Gee, is that a Geely?

Of all the China-based automakers that claim to be close to entering the North American auto market, we believe that **Geely** could be the first to sell vehicles here under its own name. The 30-year-old multi-national, which purchased **Volvo** of Sweden from Ford back in 2010, has reportedly been readying a compact wagon prototype based on the upcoming **Volvo XC40** that would use both gasoline- and gas-electric-power systems. Although China will be the car's starting-point market, we hear that a global marketing strategy that includes the United States and Canada is in the works. Currently, Michigan-based **Detroit Electric** is supplying Geely with electric motors for automobiles sold primarily in China.

Volvo XC40: Is a Geely version coming?

2017 Ford Expedition

An aluminum Expedition?

Ford announced to investors last week that it plans to introduce a lighter **aluminum Expedition** next year as a 2018 model. The Expedition is Ford's largest truck-based, off-road sport ute, and while gas is cheap and buyers are scooping up SUVs and trucks with little regard for mileage, Ford seems to be betting that situation won't last. It will switch the 2018 Expedition to the aluminum construction used in the new **F-150** (whose platform the Expedition uses), which will reduce the nine-passenger vehicle's weight and increase its mileage. The SUV's last refresh already replaced its previous V8 engine for the more economical turbocharged EcoBoost V6. Though it looks like federal mpg standards for the industry will be scaled downward, Ford is no doubt encouarged by the fact that buyers have been reacting well to the new aluminum F-150, whose introduction was once considered controversial. With competitors like the **Tahoe** and **Suburban** outstripping Expedition sales, Ford's also hoping to work a little of that aluminum magic on its own full-size.

2017 Chevrolet Bolt EV

Will Chevy break through with the all-electric Bolt?

We think it's no coincidence that Chevrolet is introducing its low-price, high-range **2017 Bolt all-electric** far ahead of Tesla's proposed Model 3.

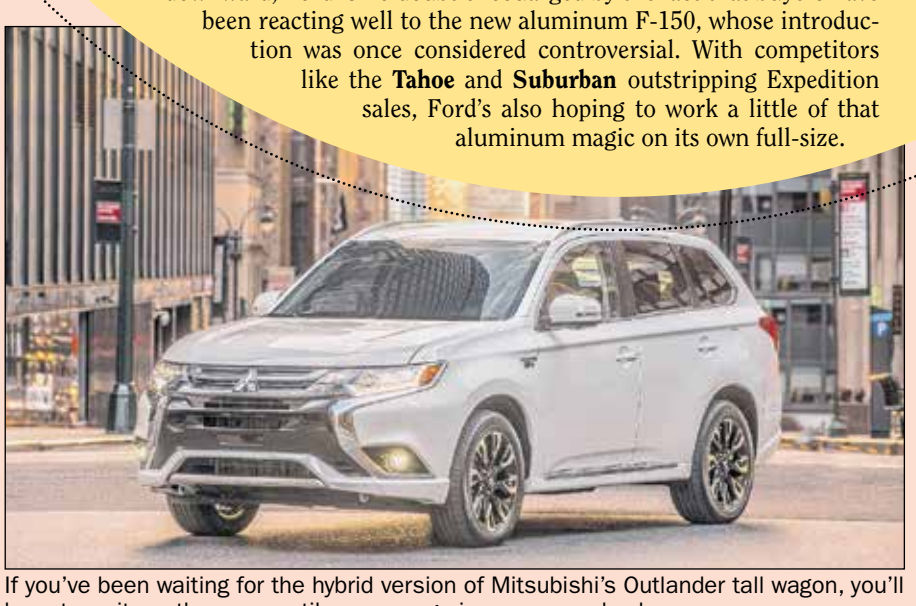
Chevy is alread bragging that its compact EV is more affordable ($33,200) than the Model 3 ($35,000), and has a longer EPA-certified range (238 miles) than the Nissan Leaf, Ford Focus electric and Volswagen e-Golf. (Chevy's larger Volt with a v is battery-powered with an auxilary gas engine.)

But back to the Tesla Model 3: Chevy would like nothing else but to upseat the standard in cool electric cars. Not to mention establish market dominance in that segment the way Toyota did a generation ago with the Prius.

However, getting an edge on the competition is one thing. But will all that be enough to finally sell a mainstream electric to the general market?

That remains to be seen. With gas at historically cheap levels, is the timing right to convince large portions of the market to make their next car an EV? Is 238 (miles) the magic number to assuage rangephobia? And, to paraphrase Bob Barker, is the price right? Only time will tell.

The Bolt will be built in Orion Township (north of Detroit), Michigan, and hit showrooms by the end of the year.



If you've been waiting for the hybrid version of Mitsubishi's Outlander tall wagon, you'll have to wait another year until some range issues are solved.

Outlander PHEV delayed... again

The oft-delayed plug-in hybrid version of the **Mitsubishi Outlander** tall wagon has again been put off. Officially, the PHEV, which is currently on sale in Europe, is not quite ready for its U.S. and Canada debut.

But word is that the wagon's fuel-economy numbers and the maximum distance that it can operate with only the electric motor aren't where Mitsubishi wants them for spacious North America. These issues are expected to be fixed by the third quarter of 2017, leaving fans of the seven-passenger Outlander no choice but to go with gasoline four-cylinder or V-6 editions in the meantime.

TEST DRIVE

2017 VW Golf Alltrack

Continued from page 1

interior's appearance noticeably. Soft-touch surfaces and a polished fit and finish add an upscale touch. HVAC controls are managed by a straight forward, three rheostat layout.

Most other features are accessed via the MIB II infotainment system, and its 6½-inch touchscreen. This is the portal to VW's Car-Net telematics bundle of connectivity, convenience and diagnostic functions. Smartphone integration is available on three platforms — Android Auto, Apple CarPlay and MirroLink — with multiple media input sources (USB, auxiliary and SD card ports, as well as Bluetooth). The touchscreen also hosts the standard, rearview camera. Other music options include SiriusXM Satellite Radio and HD Radio.

Dimensionally, Alltrack's interior mirrors SportWagen. Front seats have enough travel to accommodate even those well over six feet tall. With a little compromise on front seat pushback, there's enough room left to fit six-footers (snugly) in back as well. Cargo capacity ranges from 30.4-66.5 cubic feet. The cargo floor is usably wide, lift over height to the cargo bay and the roof rails is comfortably low. Rear seatbacks fold nearly (but not fully) flat. A panoramic moon roof is standard on mid and top level (SE, SL) cars. It has a fixed, rear section and wide-opening front half, and its size (twice that of Outback) lends a spacious vibe to the cabin.

Alltrack's on road handling was hard to distinguish from SportWagen, which is to say enjoyably agile, in a way that few crossovers or wagons can match. Even with a slightly raised ride height, there's still a car-like feel here and nicely weighted steering. The vast majority of drivers use all-wheel-drive to combat wintry road conditions, and the VW system is certainly equipped for the task. Power is apportioned 90 percent/10 percent f/r under normal conditions, but shifts to as much as 50/50 as needed to maintain grip.

My Alltrack test covered the gamut of driving life: big city grid lock, high speed highways, winding byways and some trail bashing to boot. The off-road portion included a couple of passes at a trail that ranged from light to occasionally moderate difficulty. My guess is that 95+ percent of Alltrack drivers will never attempt anything as rugged as this, and Alltrack handled it easily, on regular street tread. Alltrack's ground clearance is 6.9 inch. That's 1.4 inch more than the SportWagen, but 1.8 inch less than the crossover comparable, Subaru Outback. The Driving Mode Selector includes an Off Road setting, which adjusts throttle response, ABS and traction control for trail conditions. It also activates the hill descent function, which allows drivers to traverse downhill sections at a safe, steady speed, without need to work the pedals.

As it enters the onramp to this segment, one of the prime vehicles in Alltrack's path is the Subaru Outback — a well-regarded veteran in this space. While they will share the same market space, the cars are at least as different as they are alike. Outback has the edge in measurables like ground clearance, leg room, cargo and towing capacity. Alltrack's advantages lie in its drivetrains, driving dynamics and interior features (e.g. smartphone integration, panoramic moonroof). Outback is taller and more trail worthy, Alltrack is lower and lighter on its feet.

It feels like a German sport sedan, with the bonus of added cargo room, and winter-friendly all-wheel-drive.

The Alltrack's cabin departs from the subdued, status quo of most German cars, tweaked with V-Tex leatherette upholstery, heated front seats and side mirrors, and a leather-wrapped, multifunction wheel.

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 neweek's Test Drive:
2017 Nissan Maxima