



Buick Avista: Dream on?

The **Buick Avista** luxury concept coupe turned plenty of heads when it was introduced at the 2016 North American International Auto Show in Detroit, Mich. It also won a couple of prestigious awards for outstanding design. Even with all this, Buick's marketing boss has poured cold water on rumors that the Avista, which was built on the same chassis as the Chevrolet Camaro, will ever go past the idea stage. What was the point, then?



An rendition of the proposed **Mercedes-Benz R50**, showing some inspiration from the 2013 Vision Grand Turismo concept, and some aspiration to compete in the supercar venue.

Benz supercar rumors

We've overheard some high-placed scuttlebutt to the effect that a way-over-the-top sports car — something more far-reaching than the current **Mercedes-AMG GT** — could very well make it to streets.

The idea for such a road beast, code-named **R50**, originates with AMG, which is the automaker's in-house performance division. The AMG folks are apparently drawing inspiration from the 2013 Vision Grand Turismo concept, although the final version likely won't look exactly like that particular model.



Bugatti Chiron

A gas-electric propulsion system with dedicated electric motors for each wheel is also contemplated for the mid-engine two-seater that would produce somewhere between 1,000 and 1,250 combined horsepower. From those specs, it looks like Mercedes is itching for a car to compete with buyers for the new **Bugatti Chiron**, which cranks out 1,500 horsepower and, at 261 mph, is the most powerful production car going now.

If this project gets the green light, each of the very few R50s to be made would cost upward of \$1 million. Which really would start edging it into Chiron territory, which starts at around the \$2.6 million mark.



Mr. Popularity: The Focus RS is in limited supply with some buyers having to wait for the 2017 batch.

Ford Focus RS shortage

Being drift-happy hasn't dulled demand for the Germany-built 350-horsepower all-wheel-drive **Ford Focus RS** hatchback (base MSRP: \$36,000). Demand has been so strong that some North American customers who placed orders are out of luck, at least for the 2016 model year. Instead, about 220 buyers in total will wind up with later-arriving 2017 model-year versions. Ford's initial excuse for the cancellation was "economic turmoil in Europe" that forced the Saarlouis, Germany, plant to shut down. But Ford rep Dan Jones 'fessed up that those 220 orders from a Los Angeles dealership were cancelled simply because Ford couldn't keep up with demand before a planned summer factory shutdown.

It's not only in L.A., either. Asked when Down Under drivers might get their hands on an RS, Ford Australia's CEO Graeme Whickman simply said: "[T]he best answer I can give you is: None available right now."



Land Rover's Discovery Vision 2014 concept may be the template for the LR4's replacement.

Land Rover's latest Discovery

We hear that the Land Rover division of Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) is busy readying a replacement for the aging **LR4** (the second-gen Discovery4's name for the North American market) off-rader. It will use the same platform as the Range Rover and Range Rover Sport and will be called the **Discovery**. It will also be slotted between the Discovery Sport and the Evoque in Land Rover's pricing order.

The Discovery will also feature many of the design cues displayed in the Discovery Vision Concept that was unveiled at the 2014 New York Auto Show. North American buyers will find their Discovery powered by a 3.0-liter inline-six-cylinder engine, or with hybrid propulsion using a four-cylinder gas engine plus an electric motor.

TEST DRIVE

2016 Alfa Romeo 4C Spider

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bolsters to keep you planted during spirited driving. It is a purposeful cabin, well suited for track duties.

The flip side is the car's suitability for daily driving. Feeling every road imperfection is information for the racer, but it can be TMI for the daily drive.

No power steering makes parking a bit of a chore. The interior skews Spartan, though the presence of air conditioning suggests a tacit agreement that man does not live by racing alone.

Ditto for the (Alpine) sound system, though it's overmatched by competing cabin noises. Principal in this regard is the optional Sport Tuned Exhaust System (\$500). As someone who grew up appreciating the rumble of a V-8 engine, few cars with less cylinders compete sonically. To me, sport exhaust systems on four-cylinder engines generally amplify noise without enhancing sound. That's the case here, to my ears, and for that reason I'd steer clear of that option, though your ears may vary.

Another interior influencer in the 4C is wind flow. The Spider's fabric top can be unlatched, rolled and stored in the trunk. It's a fairly simple process and takes little time. Targas are often hard cars to enjoy when open. Lacking a convertible's rear exit point for airflow, the winds can

get trapped in the cabin, bouncing off your head, as they look for a way out. That's happily not the case in the Spider. To be sure, with the top out and windows down, it's still full-on gusty. But, top out and windows up, it's surprisingly comfortable inside. Moderate wind, yes. But no sonic "boominess."

The car's mid-engine design means the motor shares space with the storage area, and storage loses that battle. Cargo capacity is a meager 3.7 cubic feet, and that's before you put the top in there. The front end of mid-motor cars like these is often a source of secondary storage (think Porsche Boxster or, more distantly, Porsche 914). Here, however, that space is not available; a casualty of the car's function-first, weight saving agenda.

102
Number of Alfa Romeos currently registered in the 11-county Capital Region area.
Source: DMV



Think the Alfa Romeo 4C Spider is too exotic for your driveway? The DePaula-owned Maserati of Albany dealership on 1101 Central Ave. is planning to add Alfa Romeo to its inventory. Call 518-407-0777 for information.

According to the Albany Business Review's search of DMV records, 15 Alfa Romeos were registered in the 11-county Capital Region area in the past 15 months alone.

Driver visibility is fine to the front and poor to the rear. The car would be an excellent candidate for a blind spot alert system, but it's not available. A Rear Parking Assist system is offered as part of the \$1,800 Convenience Group.

Racing seats have no arm rests, so there's nowhere to park your elbows. A pair of padded pockets adjoin both seats. They're sized for cell phones, though if yours is an XL, it won't fit. The car sounds a buckle-up alert each time you start it; it's annoyingly loud and will quickly lead owners to do one of two things — click in fast, or disconnect it. The 4C is a very low rider, with wide doors and wide sills. Getting in and out gracefully can be tricky. The level of

difficulty goes up when the top goes on, and if you don't have room to fully open the doors, it's probably best to just park somewhere you can.

Asked to do what it's designed for, the 4C Spider shines brightly. As a rare and agile running mate for track day weekends, it's hard to beat. But, if you need a car that's more of a generalist than a specialist, other sports cars would be a better fit.

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.



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2017 Porsche 911 Carrera 4S Cabriolet

