



## Bye-bye, Firefly

Created by **Waymo** — the company founded by **Google's** parent Alphaet to develop a self-driving car — way back in 2013, this adorable little bubble of a car was the first attempt to imagine a vehicle without driver controls. Now Waymo has announced that the car, nicknamed **Firefly**, will be retired. Instead, it appears that Waymo will be looking toward more conventional designs. It's currently testing its fleet of autonomous Chrysler Pacifica minivans in Arizona. The Firefly project, however, launched the careers of many major players in the field, including Chris Ursmon, Sebastian Thrun and Anthony Levandowski, the current head of Uber's self-driving program whom Waymo alleges stole its secrets and took them to Uber. Some of the Firefly prototypes will be donated to museums, including the Computer History Museum in Google's hometown of Mountain View, California.



## Is the oil glut here to stay?

Crude petroleum is at a historic seven-year low — a barrel of West Texas Intermediate was selling for \$44.24 as of yesterday — despite the fact that OPEC and other oil-producing states, including Russia, agreed last month to continue to curb production in order to stabilize prices. Didn't work: Oil prices have fallen 10 percent since then.

Experts say the glut is expected to continue into next year, as growth in oil supply will outstrip demand. Largely responsible for that growth is oil being extracted from U.S. shale deposits and a nearly doubled number of American oil rigs, as well as sources coming on line from non-OPEC states such as Canada and Brazil.

International Energy Agency figures also showed that, despite the call for cuts, OPEC production output as a whole actually *increased* last month, due to Nigeria and Libya not being covered under the most recent cuts agreement.

What's that mean for your fuel tank? After gas rose from \$1.50 earlier last year to \$2.33 today, those prices aren't likely to make the same kind of jump this year. A report from Gasbuddy.com predicts prices will average \$2.49 a gallon for 2017.

### TEST DRIVE

## 2017 Buick LaCrosse

*Continued from page 1*

That said, LaCrosse AWD feels quite composed, cushioning the effects of harsh pavement, but not at the expense of a floaty feeling ride. It's comfortable and composed going down the road. Touring and Sport driving modes can be selected by the driver. Switching to the latter sharpens throttle response and hastens the shift points somewhat. It also increases steering heft (if not feel). And once the seasons change and the snow flies, AWD will afford the driver the luxury of less stress when wintry road conditions are encountered.

LaCrosse is built on GM's Epsilon II platform. The wheelbase underpinning the Buick sedan is 2.7 inches longer than the previous model, as well as its current, full-size GM cousins from Chevy (Impala) and Cadillac (XTS) (though its overall length is less). The added dimensions of the stretched chassis have been put to good use in the passenger compart-

ment. Front and rear legroom measure 42 inches and 40 inches, respectively, which comfortably seats six footers in both rows. Trunk capacity is, at 15 cubic feet, class competitive though not class leading. The car's room, ride comfort and (thanks to improved soundproofing technology) a quiet passenger compartment, make this Buick a very agreeable traveler.

The instrument panel and layout of controls are straight forward, though collectively, the materials and design of the dash, center stack and console in the Premium seem a little underdressed, for a car cresting \$50,000. Buick's IntelliLink infotainment system — with 8-inch touchscreen — is standard on all trim levels, and compatible with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay. The touchscreen system is better than average in terms of user friendliness and learning curve. I've never favored gear shifters that require finesse moves, as they can complicate what should be a simple task — putting



## Mazda moves to diesel

While other manufacturers have shied away from diesel engines here, **Mazda** is expected to introduce a **diesel-powered CX-5** later this year. While the Japan-based maker has had such a vehicle available outside the U.S. since 2012, it is now awaiting EPA approval to unleash it on America. Mazda has stated it wants its Skyactiv-D 2.2-liter diesel to make up at least 10 percent of sales. With 112,235 CX-5s sold last year, that translates to Mazda selling 11,224 of them. Let's see if Mazda can tempt diesel-phobic Americans to take a bite.



Mazda CX-5



Even as CEO Travis Kalanick steps down, Uber will be coming to the region.

## Uber implosion couldn't keep it out of upstate NY

We've been covering the travails and scandals of ride-hailing phenomenon **Uber** for a while now, but you know it's reached critical mass when the mess makes the cover of *Time* magazine. After being accused of rampant sexual harassment, breaking the law, having an impulsive man-child for a CEO, being sued for industrial espionage (see story, left top) and a whole lot of other bad things, critical mass has finally been reached.

The catalyst for this was the final report from attorney (and former Attorney General) Eric Holder, who Uber hired to investigate itself. The most seismic result of the final report: CEO **Travis Kalanick**, 40, will be taking an undetermined leave of absence. Perhaps more than anyone he embodies the brash, sharp-elbowed approach to capitalism that has been the epitome of the San Francisco-based company, and maybe the root of its unparalleled success.

But now that its aggressive style has come back to haunt Uber, perhaps all of Silicon Valley will be given pause to re-examine its own internal culture.

But all its scandals didn't stop the upstart — founded in 2008 and now valued at \$70 billion — from getting to the Capital Region this week (along with fellow ride-hailing service Lyft). Before this Thursday, we were alone with Alaska as the only states not allowing ride-hailing apps across the state, until the New York State Legislature recently passed laws to regulate such services.

Even though we've got Uber and Lyft here now, the law does allow upstate cities to decide if they want the apps operating inside their city limits. It also tacks a 4 percent tax on all ride charges, but it's unclear at this point what that money will be earmarked for.



**TEST DRIVE**  
this vehicle at these preferred dealerships:

**GOLDSTEIN BUICK GMC OF ALBANY**  
1671 Central Ave., Albany, NY 12205  
518-869-2291 [www.goldsteinbuick.com](http://www.goldsteinbuick.com)

**MANGINO BUICK GMC**  
1484 Saratoga Road, Ballston Spa, NY 12020  
518-354-3126 [www.manginobuickgmc.com](http://www.manginobuickgmc.com)

the car in gear. The Electronic Precision Shift found in LaCrosse is of the electronic joystick variety, and falls in this category.

Those features not added by trim level are featured in option packages. Among the most popular are Driver Confidence Package #1 (standard on Premium, \$445 on Essence) which includes rear cross traffic alert, side blind zone alert with lane change alert. Note that this option also requires the Sights and Sounds Package (navigation system and audio system with 11-speaker, Bose Center-

point surround sound system: 1,145). The Sun and Shade Package (\$1,550) adds a power moon roof with second row skylight and a power sunshade for the backlight. The Driver Confidence Package #2 (\$1,690) contributes adaptive cruise control, automatic parking assist, and forward automatic emergency braking.

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.

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