

In defense of the Grand Caravan

It's getting a little tiring hearing automotive writers complaining about how out of date Dodge's minivan is and how its retirement can't be too far off. Although there's no news as to a departure or replacement date, it doesn't seem the Grand Caravan is leaving anytime soon, other than from showrooms into the driveways of thousands of new owners. For as old as it is (the current platform dates back to 2008), Dodge's big, boxy carry-all was the top-selling minivan for calendar year 2017, besting the Honda Odyssey, Toyota Sienna and Kia Sedona. The Grand Caravan also beat the Chrysler Pacifica that was introduced for the 2017 model year, which is not really a surprise based on the price difference. Speaking of which, price is a huge reason for the GC's success, as it sells for thousands less than all other minivans in its class.



2008 Dodge Grand Caravan: The fifth generation of Dodge's minivan has been around for a decade, but it's still a great bang for the buck.



Hyundai's funky Kona compact crossover may be getting a performance version.

A hot Kona heading this way?

Hyundai's size-small **Kona** utility wagon is in line to receive the N performance treatment. This will likely mean the installation of a turbocharged 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine that produces 275 horsepower. The current Kona has two engine options: A 2.0L four-cylinder (147hp and 132 lb.-ft. of torque) and a 2.0L turbo (175 hp/195 lb.-ft.).

The Kona N's powerplant will be borrowed from Hyundai's i30 N, a performance version of the Elantra GT available in hatchback, wagon and fastback sedan... available in everything, apparently, but North America.

The **Kona N** isn't expected before 2020, one year after the electric Kona.

The output for the electric has been pegged at 201 horsepower, with an expected range of close to 300 miles.

Since hitting showrooms in February, the Kona has sold 5,079 units in the U.S. through May.



Carroll Shelby with his GT40: three of which won at Le Mans in 1966.



Carroll Shelby

Matt Damon

Matt Damon plays Carroll Shelby

A new film in the works will focus on automotive legend **Carroll Shelby**, specifically on the Ford GT40 race cars that he prepared for the 1966 Le Mans 24-hour endurance race in France. The lead role was supposed to go to Tom Cruise, however **Matt Damon** is set to play Shelby. **Christian Bale** will assume the role of Shelby's chief test driver Ken Miles.

Caitriona Balfe ("Outlander") will play Miles' wife, and Jon Bernthal ("The Walking Dead") will play Lee Iacocca. Though the film's final title is yet to be set, 20th Century Fox's working title is "Ford vs. Ferrari," because it centers on the 1966 Le Mans in which Shelby raced three GT40s for Ford past the finish line, besting Ferrari in a 1-2-3 victory. Ironically, Bale was once set to play Enzo Ferrari in a Michael Mann-helmed biopic. The Shelby movie is tentatively scheduled to be released in June of 2019. Shelby passed away in 2012 at the age of 89.



The 5,000th Model 3 rolled off the assembly line this week, barely making Tesla's goals.

Tesla hits Model 3 goals

The American luxury electric car maker has finally reached its self-imposed production goals for churning out units of its more affordable **Model 3**. Tesla had come under fire for its inability to meet demand in what even CEO Elon Musk called "production hell," but the 5,000th Model 3 rolled off the Fremont, Calif., assembly line around 5 a.m. on July 1, just before the end of the second quarter.

Part of the issue was demand. The **Model S** is popular even at a base MSRP of \$74,500, but the Model 3 (base MSRP: \$35,000) was eagerly anticipated, and swamped with advanced orders. Even so, golden boy Musk was facing increasing heat from shareholders, and the company itself was beset by accusations of safety issues at facilities and rampant sexual harassment in its corporate culture.

Add to that a few high profile accidents involving Teslas running on their Auto Pilot function, and this 5,000th Model 3 is good news for the company's future. Stock rose 9.5 percent on the news, celebrating its best day since November of 2015.

TEST DRIVE

2019 Volkswagen Jetta

Continued from page 1

is down a whisker (41.1 inches from 42.1 inches). The front cabin suits adults comfortably. Six-footers in back are a tight fit with like size folks in front, and the rear seat foot box is similarly snug if your feet are not petite.

Trunk space drops from 15.7 cubic-feet to 14.1 cubic-feet. Row-two seatbacks fold forward to a mostly flat, split-level load floor.

The redesigned Jetta interior shows well. Particularly so in a near top level trim like my SEL tester, with a padded, textured dash top above a 10¼-inch digital cockpit. It gets so you can date a car by the size of the display screen in the center stack. In that regard, the ceiling of the former gen Jettas (6.3 inches) is now nearly the floor. The 6½-inch base screen is replaced by an 8-inch display in SEL and SEL Premium trims. That screen size is easy on the eyes and in easy reach of

the driver. So too is the mid-stack deck of HVAC controls. The rheostat and buttons array earns high marks for ease of use with a minimum of distraction. A driver's side slot in the center console looks to be a landing spot for your mobile phone. However, the cabin designers underestimated the growth spurt in said phones. My six inch long iPhone didn't quite fit, and the March of Technology suggests a future of ever larger models.

Strolling through the trim walk, base models had standard, 16-inch alloy wheels, LED head and taillights, a 6½-inch display screen, four speaker sound system, rearview camera and VW's Car-Net App Connect. The latter includes standard smartphone integration, compatible with Android Auto, Apple CarPlay and MirrorLink.

SEs add things like a panoramic moonroof, leatherette upholstery, heated front seats, blind spot monitoring with rear



The interior of the 2019 Volkswagen Jetta has been redesigned. The SEL trim features a padded, textured dash above a 10¼-inch digital cockpit with 8-inch display.



traffic alert and front assist (forward collision warning with autonomous braking). R-Line adds to the forgoing with 17-inch aluminum rims, R-line badging and black grille, mirror caps and roof liner, two-tone seats and an electronic differential.

Highlighting the SEL additions are the larger (8-inch) display screen, projector headlights, a driving mode selector, Car-Net Telematics, lane keep assist and auto high beam controls. A 400-watt Beats audio system with eight speaker and subwoofer is standard on SEL and up.

Top ranging SEL Premiums add their own (17-inch) rims, fog lights, leather seating surfaces, ventilated front seats and an alarm system. A power driver's seat with memory and lumbar control is

also included. I felt that the driver's seat in my SEL tester was lacking in lumbar support, but as we know, reasonable backs may differ in such matters.

The 2019 Jetta offers more standard equipment than the outgoing model, at a base price \$100 lower than last year. More stuff for less money is a good starting point. And while sport-minded buyers will have to wait for more engine or handling options, the majority of compact class buyers will find the new Jetta Mk. 7 to be a good looking, tech savvy, fuel frugal choice in the compact class.

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.