



## Another hot hatch, but smaller

Following the 350-horsepower **2016 Ford Focus RS** is the high-performance **Fiesta hatchback**, a tiny car that would have more grunt than the 197-horsepower turbo-charged ST model currently available. The 252-horsepower turbocharged 2.0-liter four-cylinder from the Focus ST could be used, but for cost containment a more likely option would be a larger turbocharger for the existing 1.6-liter four cylinder. Either way, expect power to be in the same general vicinity as the Focus ST. Whatever the final choice, the hot sub-compact will get a sportier suspension (developed from the factory-sponsored Fiesta rally car) plus a unique grille and body trim.



Cuba is known as an island museum of preserved (more or less) vintage American cars, but don't think the ending of the trade embargo will see any of these roughed-up diamonds emigrating north.

## Cuban-American car exodus?

With a recent presidential visit formally opening relations between the U.S. and Cuba, you might be able to bring back a fistful of Cuban cigars. But will those vintage American cars preserved since *La Revolucion* be up for grabs, too? Probably not. Since the 1960 trade embargo, the Caribbean island has been known as a rolling museum of vintage American vehicles that Cubans — faced with the alternative of driving junky Soviet bloc offerings — have lovingly kept going by any means necessary. But the trade embargo may continue for these time-locked U.S. cars. Aside from the expense of bringing a vehicle from Havana to Miami and the fact that most have been kept operable by ingenious but MacGyver-type methods American car shows would laugh off the lot (DeSotos sporting Peugeot diesels beneath the hood!), these pre-1960 vehicles also come from another era of environmental regulations as well. In short: These Cuban museum pieces are caught in the middle. Not pristine enough for collectors, and too old for modern safety and emissions standards.

### TEST DRIVE

## 2016 Nissan Altima 2.5 SL

*Continued from page 1* notably easier on the ear than the steady state drone of CVT's in years gone by. Altima's steering and four-wheel independent suspension have been upgraded for 2016. Improvements to the latter include new shocks, rear springs, bushings and grippier tires. As mentioned above, SR models get a sport suspension with added tweaks like beefier anti-roll bars fore and aft and tuned shock dampers. The resulting setup is said to cut body roll by 20%. In handling, I placed last year's Altima just slightly on the sporty side of average for its class. In SR trim, the new model feels a full step more agile than the mean for this market, trailing only the sportiest segment offerings. Ride quality is comfortable and the car's overall dimensions make for easy maneuverability. Inside, Altima's center stack has been reworked, seats have been reshaped and new, soft-touch materials were selected

for door panels and dash. Padded too is the standard feature list, which now includes a Rear View Monitor, Siri Eyes Free Voice Recognition and Nissan ConnectSM with mobile apps on grades 2.5S and up. The roster of available safety technology has also been expanded to include Predictive Forward Collision Warning, Blind Spot Warning, Forward Emergency Braking, Intelligent Cruise Control and Rear Cross Traffic Alert. While many options are bundled into packages, there a number of extras offered as stand-alone items for various trim levels. That list includes, for example: Navigation Package (\$580), Moonroof package (\$800), Pearl White Paint (\$395), Remote Start (\$330), and a Rear Spoiler (\$405). Centered between the speedometer and the tach is a 4-inch color multi-information screen. Controls for most functions are found on the center stack or steering wheel stalks; all are easy to find and operate.



## Audi's new Quattro AWD

The system that's synonymous with Audi is, we hear, about to receive a major revision and will be called **Quattro with Ultra Technology**. The Quattro system that has been used up to now is a full-time setup, but Ultra is a non-full-time system disconnects from the rear wheels during normal driving conditions, but will instantaneously re-connect when wheel slippage is about to happen. That's right... *before* it happens. Quattro with Ultra is packed with electronics and can also be paired with Audi's Sport Differential option that adjusts the torque split between the left and right wheels (known as torque vectoring). The 2017 Audi A4 will be the first Audi to use Quattro Ultra, but eventually it will be available on all Audis with engines mounted lengthwise. Sideways-mounted engines will get the "old" system.



2017 Audi A4



This is what happens when you give designers the wheel and sales execs the back seat. Honda unveiled its **Concept D** luxury SUV concept at last year's Shanghai Auto Show.

## More autonomy ahead for Honda's designers

Honda CEO **Takahiro Hachigo** plans to limit the influence of senior sales and marketing managers with regard to product development. According to a recent story in industry newspaper Automotive News, Hachigo's idea is to free up creative personnel to develop products that won't be, according to one Honda executive, "watered down, uninspiring, what you might call designed-by-committee cars." Sounds like the Asian version of the age-old struggle General Motors' honcho Bob Lutz once referred to as "Bean Counters vs. Car Guys." And Hachigo's words seem to mirror those of Toyota CEO **Akio Toyoda's** last fall, when the grandson of the company's founder said the automaker needed to created sexier, more stylish vehicles. And, at least for premium Lexus brand, less wagons. (He's one of the few execs not enthralled by crossovers.) "Over the years, our product development process became overly complex and slow," one Honda insider told Reuter, "involving a huge number of engineers and sales and marketing people." To grease that product pipeline, Honda's Hachigo — a former automotive engineer himself who's now been CEO for about a year — sees empowering the creativity of designers as a way to speed up the product-development process. So we'll get snazzier-looking cars in the showrooms even more quickly. Hopefully this is a trend. While we're thinking the market is getting glutted with tall, small and all wagons, if these two automakers can combine their reputation for reliability with a little more spice, everyone wins.



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**TEST DRIVE**  
this vehicle at these preferred dealerships:

**LIA NISSAN**  
2233 Central Ave., Schenectady, NY 12304  
518-579-2000 [www.lianissanschenectady.com](http://www.lianissanschenectady.com)

**LIA NISSAN OF SARATOGA**  
2906 Route 9 Malta, NY 12020  
518-633-1133 [www.lianissansaratoga.com](http://www.lianissansaratoga.com)

**LIA NISSAN OF GLENS FALLS**  
373 Dix Ave., Queensbury, NY 12804  
518-681-3800 [www.lianissangf.com](http://www.lianissangf.com)

Most of the midsize sedan competition has rear seat leg room in the 38-inch range. So, while Altima's rear seat room (36.1 inches) trails Accord, Camry and Legacy, it will seat adults comfortably. Altima's cargo capacity of 15.4 cubic feet is about mid-pack for the segment; bigger than Mazda6, smaller than Fusion. Rear seatbacks fold mostly flat forward to add storage space for longer items,

though it's a bi-level space, with the folded seatbacks slightly higher than the rest of the floor.

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](http://Timesunion.com/vehiclereviews).