

Want to take your comfort and convenience off road? GMC will save a **Sierra AT4** for you.

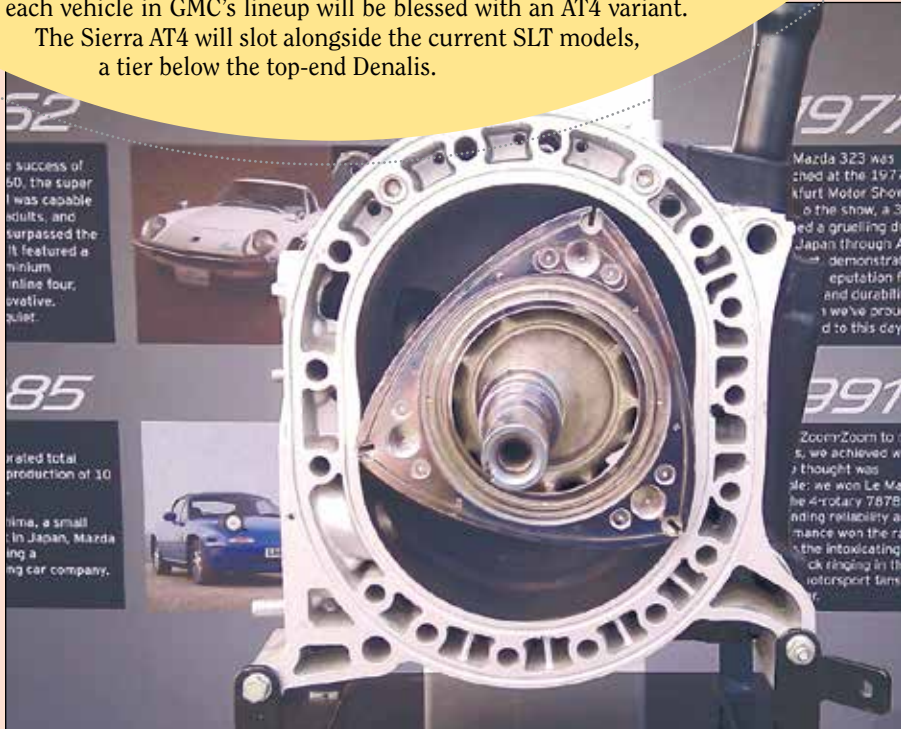


GMC launches off-road Sierra

GMC announced last week that it's heading off road with a redesigned **Sierra pickup**, to be badged as the AT4 (for All Terrain Four). In the same way the Denali model lured more luxury buyers to the brand, GMC is hoping to attract off-roaders who might otherwise opt for another light truck, i.e. Jeep. (Though GM North America president Alan Batey tried to downplay the competition.)

The **2019 Sierra AT4** will have four-wheel-drive (with a two-speed transfer case) as standard, and feature a 2-inch factory-installed suspension lift, locking differential and skid plates. The cabin will be decked out with darker elements than the standard Sierra. According to Batey, the potential AT4 buyer will "want to have all of the convenience and ... premium features, but we're also seeing that they have a pretty active lifestyle." Over the next two years, Batey said each vehicle in GMC's lineup will be blessed with an AT4 variant.

The Sierra AT4 will slot alongside the current SLT models, a tier below the top-end Denalis.



Museum piece no more. Designed by Felix Wankel, the rotary engine powered Mazda vehicles from the 1960s up until the 2012 RX-8. Mazda is bringing it back, with a new twist.

Mazda's returning rotary has a use, but not doing what you think

Mazda is forever linked to its use of the legendary **rotary engine** — as epitomized by its use in the much-missed RX-8 sports car — but the pistonless powerplant has been discontinued since the end of the 2012 model-year RX-8 in 2011.

There was much excitement, then, when the Japan-based maker announced it would be reviving use of the Wankel-design rotary engine. However, it's not going to be used the way most nostalgics probably think.

Word is that the rotary engine will initially be employed as a non-turbocharged electric power generator for an EV which would likely launch sometime in 2019. The single-rotor design means the engine will be light, and with a displacement of less than 0.4 of a liter, it will take up little space. Further uses for Mazda's rotary technology are rumored to include a sporty coupe of some sort, but that remains to be seen.

The scoop on next-gen Golf

Incoming intel indicates significant changes are in store for the eighth generation of **Volkswagen's** compact hatchback. Due out for the 2020 model year, reports claim that the next **Golf** will be available with a fully digital dashboard plus "extended autonomous driving functions" with permanent Internet connectivity. Physically, the Golf will be longer and wider than the current model, not unlike VW's **GTE Sport concept** that went on public display in 2015. There's no word



The 2015 Volkswagen GTE concept: Hopefully a template for the next Golf

as yet regarding drivetrains, but it's a safe bet that partial or fully electric propulsion will be available, and that a diesel engine option will likely continue to be off the table.



The autonomous Cruise AV is part of GM's "triple zero" plan: Zero emissions, zero crashes and zero congestion.

GM to invest \$100m in self-driving Cruise AVs

General Motors announced last week that it will invest more than \$100 million in two separate Michigan facilities to begin cranking out its **Cruise AV** self-driving car next year.

Production of the Cruise AV — essentially an autonomously-equipped version of the battery-powered **Bolt** crossover — will occur at the Orion Township plant, with roof modules being assembled at the Brownstown Battery Assembly plant south of Detroit. Cruise is the name of GM's autonomous vehicle division. Many makers are eager to produce electrics, and the Cruise AV is part of GM's "triple zero" plan: Zero emissions, zero crashes and zero congestion.

GM petitioned the U.S. government in January for approval of a fully autonomous vehicle — one without a steering wheel, accelerator or brake pedal — to make up the manufacturer's proposed commercial ride-sharing fleet of more than 2,500 vehicles.

Though GM CEO Mary Barra met personally with Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao in late March, the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (which has had GM's application for two months now) has so far deemed the proposal incomplete. The NHTSA is looking for some 16 changes to the Cruise AV — including adding airbags to the driver's dashboard that has no steering wheel — in order to approve its deployment on public roads.

A final decision from the agency might not come until later this year or even 2019, and even then GM will have to seek approval from individual states to operate its self-driving fleet.

GM's not the only one rushing to enter this nascent market, but it's gotten a little trickier lately in the wake of last month's pedestrian fatality in Tempe, Arizona, involving an Uber-owned autonomous vehicle. Several states have suspended testing of self-driving vehicles, which may cause both NHTSA and states' scrutiny of safety in testing scenarios to increase even more.

TEST DRIVE

2018 Hyundai Elantra GT

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55.1 cubic-feet, depending on how you have the seats set. That compares with 14.4 cubic feet in the Elantra sedan, and it's usably large.

The only things that would improve the space is if the rear seat backs folded to a flat load floor (they don't) and if you didn't have to move the front seatbacks forward before dropping the rears (you do, if those up front are on the tall side).

The GT Sport Styling Package (\$1,800) includes blind-spot monitoring, rear cross-traffic alert, heated front seats (power adjustable for the driver), remote entry and keyless start, dual zone climate control and a leather-wrapped wheel.

Beyond the bigger engine and sport

tuned (multi-link, independent rear) suspension, leather seats and an electronic parking brake, GT Sport models also feature a stouter braking package, 18-inch alloy rims and LED headlights. A bank of buttons and twin rheostats take care of HVAC controls — easy and fast. An 8-inch touchscreen interface accesses radio, media and navigation (part of the \$4,300 GT Tech Package, along with adaptive cruise control, lane departure warning/intervention, forward collision warning with automatic braking, ventilated seats, moon roof, LED taillights, auto-high beam controls and a premium sound system.) However, this package can only be specified on Elantra's equipped with an automatic transmission. The infotain-



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ment system supports Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, so drivers can access most commonly used, compatible smartphone functions through the display. The sole flaw with the touchscreen is that you'll need to de-glove to get it to accept input.

The fun-minded GT Sport balances the Elantra ticket, joining as it does the

economy-minded Eco sedan that was introduced last year.

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.

Don't miss next week's Test Drive: **2018 Mazda3s**

