

The Check Engine light knows

We caught a glimpse of a nationwide survey of 1996-through 2015-model-year vehicles that was recently conducted by ad outfit called CarMD.

Of the problems diagnosed through “check engine” light indicators, Hyundai models were shown to be the most reliable, followed in order by Toyota, Honda, Ford and Chrysler. However in terms of average repair costs, Fords were shown to be the least expensive.

When individual models were examined, Toyota outpaced the field in overall reliability, with the Corolla winning in the compact class, the Avalon and Lexus ES for larger sedans and the Prius in the hybrid category. In total, Toyota placed 18 vehicles in the top 100 category, which was the most of any automaker.



Volvo is unveiling a replacement for its flagship S80 sedan.



Volvo's next big luxury move

To our eyes, it seems that the sleeping Swedish giant has finally awakened and is running on all fours (cylinders, that is). Following the recent all-new XC90 tall wagon launch, we have scouted out Volvo's 2017-model-year replacement for the S80 flagship sedan. The S90 is exceptional in its design and has enough quirkiness under the hood to help catch some glances. The base T5 uses a turbocharged 240-horsepower 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine, while the 302-horsepower T6 uses the turbo for top-end power for the 2.0 along with a belt-driven supercharger to assist at lower engine revs. Lastly, the T8 plug-in hybrid adds an 87-horsepower electric-drive system to the rear wheels that increases the net output to 400 horsepower.

There's even more in store from Volvo as it completely revamps its lineup before the end of the decade.



Similar in size to the Tacoma and sold globally, the 2016 Toyota Hilux could be used as the launching platform for any Lexus venture into pickup trucks.

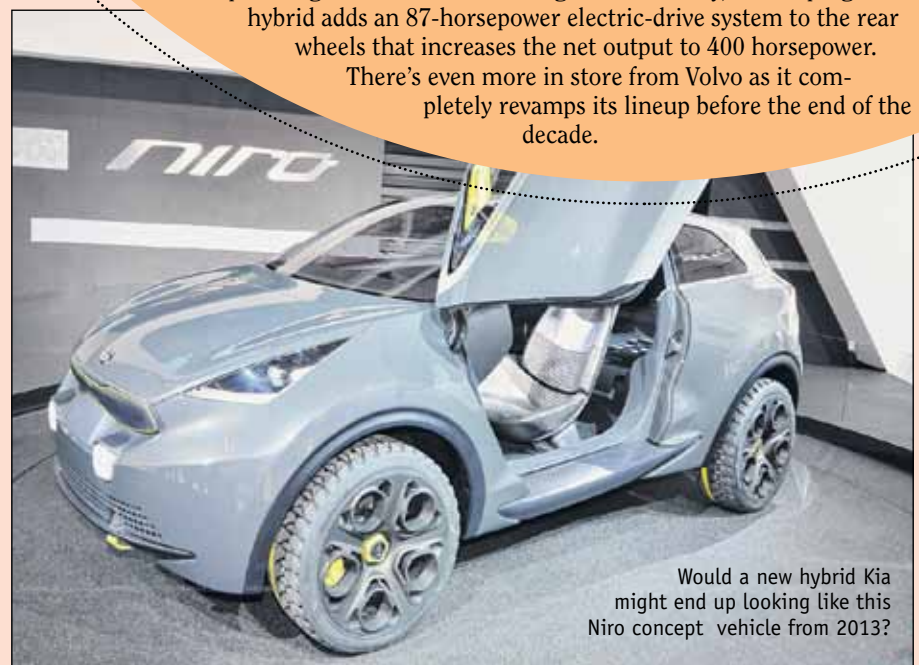
A Lexus pickup truck?

We caught wind of some upcoming product plans from Toyota's luxury offshoot. Not unexpectedly, an extended version of the popular RX wagon is in the works, as is an all-wheel-drive tall hatchback sedan not unlike the BMW X6 and Mercedes-Benz GLE “coupe” models.

However, there are also rumors of a forthcoming **Lexus pickup truck** that would be based on the global **Toyota Hilux** (similar in size to the Tacoma model sold here). Other lux pickups, notably the **Cadillac Escalade EXT** and the **Lincoln Blackwood** and **Mark LT**, have tried (and failed) to make a go of it in North America, which might discourage Lexus. For the rest of the world, notably Asia and Australia, a luxury pickup just might fly.



Upscale pickups have been tried before. Remember the Cadillac Escalade EXT (left, top), Lincoln Blackwood (left, bottom) and Mark LT (above)? Maybe their fates won't dissuade Lexus.



Would a new hybrid Kia might end up looking like this Niro concept vehicle from 2013?

Kia is fiddling with the Niro

Although both Hyundai and its Kia sub-brand have created hybrid models from their mid-size sedans (the Sonata and Optima, respectively), there appears to be plans for at least one more... at least one that will wear a Kia badge. We've spotted a heavily camouflaged model running about that's very loosely based on the Niro concept model, which was originally trotted out back in 2013 at the Frankfurt Auto Show. From appearances, the actual production Niro will be about the same size as the current Volkswagen Golf hatchback, which likely means a small four-cylinder engine — perhaps turbocharged — working in tandem with an electric motor will supply the power. Our prediction is that the Niro will debut sometime in 2016 and become available in early 2017.

TEST DRIVE

2016 Volvo V60 T5

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engine torque to the tread that has the most traction. The system's benefits work on wet or dry roads, and require no driver input.

The taller ride height benefits driver visibility, but works against handling. The Cross Country is nonetheless stable and maneuverable, but less agile than the lower, non-Cross Country V60, or sport-minded competitors like the BMW 3-Series wagons. Ride quality is comfortable but firm, and likely more so with the optional 19-inch rims fitted here than with the stock 18's.

The sole powertrain pairs Volvo's 2.5-liter five-cylinder engine with a six-speed automatic transmission. The turbo five makes 250 horsepower @ 5,400 rpm and 266 lb. ft. of torque @ 1,800-4,200 rpm. The drivetrain isn't fast, but rather adequately quick (low 7's from 0-60), with a characteristic growl when pedaled. The EPA estimates for fuel economy are

20/28 (I netted 22), and towing capacity is rated at 3,500 lb.

Standard safety features include City Safety — Volvo's low speed collision avoidance system. In addition to infotainment niceties like the ear-pleasing, harmon-kardon sound system, a cross-section of Volvo's safety technologies are bundled in the Platinum package. Included here are Adaptive Cruise Control, Collision Warning with Full Auto Brake, Pedestrian/Cyclist Detection with Auto Brake, Distance/Driver Alerts, Lane Departure Warning and Active High Beam.

The Climate package (\$1,550) collects cold weather staples like heated front seats, rear seats, steering wheel, windshield and washer nozzles, along with an interior air quality system, power child locks and dual, outboard child booster seats.

A 7-inch color display atop the center stack provides access to Volvo's Sensus infotainment system. Below the screen is



In the V60, as elsewhere in the Volvo lineup, seat comfort and support is first rate.

a large, button-busy cluster of controls, wrapped around the instantly intuitive “Mode Man” HVAC airflow adjusters. Large rear seat headrests hinder the driver's ¾ rear view. Blind spot monitoring provides the workaround, but it's not standard. The BLIS package (\$925) bundles that safety staple with Cross Traffic Alert, Front Park Assist and a Lane Change Merge Aid.

Here as elsewhere in the Volvo lineup, seat comfort and support is first rate. I'm 6'1" and I fit well enough in the front seat, though I wouldn't say no to another inch of legroom. With front seats set for someone my height, rear seat legroom is tight, and the foot wells aren't friendly to those of us with big feet. Lift-over height in back is low, and maximum cargo capacity (with rear, 40/20/40 seatbacks folded forward) is 43.8 cubic feet. That's about 10 cubic feet less than in a BMW

3-series wagon, 20 cu. ft. less than in the BMW X3. Interestingly, it's also 28.3 cu. ft. less than the Volvo XC70 wagon. As the numbers suggest, that Volvo is bigger: about 8 inches longer and over 2 inches taller than the V60 Cross Country.

So if you're specifically shopping Volvo's wagon/crossover, the question is whether you favor form or function. Style conscious shoppers will likely prefer the V60 wagon.

The V60 Cross Country takes that look, and adds an outdoor vibe. And, the XC70 pushes practicality, with a little more people room and a lot more cargo space.

A regular contributor to the Times Union for more than 20 years, Dan Lyons is the award-winning author of six books, and photographer of 165 calendars. Read Dan's recent reviews online anytime at Timesunion.com/vehiclereviews.

