



Mazda's new G-Vectoring Control should make the 2017 Mazda3 even more fun to drive.

Mazda3 gets more control

It's not entirely about fuel economy for smaller cars. The Japan-based automaker has a new trick up its sleeve and will make it available in the mildly updated **2017 Mazda3** sedan and hatchback that arrive this fall. Called **G-Vectoring Control**, the system varies engine torque to the front wheels, depending on steering inputs, whether the car is traveling in a straight line or turning. Mazda claims G-Vectoring Control maintains the car on its intended trajectory by reducing the need for steering corrections, especially on rough or slippery road surfaces. It's also claimed to smooth out acceleration inputs, which makes it more comfortable for passengers. Mazdas have a fun-to-drive reputation. And with more and more auto-drive and auto-parking features taking over lately, it's nice to see an innovation designed to make it more fun for humans to be in control.



Although it's more power than just about any buyer would ever need, part of saying the F-Series Super Duty has 925 pound-feet of torque is to hold bragging rights over GM and Dodge.

Ford's pickup adds muscle

There are horsepower wars between the American automakers in the pony car segment (Ford Mustang, Chevrolet Camaro and Dodge Challenger). However, we find the torque wars in the heavy hauling pickup class equally competitive. In the latest gauntlet throw-down, Ford's **2017 F-Series Super Duty** truck series with an available 6.7-liter V-8 turbo-diesel makes 440 horsepower and an astonishing 925 pound-feet of torque.

That, claims Ford, allows its Super Duty to tow up to 32,500 pounds of gooseneck (fifth-wheel) trailer weight, up to 7,630 pounds of payload. In contrast, the diesel V-8s in General Motors' **Chevrolet Silverado** and **GMC Sierra HD** models top out at 397 horsepower and 765 pound-feet of torque, while the Cummins turbo-diesel in the **Dodge Ram** heavy duty comes closest to the Ford with 385 horsepower and 900 pound-feet. We predict that the 1,000 pound-feet torque plateau will soon be breached.



VW done pushing diesels

Given the months and months of bad press related to the emissions cheating scandal, it comes as no surprise to us that **Volkswagen's** North American CEO, Hinrich Woeckel, states that his company is backing off on the sale and promotion of turbo-diesels and will only offer them "wherever diesel makes sense as a package to the car."



2017 Volkswagen Touareg

Reading between the lines, these peach-colored pages believe that you probably won't see any new **Jetta** or **Golf TDI** models (the vehicles most affected by the scandal here) any-time soon, but that larger models such as the next-generation **Touareg** sport utility vehicle and other all-new products could have sanitized V-6 turbo-diesels listed on the option sheets.



Spotted on a Paris street: The upcoming **Mercedes-Benz All Terrain**. Based on the E-class wagon, the all-wheel-drive vehicle will hopefully offer competition to Audi's A4 All Road.

M-B plays catch-up with new AWD

After years in the wilderness, traditional wagons have been making a comeback. Evidently, a certain other German automaker has been watching the recent success of the **Audi A4 Allroad**. That all-wheel-drive wagon is essentially a hiked-up version of A4 Avant that Audi sells in Europe and elsewhere. Now it looks like the Allroad's popularity has prompted Mercedes Benz to develop its own version, based on the E-Class wagon.



2016 Audi A4 Allroad

Dubbed the **All Terrain**, it will have Mercedes Benz's 4Matic AWD suspension with a bespoke suspension and rumored air setup to raise the vehicle's height for better

off-road capability. M-B's 4Matic AWD suspension will be standard, and powerplants will include both V-6 and V-8 gas and diesel engines. An AMG Model with close to 600 horsepower, might also be in the offing.

The All Terrain will make its official debut at the Paris Auto Show in October, and go on sale in Europe next year.

While there are no official plans to bring the model to these shores, given the popularity of such vehicles as the Allroad, Cross Country and Subaru Outback (among others), these peach-colored pages expect we'll see it hit North America soon after.

TEST DRIVE

2017 Mercedes-Benz SL450

Continued from page 1

AIRSCARF is part of the robustly priced Premium Package (\$5,050), along with ventilated seats, massage seats, keyless entry, electronic trunk closer, gray brake calipers with perforated discs, parking assist and a (surprisingly not standard) rearview camera. The interior is handsomely appointed and exceptionally accommodating of height (leg room 42.9 inches).

Many features are managed by CO-MAND — Mercedes' cockpit management and date system, which is accessed by a console mounted rheostat and surrounding buttons. The high resolution screen is easy to see, but COMAND's operating design suffers from the same level of over engineering found in many luxury cars. For example, it takes a minimum of seven steps to adjust the lumbar support. Conventional, side-of-the-seat controls typically get that job done in one or two moves.

Any conversation involving a convertible usually includes a mention of cowl shake: that shudder and judder over bumps and rough pavement that convertibles are prone to. It happens because the process of removing the top from a car's design also removes some structural stability. The SL450 is notable for how little cowl shake is present. There's a general sense of chassis solidity that's unusual in open cars, and ride quality is commendable.

As noted earlier, many sports cars are never called upon to be sporty. However, when asked, the SL warms quickly to the task. Choose Sport+ on the Driver Select Mode (Eco, Comfort and Sport are the other options), tuck into a long, sweeping corner, and the SL breezes through, with a flat feel and a nice weight to the steering wheel.

The powertrain in the SL450 combines Mercedes' 3.0 liter biturbo V-6, with a new nine-speed automatic transmission.



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The combination offers effortless quickness; capable of hitting 60 mph from a standstill in less than five seconds. Paddles on the steering wheel allow the driver to shift manually. This isn't a dual clutch transmission, and the lag time between paddle call and shift response limits the entertainment value.

However, you can use the paddles to hold a specific gear to keep the revs up. And, switching to the aforementioned Sport+ mode changes throttle response, transmission mapping and steering effort for a more aggressive approach.

Left to its own devices, the automatic works smoothly and efficiently, stretching the engine's wide power band evenly over its nine cogs. EPA says you can

expect 20 mpg's in the city, 28 highway. The engine's 362 horsepower and 369 lb.-ft. of torque are more than sufficient for your Grand Touring needs. However, there are three SL step-ups available, offering progressively more performance and exclusivity.

Were it my wallet, I would opt for the 450. However, the most persuasive case of the remaining trio may be made by the 550, owing to the thrust (0-60, 4.3) and rumble of its 449 h.p., twin turbo V-8.

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.com/vehiclereviews.



Don't miss newweek's Test Drive: **2016 Alfa Romeo 4C Spider**

