



Czech maker **Skoda** may enter the U.S. market. Get ready for this **Yeti** crossover.

## Geely, really?

Our sources are telling us that **Geely**, the China-based automaker, which also happens to own **Volvo of Sweden**, is planning a full-scale global assault under a yet-to-be-determined brand name. Apparently the plan is to roll out models using Volvo's new CMA (Compact Modular Architecture) platform. Based on this intel, we believe that Geely will use plants in Sweden as well as a new facility in the United States, as a springboard for a separate line of vehicles to be sold through Volvo's dealer network by the end of the decade. Just what those vehicles will be has yet to be determined.



## Czech it out!

A member of the the list of former Eastern Bloc vehicles like Trabant and Lada whose names were synonymous with, well, Eastern Bloc quality, Czech automaker **Skoda** did manage to eke out some halfway decent vehicles, especially since being acquired by Volkswagen Group in 2000. Sources now suggest that Skoda may re-enter the U.S. market (it once imported its Felicia compact car here in the late 1950s), after having filed multiple trademarks in the U.S. Patent Office, including for the names of three of its vehicles: **Superb** (sedan), **Octavia** (hatchback), and **Yeti** (crossover), shown above. It will launch its first three-row SUV, the **Kodiahq**, next year in Europe.



In certain cities (like Seattle) you'll be able to use an app to rent BMW models like the 3-Series sedans, i3 electrics (above) and BMW-owned Mini vehicles.

## Cadillac changes course on plans for two new models

Speculation was running rampant that General Motors' up-market brand would be introducing a new flagship sedan that's a cut or two above the newly released **2017 Cadillac CT6**. That plan has been scuttled, at least for the time being, as Cadillac's brass focus on other transportation forms, notably an extended three-rows-of-seats version of the **XT5** (right) and next-generation **Escalade** wagons.

The good news is that Cadillac is proceeding with plans for a compact model — slotted below the ATS — that would compete with the Audi A3 and Mercedes-Benz CLA.

The new model will employ the 2016 Chevrolet Cruze's front-wheel-drive platform, but with rear-wheel-drive. As yet, a launch date has not been confirmed.



Cadillac XT5

## BMW shares rides

Recently launched in Seattle, Wash., **ReachNow** allows licensed drivers to rent BMW **3-Series** cars, **i3** electrics or **Mini** brand vehicles on a short- or long-term basis. Customers use the ReachNow smart-phone app and can even employ the services of a chauffeur, if desired. Speed is key here; BMW brags the registration and approval process take less than two minutes. After just four weeks, more than 13,000 Seattle residents had registered for the service. BMW plans to expand ReachNow to other North American cities over the next few months.

Let 'em know you want Smallbany on that list.

### TEST DRIVE

## 2017 Fiat 124 Spider

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any trim level for \$1,350. The four is rated at 160 h.p. @ 5,500 r.p.m., and 184 h.p. @ 2,500 r.p.m. That's +5 and +36, respectively, when compared to the Miata's engine.

Fiat has changed the transmission gearing to suit the MultiAir engine's power band. The taller gears and mild, turbo boost give the Fiat a different feel than the Mazda, with a little more mid-range grunt. Fiat estimates a 0-60 time of about 6.8 seconds. Despite the fact that the Spider spots the Miata about 100 lb., it wouldn't surprise me if the buff book guys shave that time down.

Suspension tuning is also different, Spider vs. Miata, though the recalibration isn't readily apparent on the road. Weight distribution is 54% front/46% rear (vs. 53/47 Miata).

The Fiat has fine reflexes and the overall balance of power and handling is first rate. Top notch, too is the manual shifting. No surprise there as this is one of the strong suits of the Miata, and the transmission is the same. Automatic equipped models only have steering wheel mounted shifter paddles on Abarth. However, it's a moot point, as the automatic isn't a dual clutch design. Manumatic shifts lack the lightning fast, call/response reflexes that make you want paddle shifters. In automatic mode, the transmission works well in the majority of driving situations. The only exception I found was an occasional slowness to

respond in gear selection, when backing off of hard acceleration. The difference in fun factor between a stick shift and an automatic is more noticeable in sports cars than it is in any other type of car. If working a clutch is hard for you, or your traffic life involves constant stop and go, I get wanting an automatic. But the added enjoyment of a manual when driving this car can't be overstressed.

While its surprising that Abarth models have just four more h.p. than the other Spider models, it's no surprise that they have more aggressive suspension tuning, and plenty of cornering grip. (We'll review an Abarth model in full once they're made available for street driving.)

EPA estimates for fuel economy in the 124 Spider are 26 city/35 highway (manual); 25/36 automatic. We notched 24.9 mpg's, albeit in rather spirited driving.

The Spider interior layout mirrors the Miata's. A fine driver's position, same straight forward rheostats for HVAC controls, same over-the-shoulder location for cup holders, little storage space. Fiat added more soft-touch materials on the dashboard and door panels. Seat shape and bolstering is said to differ as well. It's hard to tell the difference, but the seats hold you well and are comfortable over the long haul.

Fiat's Connect 7 sound system (standard on Lusso, optional on Classica) includes AM/FM/MP3 with USB and auxiliary port inputs, and a rear backup camera. Bluetooth connectivity provides



TEST DRIVE  
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access to Internet radio apps (Pandora, Aha, Stitcher). A navigation system and satellite radio are further options. Available safety related technology includes blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic detection, rear park assist adaptive headlights and auto-dimming mirrors.

The manual convertible top can be quickly and easily raised or lowered from the driver's seat. A spring mechanism assists with the lift. The top on all Spider levels has added acoustic insulation and an inner liner. The equivalent top is only offered on Miata's top trim level.

Wind buffeting at speed is clipped nicely by the combination of windows up and the rear, between-the-headrests deflector. Go windows down for full-on, windblown convertible effects. The available Bose premium sound system includes a revival of the in-headrest speaker system that I first experienced in first generation Miatas. When speed and wind conspire to raise the ambient noise, having a set of speakers near your ears is helpful.

Classica and Lusso 124 Spiders are slated to roll into Fiat dealerships soon. Enthusiasts champing at the bit for an Abarth will have to champ a bit longer (third quarter introduction).

However, the hardest Spiders to get will be the first ones built. The initial one-hundred and twenty-four Spiders to roll off the production line will be offered for sale as a special edition, celebrating the 50th anniversary (2016) of the 124 Spider.

These Prima Edizione cars will all wear an identical blue hue (Azzuro Italia), with saddle leather seats. Priced at \$35,000, the loaded limiteds are each fitted with an individually numbered badge and come with some commemorative swag.

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](http://www.TimesUnion.com).



Don't miss next week's Test Drive:  
**2016 Volkswagen Beetle Dune convertible**

