

Buick drops its name

Starting with the 2019 model year, new Buicks will cease to be identified as Buicks, per se. Instead, only Buick's tri-shield logo and the actual model name (i.e. Encore, Regal, etc.) will be displayed. The move isn't unprecedented: Hyundai, Volkswagen and Audi also eschew names on their badging. The reason, according to the company, is to establish consistency across market-places. (The change will also be implemented in China, Buick's only other market outside of North America.) The company cited studies that found three out of four consumers recognize the tri-shield as a Buick, even without the name.

Another unstated bonus: It clears up more space to put the name Avenir, the designation of Buick's upscale line, on those vehicles.



Porsche's Cayenne SUV could get a coupe-ified version.



Cayenne coupe coming?

Quick: What's Porsche's top-selling model? It's not the 911, but the **Cayenne** crossover. Now the German maker may be angling to release a sportier variant of the Cayenne that features couple body styling, but retains four doors. Following the trend of automakers seeking to make their SUVs sleeker (even Land Rover just released the Range Rover SV Coupe for a mere \$295,000) the Cayenne coupe will feature a dramatically tapered roofline, similar to the Porsche Panamera, and a hatch. You want sportier? Reports say Porsche will replace the base Cayenne's 3.0L twin-turbo V6 with the 434-hp, 2.9L twin-turbo V-6 that the powers the Cayenne S or the 541-hp, 4.0L twin-turbo V8 from the Cayenne Turbo. Such a configuration would surely help it compete with the Audi Q8, BMW X6 and Mercedes GLE Coupe. Rumors say the Cayenne coupe could hit the U.K. market in late 2019, with North American sales sure to follow, given the success of the X6 and GLE Coupe here.



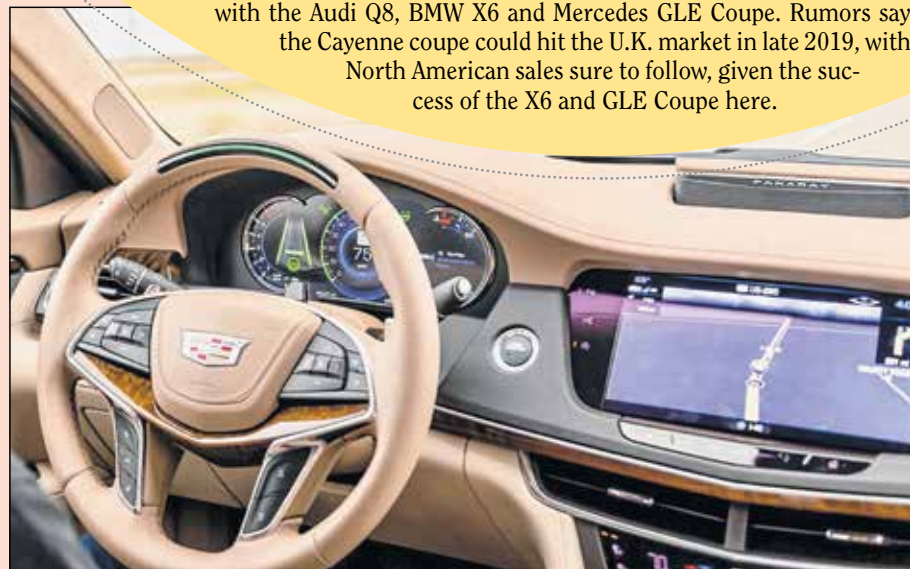
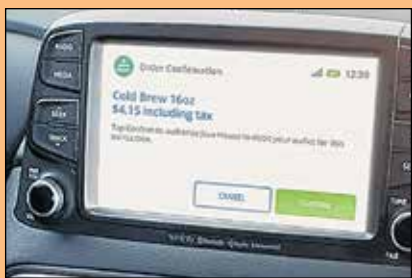
Hyundai's new tech will let you pay for goods and services right from your dash.

Hyundai's Digital Wallet

Those who enjoy paying for things on the go with their smartphone might just love Hyundai's new Digital Wallet, which was showcased last week at the TU-Automotive high tech conference in Detroit. Along with automotive software developer Xevo, the Korean automaker is readying a system for market that allows drivers to pay for gas, coffee and parking from their dashboard's infotainment system and its already existing Blue Link system.

In the future, Hyundai expects to connect drivers to popular brands to make in-vehicle purchases through their dash's touchscreen via a secure system. Brands already on board include Chevron and Texaco gas stations, Applebee's To Go and ParkWhiz, an electronic service that allows users to book a guaranteed parking space before reaching their destination.

Though no official launch date has been set yet, the technology could be implemented through an existing mobile app to display through the vehicle's infotainment system, or be part of an entirely new platform incorporated into Hyundai vehicles. Either way, get ready to spend while driving.



Caddies to get hands-off Super Cruise

While Cadillac's partially-automated Super Cruise system is only available on its CT6 sedan — it was notably absent on the 2019 XT4 SUV unveiled in January at the New York Auto Show — the automaker claims that by 2020 it will be on every model in its lineup, and then possibly on other vehicles in General Motors stable.

While not truly autonomous, Super Cruise is a driver assist system that pairs radar adaptive cruise control with a camera-based lane centering capacity, allowing users to take their hands off the wheel while driving. Unlike Tesla's AutoPilot and Volvo's Pilot Assist, Cadillac's system can currently only be used on divided highways.

Cadillac also plans to equip an unnamed, upcoming crossover with vehicle-to-everything (V2X) communication capabilities, which would be the next step in implementing fully autonomous vehicles on roadways.

TEST DRIVE

2018 Dodge Challenger GT

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eight-speed automatic transmission (sadly, no manual is offered), the 3.6L posts 305 horsepower @ 6,350 rpm and 268 lb.-ft. of torque @ 4,800 rpm.

The six lacks the rumbly soundtrack of a V-8, but it doesn't lack for power. Three-hundred-five horsepower is sufficient to move the big (4,106 lb.) coupe along nicely. EPA fuel economy estimates are 19 city, 27 highway and 21 combined. That's not a lot, but it's about what you'd

expect for a 300 h.p., two-ton car with AWD, and it's also in line with the ratings of many crossovers, a number of which have a lower fun factor.

This test drive took place in June, here in the Capital District. I also drove a Challenger GT extensively in Maine two winters back, in a closed course stuffed full of snow. Shod with all season tires, Challenger handled snowy conditions as well as most crossovers. And on dry pavement it just plain handles better than most crossovers, owing to a lower center of gravity, sport tuned suspension and balanced weight distribution (52 percent front/48 percent back — best among all Challenger models). Unlike many fun to drive, sporty cars, you don't have to park this one and wait out winter.

The last time I drove a Challenger GT, I noted that the ride was firm, and got jittery on rough pavement. I was therefore eager to size the car up again, this time on local roads. I've confirmed — it's firm. But it's comfortable on balance, and smoother than I gave it credit for the first time. I realize that my previous reaction speaks more to the state of the average Maine back road than it does the suspension of this car.

Challenger is essentially a big two-door coupe: very comfortable in front, and if those so seated are tall, back seat leg room is effectively erased. In that regard, it's in the same boat as longtime rivals Mustang and Camaro — even though modern era Challengers are larger than either of those two pony cars.

If you regularly bring adults with you in back and you're thinking Dodge, you'd do well to walk across the showroom and try a test sit in Charger, which is also offered with AWD. Its 40.1-inches of rear seat leg room is fully seven inches more than Challenger.

When it's crossovers vs. cars, the former wins on interior functionality. That said, Challenger's trunk capacity is 16.2 cubic feet. Good room, but with a smallish opening and moderate lift-over to reach it.

The Uconnect infotainment system is pretty easy to navigate, via 8.4-inch touchscreen, and the system is compatible with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay. A media hub was added to the center console in the last interior re-do back in 2015. It includes an SD card slot, USB outlet and auxiliary input jack. Thick c-pillars and fat headrests create big ¾-rear blind spots in Challenger. Standard rear backup camera and rear parking assist have you covered for routine rearward maneuvers.

But I'd consider blind spot monitoring a mandatory option. It's bundled in the Driver Convenience Group (\$1,095), along with rear cross-traffic detection, HID headlamps and a remote start system. Among the other available options, a moon roof adds \$1,195 to the bottom line, and a navigation system can be incorporated into the Uconnect display for \$795 (also includes Sirius XM Traffic and Travel Link).



TEST DRIVE

this vehicle at these preferred dealerships:

ARMORY CHRYSLER DODGE JEEP RAM SRT FIAT
926 Central Ave., Albany, NY 12206
518-641-7777 www.armoryauto.com

GOLDSTEIN CHRYSLER JEEP DODGE RAM
968 New Loudon Rd., Latham, NY 12110
518-785-4156 www.goldsteinchryslerjeep.net



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they do with Charger). Drivers sitting behind a Charger AWD at a stop light see the AWD badge on the car's trunk lid and realize that they have a four-season driving option that they might never have considered. The GT name (and badging) for Challenger removed the possibility of that "Ah-hah!" moment. The reasoning was that those in the know, will know.

That logic was reexamined, and the 2018 editions replace the GT deck lid badge with a "4". Better marketing, for sure, though the stylized 4 still doesn't hammer the point home the way a simple AWD would. The fact that you're offering a sporty coupe with winter-friendly AWD as an alternative to crossovers and utes should be spelled out plainly.

After all, when you're selling a product, preaching to the choir is less important than growing the congregation.

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.