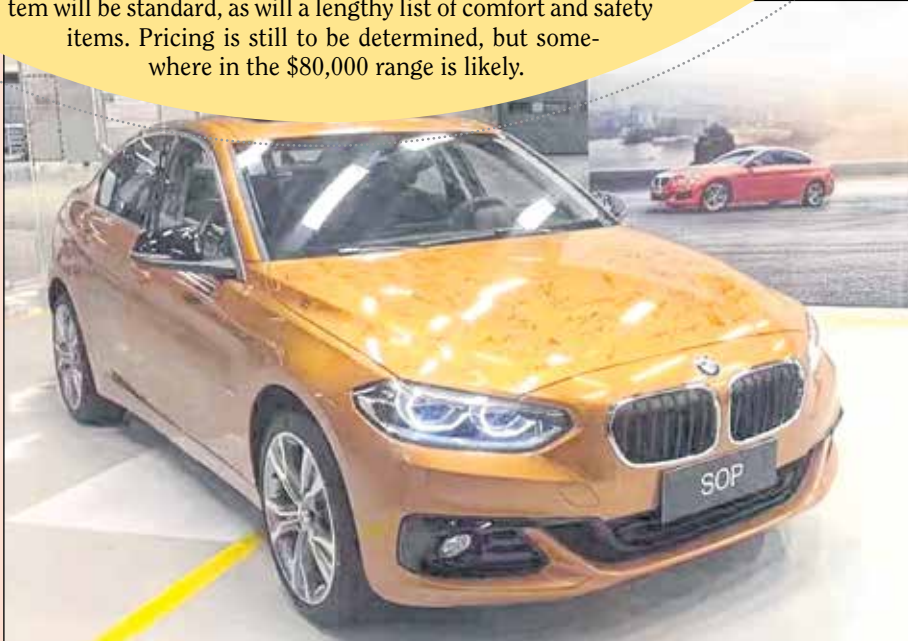


The new **Audi Q8** SUV will have a sloped roof, not unlike German rivals Mercedes-Benz GLE (left) or BMW X6 (right).



Audi’s new Q8 fastback

These peach-colored pages hear that Audi is planning an all-out assault on the premium four-door utility “coupe” category that’s currently dominated by the BMW X6 and Mercedes-Benz GLE. The four-passenger **Audi Q8** that’s due out for the 2018 model year will come with an aggressive-looking — as in menacing — grille flanked by oversized air intakes that should scare anyone noticing a rearview mirror full of Q8 closing in on them. Backing up the look will likely be Audi’s 333-horsepower supercharged V-6 or possibly even a turbocharged V-8 with 450 horsepower. Of course, Audi’s Quattro all-wheel-drive system will be standard, as will a lengthy list of comfort and safety items. Pricing is still to be determined, but somewhere in the \$80,000 range is likely.



This China-made BMW 1 series was unveiled at last November’s 2016 Guangzhou Auto Show. An affordable BMW 1 series sedan would likely bring in new buyers to the brand.

BMW 1 series: For China only?

The German automaker announced that it would manufacture a new **BMW 1 series** base sedan in China with assistance from its partner Brilliance Auto. And then sell it only in China. But although BMW says that this 1 series is strictly for the burgeoning Chinese market, we have no doubt that the North American dealer network will be begging to be able to put it their showrooms, and sales sheets. The small front- and all-wheel-drive, four-door car that’s being built on the same platform as the current crop of Mini-brand vehicles would give buyers access to BMW at a more affordable price than the current base 3 series, which starts at around \$34,000. As with the Mini, an all-turbocharged three- and four-cylinder engine lineup is available in the 1 series. If it makes it, 2018 seems most likely.

TEST DRIVE

2017 Volkswagen Passat

Continued from page 3
infotainment system is standard on all Passats. It includes VW’s CarNet App-Connect technology and USB connectivity, and supports the Apple CarPlay, Google Android Auto and MirrorLink connected car systems. App-Connect (part of CarNet) makes it easy to sync your phone with the car, and the system responds well to voice commands. Passat’s two-motor menu starts with VW’s 1.8-liter, turbocharged four-cylinder, rated at 170 horsepower and 184 lb. ft. of torque. It’s paired with a six-speed automatic transmission. The 1.8L is used on a variety of VWs and I enjoy its wide power band and refined feel. It’s sufficiently responsive (I would guess mid-to-high seven second range from

0-60) and particularly quick off the line, in a way that small fours often aren’t. Fuel economy is estimated at 23 city/34 highway/27 combined, which is on par with its peer group. Many of the mainstay models in the midsize class (Accord, Camry, Altima, Fusion) offer a six-cylinder step-up option from the base four. So too does VW, with the 3.6-liter VR6 engine. The six is matched with an up-graded transmission and makes a healthy, 280 h.p. and 258 lb. ft. of torque. It’s about two seconds faster from 0-60 than the four, and fuel economy is estimated at 20 mpg city, 28 highway. The dual clutch transmission offers the option of responsive “manumatic” shifting via steering wheel paddles (SEL Premium only). The VR6 is an Auto-




The 2017 Passat has a refined looking cabin, understated in the Germanic tradition, but well crafted with polished gray-color, faux wood trim. The deck of HVAC controls on the center stack are simple to use and minimally distracting. The 6.3-inch display, however, competes with the near-tablet sized dimensions in some newer vehicles.

bahn burner, and if you opt in, I can’t blame you. But the four is more than enough engine for most anyone. Missing (and missed) from the under hood offerings is VW’s 2.0L TDI. The turbo diesel is expected to return to the lineup, once the regulatory issues with the engine’s emissions control have been resolved. This generation of Passat is front-wheel-drive with no AWD option. No changes were made to chassis or suspension this year. While handling in

these seventh generation models isn’t as responsive as in the smaller versions that preceded them, the car nonetheless strikes a fine balance between comfort and cornering chops. Ride quality is supple, and if you get the urge to carve a curve or two, the Passat responds with casual confidence.

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 Durango



Alfa’s return to F1 racing?

Alfa Romeo has made a push for more global awareness of its brand lately... there’s even an Alfa dealership opening in Albany this spring. Along those lines, reports now indicate that Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) boss Sergio Marchionne wants to see Alfa Romeo return to Formula One. FCA already competes in the open-wheel series with the Ferrari brand. Alfa’s role would be to help develop Italian drivers for Ferrari. The last time Alfa Romeo competed in F-1 was the 1985 Australian Grand Prix.



The last time Alfa competed in F1 was at the ’85 Australian Grand Prix, when Eddie Cheever drove the #23 Benetton Team Alfa Romeo 184TB Turbo.



In the 1982 film “Firefox,” Clint Eastwood flew a jet fighter he controlled with his mind. Is your car far behind?

Mind over machine?

In the future, will your brain be one with your car? Tesla CEO (and SpaceX founder, alleged inspiration for Iron Man’s Tony Stark and, in general, all around futurist) **Elon Musk** sees the inevitability of **brain/machine interfaces**. Speaking at the World Government Summit in Dubai last week, Musk, 45, reiterated remarks he made a year ago at a computer code conference, in which he predicted a “neural lace” that would interface directly with the user’s gray matter, letting operators communicate their thoughts to the computer using less bandwidth, less motion and less delay than mechanical configurations such as a keyboard and mouse. In Dubai, he said such a system could “achieve a symbiosis between human and machine intelligence, and maybe solve the control problem and the usefulness problem.” The usefulness here meaning the usefulness of humans who might otherwise find themselves obsolete. Others have predicted that artificial intelligence (AI) might soon overtake the human brain’s ability to not only perform repetitive tasks but make complex decisions as well. To that, Musk adds the disruptive factor that the advent of self-driving cars will create. Maybe we didn’t found PayPal or launch our own spacecraft into orbit, but it’s not hard to see where he’s going with this. And no, it’s not hooking your brain up to your 2022 Camaro ZL1. Musk has an ambivalent view of artificial intelligence — he once referred to its development as “summoning the demon” — but thinks this symbiosis with machines could prevent us humans from becoming “house cats” to AI. The upside is, your symbiotic human children may have jobs in the future. The downside is, if you thought *you* were shackled to a computer at work, wait until their brain is literally hooked up to one.



Tesla CEO Elon Musk