

The 2019 Ford Ranger will be based on this **Ranger T6** model, which is still sold around the world.



Ford's super Mustang GT

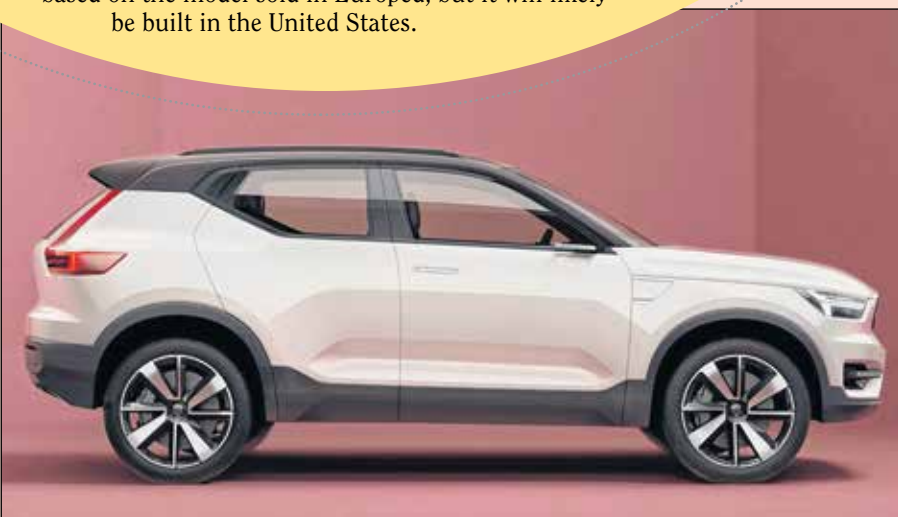
Word is that Ford has an upcoming handling package ready for its iconic Mustang pony car. This would help it to go head-to-head with the Chevrolet Camaro SS 1LE (not to be confused with the ZL1 1LE that uses a Corvette-based 650-horsepower ZL1 1LE). The performance 'Stang is meant for road and track use with what Ford calls a Level 2 package. It consists of a firmer suspension, Brembo-brand brakes, larger radiator and meaty 19-inch rubber. What's missing in this performance laundry list is any mention of a power bump for the Mustang's 5.0-liter V-8 that is rated at 460 horsepower for 2018.



An upgraded Mustang GT will be brought out as a competitor to the Chevrolet Camaro SS 1LE.

News on the Ranger front

There's plenty of anticipation among midsize-truck fans concerning the return of Ford's sorely-missed junior model **Ranger** truck, abandoned on these shores in 2011 by Ford in favor of more profitable larger models. Sources say at least a couple of disguised prototypes — both four-door crew-cab models — are being evaluated on private tracks, and even on some public roadways. At this point, turbo-diesel four-cylinder engines are the only powerplants being tested (the Ranger will be sold globally), but it's quite possible that at least one will be available here to compete with similar **Chevrolet Colorado/GMC Canyon** diesel models. As well, at least a couple of turbocharged gasoline four-cylinder engines (including a high-output version for the off-road-focused Ranger Raptor) will be on the Ranger's build sheets when it arrives for the 2019 model year. The new Ranger will be based on the model sold in Europe, but it will likely be built in the United States.



Since people are used to a monthly payment, why not just call it a subscription fee which also adds some unusual perks. That's one option to get into this new Volvo XC40.

Don't buy a Volvo, subscribe to it

We believe the Sweden-based automaker might have come up with a way to entice tech-savvy buyers into the upcoming **Volvo XC40**. The compact wagon, which arrives early next year as a 2019 model, will be available by online subscription.

Called **Care by Volvo**, the service requires customers to pay a flat fee each month, which includes all maintenance, a concierge service (something like GM's OnStar program) and, in some cases, regular cleaning. Customers could also arrange to borrow a different Volvo model (for example, a larger wagon or sedan) for short periods. Owners may also share their car with friends and family by using the Care by Volvo app as a digital key.

However, if an outright purchase is what buyers want, they can arrange to buy out the XC40 subscription at a pro-rated amount, or simply buy a brand new one. The no-negotiation fixed price was tried out by the now-defunct Saturn in the 1980s.

The base price for the Volvo XC40 starts at \$34,200, including destination fees.



Toyota unveiled this FT-4X concept at this last spring's Detroit Auto Show...

A replacement for Toyota's FJ Cruiser?

These peach-colored pages are excited by a couple of Toyota's concept models that each appear to portend a successor to the discontinued but missed **FJ Cruiser**, itself a retro throwback to the Japanese maker's classic Land Rover models. This past spring, Toyota showed the **FT-4X** model at the New York International Auto Show, dubbed an off-roader for Millennials.

It was whispered to be production-bound. But Toyota recently rolled out the **TJ Cruiser** concept. We believe this larger boxy concept model has a greater shot of winding up in dealer showrooms, based on a more practical shape with sliding rear side doors that have definite minivan overtones, even though there are only two rows of seats that can all be folded completely flat.

The TJ (the initials stand for "Toolbox Joy") concept is powered by the Prius hybrid system that includes a 2.0-liter gasoline engine, but at this point it's way too early to speculate if it a production model will ever be built.



...but we think this **TJ Cruiser** concept has a better shot at being produced.

TEST DRIVE

2018 Toyota Avalon Hybrid

Continued from page 1

carries over to the passenger cabin. The inside is invitingly large and comfortable, with room for five adults. The Hybrid's battery pack reduces the capacity to 14 cubic feet which, while useably shaped, is two less cu.-ft. than gas powered versions. More notable than the size is the fact that the rear seatbacks don't fold forward. While a center pass-through allows you to hold long, skinny items (like skis) inside, taking home a big box from a big box store may require alternate transportation.

The 7-inch touchscreen allows access to Toyota's Entune infotainment

interface. It's fairly straight forward in operation, though it lacks compatibility with smartphone apps like Android Auto or Apple CarPlay. Premium trim models get an upgraded audio system, with nine speakers and an integrated navigation system, a suite of apps and some desirable safety features like blind spot monitoring and rear cross traffic alert. All Avalons have a storage tray in the covered, center console to hold a pair of phones while they recharge. Premium and Limited models have Qi-compatible wireless smartphone charging.

Toyota's Safety Sense package is standard, and the roster of equipment



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The price of the top Toyota hybrid sedan crosses over the bottom of the Lexus hybrid line, Toyota's upscale corporate cousins. Avalon Hybrid Limited's MSRP of \$42,800 compares with \$41,820 for the ES 300h (Lexus' base hybrid). On

a feature-per-dollar basis, the Avalon enjoys a clear advantage, so the question becomes how much value you place on brand.

Avalon, gas or hybrid, appeals as an under-the-radar pick; a near-luxury sedan for the non-label shopper.

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.