



Cherokee in for a facelift

Rumors are suggesting that Fiat Chrysler will placate critics of the current mid-range **Jeep Cherokee** wagon with a revised front- and rear-end design. That likely means the end to the controversial cats-eye headlights and oddly shaped slotted grille that arrived with the new design for the 2014 model year. The Cherokee will continue to be built on the same Alfa Romeo-based platform and will be available with the Fiat-built 184-hp four-cylinder and optional Chrysler-built 271-hp 3.2-liter V-6. A rumored Trackhawk model could see a bump in output into the low 280-horse range, or it could get the 3.6-liter V-6 used in the Jeep Grand Cherokee.



2015 Jeep Cherokee grille

Ride of the Valkyrie

There are sports cars. And there are super cars. And then there are hypercars. While that term is not precisely defined, it's certain that the planned **Aston Martin Valkyrie** will fall into the latter category. The prototype was unveiled at last year's Geneva Auto Show under the code name AM-RB 001, but now it's heading for production, with an arrival date of 2019. The Valkyrie's mid-mounted 6.5-liter V12 paired with a KERS-style hybrid powertrain and is designed for maximum power-to-weight ratio. Those 1,100 horses will propel a vehicle expected to weigh less than a Mazda Miata. In fact, taking weight-shedding to a fanatical extreme, Aston Martin and Red Bull F1 racing team engineers opted against a traditional badge in favor of a chemically-etched aluminum nameplate just 70 microns thick, 30 percent thinner than a human hair and 99.4 percent lighter than the winged logo on the British maker's production vehicles. It's even expected to outperform Aston Martin's track-only Vulcan model. Only 175 Valkyries will be produced at \$3.2 million each.



The three-wheeled electric Bricklin 3EV (above) may hark back to the 1970s automotive footnote Bricklin SV-1, below.



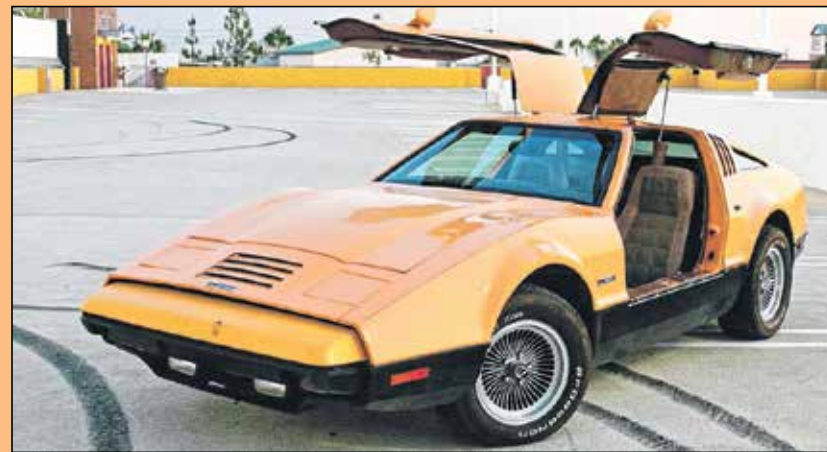
This Land Rover Defender Concept 100 was panned by faithful fans when it was introduced at the 2011 Frankfurt show. A totally revamped Defender is on the way, though.

Visionary or mad genius?

Malcolm Bricklin was the first to begin importing Subarus into the U.S. in the late 1960s (as well as Yugos in the '80s), but is perhaps best remembered for venturing out on his own to create the gull-wing **SV-1**. Though it sold less than 3,000 units from 1974-5, the Canadian-made car was ahead of its time in safety and — with its American Motors 360-cubic-inch V8 engine — even dented off a Corvette in every performance category in a *Car and Driver* test.

Now, the 78-year-old entrepreneur is hoping to get back in the automaking business with an equally unique vehicle: the three-wheeled **Bricklin 3EV**.

According to Bricklin's prospectus, the battery-powered two-seater would retail for \$25,000. Also in that prospectus, he's looking for 100 hopeful dealers to invest \$2 million each in combination dealership/art galleries/virtual reality test drive pods. Is he a visionary? Or a mad genius? *Automotive News* suggests that Bricklin can bring the 3EV to lots within two years. Given the requisite financial backing, of course. Only \$200 million will tell for sure.



Defender for the faithful

No one was particularly shocked to hear that **Land Rover** will introduce a new **Defender** model sometime next year. This most iconic of Jaguar Land Rover's utility vehicles dates back to the first Land Rover in 1948. Modified and modernized over the decades, this new model will be the first Defender available in the U.S. since 1997.

Word has it that the 2019 Defender (revamped to meet stricter new European emissions standards) will use a significant degree of aluminum for the chassis and body to pare down the weight and increase agility. And thanks to two subframes attached to a light unibody, the Defender will be truly off-road capable once again.

Expected to slot above the Discovery and below the Range Rover, the Defender will be available in five body styles, including a four-door and two pickup models with either two or four doors. Land Rover has said it hopes to sell at least 30,000 units annually. Expect a \$55,000 base MSRP.

TEST DRIVE

2017 Dodge Challenger T/A

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While I found the nav system's response time on recalculations a little slower than I'd like, in general, the Uconnect touchscreen's interface is better than most. The optional sound system upgrade (276-watts, six speakers, \$795) gets a thumb's-up, and the Uconnect system is now compatible with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay.

Challenger seats adults easily in front and is more tolerant of rear seat passengers than either Camaro or Mustang. However, flexibility is required to wiggle your way in and out of the back seats. If rear seat passengers are a regular part of your driving life, consider the Charger. Back seat leg room in Charger will fit most without complaint. And while you'll sacrifice the cool, coupe look, the ease of ingress and egress in the four-door makes the tradeoff work for some buyers. Challenger's trunk is, at 16.2 cubic feet, a worthy luggage swallower.

Both steering and suspension are upgraded on T/A models. The former has

a nice heft and while it isn't as nimble as smaller cars, Challenger is light on its feet for its size (4,200+ lb.). The stiffness dialed in to enhance handling is unfelt on smooth roads. On rough pavement, imperfections register as muffled drumbeats through the 245/45ZR20 Goodyear all-season performance tires.

My test car was equipped with the 5.7-liter Hemi V-8. The "Small Hemi" (only in relation to the 6.4-liter 392, which is optional on the T/A) posts 375 horsepower, to go along with 410 lb.-ft. of torque. Those figures are for manual transmission cars; automatics are rated at 372/400.

All 5.7 Challengers get a 2 ¾-inch, electronically controlled active exhaust system for 2017, that delivers fine tone. The 5.7 is muscular and its power is distributed nicely by the transmission. In sixth at highway speeds, the engine is unstressed and while no one buys a muscle car for the gas mileage, I netted 25½ mpg's on my recent test drive, which included long highway runs, at keeping-



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
968 New Loudon Rd., Latham, NY 12110
518-785-4156 www.goldsteinchryslerjeep.net

up-with-traffic speeds. That number bests the EPA estimates of 15/23/18.

The T/A I drove was (happily) outfitted with a manual transmission. Of special note here is the clutch effort, which was very comfortable, even in extended, bumper-to-bumper stretches. The standard Hill Start Assist removes roll back anxiety when stopped on a grade.

If you like a stick shift, you'd like the T/A's. Beyond the easy clutch action, the Tremec six-speed is capped by a shifter of the grip-it-and-rip-it variety. The short, snappy throw between gears are really enjoyable — except if you load the center console cup holders, in which case your arm angle ergonomics may suffer (the

direct line for me went right between the holders).

The workaround is to park your water bottles in the door pockets designed to house them, leaving the cup holders clear for optimum arm angle. If you've got more than one beverage with you (always a possibility, in the Age of Hydration), or your coffee cup doesn't cut it in a door pocket, you can still manage a pretty straight line to the shifter, if you limit cup holder occupancy to one item. Two cup holder occupancy on board? Work it out. If you like to shift, it's worth it.

A regular contributor to the Times Union for more than 25 years, Dan Lyons is the

