

Nissan seems to be in no rush to replace its 370Z, shown here in a Nismo racing version.



Porsche's new "coupe" coming?

We're hearing rumblings that the company known for producing exemplary sports cars is seriously considering adding a **four-door fastback version of the Cayenne** utility vehicle to the lineup. Apparently this is in response to the sales success that BMW and Mercedes-Benz are experiencing with their similarly shaped X6 and GLE models, respectively. Each of the company labelled coupes is available with a choice of turbo-charged powerplants from relatively mild to wild, which is exactly what Porsche currently installs in the Cayenne. The only flaw in this plan is that plenty of cash is already being spent to put a battery-electric model into production by the end of the decade. Does Porsche have the money to also develop a fastback Cayenne? We think that Porsche will find a way.



Porsche Cayenne

The end of Nissan's Z?

That's what we believe to be a likely outcome. The fact that the current iteration of the company's sports car, the **Nissan 370Z**, has been around since the 2003 model year with only one update since that time would indicate that the 370Z's days are numbered. And public comments issued by a number of Nissan execs regarding the sports car's low priority seem to support the notion that there are no plans to replace the car with a fresh model. There are also rumblings in high places that, with the success of the premium priced GT-R, there is really no need to spend gobs of money to design and build a new Z. It was for similar financial reasons that Mazda and Fiat shared development costs of the current MX-5 and 124 Spider roadsters. BMW and Toyota are also sharing some development costs to bring the next Z4 and Supra sports cars to market. Maybe there's a fellow automaker Nissan can partner with to keep this venerable model alive.



Uber and NASA will create a flying taxi, coming soon to airspace over L.A. and Dallas.

Autonomous flying taxis?

The rush for self-driving vehicles has taken another step forward as ride-sharing company **Uber** has signed a contract with **NASA** to develop an autonomous "flying taxi" for actual real-world testing by the year 2020.

The agreement was announced Wednesday at the Web Summit tech conference in Lisbon, Spain. The Uber Elevate project will help NASA examine how unmanned aerial systems such as drones can operate safely at lower altitudes.

Uber will work on that long-time snag for the dream of flying cars, traffic management. The company hopes to begin testing the flying taxi drones — which will take off and land vertically — in Los Angeles, Dallas-Fort Worth and Dubai in 2020.

The company had already recruited two NASA veterans earlier this year to run its fledgling airborne vehicle design team, and has signed a deal with Sanstone Properties, which has 20 sites across the L.A. area, to build "skyports" for the flying taxis. Uber will partner with other manufacturers to build the actual aircraft.



Though the Wrangler JL model that's been tested in public has been carefully covered up, word is it won't look all that different from this 2018 Wrangler JK, shown here in the four-door Sahara package.

More details emerge about the next-generation Jeep

Sources are confirming a number of details about one of the world's most recognizable vehicle brands. The new Jeep model, called the **Wrangler JL**, won't look all that different from the current JK series, but a new frame plus aluminum body panels will result in a weight reduction of about 250-300 pounds, depending on the body style (two or four doors).

The current 3.6-liter V-6 will also return virtually unchanged, but a new turbocharged 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine will become the base engine. Additionally, a four-cylinder turbo-diesel will become optional about a year after the JL's early-2018 launch.

The Wrangler will be available with a choice of two four-wheel drive systems, including a full-time unit that automatically engages the front wheels once the rears begin to lose traction. Lastly, the rumored Wrangler pickup is a go, but its name and launch date remain a closely guarded secret.

TEST DRIVE

2018 Honda Fit Sport

Continued from page 3

so inclined, the stick shift livens up the Fit's drivability nicely. The added control for shift points helps wring all the horses out of the small four, and the shifter mechanism itself is short and quick from gear to gear, with a very light action on the clutch.

The manual adds a definite fun factor that's lacking from the CVT, though the automatics do have the edge in fuel economy. EPA expectations call for 29/36/31 for manual equipped Fits, 31/36/33 in Sport/EX/EX-L with CVT and 33/40/36 with CVT equipped LX models. I recorded 33 mpg's during my test drive.

Fit's finest feature is its flexible floor plan. The capability to carry adults in both rows and/or a large amount of cargo in a car with a footprint this small is unmatched in its segment. Cargo capacity is quite good — 16.6 cubic feet, expandable to as much as 52.7 cu. ft. Rear seatbacks fold flat (and also lift up), load floor and

lift over height are impressively low. Depending on what you want to put inside, the car can be configured to handle items that are long, tall or just plain large.

So, cargo fares well, and so too do people, for the most part. If you're six feet or taller, you'll find your legs at least slightly bent in the front seats. I didn't find it uncomfortable, and it's probably a function of preserving all the space behind them.

That said, you can put six-footers in both rows in reasonable comfort. The front seats are comfortable albeit flat, so if you test the limits of the sport suspension, your butt may travel a bit. Elbows take it on the chin inside. The left side arm rest is hard, and an inside elbow rest doesn't exist — not a plus, if you like to park your arms while driving.

The interior is well stocked with assorted, small storage spaces. The most noticeably undersized spot is the center console. HVAC controls are well placed in



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the middle of the center stack. The trio of knurled knobs are easy to use and non-distracting.

In a major upgrade, Honda has dispensed with the former, virtual volume adjuster for the sound system, in favor of an actual, functional button. Onboard navigation is only available on top-trim EX-L, but smartphone owners can use Android Auto and Apple CarPlay to import their favorite navigation app via the infotainment system. As long as you're traveling in an area with good cell service and have a healthy data plan, you're good to go.

Honda Sensing is a suite of safety and convenience features that includes Adaptive Cruise Control, Collision Mitigation Braking (with Forward Collision Warning), Lane Keeping Assist System and

Road Departure Mitigation (with Lane Departure Warning). The bundle is available on Fit, but the wrinkle is that it's only offered on certain combinations. You can order Honda Sensing on CVT-equipped Fits of any trim level. But, the only stick shift model it's offered on is the mid-level EX. And the EX-L isn't available with a manual. The packaging decisions are a bit of a puzzle.

Now with a Sporty looking option, Fit continues to impress. This small, economy car is surprisingly large inside, thanks to the acrobatic adjustability of the back seat.

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.