

Four new Ford models to arrive

With the growth in tall wagons (a.k.a. crossovers), it wasn't a surprise to hear Ford's sales VP Mark LaNeve confirm that his company will launch four such vehicles globally in the next four years.



The Ford Escape will be getting a Trax-sized little brother.

Although LaNeve didn't provide specifics, we have it on good authority that one will be smaller than the current **Ford Escape** (think Chevrolet Trax or Honda HR-V in terms of size), while one other will wear a Lincoln badge. The latter, it's further rumored, will compete with the full-size BMW X6 or Mercedes-Benz GLE. Both of these so-called tall "coupes," as well as the smaller BMW X4, are less practical than traditional wagons but they sell well based on their style.



Audi says that a new electric compressor will make turbo lag a thing of the past. The compressor runs off a 48-volt battery and the first use will be in this SQ7.

Has Audi killed turbo lag?

Turbocharging is one sure-fire way to increase the horsepower of smaller engines, which, if driven prudently, can return decent fuel economy. The only sticking point has been the frustrating time delay from when the accelerator is pressed to when the turbo begins to make noticeable boost pressure (known as lag). We hear that Audi has solved this problem by adding an **electronic compressor** ahead of the turbo that spins up to 70,000 revolutions per minute. What does it do? Simply put, the compressor runs off a separate 48-volt lithium-ion battery, which Audi says is powerful enough to basically eliminate lag. In its initial application, the electric compressor will be installed in the 2017 Audi SQ7 tall wagon equipped with a twin-turbocharged diesel V8 that produces 435 horsepower and 664 pound-feet of torque.



Built-in gun racks at Land Rover

Think gun racks are an accessory for us upstate rednecks only? Well, high falutin' British marque Land Rover wants you to think again.

For the 1% off-roading types, a new **Range Rover Holland & Holland edition** will come loaded with about every luxury extra you can think of. That includes a special slide-out cabinet positioned beneath the load floor that can hold a couple of shotguns (not included).

That figures, since England-based Holland & Holland manufactures high-end shotguns that it sells at its company stores in New York City and Dallas, Texas. Prices start at \$245,000 for each of the 30 special edition vehicles being shipped here. As for the rifles, a quick look at the spec sheets of Holland & Holland's offerings has confirmed that each shotgun shown below costs more than the cars we drive to work.



BMW-owned Mini has been maximizing its offerings in recent years, but its expanding lineup is rumored to include a **four-door sedan**. At the other end of the spectrum, the **Superleggera** roadster (background) is also waiting for a green light. Which will win the race to the production line?

Is Mini considering a (gasp!) sedan?

That's a possibility, we believe. The head honchos at BMW's **Mini** division are considering the addition of a four-door compact sedan to a lineup full of anything but, including the **Cooper**, **Countryman** and **Clubman** (the two-seat Mini coupe and roadster are history, as is the two-door Paceman).

At the same time, Mini's planners are waiting for the hot-looking **Mini Superleggera** roadster to receive the green light for production. With the low payback of low-volume models against the development costs, we think the sedan stands a far better chance of being built than the Superleggera.

TEST DRIVE

2016 VW Beetle Convertible R-Line SEL

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ample head room regardless. Interior storage includes a dash top tray and dual level glove boxes. Door-mounted straps secure a water bottle or similarly sized item. A long, thin, covered center console doubles as an inside arm rest.

Beetle's cargo capacity of 7.1 cubic feet compares with 6.0 in the Mini convertible and 5.4 in the Fiat 500 Cabrio. It's not large (and the "mouth" is small), but it's big enough to be useful.

A large roll aboard and a pair of carry-on size soft bags fit comfortably. Rear seat backs split and fold to increase the space's utility.

The convertible top is thick and well insulated to stand up to weather (and seal out winter). It folds to a stack in 9.5 seconds and can be operated "at speeds up to 31 mph" (kinda makes you wonder

what happens at 32, doesn't it?).

Wind flow is moderate at highway speeds. The soft top Beetle's wide roof line and rear seat headrests conspire to limit rear visibility. Blind spot monitoring and rear traffic alert are standard on SEL trim, unavailable elsewhere, and highly recommended for this vehicle. Functioning as an extra set of electronic eyes, they come in handy for everything from backing out of a parking space, to looking before you leap, in highway lane changes.

1.8T models are, of course, powered by VW's 1.8 turbo four. R-Line models get the 2.0L turbo four. VW's 2.0 turbo diesel is currently off the engine menu, pending the resolution of certification issues.

Both available engines are good choices in my view. The 2.0T is rated at 201 horsepower and 207 lb. ft. of torque. It's



ADDED TECHNOLOGY is the model year headliner on the inside of the 2016 Volkswagen Beetle, with MIB II infotainment system with USB connectivity in all models and trim levels. The SE and SEL trims' larger 6.3-inch display is a plus, but the flush screen offers no hood and is subject to washout in strong light.

quick off the line, and gathers pace rapidly (under 7-seconds from 0-60 mph). It feels smooth and refined at all speeds and returns very solid fuel economy (EPA says 23/31 with six-speed stick, 23/29 with six-speed dual clutch automatic).

While I enjoy a stick shift, VW's dual clutch automatic is the next best thing. When driven in "manumatic" mode, gear shifts are enjoyably quick, with the flick of the steering wheel mounted paddles.

Though not sporty handling per se, the Beetle Convertible feels fairly agile, given its compact foot print, and ride quality is good, even over the long haul. This

generation of Beetles is 20 percent stiffer than the former models, but rough pavement reveals some cowl shake.

Convertibles are thought of as summer cars, but the combination of front-wheel-drive and electronic stability control will add confidence when dealing with winter's seasonal snow and slop.

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.



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