

## Smart tires from Continental

The Europe-based tire manufacturer has a couple of futuristic skins under development. The first one, **ContiSense**, monitors tread depth, tire temperature and tire pressure, and transmits this information to the driver. It also does the same regarding road-surface conditions, such as moisture and icing. **ContiAdapt** tires employ special compressors that vary the tread width for maximum grip or reduce the tread “patch” and increase tire pressure for improved efficiency (and fuel economy).



Smart tires from Continental feature a control panel, and can transmit road information to the driver.



This 2014 was the last for the Jaguar XK (below). Could a renewed model look like the Aston Martin Vanquish?

## Is Jaguar bringing back the XK?

After ending production of its two-door grand touring 2+2 in 2014 with no replacement, reports suggest **Jaguar** might be bringing it back. Apparently, Jaguar design head Ian Callum has a blueprint ready to go for the next-generation **XK**. His vision is for a high-end grand touring model in 2+2 body, which could mean a vehicle that shares a similar style with Aston Martin's Vanquish coupe. (Callum also worked there). However, with Jaguar's top brass remaining focused on further development of the F-Type — which cratered XK sales when it came out in 2013 — a new XK won't likely appear until the 2021 model year, at the earliest, which would be about two years after the F-Type's scheduled redesign. By that time, powertrain availability will likely include a gasoline-electric hybrid of some sort.



Subaru's Viziv Performance concept car shown at the recent Tokyo Motor Show. A shape of things to come for the company's WRX performance models?

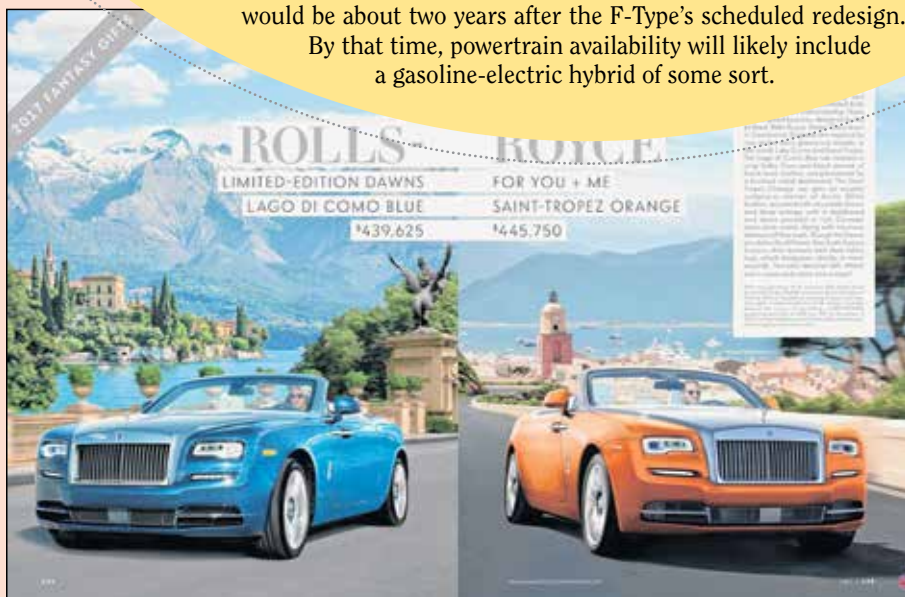
## Subaru's next-generation WRX could head in a new direction

We believe that **Subaru's** high-output **WRX** models will differ markedly from the current Impreza sedan design on which they've heretofore been based.

Perhaps a protend of this is the **Viziv Performance** concept car shown at the recent Tokyo Motor Show; stunning in its execution, it just might likely provide the design inspiration for the next WRX.

The change would add significant desirability to it and the higher-output **STI** offshoot. That is, of course, if Subaru uses the Viziv Performance's shape for the WRX. But with increased competition from other rally-inspired sedans and hatchbacks, the time is right for Subaru to step up its game in the segment. Already, Subaru used the Tokyo show to debut the hotly-anticipated **WRX STI S208**, with its lighter carbon fiber roof and promised performance upgrades. Only 450 of the STI S208s will be made, with all of them going to the Japanese market. However, it seems to suggest that Subaru is ready to up its ante in the heated hot hatch segment.

2017 Subaru WRX STI



The 2017 Neiman Marcus Christmas gift book has two Rolls-Royce Dawn convertibles in it, ready to order for under \$450,000. The Walmart Toy Book this ain't.

## A new Rolls-Royce under the tree?

Each year, upscale department-store chain **Neiman Marcus** puts out a Christmas gift book that usually contains an exotic vehicle for its well-heeled customers to drool over. The 2017 edition is no different, with the inclusion of two specially-commissioned **Rolls-Royce Dawn Drophead Coupés** in bespoke Lago di Como-inspired Coniston Blue and Saint-Tropez Orange as its top gifts.

The orange model features a “sumptuous interior of Seashell leather, accented with Dark Spice and Mandarin, with a dashboard and doors paneled in rich Canadel open-pore wood, along with luxurious lambswool floor mats.” That model will put you out \$445,750, but for each Dawn purchased, Neiman Marcus will donate \$1,000 to its own Heart of Neiman Marcus Foundation. How generous.

In light of the holiday spirit, what would Dickens say? He'd say go down to Maserati of Albany, pick up a brand new, plenty luxurious GranTurismo Sport for around \$150,000, and drop the remaining 295 grand in the Salvation Army kettle.

### TEST DRIVE

## 2018 Alfa Romeo Stelvio

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The engine revs freely and I found myself banging my head on the 5,500 rpm redline limiter sooner than expected. The engine certainly sounds game for higher revs. The brushed aluminum shifter paddles are notable for both their action and their sheer size. The short click from shift request to transmission response is satisfyingly crisp. And the large size of the paddles is largely a positive. The only drawback is that they stand between your fingers and the stalks behind them. You therefore work around the supersized paddles to make adjustments to wipers, blinkers, etc. If you like to — at least occasionally — shift it yourself, the shared stalk space issue will be overlooked. If you don't, it may be more of an annoyance (and, may I say, whaddya expect in a vehicle with obvious sporting intentions).

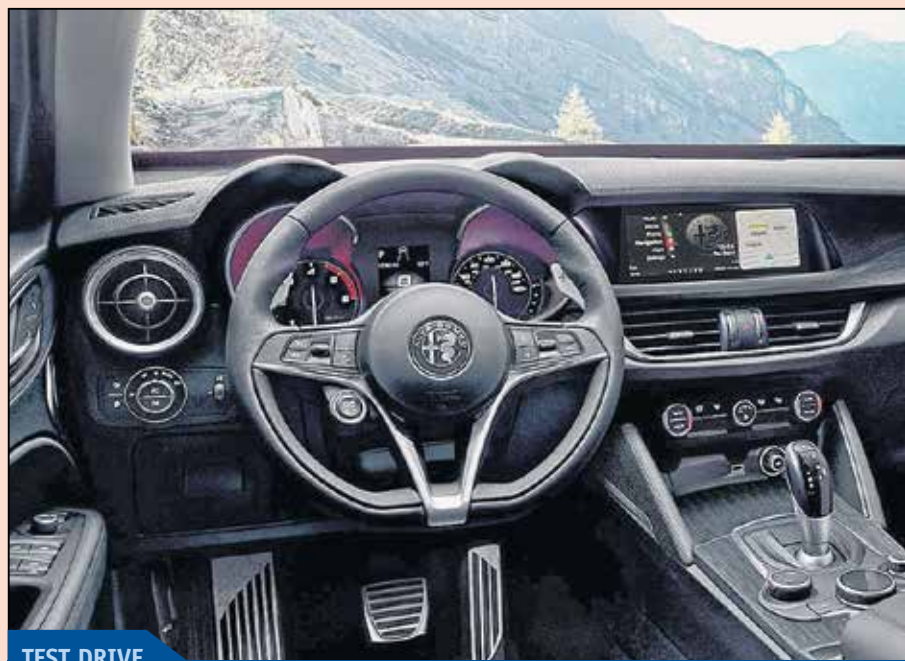
Fuel economy is rated at 22/28/24, and my week behind the wheel was spot-on the combined average of 24 miles per gal-

lon. Towing capacity is 3,000 lb.

The last vehicle in this segment that we tested was the Audi Q5. Compared to the Q, Stelvio is +28 in horsepower, +33 in torque. It's quoted time from 0-60 is half a second faster, but the Audi is +1 in combined fuel economy.

Stelvio's interior has an understated appearance, more so with the all-black cabin in my test car. With six-footers up front, like-size passengers are a tight squeeze in back. Cargo capacity ranges from 18.5-56.5 cubic feet, depending on how the seats are deployed. That's less than the Q5 (26.8-60.4), and on the small side of the segment generally.

The gearshift is of the electronic, joystick variety, requiring finesse moves, rather than something more direct, so I'm not a fan. HVAC functions are accessed by a trio of dials, mid-way up the center stack — easy to use. Most infotainment selections are made using a knurled knob to interact with the menus



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displayed on the central touchscreen (6.50-inch standard, 8.8-inch optional). Adding a “back” button would speed up the processing time. Overall, the Alfa infotainment system is about average in terms of complexity. As with many such systems, the time spent drilling down through menus is potentially distracting to the driver.

Stelvio's curving roof line and shallow backlight present rear visibility challenges for the driver. Buyers should consider the available blind spot monitoring a mandatory option. Other technology on the option sheet includes forward collision warning/mitigation, adaptive cruise control and lane departure warn-

ing. Though it was not offered at the beginning of production, Android Auto and Apple CarPlay compatibility will be a rolling update to the infotainment system's repertoire this year.

Given the popularity of compact luxury crossovers, the surprise isn't that Alfa has launched the Stelvio, but rather the fact that it took this long for them to do so. So, late to the party, yes. But it's a party that shows few signs of breaking up anytime soon.

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.