

Ford enters the self-driving race

Every automaker, it seems, is running flat-out to develop its own autonomous/self-driving vehicle. So it came as no surprise to us that the **Ford Motor Company** says it will have a mass-produced self-driver ready to roll in the year 2021.

However before you run down to the nearest Blue Oval dealer with your deposit, Ford CEO Mark Fields says the vehicle will initially be available “specifically for commercial mobility services.” Presumably that means ride-hailing companies such as Uber will get first crack. Also according to Fields, Ford’s autonomous car won’t come with a steering wheel or control pedals of any kind.

In other words, you’ll summon the driverless Ford on your smart phone, type in (or voice) your destination coordinates and simply sit back watch the scenery go by. Sounds absolutely boring.



First Shelby Cobra sets record

The Late Carroll Shelby’s first **1962 Cobra** that blended a British AC Ace body and chassis with a Ford V-8 recently sold for **\$13.75 million**, including auction fees, by RM Sotheby’s in California. The price surpassed the previous record for an American car (a 1968 Ford GT40) by \$2.75 million, making it the most expensive American car ever sold at action. The unrestored prototype is the first assembled by Carroll and crew. The car was originally painted a different color each time it was loaned out to various auto magazines to give the impression that Shelby’s fledgling company was actually producing more cars. Chassis number CSX2000 ended up the trademark blue color, and has never been repainted since. We’re sure the new owner will leave well enough alone, too. As an added bonus for all that money, the lucky buyer gets to know this was the car that Carroll Shelby personally kept until his death in 2012.



Deja new: The 2017 Dodge Challenger T/A will come in both 375 or 485 hp variants.

Dodge resurrects two blasts from the past

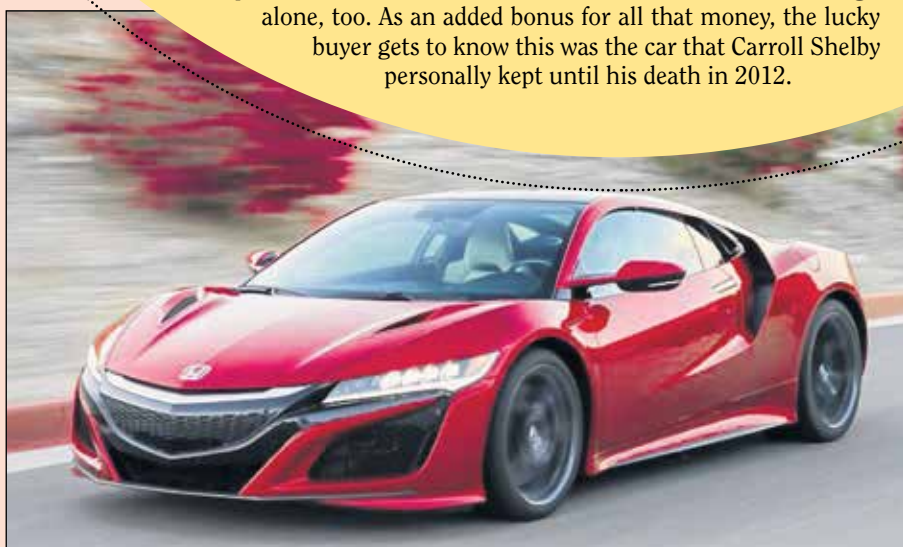
The neat thing about so-called pony cars — specifically the **Ford Mustang**, **Chevrolet Camaro** and **Dodge Challenger** — is that there is practically no end to each car’s performance-charged heritage. Case in point are the 2017 Dodge Challenger and Charger. Specifically, we hear that the Challenger will be available in special **T/A** (named for the 1970 Trans Am road race series) livery, while the four-door Charger can be had in a new **Daytona** model, minus the tall rear wing that came on the 1969 original.

Each car comes with a lowered ride height, special exhaust and a 375-horsepower 5.7-liter “Hemi” V-8, or the optional 485-horsepower 6.4-liter V-8 that makes 485 horsepower. A six-speed manual transmission can be had in the Challenger, while only an eight-speed automatic (optional for the Challenger T/A) feeds power to the rear wheels in the Charger.



2017 Dodge Charger Daytona

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The proposed Honda ZSX: Like an Acura NSX you can afford. If you’ve got \$80,000.

A mid-engine Honda hybrid?

That’s what insiders are saying. Not only that, they’re telling us the car will be called the **Honda ZSX** and could be revealed as early as January at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, Mich.

Word is that the car will be far less complex than the latest all-wheel-drive gasoline-electric-powered **Acura NSX** (from Honda’s upscale brand) and will make considerably less than the NSX’s 573 net horsepower (somewhere in the 300 and 400 horses is likely). And because it will use a turbocharged four-cylinder gas engine paired with a single electric motor sending torque to the rear wheels instead of the NSX’s 3.5-liter V-6 plus three motors turning all four wheels, the ZSX should be far less expensive (by close to half, say some) than the NSX’s \$155,000 base price.

TEST DRIVE

2017 Toyota Prius Prime

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efficiency numbers. City/Highway/Combined fuel economy is rated at 55/53/54, with a cruising range of 640 miles, and an MPGe rating of 133. Lofty numbers they are, and I replicated the EV range in my test drive and posted low 50’s mileage. The system transitions smoothly from electric to gas power. EV mode driving is silent. Gas engine noise is noticeable when, for example, pushing hard on a grade. But the sound seems amplified in contrast with the golf cart quiet of driving in EV mode.

Like the liftback, Prius Prime is about a high 9-second car, from 0-60. That won’t win you any drag races, but the ‘round town, 0-30 response is fine. High-demand situations like highway on-ramps or passing are where the lack of thrust comes to the fore. Drivers learn what the limits are, and how to stay within the boundaries. Prime takes less than 5½ hours to completely recharge its batteries, plugged into any 120 volt outlet. With a 240 volt hookup, you’re topped up in 2 hours, 10 minutes.

The Prius plug-in shares the same TGNA chassis that the redesigned liftback sported in its debut last fall. It’s not a

sports car, to be sure, but it feels far more agile than past hybrids, willingly winding through curvy stretches. Ride quality feels acceptably smooth, and despite their multitasking obligations (providing regenerative power), the brakes have a normal pedal feel.

Like other Priuses (or is it Priui?) Prime forgoes the traditional (dash cluster behind the steering wheel) design. A thin binnacle stretches across the dash top, housing the electronic instrument cluster. Contents of the twin, 4.2-inch color display displays can be programmed via steering wheel embedded controls.

The speedometer is left of center on the instrument cluster, but I still miss having a straight-ahead speed reading. Base models get a 7-inch touchscreen and a separate bank of HVAC controls below. Mid- and top-level cars have a more screen-centric cabin, with a tablet-sized touchscreen. The vertical, 11.6-inch screen also absorbs the HVAC controls. A navigation system is standard on all trim levels.

The standard multimedia bundle on base cars includes AM/FM/CD player, six speakers, auxiliary audio jack, USB 2.0 port with iPod connectivity and control,



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advanced voice recognition, hands-free phone capability, music streaming via Bluetooth wireless technology, and Siri Eyes Free. The premium JBL sound system included on top level models is exceptional and will improve your commute mood. Toyota Safety Sense “P” — a package of driver assistance technologies — is standard on all models. Included in the package are: Pre-collision System with Pedestrian Detection, Lane Departure Alert with Steering Assist, Automatic High Beams and Full-Speed Dynamic Radar Cruise Control.

The car’s shallow backlight cuts down on straight back visibility, and deploying the pull-out cargo bay screen further hinders rear visibility. The standard rear view camera helps fill in the gaps. Rear blind spot monitoring (bundled with rear cross-traffic alert) is helpful, though only available on the highest level model.

The interior seats six-footers in front and back. Increased sound insulation makes this generation of Prius quieter

than previous versions. Rear seatbacks fold forward to add storage space (front seats may need to be moved for headrest clearance). Reductions in the size of the charging system allowed more room for storage. However, the plug-in’s additional batteries reduce cargo capacity relative to the liftback (19.8 cu. ft. vs. 24.6) and add weight (Prime is about 300 lb. heavier). The load floor is higher than the liftback, and it’s not level.

The second generation plug-in joins the dominant brand in the hybrid market. Toyota-Lexus account for 70 percent of the sales in this segment. The new Prius Prime is available in three trim levels: Prime Plus (MSRP: \$27,100), Prime Premium (\$28,800) and Prime Advanced (\$33,100). Prospective buyers can also factor in the available, \$4,500 tax credit.

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.

