

Is progress leaving us stranded?

We've always felt uncomfortable with cars that replace the traditional spare tire with run-flats or pressurized fix-on-the-fly repair kits. We're also a bit nervous driving vehicles with keyless push-button starters.

Now the American Automobile Association (AAA) is reporting a spike in service calls related to run-flats, inflators and people driving off without their key fobs. It turns out that inflators don't always work well, especially when the puncture is in the tire's sidewall and run-flats can also leave you stranded.

As for keyless ignitions, it's easy to be stranded if you happen to move the key fob somewhere else outside the vehicle after the vehicle is running. If you then drive off and don't notice, you won't be able to restart car since they key fob isn't present. Not the position to be in after driving for a couple of hours.



At 550 h.p., Porsche's wagon prototype of the Panamera isn't meant for hauling groceries.

A more practical Porsche?

The German automaker debuted the second-generation four-door **Panamera** last summer, but rumor is it will show off a **wagon prototype** at the 2017 Geneva Auto Show next March. That scuttlebutt would corroborate earlier reports of the wagon version being readied for a 2018 release. There have also been sightings of a Panamera prototype with a lengthened roof at the famed Nurburgring testing track.

Wagons are the rage right now, but if the Panamera version sees production, the only competition for an upscale performance wagon would be the **Mercedes-Benz E-Class** wagon, only available in Europe as the E400, but expected soon as an



2017 Mercedes-Benz E400 wagon

AMG E63 performance version. Even so, the E400 isn't the kind of sleek, shooting brake profile offered by the **Audi RS 6 Avant** or the aptly-named Mercedes-Benz CLS Shooting Brake (both Europe only).

As for competition, the the E400's 329 h.p. twin turbo V6 would face the the current Panamera's 440 h.p. V6, or the 462 h.p. hybrid version, or the 550 h.p. of the Panamera's V8 option. But you get the idea. Practical, indeed.



A rendering of what a revamped 2018 Accord might look like. If so, Honda would be following the faux fastback lead of the Ford Fusion (below) and Chevy Malibu.

Honda takes the fastback lane

The Japan-based automaker is one of the top players in the mid-size-sedan wars with the nicely turned-out **Honda Accord**. It's also hard at work developing the next-generation four-door that will debut in late 2017 for the 2018 model year.



2017 Ford Fusion

Honda is usually pretty hush-hush when it comes to future models, but our intelligence points to a less-con-

servative looking Accord coming our way. Along with a more exciting grille, Honda is adopting a slanted fastback roofline that isn't that dissimilar to the ones penned for the Chrysler 200, Ford Fusion and Chevrolet Malibu.

As for power, rumor has it that a turbocharged 1.5-liter four-cylinder and non-turbo 2.0-liter I-4 from the Honda Civic will be used, but will make a bit more power. There's some talk that Honda's excellent V-6 will be dropped, or perhaps available only on the Accord coupe.

More Mexican Tacomas

Here's a few Mexican immigrants even Donald Trump won't turn away. There's going to be a lot more **Toyota Tacoma** pickups entering the U.S. after Toyota finishes a \$150 million expansion of its **assembly plant in Tijuana, Mexico**. Starting in late 2017 or early 2018, that should boost production from 100,000 units to 160,000 annually.

While the Tacoma's dominance of the U.S. midsize pickup market has increased 21 percent last year, the move is seen as an attempt to stave off competition from GM, whose well-received **Chevrolet Colorado** and **GMC Canyon** returned to the market last year, not to mention from the resuscitated **Honda Ridgeline**. It's a competitive segment, with the **Nissan Frontier** up 45 percent in sales and the planned return of the **Ford Ranger**.



TEST DRIVE

2017 Nissan Maxima

Continued from page 1
aluminum rims. The seats are charcoal leather/Alcantara, with five available body colors (red, blue, silver, white and, yes, black).

Maxima can hold adults front and rear in comfort, though its rear seat legroom trails class competitors like the Acura TLX, Hyundai Azera and Toyota Avalon. Trunk room measures 14.3 cubic feet, which is more than TLX (13.2), but less than Azera (16.3) or Avalon (16.0).

Maxima's monospec powertrain pairs a 3.5L V6 engine with a Continuously Variable Transmission. The six is quite smooth and quick (low 6 second range from 0-60). The V6 power output (300

horsepower, 261 lb.-ft. of torque) holds the edge over segment competitors TLX (206/182), Avalon (268/248) and Azera (293/255). EPA mileage estimates are 21 city, 30 highway, 25 combined for the front-wheel-drive midsize; there is no AWD model. Maxima's mileage is on par with Avalon and Azera, and trails TLX (24/35).

Continuously Variable Transmissions, in their earlier iterations, tended to linger at the speed that most efficiently put power to pavement. At certain rpm's, this led to a droning effect that many found unpleasant. The latest generation of Nissan's CVTs are programmed with seven simulated gear ratios, to electronically simulate shift points, which effectively

MAXIMA'S FULL LINE-UP STRETCHES FIVE MODELS WIDE.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER

TEST DRIVE
this vehicle at these preferred dealerships:

LIA NISSAN 2233 Central Ave., Schenectady, NY 12304
518-579-2000 www.lianissanschenectady.com

LIA NISSAN OF GLENS FALLS 373 Dix Ave., Queensbury, NY 12804
518-681-3800 www.lianissangf.com

LIA NISSAN OF SARATOGA 2906 Route 9 Malta, NY 12020
518-633-1133 www.lianissansaratoga.com



tamps down the buzzing.

Maxima's suspension combines an independent front strut and coil with an independent, double-wishbone rear setup. A Drive Mode selector on the center console offers the choice of Normal or Sport settings.

On the street, I found it hard to detect much difference in steering or suspension between the two. In normal mode, Maxima feels reasonably agile, with an enjoyably smooth ride that, I suspect, would suit the majority of its buyers. Judging from its standard equipment (specially tuned suspension, available summer performance tires, paddle

shifters, active trace control and active braking), the SR model figures to be the sportiest (and stiffest) Maxima.

The full lineup for year two of Generation 8 in Nissan's Maxima stretches five models wide: S (MSRP: \$32,560), SV (\$34,540), SL (\$37,040), SR (\$37,820), and Platinum (\$39,990). To these numbers, add a destination charge of \$835.

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.