

Sedan body count: 3

Anyone looking to buy a **2017 Buick Verano** or **Chrysler 200** sedan had better act quickly. Both four-door models have quietly ended production, although they will still be around for a bit longer, until supplies are exhausted. Preceding their retirement is the **Dodge Dart** that failed to answer the bell for the 2017 model year, however unsold 2016 remainders might still be available on dealer lots.



2017 Buick Verano

Along with this trio, we're hearing that there could be other sedans circling the drain.

The main reason for their apparent demise is a shift in buyer preference toward utility vehicles, which are more versatile in their passenger and cargo capabilities and, when equipped with all-wheel-drive, more capable in bad weather and over rough and slippery roads.



The '18 Mustang loses base V-6

It appears that, in updating the venerable pony car for 2018, Ford will be using its turbo-charged 2.3-liter, **four-cylinder EcoBoost** for the entry-level Mustang, replacing the current V-6 engine that has been a mainstay for decades. Though specific performance stats have not been released, Ford claims the EcoBoost engine is even more powerful than the outgoing V-6. Ford also said that the new Mustang's dash will get a digital instrument cluster similar to the one found in the Ford GT supercar, with multiple view modes and customization options. A nice plus, seeing as how the GT goes for \$400,00+.

Those opting for the **Mustang GT** will get the option of an upgraded five-liter V-8, as well as a twin-disc clutch in the six-speed manual and an automatic transmission with steering wheel-mounted paddles for manual control.

In terms of fuel economy and 0 to 60 times, Ford claims that the automatic will outperform the manual version. The GT will also come with the MagneRide suspension found in the Mustang Shelby GT350.



LOOK, MA. NO DRIVER. In one of its last moves, the previous presidential administration selected 10 official sites for autonomous vehicle testing.

Self-driving testing sites chosen

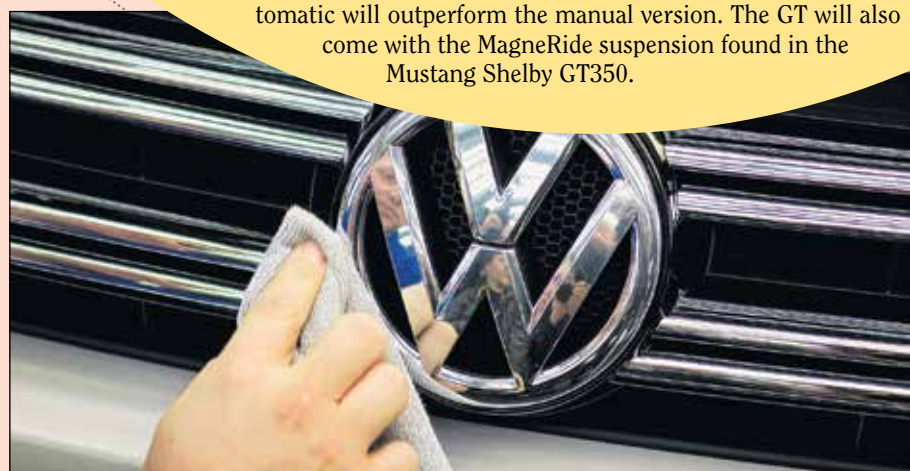
While others debate about President Obama's legacy, we think we may have one decision future generations will look back on.

In one Obama's last decisions as a resident of the Oval Office, he oversaw the U.S. Department of Transportation's choice of 10 sites where testing for autonomous vehicles will be officially conducted. Before outgoing Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx packed up his stuff, he'd sifted through more than 60 applicants for testing sites to choose the final 10. Among other factors, those sites were selected based on their safety planning and information-sharing capabilities.

Those selected include Pennsylvania's Thomas D. Larson Pennsylvania Transportation Institute; Michigan's American Center for Mobility (ACM) at Willow Run; the Texas AV Proving Grounds Partnership; Maryland's U.S. Army Aberdeen Test Center; California's Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA) & GoMentum Station, and San Diego Association of Governments; the Iowa City Area Development Group; University of Wisconsin-Madison; Central Florida Automated Vehicle Partners; and the North Carolina Turnpike Authority.

In its final days, the Obama administration's DOT also proposed a rule requiring all automakers to have vehicle-to-vehicle (V2V) communications abilities in all their vehicles by 2021. V2V allows self-driving cars to sense the presence of transportation infrastructure (that is, stop signs and traffic lights) as well as interact with other vehicles on the road. It's estimated that installing such technology will cost \$350 per vehicle.

We'll have to wait to see what new Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao does with these decisions.



Finishing touches at the Volkswagen plant in Wolfsburg, Germany. VW has surpassed Toyota last year to become the planet's number one seller of vehicles.

Do cheaters win?

Not all that long after it was caught installing software to allow its diesel cars to cheat on emissions tests, **Volkswagen** has emerged as the **world's largest auto seller**, beating out perennial top-spot holder **Toyota** by more than 150,000 vehicles last year.

Though demand was down in the U.S. by double digits, VW saw a 3.8 percent increase worldwide. Overall, 10.31 million units were sold from the Volkswagen Group's wide portfolio that includes everything from budget (Spanish brand Seat, Czech-made Skoda) to budget-busting (Bentley, Bugati). VW also wholly owns Audi and Porsche.

Toyota sold 10.18 million vehicles in 2016, a 0.2 percent year-over-year increase. It overtook General Motors in 2009, and since then has only missed the top spot once.

It's vindication of sorts for former VW CEO Martin Winterkorn, who was forced to step down in late 2015 after the diesel cheating scandal broke. Before that, Winterkorn had set goals for his company to become the global sales leader by 2018.

New CEO Matthias Mueller has made a greater priority on improving corporate ethics than sheer sales. But hey, when you're number one, you can only go down.

TEST DRIVE

2017 Jeep Wrangler

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gearbox. Five gears in an automatic transmission is a little dated and leads the Wrangler to rev higher than average at higher speeds. The 3.6L's ample torque is most obvious at the slow crawl pace that off-roading is all about.

Maximum towing capacity is 2,000 lb. in Wrangler; 3,500 lb. in Unlimited. Fuel economy is not a strong suit, and the 16 miles per gallon that I averaged is in line with EPA estimates (17/21).

Wrangler is offered with two four-wheel drive systems. Both are part-time, as opposed to the full-time, on-demand setups commonly seen in crossovers. The driver manually switches the transfer case out of 2WD High into 4WD Low or 4WD High when facing loosed, off-road surfaces like dirt, rocks and gravel. The system is happy to handle wet, sloppy conditions like mud and snow, but you

have to revert to 2WD High for "normal" driving on dry, smooth surfaces.

The laundry list of trail bashing options is comprehensive: 4x4 systems, axles, axle ratios, differentials, disconnecting front sway bars, tire/wheel packages, tow hooks, skid plates, side steps, rock rails, etc. Ground clearance is 9.7 inches on Sahara, with angles of approach/ breakover/ descent of 41.7 (impressive)/25.1/31.8 degrees, respectively. Rubicon and Sport (with optional suspension) have better clearance, Sport (normal suspension) is a little less. So, off-road, Wrangler can be as bad as you want to be.

On road, driving dynamics are a compromise for a vehicle that would really rather be driving in the dirt. Wrangler's short wheelbase, stiff suspension and tall-in-the-saddle ride height make for an active driver. Ride quality can be a little jittery/bouncy, cornering is confident —



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER

TEST DRIVE
this vehicle at these preferred dealerships:

ARMORY CHRYSLER DODGE JEEP RAM SRT FIAT
926 Central Ave., Albany, NY 12206
518-641-7777 www.armoryauto.com

GOLDSTEIN CHRYSLER JEEP DODGE RAM
613 Loudon Rd., Latham, NY 12110
518-785-4156 www.goldsteinchryslerjeep.net

LIA CHRYSLER JEEP DODGE RAM
2116 Central Ave., Schenectady, NY 12304
518-579-3300 www.liachryslerdodgejeep.com

when kept to modest speeds.

Two-door versions are the way to go, if you want to drive a Wrangler where it's at its best (off-road). Four door Unlimiteds are more practical for most people, adding room but not subtracting the adventuresome Jeep vibe. The sales numbers bear this out. Unlimited models

joined the lineup in 2007. Of the 191,774 Wranglers sold last year, 81 percent were four-doors.

A regular contributor to the Times Union for more than 25 years, Dan Lyons is the award-winning author of six books, and photographer of 180 calendars.

Don't miss next week's Test Drive:
2017 Dodge Challenger GT

