

New BMW Z4 is nearly ready

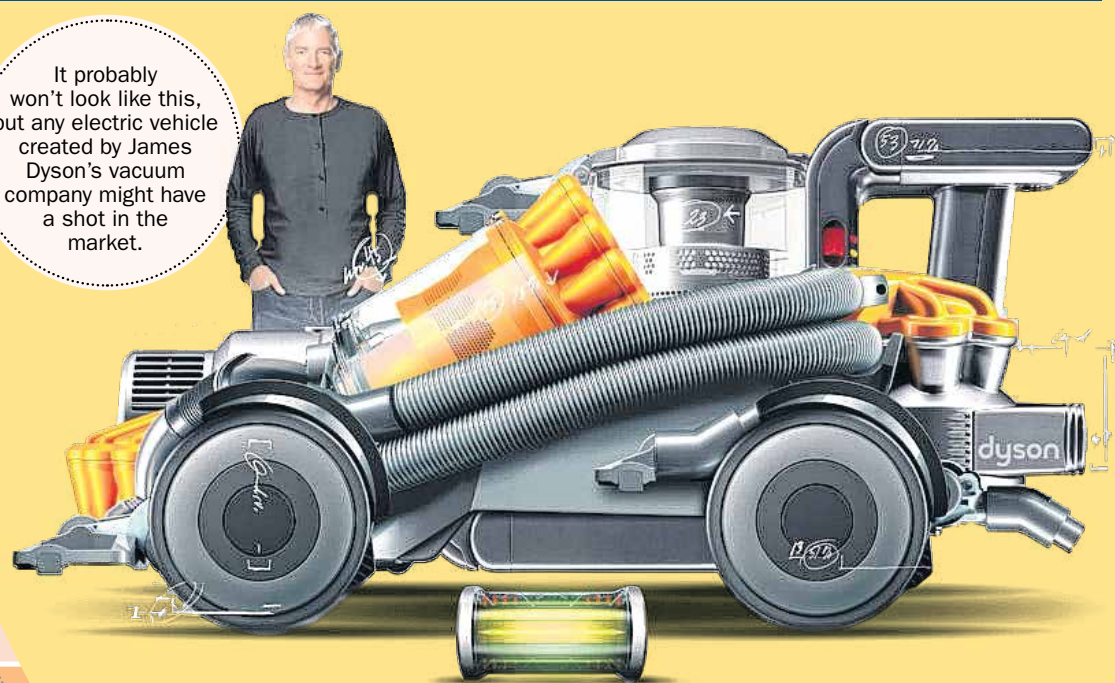
We've been waiting for news concerning the automaker's replacement for the roadster that was retired in 2016. We can now confirm that the production car will look similar to the concept that was shown in Monterey, Calif., last summer, and that it will have a fabric top instead of a folding hardtop.



BMW's Z4 replacement may look like this concept shown off last year at Monterey.

Turbocharged four- and six-cylinder engines will be available, producing about 250 and 350 horsepower, respectively. The new Z4, which arrives for 2019, and the forthcoming Toyota Supra coupe share the same basic structure, but not engines or body panels.

It probably won't look like this, but any electric vehicle created by James Dyson's vacuum company might have a shot in the market.



Will Dyson clean up with electric cars?

The company headed by 70-year-old Sir James Dyson of England is well known for making vacuums, bladeless fans and other household items. However, according to sources, Dyson is planning to enter the automobile business. Perhaps earlier reports of a Dyson flying car were merely meant to whet our appetite. Closer to the ground, Dyson has reportedly earmarked \$2.7 billion to develop electric vehicles and plans to hire 400 employees. Much of the initial effort will be directed at battery development as well as engineering lightweight composite body structures. Given Sir James' expertise in both areas, albeit on a smaller scale, he seems to have a good shot at succeeding in his new venture.



The 2018 Kia K900. If corporate cousin Hyundai has shown enough promise breaking into the luxury segment with its Genesis brand, why not Kia?

Kia rejigs the K900, hoping it will finally click with luxury buyers

The Kia sedan that uses the same platform and powertrains as the Hyundai Equus/Genesis G90 has been a bit of a sales dud, but reports are revealing that a second-generation **K900** will be revealed later this year. Word is the styling will differ considerably from the current model, resulting in a slightly longer and wider body that will project a more luxurious presence. Both the 3.8-liter V-6 and optional 5.0-liter V-8 engines are expected to return, however a hybrid power system hasn't been ruled out. Base pricing is also expected to remain in the low-\$50,000 range.



Ford reworks its "secret" minivan

We wonder why The Blue Oval automaker isn't making a bigger deal of its revised **Transit Connect** van that will debut this fall in regular- and extended length models. The passenger wagon, as Ford calls it, is based on the work-van version and has seating for up to seven passengers. It also has plenty of oversized (for a van) windows to scope out the passing scenery. And with a high roofline and a low load floor, the Transit Connect will easily swallow plenty of bulky cargo once the enormous liftgate is opened. And if fuel economy is a concern, a new 1.5-liter-four-cylinder turbo-diesel option could achieve 30 mpg on the highway, says Ford. A 2.0-liter four-cylinder gasoline engine is standard. Pricing for the passenger van is expected to start in the mid-\$20,000 range.

TEST DRIVE

2019 Volvo XC40

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lively throttle response, without any edginess. It works best with the transmission in automatic mode.

Manumatic shifting is possible (via steering wheel mounted paddles), but DYI shift response lacks the immediacy (and hence the fun) of a dual clutch transmission. Volvo says the trip from

Rear seat headroom is best in its peer group, and the XC40 trails only the BMW in rear seat legroom.

0-60 takes 6.2 seconds, which puts it at the front of the pack we've been using for comparison. It feels quick, accelerates smoothly and is noticeably quiet going about its business. That's true even when you go to the whip, which can't always be said, when small displacement engines are hard at work. No EPA estimates on fuel economy are available, as of this writing.

Waiting in the wings is a second, T4 version of this engine. The T4's preliminary power ratings are 187 horsepower @ 4,700 rpm and 221 lb.-ft. of torque @ 1,400 rpm. Volvo says the T4 is expected to be about a second slower from 0-60 than the T5, which would still rate as

responsive. Fuel economy estimates have also not been finalized. The T4 will be installed in all front-wheel-drive XC40s. The Borg Warner system in AWD equipped models maintains a front drive bias under most conditions, automatically shifting up to 50 percent of available torque to the rear wheels as needed, for maximum traction. AWD is always engaged when starting from a full stop, so you can get off the dime with alacrity, when need be. The XC40 feels reasonably nimble and rides easily. I didn't encounter enough crummy pavement to make a judgement as to whether the various wheel sizes (18-inch, 19-inch, 20-inch) impact ride quality.

Black and White reference time. Years ago, car doors featured map pockets. Wide and thin, sometimes hard, sometimes soft, they provided easily accessible storage space for maps. (Maps were what we used to help find our way, in the decades before we began arguing with our navigation systems).

When we entered the Age of Hydration, door pockets sprouted flares on one end, large enough to harbor our ever-present water bottles. Bottle bulges notwithstanding, door pockets have been shrinking industrywide for years. So much so that on most modern vehicles, there's barely enough room left there for a map. If, you know, anyone still used maps.

The XC40 is a revelation in this regard. Volvo's Air Woofer Technology (which



conjures up the image of a plane full of dogs in white lab coats) moves said speaker to the firewall. This allowed the engineers to rethink the use of the door panels, and reintroduce a now-novel concept to drivers — usable door pockets. Other interior storage highlights include a flip-out bag hook on the glove box door, multiple compartments in the center console and a drawer under the driver's side seat. Larger gear goes to the rear, where the XC40 houses up to 57.5 cubic-feet. That includes under-floor storage, the lid for which can be reconfigured to section off that space. Split, rear seatbacks fold flat forward to allow for longer/larger items.

As for passengers, a six-footer can fit behind a driver of the same size. Rear seat headroom is best in its peer group, and the XC40 trails only the BMW in rear seat legroom (the X1 is also tops total cargo capacity). Row one holds adults of most any size, and sliding behind the wheel, the driver takes in a clean, stylish space. Leather seating is standard, and the front seats are supportive and long distance comfortable.

Many onboard systems are accessed via the Sensus Connect system, with a 9-inch touchscreen, top center on the dashboard. The vertically oriented display is bright. The learning curve for navigating the myriad system controls is steep. The good news is, once you learn the drill, it's a very smart system, and when you learn the language, voice controls can make some tasks hand's-free. An available, wireless phone charging pad is at the base of the center stack.

Smartphone owners take note — the Sensus system is compatible with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

Additional content is here for the asking, subject to your wants and budget. Blind spot monitoring/cross traffic alert are part of the Vision Package (\$1,100). A 360-degree camera system and articulating, LED headlights top the Advance Package (\$995). The 600-watt, 13 speaker, harmon-kardon sound system is a stand-alone option (\$800) on R-Design, and a package item (\$1,375) on Momentum.

An intriguing element about Volvo's latest addition is a new, non-ownership option. In addition to the traditional channels (buy, lease), the company will offer qualified consumers a subscription plan. Customers will pay a non-negotiable, flat fee for 24 months (\$600 or \$700 per month, depending on trim), with a 15,000 mile annual allowance. The fee will be nearly all inclusive.

You buy your own gas, but most other car-related costs (insurance, maintenance, roadside assistance, concierge services) will be rolled in the monthly payment. Subscribers will have the option to upgrade to a new car after 12 months.

The business model is similar to that used for smartphones, and its popularity will undoubtedly be closely monitored by other automakers.

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.

