new dealerships provide strong curb appeal. The new facilities will use more glass, allowing customers an open view into dealership operations. A Mazda Lounge will provide customers with technology features such as multiple-device charging stations and access to free WiFi. Digital displays will provide continuous motion and replace stale imagery as vehicle designs and models change with time. The first Retail Evolution dealership built from the ground up, Mazda of Everett, recently opened in Washington State.

Honeywell, the leading global developer of automotive turbochargers, sees turbo adoption rising globally to 47 percent by 2020, with an increasing appetite for turbo technology innovations that enhance overall powertrain systems, reduce complexity and are tailored to local market needs. Honeywell says the next evolution of turbocharger applications can be seen in diesel, gasoline and hybrid models from entry level to luxury segments. According to their annual survey, automakers are focused on rightsizing more than simply downsizing engines, to optimize performance and fuel economy as global regulations continue to drive more fuel efficiency.

Personal finance website **WalletHub** has released the third-quarter installment of its 2015 Auto Financing Report, along with an analysis of the Strictest and Most Lenient States on High-Risk Drivers. Ana-

lyzing auto loan and lease offers from more than 150 financiers, they find interest rates for new cars are close to their lowest point in the past three years, at an average 19 percent lower than used-car loans. Buyers with fair credit will spend some six times more—about \$6,100 over the life of a five-year \$20,000 loan—than those with excellent credit. They suggest new car buyers finance with car manufacturers (rates at 61 percent below average) or credit unions (30 percent below average). National banks run 10 percent and regional banks 43 percent above average. The average automaker receiving a WalletHub Transparency Score of just 4.0/10 on leasing details. Comparing



Bling Helmet

insurance premiums for high-risk drivers, DUI laws and penalties for various driving violations in the 50 states and the District of Columbia, WalletHub finds Arizona is the strictest of them all.

FlightCar is the world's first peer-to-peer car sharing company to operate at airports—offering car owners free parking and an opportunity to earn money, instead of leaving their car unused at the airport. Simply park with FlightCar, and they drop you off in a Town Car at your terminal. Your car gets a free car wash and you get the cash. Plus, it's all insured up to \$1 million. FlightCar is in 14 markets with more on the horizon.

The International Transportation Innovation Center (**ITIC**) in Greenville SC has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with **SK Telecom** of South Korea to collaborate in the development of quantum cryptography technologies. With the rise of an increasingly connected world, cryptography technology is being touted as a possible solution to a whole new set of security challenges. ITIC and SK Telecom will jointly develop and pursue standardization of hacking-prevention technologies to protect connected vehicles. Developed in 2011, SK Telecom's Quantum Cryptography System uses quantum physics instead of mathematics-based encryption algorithms commonly used today. Currently, most systems, including connected vehicle ecosystems, use software-based pseudo random number generators for encryption, which can fall vulnerable to hackers who decrypt the sequence of digits. SK Telecom's technology will generate true random numbers based on hardware.

LIVALL has introduced the Bling Helmet, the world's first smart cycling helmet, integrating communications, music and smart lighting. The Bling Helmet features built-in Hi-Fi Bluetooth speakers and a microphone, enabling cyclists to make and answer phone calls to stay connected on the road. For group riding, LIVALL also features a walkie-talkie function to make it easier for cycling teams to communicate with each other—no more yelling. It can also convert text messages to voice. The Bling Helmet is available with discount pricing on Indiegogo, where it raised almost a quarter million dollars in a month. The helmet will start shipping in November. ■

UPCOMING FEATURES

NASCAR at PIR



2016 Chevrolet Camaro 48-state tour: Minnesota-Utah



Patrick Peterson - AZ Cardinals star and car enthusiast



Man Vs Machine Grand Canyon steam train vs bicycles



LA Auto Show



Arizona January auctions



Mazda MX-5 Miata



Ford Edge Titanium



Mitsubishi Outlander



RAM ProMaster City



Audi Truth in Engineering 



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*Starting MSRP for a 2015 Audi A3 1.8T Premium. Model shown is a 2015 Audi A3 2.0T Prestige with 19" wheels and Sport pkg., starting MSRP \$43,250. Prices exclude destination, taxes, title, other options and dealer charges. \$489 Dealer Doc Fee. Dealer sets actual price. "Audi," "MMI," "quattro," "Truth in Engineering," all models names, and the four rings logo are registered trademarks of AUDI AG. ©2015 Audi of America, Inc.



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