

Digital license plates arrive

California will soon begin testing a license-plate system that could eventually replace metal plates.

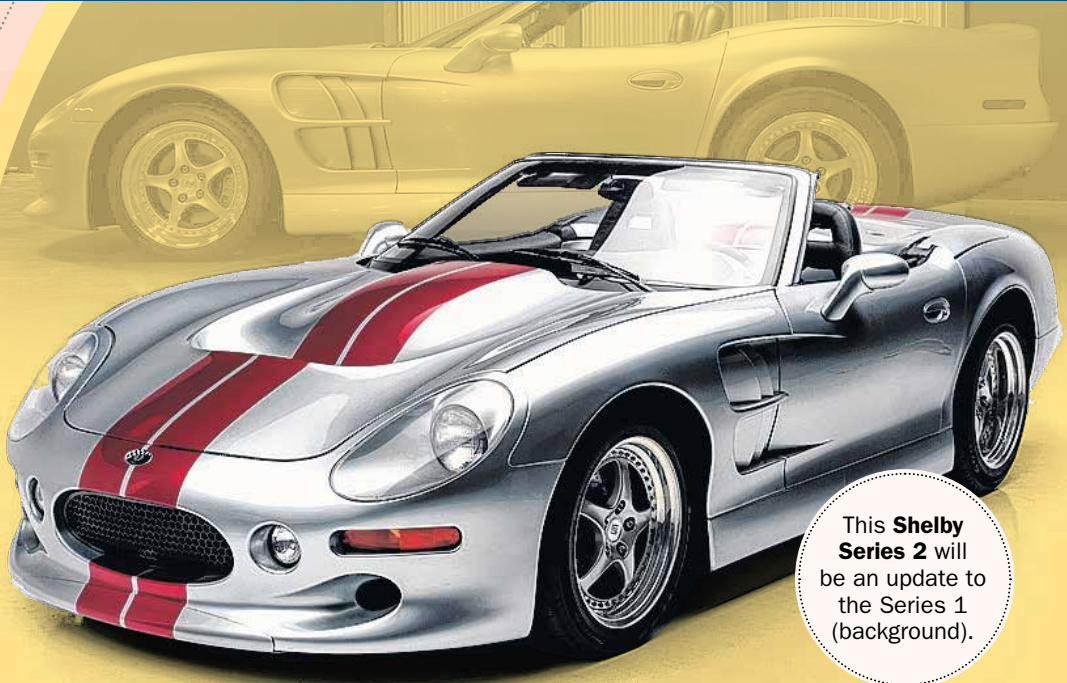
The digital plates can be customized in a number of ways, including black-on-white or white-on-black imaging, and even display ads and personal messages. The digital plates feature immediate electronic registration updates (no more DMV lines), while stolen-vehicle and other emergency notifications can be transmitted to and displayed on the plate.

The digital versions would be available through dealerships and are expected to cost about \$700 plus a monthly operating fee.

Sacramento, the first city employing this technology, just received a shipment of 24 Chevy Bolt EVs with digital plates.



Digital license plates use the same technologys as a Kindle e-book reader.



This **Shelby Series 2** will be an update to the Series 1 (background).

Shelby’s roadster returns

The **Shelby Series 1** that was made from 1999 to 2005 is the only model designed and manufactured by Shelby American, the legendary race driver Carroll Shelby’s company. Powered by an Oldsmobile L47 Aurora V-8 (despite Shelby’s long association with Ford, much of the car used General Motors parts) the Series 1 goes from 0 to 60 in 4.4 seconds. It has a top speed of 170 mph — 15 mph faster than a 427 Shelby Cobra. Only 249 units of the Series 1 were built. Though Carroll Shelby passed away in 2012, Shelby American, with help from Wingard Motorsports, is building the **Series 2** version that has an up-to-date chassis and suspension and a choice of two 427-cubic-inch (7.0-liter) V-8 engines producing up to 800 horsepower. Just four cars per year will be built, with prices starting at \$350,000 for a carbon fiber framed model and \$850,000 for aluminum.



This one-off Aston Martin Cygnet will be racing with the Vanquish’s V8 this weekend.

Napoleon complex?

Aston Martin’s foray into the subcompact segment didn’t fare too well, mainly because the **Cygnet** was basically a Toyota/Scion iQ with a luxury interior, a DB-9 grille and a doubled price tag for the same 1.3L, 97-hp engine. And so it was killed off in 2013.

Fast forward to this weekend’s Goodwood Festival of Speed in England, where Aston Martin decided to debut a one-off experiment that answers the question: What happens when you stuff a 430-hp V-8 beneath the Cygnet’s tiny hood?

The 4.7L powerplant is borrowed from the Aston Martin **Vantage**, which goes from 0 to 60 in 4.2 seconds. (The regular Cygnet’s time is 11.3.) No word from Aston Martin on the new Cygnet’s time, but it weighs under 3,000 lbs. to the Vantage’s 3,700 lbs. This Cygnet also gets rear-wheel-drive, a full roll cage, 19-inch wheels (to its normal 16-inch), Recaro racing bucket seats and a carbon-fiber front extension to accomodate the larger engine.

Also no word on how much the owner paid for this conversion. But the looks on those watching it run Goodwood’s famous hill-climb course this weekend will be priceless.



This Harvey-damaged car may have found its way onto a used car lot near you.

Schumer: Federal flood disclosure for used cars

Since Hurricane Sandy in 2012, New Yorkers are well acquainted with the effects of flooding on houses. Less so on cars. Some have unknowingly purchased vehicles damaged by water — either in New York state or other parts of the country — that have been secretly cleaned up enough to pass for undamaged, but harbor hidden electrical or other problems.

There oughta be a law, right?

There might be, if Sen. Chuck Schumer gets his way. This week, the senior senator from New York publicly called on the Federal Trade Commission to reevaluate its “used car rule” to require that sellers disclose whether or not the car has been involved in a flood. According to Schumer, the agency’s rules do not currently mandate information on such damage.

This push is more timely than ever. Last year, Hurricane Harvey damaged more than 500,000 vehicles in Texas, while Hurricane Irma damaged nearly 400,000 vehicles in Florida, according to auto industry experts. Many of these vehicles were cleaned up and put on the used market with all water damage (temporarily) masked. And it might never show up on CarFax.

“While the FTC has been sounding the alarm on ‘hurricane cars,’” Schumer said, “consumers are still at risk of being duped and burdened by a financial road of ruin if they unknowingly buy one.”

We’d say the senator was grandstanding if he didn’t have a good point. Still, it’s unknown what effect Schumer’s efforts will have on an administration adverse to the regulations already in place, let alone adding any new ones.

In the meantime, for your protection as a consumer, the Automotive Dealers Association advises having any potential automotive purchase inspected by a mechanic familiar with the often-subtle signs of a once-flooded refurbished car.

TEST DRIVE

2018 Buick Regal

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The modest ride height boost is courtesy of taller tires and longer springs. But with a softly sprung suspension and just 5.7 inches of ground clearance, TourX is not designed with off-roading in mind.

However, the standard, twin clutch AWD setup, stability control and the car-level center of gravity figure to make TourX very confident in tackling winter road conditions. And on the road, the chassis setup offers a fine, trip-worthy ride. Handling is composed, but not sporty; braking feels confidently stout.

TourX fits adults comfortably in both rows. Aside from the leather found in top ranging models like this one, interior materials overall lag the luxury level competition that the car aspires to join.

The dash layout is clean, controls are straight forward and technology is there for the asking. Essence level models add

a layer on top of Preferred trim: heated, leather-trimmed front seats and steering wheel, eighth-way power passenger seat, upgraded, 8-inch touchscreen for the infotainment system, ambient interior lighting, hands-free power lift gate, remote start, split, folding rear seats. In addition, my Essence tester was outfitted with two option bundles. The Sights and Sounds package (\$1,095) includes the aforementioned, 8-inch touchscreen infotainment system compatible with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, navigation, Sirius XM radio, HD radio, and an eight-speaker Bose sound system.

Driver Confidence Package #1 (\$1,725) adds auto leveling LED headlamps, cornering lights, parking assist, memory function for the driver’s seat and heated, outside rearview mirrors, four-way power front seats with lumbar, and alert systems for blind spots, rear



TEST DRIVE this vehicle at these preferred dealerships:

D’ELLA CADILLAC BUICK GMC, INC.
293 Quaker Rd., Queensbury, NY 12804
518-793-3871 www.dellacars.com

GOLDSTEIN BUICK GMC OF ALBANY
1671 Central Ave., Albany, NY 12205
518-869-2291 www.goldsteinbuick.com



crossing traffic and lane change.

Though not found on my car, an additional \$1,190 (Driver Confidence Package #2) tacks on more technology: adaptive cruise control, following distance indicator, forward collision alert, forward automatic braking, lane keep assist and front pedestrian braking.

The sleek looking TourX underscores the fact that you needn’t drive a boxy vehicle to have roomy cargo capacity. Volume ranges from 32.7-73.5 cubic-feet, depending on how you arrange the rear seats. While that doesn’t measure up with the old school Roadmaster Estate (54.7-92.4), it matches up nicely with the

Subaru Legacy Outback V-6 (35.5-73.3 cubic-feet) – the Buick’s most direct market competitor. It also compares favorably with luxury models like the Audi A4 Allroad (24.2-58.5), BMW 3-Series Sports Wagon (17.5-53) and the Volvo V60 Cross Country (28-43.8).

While the TourX doesn’t offer the same measure of performance or panache as this prominent Euro trio, Buick is betting that more space for less simoleons may entice some buyers to think twice.

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.