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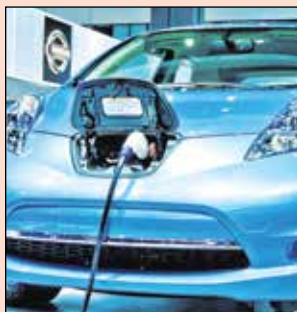
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TEST DRIVE

Ute Movement

2017 Dodge Durango GT AWD

DAN LYONS | text
Special to the Times Union

The Dodge Durango has followed an interesting trail. The now full-size SUV started out as a midsize in 1998. The second generation arrived in 2004, and size-wise, it was status quo. But, when it came time for the next redesign, Durango parted company with the pack.



While most SUVs were being downsized or morphing into crossovers, Durango staked out its claim in the Big Ute class. The third generation arrived for 2011 as a full-on, full-size. It was a gutsy call. Average gas prices crossed over the \$2.00 per gallon mark for the first time in 2005 (\$2.30) and broke the \$3.00 barrier in 2008 (\$3.27), which would've been about the time plans were being formed for the next

2017 Dodge Durango GT AWD
Base MSRP: \$40,095 · As Tested: \$48,765

model. Riding on a stretched version of the chassis it shares with the Jeep Grand Cherokee, Durango serves the large SUV market with a traditional skill set: rugged build, three-row seating, power to tow.

The lineup is shuffled slightly for 2017. The GT trim level replaces the Limited as the expected, volume model, with an MSRP of \$37,495. It's flanked by the entry level SXT (\$29,995) and two trims above: Citadel (\$41,395) and R/T (\$42,095). Add \$2,600 to these prices if you want to swap the stock, RWD setup for AWD, and the destination charge is \$1,095. My AWD equipped GT had an as-delivered price of \$48,765.

Durango's styling carries over largely unchanged for 2017. So too do two appearance packages. Blacktop (\$595) adds 20-inch gloss black aluminum rims, cross-hair grille, badging and headlamp bezels. The front and rear fascia, wheel flares and sill molding are body color, and the package also adds dual exhaust and LED DRLs. The interestingly named Brass Monkey appearance package (\$595) features 20-inch burnished bronze rims along with a gloss black grille and badging.

Dodge's dashboard redesign in 2014 fitted either a 5-inch (SXT) or 8.4-inch (GT and up) touchscreen interface in the center stack. Some of the HVAC and sound system functions use conventional controls, while others are absorbed into the touchscreen, which slows access time slightly. Still, the larger version is



FULL-ON. Though it shares a chassis with the Jeep Grand Cherokee, the 2017 Dodge Durango continues to stake claim to the full-on, full-size SUV class. All trims get a 3.6-liter V6, while a 5.7-liter Hemi V-8 is an option (standard on R/T).

better than most in the segment in terms of visibility and usability, and this includes the available navigation system. The rotary shift knob first seen in the Ram truck line migrated into Durango three years back, and and it gets a thumb's-up from me. The knurled knob is easy to use, with positive click stops that let you feel the gear changes as you make them.

SXT has standard, five-passenger seating, with an available third row. All other trims are three-row/seven-passenger setups, with the option of swapping the middle bench for a pair of captain's chairs. Doing so increases the comfort, but reduces capacity by one and, when you fold the seatbacks down for carrying cargo, it leaves a gap between the seatbacks large enough for a good-sized dog

to slip into. (I have this on good authority). Adults fit comfortably in the second row and — unusually — the third as well, though the ins and outs of getting in and out place a premium on flexibility. Visibility is generally good for the breed, with the exception of ¾-rear blind spots common to SUVs. Folding the rear seat headrests forward when no one is aboard in back is one way to improve your rear view. Another is adding blind spot and cross path detection. It's part of the \$1,195 Safety/Security and Convenience Group, which also includes automatic high beams and headlight leveling, rain sensitive windshield wipers, cargo cover and net, HID headlamps and a power tilt/tele steering column. Every seat (save the driver's) can be folded

Light off-roading and dealing with winter weather conditions are both well within Durango's comfort zone.

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