

Forty-eight-volt electrical systems

Currently (pun intended), virtually every vehicle dating back at least 60 years has used 12-volt systems. However Audi and Bentley are breaking the ice with the **2017 SQ7** and **Bentayga** models, respectively.

Both will use 48-volt electrics, as will an increasing number of vehicles in future. This is due to the use

of electrically operated components coming on stream, such as start-stop technology.



2017 Audi SQ7

Mitsubishi is buffing up its thin product lineup. The most obvious choice: A crossover.



Mitsubishi's full-size tall wagon

We have learned that Mitsubishi's thin lineup of vehicles that are available in North America is about to be bolstered. A premium-grade sport ute that currently goes by the name **Grand Tourer** will be shown this fall at the Paris Auto Show in France. The new model will also feature Japan-based automaker's latest plug-in hybrid technology similar to the system that will be optional in the 2017 Outlander tall wagon. We also see the impending launch of the Grand Tourer as a sign that Nissan, which is Mitsubishi's largest shareholder, believes that there continues to be a market for the brand in North America, particularly in the sale of electric and gasoline-electric vehicles.



Honda unveiled its 25th anniversary Sonic the Hedgehog Civic at last month's Comic Con.

Will Camaro and Mustang share a transmission?

We have uncovered some heretofore secret intel concerning the **10-speed automatic transmission** that was jointly developed by **General Motors** and **Ford**. That unit was originally intended for use in both automakers' full-size pickups, but Chevrolet has decided that it will be available in the 640-horsepower **2017 Camaro ZL1**.

Not to be outdone, word is that Ford will also make the 10-speed an option for the **Mustang GT's** 5.0-liter V-8 and possibly the **Shelby GT350** model with its 5.2. It seems the automatic is capable of producing ultra-quick shift changes, — quicker apparently than Porsche's paddle-shift PDK unit.

That makes it ideal for track use as well as for helping to reduce fuel consumption in everyday use. We expect that the joint-venture automatic won't be available until the 2018 model year.



2017 Camaro ZL1

Sonic Civic at Comic Con

Sonic Civic at Comic Con

Nostalgia check: **Sonic the Hedgehog**, star of the early 1990s Sega video game, turns 25 this year. In celebration of a quarter century of speedy cartoon animals, Honda produced a commemorative Civic (what else would gamers want to drive?) to show off at San Diego's Comic Con, held in late July.

The so-called **Sonic Civic** is covered with a vinyl graphics wrap over its Sonic Blue paint job, set off against Sonic Yellow accents. With a nod toward the tuner crowd, Honda lowered the Sonic Civic's ride height, too.

The theme carries over inside to the Katzkin leather seats, with a pair of 10-inch 500-watt Rockford Fosgate subwoofers and a pair of 400-watt amps in the trunk. For gaming fans, there's also a flip-up, 32-inch TV. For performance fans, not so much, though: The Sonic Civic packs the same 1.5-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine as base Civics. Leave the speed for the cartoon hedgehog.

TEST DRIVE

2017 Toyota Prius v

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arresting array of dashboard graphics — something to visually engage the driver in the pursuit of max mileage.

The joystick-like gearshift selector juts out horizontally from the dashboard. "Park" is selected by pushing a nearby button. Why Park has been segregated from the rest of the gear settings, I have no idea (was it something it said?), but the result is two buttons situated in (too) close proximity — Park and Power. I have griped in the past about why turning the power on in a car is less and less a matter of using your key. This is commonplace in modern cars, of course, and far from Toyota specific, but the logic escapes me. There is no appreciable time savings in the starting process, and even if there was, it's offset on the back end by the time it takes to find wherever the key fob has gotten to, when you reach your destination. And now, if you'll be kind enough to get off my lawn, I'll return to my review.

In humans, reaching 40 gets mixed reviews. In cars, over 40 (mpg's that is) is rare territory, and generally more cel-

ebrated. Prius v is EPA-rated at 44 miles per gallon city, 40 highway and 42 combined. My test drive in the v was 1,000 miles long (about 70 percent of which was highway) and I logged 46 miles per gallon. Even in a period of relatively low gas prices like the one we're in, that's impressive — especially in a midsize wagon, not a micro car.

The hybrid powertrain pairs a 1.8 liter, Atkinson-cycle, four-cylinder gas engine, with an 80 h.p. electric motor. The combined, net power output from the hybrid system is 134 horsepower. The driver can select from three driving modes. "EV" will engage full electric power up to a maximum of about 25 mph for up to about a mile. "Eco" gives you the most mileage-minded combination, tamping down throttle response and limiting the power consumption of the A/C unit. "Power" offers a mild boost in mid-range performance.

In uber-mileage cars like this, mpg's trump mph. Modest acceleration is seen as the price one pays for superior mileage. Toyota quotes a 0-60 mph time for Prius at a leisurely 10.3 seconds. The



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hybrid powertrain works well together and there's adequate power for normal driving. The engine's small displacement only becomes noticeable in high demand situations like passing or maintaining highway speed on a long grade with passengers on board. The standard small-engine caveats all apply. Pick your spots carefully when passing and on traffic ramp merges. Handling in the front-wheel-drive Prius v is competent and ride quality is quite good, even with the Five trim's 17-inch alloy rims.

Prius v is offered in four trim levels: Two (MSRP \$26,675), Three (\$28,060),

Four (\$29,695) and Five (\$30,935). Buyers of the top-ranging (and redundantly named) v Five models can also opt for the Advanced Technology package (\$3,335).

While the JBL sound system included as part of the bundle didn't have an especially premium sound, the panoramic skylight made for an enjoyably airy feel inside the cabin, even though it doesn't open.

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 170 calendars. Read Dan's recent reviews online anytime at Timesunion.



Don't miss newweek's Test Drive: **2016 Volkswagen Golf GTI S**

