

Chrysler creates a Hurricane

You can now count Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) among the growing number of automakers taking the turbocharged four-cylinder route to replace V-6 engines.

Your faithful Times Union Automotive section hears that the new engine, called the **Hurricane**, will wind up powering the next-generation Jeep Wrangler that's slated to arrive for the 2018 model year. Output is rumored to be about 300 horsepower and about the same peak torque. Compare that to the Wrangler's current V-6 that makes 285 horsepower and 260 pound-feet of torque.

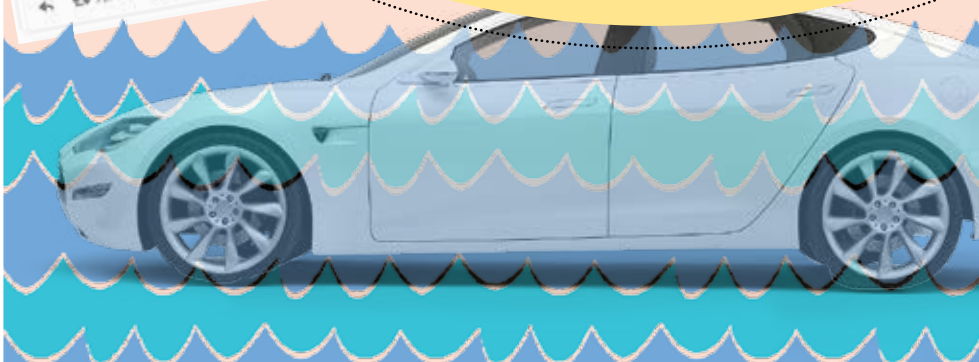
We're certain that the Hurricane will be used in other FCA vehicles including the **Jeep Grand Cherokee**, **Ram 1500** pickup, **Dodge Journey** and **Durango** wagons, and the redesigned **Chrysler 300** sedan.



The **Toyota FT-1** concept will make it to production in some form (as the Supra, most likely), but it will also be a shared platform with BMW.

A Toyota with a German accent?

Sadly, we're going to have to wait a while longer for the next **Supra** to make its debut. But we've learned that Toyota's supercar is expected to look similar to the **FT-1** concept model that dates back to 2014, and will share platforms (but not powertrains) with the upcoming BMW Z5 roadster that's due out in 2018. The Supra (still the most likely name) coupe will also roll off the assembly line at about the same time. Both cars will be built in Austria by Canada-based Magna Steyr. That company currently assembles the Mini Countryman and the Mercedes-Benz G-Class tall wagon. Total combined production of 60,000 Supras and Z5s is anticipated.



Is S for submarine?

The **Tesla Model S** has gotten some rave reviews for style and safety, but here's one from Tesla CEO Elon Musk himself that suggests yet another use for the all-electric luxury sedan.

A boat.

The entrepreneur tweeted last Sunday that the Model S "floats well enough to turn it into a boat," with the wheels' rotation providing enough thrust to pilot it. He did note that this (hopefully emergency-only) nautical adaptation was "for short periods of time." And the Tesla legal department probably prompted him to add: "We *def* don't recommend this." No, submersing an \$80,000 electric-powered car in water definitely doesn't sound recommendable, or fiscally prudent. One of our colleagues is still trying to hide from Carfax the fact that his car did that during Hurricane Sandy.

In an interesting side note, in 2013, Musk bought the customized **Lotus Esprit** that **James Bond** turned into a submarine in the 007 film "The Spy Who Loved Me." Not too long thereafter, Model S owners discovered a hidden Easter egg in the car's software which turned its image on the dashboard screen (above, right) into that of the submarine Lotus, complete with depth in leagues. Now that's forward thinking.



Autonomous vehicles: Are we all ready yet?

There are some of us who continue to be adverse to technology, and not just baby boomers still too frightened by "2001: A Space Odyssey" to turn control of their vehicle over to a computer.

Relax. You're not alone.

According to a recent study by the University of Michigan, just under half of the motorists surveyed found that 48.3 percent said they **didn't want any automation at all** in their next vehicles. Slightly less than half (46 percent) prefer to **remain in full control** of the driving.

46
percent of drivers prefer to **remain in full control** of the car.

Two-thirds said they are moderately or very concerned about riding in a completely self-driving vehicle, while about half have the same levels of concern regarding partially self-driving vehicles. (The survey broke down three levels of autonomous driving: fully self driving, partially self-driving, and 'no self-driving.) In contrast, just under 16 percent said they would prefer riding in an autonomous vehicle. And relax, baby boomers. The study also suggests that younger drivers are only *slightly* more accepting of fully autonomous automobiles. All in all, we remain traditionalists on the road: 95 percent of respondents would still want steering wheels and brakes in such vehicles.

Brandon Schoettle and Michael Sivak of the U-M Transportation Research Institute surveyed 618 motorists on their preferences. They've been tracking driver attitudes toward autonomous vehicles over the last two years, and found those feelings haven't changed much in that time period.

So we may be a ways off from the future. Having automakers and software designers establish legal liability for accidents and allowing motorists to take incremental steps (self-braking and self-parking features, for example) may smooth over some of these concerns and ease us into a driverless future.

TEST DRIVE

2016 Volkswagen Beetle Dune

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It supports the three major smart-phone platforms — Android Auto, Apple CarPlay and MirrorLink. The larger display is an easier read than the 5-inch version in lower trim levels, though its location (flush with the dashboard and sans hood) leaves it open to screen washout when the sun is out and the top is down. Lighting and Technology packages allow access to desirable features like Bi-Xenon headlights and the Fender premium sound system.

The front seats are comfortable and multi-adjustable. If those up front are tall, there's little leg room left for those behind. 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.

The opening of the Beetle ragtop's trunk is small and while the cargo capac-

ity isn't large, it's useable and larger — at 7.1 cubic feet — than competitors like the Mini convertible (6.0) and the Fiat Cabrio (5.4). The rear seat backs split/fold for added storage options.

I really like the coupe's roofline, and like most any hardtop, the profile view is superior to the convertible version. But, you can't drop the top on a hardtop (put down that Sawzall), and the VW's convertible top is a good one. Snug and well-insulated, it has a heated glass backlight and folds to a stack in back in 9½ seconds. Wind flow in the cabin is moderate at speed; conversations can be held easily with windows raised.

The distance between the seats and the windshield lend a larger car feel to the Beetle's front cabin. The rear seat headrests and the wide roofline common to convertible tops conspire to limit rear visibility. A rearview camera and park distance control are standard.

However, blind spot monitoring and rear traffic alert would be helpful, and are unavailable in this trim level.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER



Dune is a sporty, front-wheel drive convertible, not a sports car. It feel agile and ride quality is good even with the larger, model-specific wheels and tires. Powertrain options — at least initially — are limited to one choice: a 1.8-liter, four-cylinder engine matched to a six-speed automatic transmission.

Here as elsewhere in the VW lineup, the 1.8T scores well as a drivable and economical motor. It's refined, has ample quickness and returns good fuel econo-

my. EPA estimates for Dune convertible are not yet available, but the comparably equipped Beetle convertible is expected to get 25 miles per gallon city, 34 highway. I logged 25 mpg's in a week of mixed driving.

A regular contributor to the Times Union for over 20 years, Dan Lyons is the award-winning author of six books, and a photographer with over 170 calendars to his credit. Read Dan's recent reviews on line anytime, at www.TimesUnion.com.

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