

Is there a new Rotary-engine model coming from Mazda?

Despite denials from the automaker's higher-ups, our far-east network is hearing that a luxury-oriented model — to be called the **RX-9** and to be loosely based on the RX-Vision Concept that was shown in 2015 — will in fact enter production for the 2019 model year.

It's also claimed that an unveiling of the close-to-final RX-9 design will happen this October at the Tokyo International Motor Show in Japan. If true, it would mark the first pistonless-powered Mazda since the RX-8, which departed the North American market after the 2011 model year.

Apparently, Mazda's engineers have made great strides in the rotary engine's design, presumably curing the problem of the amount of fuel used to achieve decent power output.



Fiat Chrysler killed off the Viper this year, but Bob Lutz and Henrik Fisker's VLF Automotive will sell you this supercharged version for a cool quarter million bucks.

Viper lives on as VLF Force 1

With **Challenger's** now pumping out 800+ horsepower, the once-fearsome **Dodge Viper** is retiring into redundancy this year. But don't say good-bye; more like see you later. **VLF Automotive**, a company founded by Henrik Fisker — the former BMW/Aston Martin designer behind the now-defunct electric Karma company — and General Motor's former "car guy" Bob Lutz, plans to resurrect and redefine the marque. (They did the same by turning the electric Fisker Karma into the gas-fueled and firebreathing Destino.) VLF will build 50 exotic-looking sports models using donor Vipers and their engines to produce the **VLF Force 1**. The V-10 will be tweaked to produce 100 more horsepower than the standard Viper's 645 horsepower. That should bring it from 0 to 60 in 3.0 seconds with a max speed somewhere over 200 mph. The 21-inch wheels are shod in Pirelli P Zero tires and pack a Brembo brake package. The roadster version was shown off a few months back at the Shanghai Auto Show, but production will be at VLF's plant in Auburn Hills, Michigan. Prices start at \$268,500, which is more than double the price of a base Viper.



Buick will produce a wagon in the Regal TourX, but not in Canada.

Buick: busy as beavers

What a difference a couple of years can make for **Buick**, as by 2018 the lineup will be significantly different that it was in 2015.

Model-year 2016 saw the arrival of the new **Cascadia convertible** and mid-size **Envision** tall wagon. They were followed by a redesigned **LaCrosse** full-size sedan and the revised **Encore** compact wagon for 2017. For this coming model year, there will be a redesigned full-size **Enclave** wagon, a new **Regal Sportback** hatchback, **Regal TourX** wagon and a redesigned **Regal GS** sedan.

The GS's arrival is surprising since it was assumed that Buick was shifting away from sedans, including the **Verano** that was canceled in 2016.

Unlike the Sportback and TourX that will each use a turbocharged 250-horsepower four-cylinder engine, the GS will join with the LaCrosse in providing a 3.6-liter V-6 as the sole powerplant.

Both will also make all-wheel-drive optional, but the Regal's nine-speed automatic transmission differs from the LaCrosse's eight-speed shifter.



Buick's redesign of the full-sized 2018 Enclave will be the first to include a high-end Avenir trim, inspired by the Yukon's successful Denali.



Honda has been without a halo car since the demise of the S2000 roadster in 2009.

A mid-engine Honda sports car?

Our sources continue to hear whispers about a **mid-engine, two-seat Honda** that would list for less than half the base price of the \$160,000 NSX hybrid that the automaker's premium Acura division currently has in showrooms.

It's no secret that Honda dealers have been pushing for a "halo" model to draw in buyers ever since the demise of the **S2000 roadster** in 2009, and one that would also fit with the brand's significant motorsports involvement.

Word on the street is that the car — a two-seat convertible, actually — might also come with a gasoline-electric powerplant, but would be rear-wheel-drive (not AWD) and make a lot less power (about 350-400 horses would be a reasonable guess) than the NSX's 573 horses. Our guess is it would cost considerably less, though. No word on price, but the 2009 S2000 MSRP's for \$34,995, or about \$40,000 in today's dollars.

TEST DRIVE

2017 Jeep Renegade Altitude

Continued from page 3

transmission, or a 2.4L four-cylinder coupled to a nine-speed automatic transmission. 1.4L is rated at 160 h.p. @ 5,500 r.p.m., and 184 h.p. @ 2,500 — 4,000 r.p.m., while the 2.4L makes 180 h.p. @ 6,400 r.p.m., and 175 h.p. @ 3,900 r.p.m. My driver this time test had the 2.4 auto. Renegade has runabout power (0-60 in about 9.5 seconds).

There's enough under foot to cover all the basics, but not a lot of surplus, so pick your spots for passing and lane merges. Towing is not recommended with the 1.4L or with front-drive versions running the 2.4L. AWD 2.4L models equipped with the tow package are rated to handle up to 2,000 lb. EPA says you can expect 21 mpg's city, 29 highway and 24 combined with the 2.4L (the 1.4L manual should return 24/31/26). These numbers trail most in this class.

The sportiest drives in this segment

include the Mazda CX-3 and Nissan Juke. Renegade doesn't match these two but, owing to its compact footprint and independent suspension, it feels fun to drive. Ride quality is good — impressive, given its size. And given their size (large), the mirrors create some wind noise at highway speeds.

Choose the Navigation Group with Uconnect (\$1,345) and you pick up a 6½-inch touchscreen display, GPS navigation system, HD radio and Sirius Traffic and Travel information. The Uconnect infotainment portal rates better than most for usability. Lift out, composite sunroof panels are optional in standard and power versions. Front cabin storage spots are numerous, if small. The lid for the center console bin doubles as an adjustable inside arm rest.

Six-footers fit comfortably in front. With seats so adjusted, like-size passengers will find legroom in back pretty



TEST DRIVE
this vehicle at these preferred dealerships:

ARMORY CHRYSLER DODGE JEEP RAM SRT FIAT
926 Central Ave., Albany, NY | 518-641-7777 | www.armoryauto.com

GOLDSTEIN CHRYSLER JEEP DODGE RAM
968 New Loudon Rd, Latham, NY | 518-785-4156 | www.goldsteinchryslerjeep.net



tight. Rear seatbacks fold forward to a mostly flat floor when needed for extra storage, and you may have to move the front seats up first to allow clearance. The front passenger seatback folds forward as well to allow extra-long items to be carried inside.

Cargo capacity ranges from 18.5 - 50.8 cubic feet. For comparison, that's bigger than Mazda CX-3 and Nissan Juke; smaller than Honda HRV and Subaru Crosstrek. Additional hidden storage is found beneath the load floor in back.

There's a long list of available extras. For example, Advanced Technology (\$995) adds automatic high beams, forward collision warning, lane departure warning, rear park assist. Safety and Security (\$945) includes blind spot monitoring/rear cross path detection,

HID headlights, rain sensitive wipers, a security alarm and a tonneau cover. Cold Weather group (\$545) tacks on heated front seats and steering wheel, as well as a windshield wiper deicer and all season floor mats.

So extensive is the option sheet that a fully loaded Altitude like my tester stickers for \$32,990 delivered, which is \$1,500 more than the price of a base Grand Cherokee. As with most purchases, the amount of restraint needed when considering your choices depends on your taste, and your budget.

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.