

Farewell Brock

We were saddened to hear about the recent death of **Brock Yates** from complications of Alzheimer's Disease at age 82. Yates was a long-time writer for *Car and Driver* magazine as well as an author of numerous auto-related books. He was also a screenwriter of a couple of films, the most well-known of which was "Cannonball Run" that starred Burt Reynolds and was directed by Hollywood stuntman Hal Needham. In a 1968 article entitled "The Grosse Pointe Myopians," Yates fearlessly predicted the decline of the North American auto industry and the rise of Japan-based imports. He was derided for his opinion by a number of auto executives who worked for domestic-based automakers, but as it turned out he was right on the money.



Brock Yates

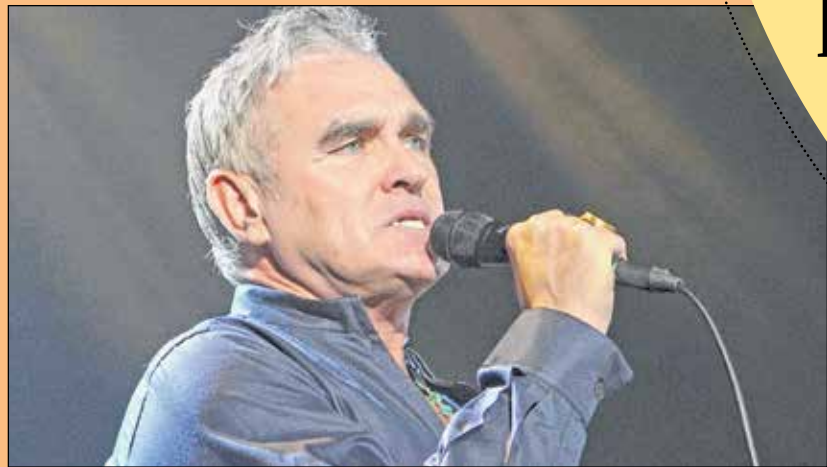
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Is this a glimpse of what a resurrected Ford Bronco might look like? We may have to wait until 2020 to find out.



Bronco, Ranger to return?

News is that **Ford** will bring back two of its more popular trucks from the past: the **Bronco** sport utility vehicle and the **Ranger** pickup. Both Ford and UAW Local 900 chairman Bill Johnson have confirmed that the sixth-generation 2020 Ford Bronco is scheduled to be built at the Ford plant in Wayne, Michigan. (Language in the recent UAW contract suggested as much, but now it's official.) A **Bronco concept** was floated in 2004, but some rumors have design being headed by Ford Australia, possibly based on the Aussie-only **Everest** SUV. Either way, it's likely the new Bronco will employ the Ranger's ladder frame. Speculation has it that the **Ranger**, which is expected for the 2018 model year, will grow from compact to mid-size so it can compete with Chevrolet Colorado, GMC Canyon and new Nissan Frontier. It could also resemble the current Ranger that's available in Europe, Africa and South America.



British singer (and vegan promoter) Morrissey suggests GM offer a vegan leather interior.

Morrissey to GM: Go vegan

If you recall the '80s at all, you remember Smiths' lead singer **Morrissey** wearing his heart on his sleeve to an almost cringe-worthy extent. Still pumping out the hits in Britain and currently on a U.S. tour, Morrissey (that's it, just Morrissey... like Cher) recently penned an open letter to **General Motors** CEO Mary Barra urging the automaker to begin offering vegan (non-animal based) leather upholstery in its vehicles.



Will Mary Barra heed Morrissey's advice and offer a vegan Chevy Bolt?

Morrissey — who sang on the Smiths' album 1985 album "Meat is Murder" and was interviewed last year by Larry King on his commitment to being vegan — specifically suggested that Chevy's electric **Bolt** and **Volt** models offer faux-leather upholstery, steering wheels and gear shifts. "More and more people are opting for vegan leather for the sake of both cows and the environment," Morrissey wrote

before playing the Royal Oak Music Theatre in Detroit. These peach-colored pages say: It's not as crazy an idea as it sounds. With carmakers eager to entice Millennials with the latest Internet-connected goodies, why not tempt them with a little low-tech moral goodness? And electric models usually attract a more eco-conscious buyer, anyway. GM wouldn't be the first. Boutique electric automaker **Tesla** already offers an all-vegan Ultra White interior option in its Model X SUV, a feature said to be a preference of CEO Elon Musk. For the present, GM only offers animal-product leather in its interiors, but we'll wait for Mary Barra's response to see if that changes.



The Ram TRX concept was unveiled last October at the Texas State Fair in Dallas, of course.

New Ram could challenge Raptor

That's how we see it after scoping out the **Ram TRX**. The 4x4 concept truck debuted last October at the Texas State Fair has a lifted body, massive skid plates and serious off-road rubber, and appears ready to challenge any type of terrain imaginable. A supercharged 6.2-liter V-8 "Hemi" engine rated at 575 horsepower has been specifically designed for torturous driving. It's hooked up to an eight-speed automatic transmission with paddle shifters. The powerplant's overall height also necessitated the design of a special hood. Although the Ram TRX is referred to as a concept, the **Ford Raptor's** popularity along with rumors that the toughened-up **Nissan Titan Warrior** show truck might actually be production-bound makes the Dodge likely to wind up in dealer showrooms.

TEST DRIVE

2017 Mazda3 Grand Touring

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Chassis tuning is has a definite, sporty bent. The Mazda3 eagerly takes to curvy roads, and steering is precise, if a little light. Mazda's G-Vectoring Control system is now standard issue on all 3s. The system adjusts engine torque as you enter a corner, to optimize turn-in response and minimize steering corrections. If you were able to test two cars on a track, back to back, with/without the system, the difference might be detectable. Without that frame of reference, it isn't.

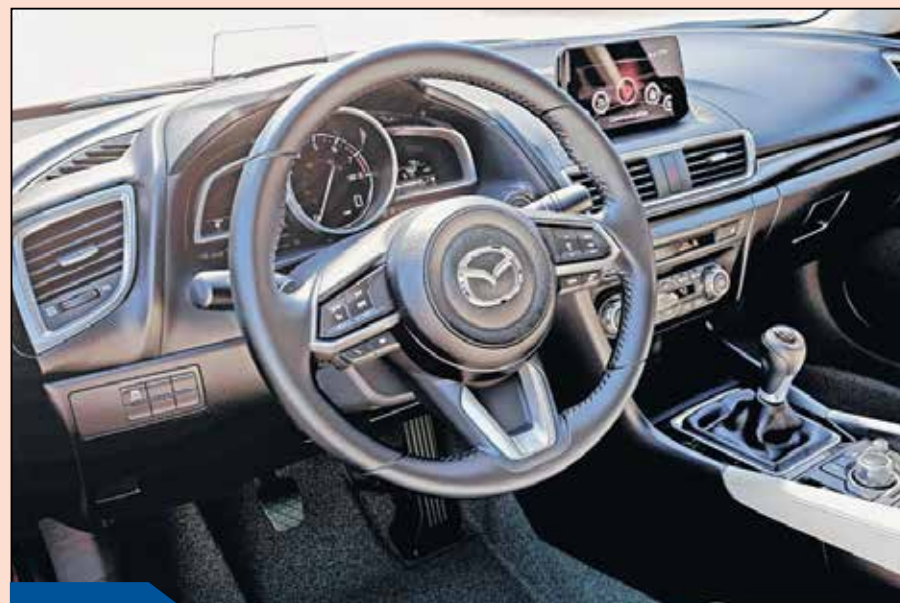
Sport trim models have 16-inch rims and tires and figure to be the smoothest riding of all Mazda3s. All trims above Sport trade their 16s for 18s. The improvement in looks/handling comes with a ride/handling giveback. On smooth pavement, the ride is likewise. But, as road imperfections arise, ride quality gets a little stiff and jittery, and potholes produce impact harshness. My impression

is that most enthusiasts will happily take the trade-off. My suggestion is to include both smooth and bumpy roads in your test drive, and see what you think.

Trunk room is 12.4 cubic feet, which lags behind class competitors like Focus, Corolla, Civic or Jetta. If more is better for you when it comes to stuff space, also consider that the cargo capacity of the Mazda3 five-door hatchback ranges from 20.2 - 47.1 cubic feet. The rear seatbacks in the four-door fold forward to allow for longer/larger items, but you may first have to push the front seatbacks out of the way — an inconvenience.

Moving from the trunk to the back seat, six-footers will be a tight squeeze behind like-size people in front. The Mazda3's 35.8 inches of rear seat leg room is more than Focus, less than Civic (37.4 inches), Jetta (38.1 inches) or Corolla (41.4 inches).

The front cabin shows well and controls are arranged logically. A rearview



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camera is standard on all models. Most controls are accessed through either the 7-inch display in mid-center stack, or the knurled knob on the console. In an industry filled with over-engineered interfaces, Mazda scores points for a better (simpler) than average design.

Inside updates for 2017 on Grand Touring cars include perforated leather trimmed seats, and a revised dash display, with analog tachometer and digital speedometer. GTs also get a color head-up display unit that gets a thumbs-

up, for its clean layout. In addition to the typical speed readout, you can display other priority information, like blind spot monitoring. The screen's windshield location makes for minimal distractions. You can get the information you need with only the slightest aversion of your eyes from the road.

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.



» Don't miss next week's Test Drive:
2017 Honda Accord Hybrid

