

Honda, Lincoln and Volvo win big at Detroit show

The 2018 North American International Auto Show (NAIAS) in Detroit, Mich. began with an announcement that the **Honda Accord** was named the North American Car of the Year, the **Volvo XC60** got the Utility Vehicle of the Year award and the **Lincoln Navigator** nabbed Truck of the Year title. The show wrapped up Jan. 28.

The midsize Accord's major revision last year won rave reviews from critics, with the largest trunk in its segment. And while, yes, the expert jury does understand that, like the XC60, the Navigator is also an SUV, it garnered the top truck accolade for its truck-like towing ability, said jury president Mark Phelan of the *Detroit Free Press*.



2018 Honda Accord



Tesla Starman heads to space

Last Tuesday, **Tesla Motors** co-founder Elon Musk — wearing his other hat as CEO of SpaceX — celebrated the launch of that private space travel company's new Falcon Heavy rocket from Cape Canaveral. But don't think he forgot his car brand. Mounted atop the rocket was a red **Tesla Roadster**, with a spacesuit-wearing dummy dubbed "Starman" at the wheel. Musk explained that test space flights often include simulated weights and, hey, why not use Tesla's latest \$200,000 electric roadster? Images of Starman behind the wheel of the Tesla Roadster heading off into space were livecast back to Earth. The test of what is now the world's most powerful rocket was successful, with its reusable boosters making it back to Earth safely. Starman and his Tesla will keep traveling, however. Intended for Mars, they overshot their trajectory and are now headed for the asteroid belt. But don't expect aliens in some distant future galaxy to find the car. Scientists say that it will either be smashed to bits by asteroids or fall apart after being bombarded by radiation.



This Ram truck Superbowl ad was widely condemned as tasteless and tone deaf.

Lesson: Car ads, religion and politics don't mix

The post-mortem of **Superbowl** ads is complete, and one thing most agree on is that the worst commercial was the one-minute **Ram truck** spot which featured a voiceover of **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, delivering one of his last sermons on the value of service. Why? Because Ram trucks git'r'done?

The King Center in Atlanta quickly made it known that neither it nor King's daughter Bernice were responsible for authorizing the speech's use. (It was approved by a company run by Dexter King, the civil rights leader's son.) But since race is a sensitive issue these days, especially in pro football, the real question is: Who at Fiat Chrysler thought this was ever a good idea in the first place?

Also this week, another automaker ran afoul using a religious leader's words. After **Mercedes-Benz** quoted the **Dalai Lama** in a post on its Instagram account, China threw a fit. And since a quarter of all Mercedes-Benzes are sold in China, the German automaker launched into all sorts of apologies.

Since China invaded the Himalayan country in 1950, it's attempted to absorb Tibetan culture into its own, and considers the Dalai Lama — currently living in exile in India — as a dangerous dissident. "We fully understand how it has hurt the feelings of people in the country, including our colleagues working in China," Mercedes-Benz said about its post. "We sincerely apologize for this."

For the record, here's the offending quote used: "Look at situations from all angles, and you will become more open."



The new Volkswagen Arteon could receive a twin-turbocharged V-6 worth about 400 hp.

VW to target Kia's Stinger?

It's no secret that **Volkswagen** will launch a new fastback sedan for 2019 to replace the recently cashiered CC model. The **Arteon**, as it's called, can be optioned with a 276-horsepower V-6 from the Passat sedan's parts stash.

Better still, a brand new turbocharged 3.0-liter V-6 (a planned option for the **Atlas** utility wagon) is expected for the sporty **Arteon R**. The engine is guesstimated at 400-horsepower 390-pound-feet of torque.

Arteon could provide competition for the new **2018 Kia Stinger** sedan that can be had with a 365-hp twin-turbo V-6. If other automakers copy Kia's and VW's performance approach, it just might revive lagging sales of four-door sedans in North America.

TEST DRIVE

2019 Jeep Cherokee

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as needed. For drivers mainly interested in four-wheel traction on demand for wintry conditions, this is your system. Active Drive II (same availability as I) includes a two-speed Power Transfer Unit with torque management and low range. The 4-Low mode locks front and rear driveshafts for enhanced low speed power or towing.

Finally, Active Drive Lock (exclusive to Trailhawk) builds on Active Drive II, with

For drivers mainly interested in four-wheel traction on demand for wintry conditions, Active Drive I is your system.

the addition of a locking differential for maximum low speed traction in severe off-road conditions. Regardless of system chosen, all 4x4 Cherokees feature Jeep's Selec-Terrain traction control system. Drivers choose from up to five settings: Auto, Snow, Sport, Sand/Mud and (Active Drive Lock only) Rock. Each optimizes as many as 12 systems to enhance vehicle control.

Trailhawk's off-road prowess is hard to

overstate. Selec-Speed control and Hill-Descent Control allow you to traverse tricky stretches at a slow, regulated, adjustable speed, without need to touch the pedals. This frees the driver to concentrate on just seeing and steering.

A trail spotter suggested that I traverse a long bed of large rocks sans pedals, to demonstrate the Selec-Speed control. I did, and it works, although I think we managed to locate and test every skid plate beneath that Trailhawk in the process! It's useful trail technology and a solid option for the driver, but I like to feather the brake with my left foot, the gas with my right and switch the controls off when picking my way through trail obstacles, to cushion the transitions).

If you run across a stream in your travels, this Jeep will ford water up to 20-inches deep. Its angles of approach/break over/departure are 29.9/22.9/32.2 degrees, respectively, and very respectable. Driving down one particularly steep stretch of a trail brought those numbers home. Exiting the base of the hill, the angle of the Trailhawk was such that I was practically standing on the firewall. Yet the front end of the vehicle wasn't scraping.

Interior updates for 2019 include new trim on the dash and center console (now piano black and satin chrome). Cherokee's cabin is sized such that six footers can (just



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

fit in back, with like-size folks up front. Cargo capacity ranges from 25.8-54.9 cubic feet. That's an increase of about three cubic feet over the previous model. Lift over height is low enough for easy loading, and a new kick wave sensor allows you to open the tailgate when your hands are full (standard on Overland, optional on Limited).

Stowage spots up front include a good sized center console, covered dash top tray, and reeally thin door pockets (will hold a water bottle and maybe a map (passing thought — how many times have you wished you had a map when you suspect that your GPS navi is giving you a bum steer?).

A newly enlarged cubbyhole at the base of the center stack is big enough for a couple of phones, and puts them in proximity of the USB and auxiliary ports, and a 115-volt outlet. Cherokee's thick roof pillars create typical SUV ¾-rear blind spots. A blind spot monitoring system is standard on Limited, Overland and Trailhawk, and optional on Latitude/ Latitude Plus (as part of the SafetyTec Group, which also includes rear cross path detection, rear park assist and power foldaway mirrors).

The fourth generation Uconnect infotainment system is offered in three versions, with 7.0 or 8.4-inch touchscreen sizes. The larger size screens have upgraded graphics, and employ the pinch/swipe/tap moves familiar to smartphone users. Speaking of which, all versions of Uconnect are compatible with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay.

Controls are generally easy to operate, though some HVAC settings are absorbed into the 8.4-inch touch screen, making routine climate adjustments a two part process.

Cherokee competes in the largest SUV segment in the U.S. market. Midsize Sport Utility Vehicles account for over two million sales annually. Big and highly competitive. This segment includes veteran nameplates like CRV, RAV4 and Escape.

Restyled and restocked with new technology, Cherokee's strongest asset continues to be its best in class off-road capability, now wrapped in a more refined and roadworthy package.

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.

