

Cadillac retools lineup

General Motors’ top brand hasn’t had an easy time of it in North America as it battles a number of Europe- and Asia-based automakers for the hearts and wallets of prosperous purchasers. Reports are that big changes are in store for Cadillac, beginning with the late-fall arrival of the new XT4 compact utility



The new XT4 will lead a significant revamp of the Cadillac line.

vehicle that’s one size smaller than the current XT5. Following that launch, the all-new compact CT4 and midsize CT5 sedans will replace the existing ATS and CTS models. The full size XTS sedan also takes its final bow.

Fortunately for coupe lovers, the ATS two-door will stick around for the time being. A bit farther down the road, Cadillac will introduce a new XT6 luxury utility model that would be lighter and more fuel-efficient than the big and beefy Escalade.

PHOTO: FAYEZ NURELDINE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Samar Almogren was granted a driver’s license on June 24, making her one of the first 10 Saudi women legally allowed to drive in the conservative kingdom.

First Saudi women hit the road

Last month, Saudi Arabia abruptly issued driver’s licenses to 10 women, nearly three weeks in advance of the ultraconservative kingdom’s announced plans to lift the decades-long ban on women driving.

It’s no small deal. A number of Saudis who had publicly championed ending the ban on women driving had already been jailed for allegedly seeking to “undermine the security and stability of the kingdom.” To get around, Saudi women must be driven by a male relative, and those who do work spend much of their salary paying professional drivers. It should go without saying that these peach-colored pages consider driving a fundamental human right.

The historic shift, shepherded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, follows other reformist moves, such as making movie theaters legal again, allowing public music concerts and promoting employment for women. But these are baby steps. Among myriad other restrictions, Saudi women still cannot swim in public, compete freely in sports or interact with unrelated men.

Though the Saudi government released quotes from the 10 women, as well as photographs of them with their new licenses, it isn’t yet known why licenses were issued ahead of schedule, or how these women were selected for the honor. To date, 2,000 Saudi women have already signed up for driving courses offered at universities... that are still segregated by sex.



Even quirky versions like the Twist and Gen-X couldn’t save India’s \$3,000 Nano.

Good-bye, world’s cheapest car

It’s hard to nail down a benchmark for citing the world’s most expensive production vehicle, but as for the cheapest, that’s easy: the **Tata Nano**. Smaller than a Smart car (MSRP \$12,000) and less iconic than a VW Beetle, this “people’s car” of India sold for 215,000 rupees, or about \$3,000. Oddly, that accessible price point wasn’t enough to guarantee it a foothold in the market. Even the Indian market. Tata Motors produced only one unit of the four-seat hatch in June, and exports were down from 275 that month last year to zero in 2018, even as other Indian automakers’ figures were rising in every segment, from motorcycles to commercial trucks. Alas, after sticking with the Nano through instances of the Nano catching fire, Tata finally announced last month it would cease production. When launching it in 2005, Tata predicted annual sales of the two-cylinder compact would reach 250,000. But even a decade later, 2016 sales were only 7,591. Sure, there comfort issues and safety concerns, though even the tiny Ford Figo, VW Polo and Maruti Suzuki Alto 800 also got perfect zeroes on front crash testing. But the consensus is that the Nano did too good of a job, and was killed by the social status factor. Even in a developing country, it seems, too few people wanted to be seen in a car *that* cheap.



This new wheel can switch configurations on the fly to gain more traction.

Shape-shifting tires

DARPA is reinventing the wheel. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency — the government agency that pioneered GPS and the Internet — has developed the **Reconfigurable Wheel Track**, a wheel that changes its basic shape to gain more traction.

RWT allows the vehicle’s operator to shift the shape of the wheel from round to triangular — mimicking tank treads — to better maneuver various ground conditions. The entire process takes only a matter of seconds, and was recently demonstrated on a RWT-equipped Humvee at DARPA’s Arlington, VA, test facility.

There’s no immediate plans to implement the RWT technology, however, and it could be a decade or more before it sees any commercial application.

The technology was developed with a team of engineers from the National Robotics Engineering Center at Carnegie Mellon University. DARPA was founded during the Eisenhower administration in response to the Soviet launch of Sputnik.

TEST DRIVE

2018 Ford Mustang

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neighbors who might not share your love of V-8s at work, newly available features allow you to quiet your steed to more socially approved levels when needed. A Quiet mode for the exhaust system tamps down on the sound as you slip in and out during the wee hours. You can even program the car to start in hushed tones during specified times each day, to keep the peace.

Aside from Shelby versions, the Mustang motor menu is simple and straightforward. Gone is the V-6, replaced by a 2.3L EcoBoost four-cylinder engine. The direct injection, turbo four is rated at 310 horsepower and 350 lb.-ft. of torque.

The 5.0L V-8 returns for 2018 with some additional ponies, thanks to new fuel injection technology. It’s now rated at 460 horsepower and 420 lb.-ft. of torque.

Both engines are matched with a six-speed stick, and the optional automatic

transmission (\$1,595) now has 10 speeds, rather than six. The 5.0/six-speed stick makes a nice combo, and is capable of 0-60 times in the mid four-second range.

MPH generally trumps MPG’s in performance cars, but for the record, I recorded 19.9 miles per gallon in a week’s driving. The manual transmission has been beefed up to accommodate the V-8’s added thrust, and the shifter has a short, positive throw from cog to cog. Clutch weight is very manageable; brakes feel firm. The line-lock feature will help track-bound drivers warm their tires to improve grip, prior to their ¼-mile passes.

All Mustang models get suspension upgrades this year, including new shocks, stabilizer bars and a cross-axis joint in back to boost lateral stiffness. While there’s some cowl shake and jitter evident on bumpy pavement, the ride quality in the GT convertible is very livable, and the car handles crisply.



TEST DRIVE
this vehicle at these preferred dealerships:

DEPAULA FORD
799 Central Ave, Albany, NY 12206
(518) 336-0979 www.depaulaford.com

JACK BYRNE FORD
1003 Hudson River Rd., Mechanicville, NY 12118
(518) 664-9841 jackbyrneford.dealerconnection.com



Those wishing to take it to the next level can opt for the GT Performance package (\$3,995) for a wide ranging bundle of performance upgrades (brakes, suspension, tires, radiator, differential, etc.).

To the extent that such gear may require a give back in ride comfort, a test drive with a car so equipped on your favorite choppy road is suggested. Staying with suspensions, Magneride — a real-time active damping system — is also on the option sheet (\$1,695).

Coupe or Convertible, Mustang seats adults easily in row one. The back seat is +2 size, more suitable for parcels than people. The trunk measures 11.4 cubic feet — pretty good, by convertible standards.

New this year is a heated steering wheel, the view through which can now also include a configurable, 12-inch digital instrument cluster — up to eight digital gauges, and up to 26(!) colors.

New upholstery materials and colors arrived with the refresh, and dash and center console feature hand stitching.

SYNC Connect allows drivers to monitor their Mustang through the FordPass smartphone app. Owners can lock, locate and start their vehicle remotely, as well as monitor vehicle diagnostics. A 4G LTE mobile Wi-Fi hotspot is also offered.

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.

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