

Tucson takes to new heights

In the highly competitive small-utility class, automakers are practically obligated to frequently make over these models. That certainly applies to **Hyundai**, which, according to well-placed sources, will introduce a significantly updated **Tucson** in 2019 as



If Hyundai's redesign follows through, this 2018 Tucson will get "squarer."

a 2020 model. Physically, the compact wagon will receive similar sheetmetal to the all-new 2019 Santa Fe that launches later this year. The Tucson's cabin will also see significant change, including a tablet-style touch-screen perched above (and not within) the dashboard. You can also expect suspension changes aimed at smoothing out the vehicle's somewhat choppy ride. Although there's no specific word on powertrains, the Tucson's non-turbo and turbocharged four-cylinder engines are likely to carry over.

change, including



The current Soul will get a new grille more in line with Kia's corporate look.

Kia is working on a new Soul

Reports are that the third generation of Kia's funky (and roomy) subcompact crossover will arrive in 2019 as a 2020 model. They're also reporting that it will retain the same basic shape and size, but front-end styling, arguably the car's weakest link, will be significantly revised in keeping with Kia's current corporate look. It's likely that the base 130-horsepower four-cylinder engine will be dropped, leaving the 161-horsepower 2.0-liter four-cylinder and the 201-horsepower turbocharged four-cylinder to carry on. The Soul EV (electric vehicle) is expected to return with an increase in range over the current 111-mile maximum. Debuting as a 2009 model, the Soul was first conceived by Mike Torpey, a designer at Kia's Irvine, California design center. After a trip to Korea where he learned of the importance of the wild boar to Korean culture, he based his early designs on a caricature he did of a boar wearing a backpack. Hey, many popular cars have been based on less than that.



This self-driving Ford Focus will actually have a driver when delivering pizzas.

Ford's self-driving pizza delivery cars

Ford announced that it will be partnering with **Domino's** pizza chain to begin testing a self-driving pizza delivery vehicle in the Miami area.

Before misanthropes rejoice about another opportunity to avoid human interaction, we repeat, this is only a test.

Unlike recent fully driverless vehicles being tested out on public roads recently, the Ford Focus will have fully autonomous driving ability — and the sedans made to look like there's no driver — but there will be a human manning the vehicle.



The two-month pilot period is meant as an opportunity for both companies to study human interaction with the (seemingly) driverless vehicle. Ford and Domino's recently completed another collaboration on pizza delivery in Michigan, where both companies are headquartered.

Moreover, Ford is keen to remain ahead of the curve on self-driving cars and their various applications. And while Uber has temporarily suspended its autonomous testing after one of its self-driving Volvo SUVs struck and killed a pedestrian in Tempe, Arizona, the deployment of autonomous transportation on American roadways is expected to continue.



Avenir trim gives Buicks, like this 2018 Enclave, an even more upscale appeal.

Buick adds more Avenirs

Sources are saying that this General Motors division will make a major move on the upper end of the automotive spectrum with the **Avenir** nameplate.

Branded as a premium trim level, the Avenir subset was first introduced for the Buick Enclave utility wagon and will soon be offered as a high-end trim for the full-size LaCrosse sedan. It also appears likely that the Regal will receive the Avenir treatment as will the Envision and Encore utility vehicles.

Apparently, Buick's marketing team has been greatly inspired by the success of the GMC brand that has success with its loaded-to-the-hilt Denali models.

TEST DRIVE

2018 Mazda3

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Mazda lineup is centered in their crossover models, not the sedans and hatches. That said, with common sense and appropriate tires, front-wheel-drive will get you through a lot, and the Mazda3 acquitted itself well when asked, in the wintry sloop.

And once days turned a little warmer and forecasts no longer included frozen precipitation, the Mazda3 eagerly took to curvy roads. Steering is precise, if a little light feeling.

Mazda's G-Vectoring Control system is standard issue on all 3s. The system adjusts engine torque as you enter a corner, to optimize turn-in response and minimize steering corrections. If you were

able to test two cars on a track, back to back, with/without the system, the difference might be detectable. Without that frame of reference, it isn't.

Sport trim models have 16-inch rims and tires and figure to be the smoothest riding of all Mazda3s. All trims above Sport trade their 16s for 18s. The improvement in looks/handling comes with a ride/handling giveback, most noticeable on less-than-perfect pavement.

My suggestion is to include both tire sizes in your test drive, and add a bumpy road or two in said trip (shouldn't be hard to find — it's spring).

Trunk room is 12.4 cubic feet, which lags behind class competitors like Focus, Corolla, Civic, Jetta and Mazda3.



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Come again? That last reference is to the other Mazda3 model — the five-door. Cargo capacity for the hatchback ranges from 20.2 - 47.1 cubic feet. Back to the sedan: the rear seatbacks in the four-door fold forward to allow for longer/larger items, but you may have to push the front seatbacks out of the way first. Moving from the trunk to the back seat, six footers will be a really tight squeeze behind like-size people in front.

The Mazda3's 35.8 inches of rear seat leg room is more than Focus, less than Civic (37.4 inches), Jetta (38.1 inches) or Corolla (41.4 inches).

The front cabin shows well — clean

and modern. A rearview camera is standard on all models. HVAC controls are located in a deck mid-way up the center stack, and are easy to use.

Adjustments for system settings, sound system and navigation are made on the 7-inch touchscreen display atop the stack, or by a knurled knob and buttons on the console. In an industry filled with over-engineered interfaces, Mazda has a better than average design.

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.

