

More passengers for the RX

We hear that Lexus's popular five-passenger tall wagon is about to get an optional extra collapsible bench seat, possibly as soon as next year. However, instead of extending the distance between the



2017 Acura RX

front and rear wheels to make room, the designers who toil at Toyota's upscale division will apparently extend the body of the RX by several inches behind the rear axle and square off the roofline to hold two extra bodies. The resulting RX L will be sold alongside the standard-length RX and will presumably use the same 295-horsepower 3.5-liter V-6 as well as the optional 308-horsepower gasoline-electric hybrid system. The RX L is expected to debut this fall at the 2017 Tokyo (Japan) Motor Show and will likely be available in North America by the first quarter of 2018.



Cars living on borrowed time are (clockwise from top left) the Buick LaCrosse, Chevrolet Impala, Cadillac CT6, Chevy Sonic and Chevy Volt (right).



GM's chopping block

Blame it on crossover mania, but cars — you know, traditional four-door sedans — aren't selling as well as they used to. Witness the rumblings that **General Motors** is thinking of killing off a half-dozen different models in order to free up production capacity for building more crossovers, SUVs and trucks. Rumored to be on the chopping block are the **Buick LaCrosse**, long-running **Chevy Impala**, **Cadillac CT6** and **XTS**, subcompact **Chevy Sonic** and the electric **Chevy Volt**. All are mid- to full-sized sedans save for the Sonic, which sells well elsewhere in the world except for the U.S. (The mini **Ford Fiesta** will also be yanked from these shores starting in 2018.)

Most curious would be the axing of the Volt; makers are falling all over themselves to have an electric in their lineups. But Chevy now has another electric ready to take its place: the electric **Bolt** which, you guessed it, is a small crossover.



Taking a gamble, Hyundai dropped the six-cylinder from its Sonata in 2011. Now the 2.4L puts out 198 hp. Combined with a drop in weight, the Sonata's mpg has improved some 26 percent to 28 mpg. A consumer group's newly released study shows that meeting government fuel-efficiency standards may actually save car and truck owners money, even with any added costs.

Report: Fuel-savings outweigh any added technology costs

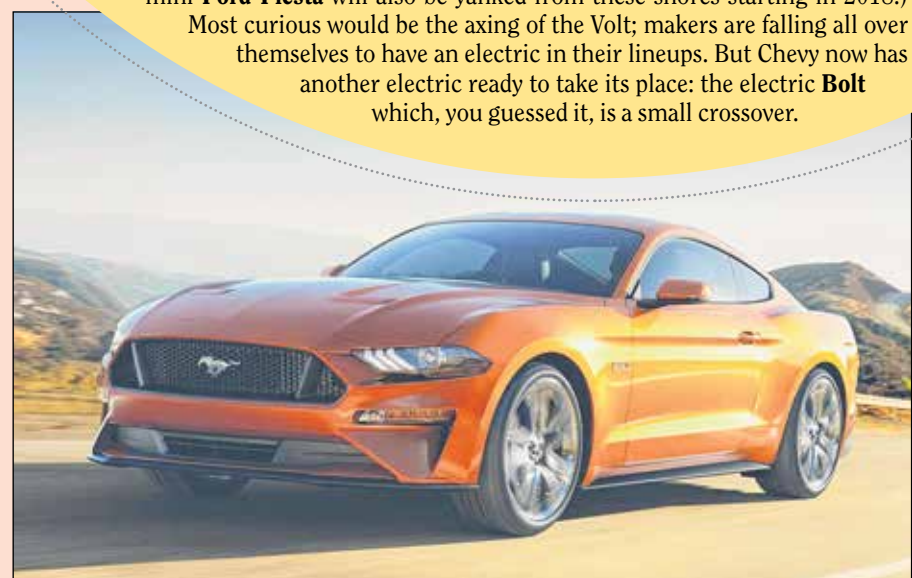
Last month, the **Consumer Federation of America** released data it said showed that the value of fuel savings from higher mpg's would outweigh any costs that fuel-saving technology would add to vehicle costs.

The study comes out just as automakers are lobbying the federal government to relax the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) fuel-efficiency standards set to be met by the 2015 model year, which were negotiated during the previous administration, just after the auto industry bail-out.

The public interest group compared the price and fuel-efficiency of 27 all-new 2017 vehicles (79 trim models in all) and found that:

- The added per-vehicle cost of fuel economy averaged \$320 but the estimated fuel savings averaged \$946.
- 27 percent of the vehicles introduced in 2017 cost less than their 2011 versions and got 1 to 10 mpg better fuel economy.
- Nearly half the 2017 vehicles cost less to buy and fuel than their 2011 counterparts, when estimated over 5 years.
- 58 of the 79 vehicles studied had increased in price, but 12 vehicles had fuel savings that offset the entire price increase and more than half had fuel savings that offset the increased cost of the fuel-saving technology itself.

You can argue the red state/blue state merits of government intervention in private industry, but these peach-colored pages are all about the green. If it's going to save us a few bucks down the road, then consider us part of the 79 percent of Americans the Consumer Federation says supports those standards.



Will the 2018 Mustang's new feature enable it to outspurt the Porsche 911 Carrera?

New Mustang's drag strip mode

Ford is claiming that the refreshed **2018 Mustang** will be its fastest pony car ever, with a "drag strip" mode (part of an optional performance package) that will take it from 0 to 60 in under 4 seconds. If true, the 2018 Mustang will be able to dust off the \$94,000 Porsche 911 Carrera. The Mustang GT is expected to start \$35,095, with the performance package adding another \$4,000.

The horsepower for the Mustang's 5.0L V-8 will get bumped from 435 to 460 — with torque increasing to 400 pounds-feet to 420 — and will be paired with Ford's new 10-speed transmission. The four-cylinder, 2.3L EcoBoost engine remains the same as 2017 with 310 horsepower, but increases in torque from 320 to 350 pounds-feet. The EcoBoost will also have the optional "drag strip" mode that will take it from 0 to 60 in under 5 seconds. No word on mpg's for either engine.

Ford announced it will be dropping the 3.7L V-6, which accounted for only 15 percent of Mustang sales. The 2018 Mustang will hit showrooms in the fall.

TEST DRIVE

2018 VW Tiguan

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more than handling. It feels quite stable and is reasonably agile, but the GTI comparisons are set aside for the time being (we'll check back when the R-Line arrives).

VW's 4Motion system operates in FWD mode under normal circumstances. However, the Haldex clutch pack center differential automatically varies the amount of engine torque from front to back as well as side to side, to maintain traction. The added grip is available on wet or dry roads.

4Motion-equipped vehicles have four selectable on-road modes (Eco, Normal, Sport, Custom) as well Snow and Off-road settings. Each adjusts the parameters for throttle, transmission, steering and (optional) adaptive cruise control.

All Tiguans with front-wheel-drive are equipped with three-row seating. Curiously, if you want three rows with AWD, you pay an additional \$500. The front two rows hold adults without complaint (though Tiguan's front leg room trails CR-V, RAV4 and Rogue). Its rear seat leg room lags CRV and RAV4 but bests Rogue — the only one in this group besides the VW to offer a third row. And in that third row, you get 27.9 inches of leg room, which is less than Rogue — and practically speaking — only suitable for small kids.

With all three rows full of folks, cargo capacity shrinks to 12 cubic feet. Fold row three flat forward and you're up to 33 cubic feet of stowage space, which is more than the Rogue, less than the rest. Finally, in max cargo mode, Tiguan offers 65.7 cubic feet of cargo room (also less



The 2018 Tiguan offers the option of Volkswagen's 4Motion system, which normally operates in front-wheel-drive, but switches to AWD when under challenging conditions. Of its six settings, two are designated for Off-road and Snow.

than the rest). The second row seats slide up and back to apportion room front or rear which is handy. However, the seat-backs for row two don't fold completely flat, which is inconvenient for things like a dog crate. Rear lift over is comfortably low and the pull-out cargo cover stores neatly beneath the deck when not needed.

An oversize moon roof with ambient lighting is a \$1,200 option on all trims. A Fender premium sound system (9 speakers, 480 watts) is standard on top-ranging SEL Premiums. All trim levels have VW's Car-Net infotainment system and an 8-inch touchscreen. Smartphone

integration supports Android Auto, Apple CarPlay and MirrorLink. Driver assistance standards include a rear view camera and automatic post-collision braking. Available features include forward collision warning with emergency braking and pedestrian monitoring, blind spot monitoring, lane departure warning, adaptive cruise control, park distance control high beam control and the always useful bird's-eye view camera.

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.