

Volvo claims the Polestar 1's carbon-fiber construction shaves off more than 500 pounds.



Volvo's lightweight supercar

Most people probably haven't heard of **Polestar**, but we believe it won't take long before that changes. The first car from Volvo's recently announced spinoff division — named for the Swedish maker's racing venture — is a two-door coupe called, appropriately enough, **Polestar 1**. Among its unique features is a carbon-fiber body that Polestar claims is stronger and more than 500 pounds lighter than a similar steel structure. For propulsion, the Polestar1 will use a Volvo-sourced plug-in hybrid powertrain that includes a twin-turbo four-cylinder engine that directs power to the front wheels through an eight-speed automatic transmission. There are also twin electric motors, one for each rear wheel. The system's combined output is estimated at 600 horsepower and 738 pound-feet of torque. Also claimed is a 93-mile range on electric power alone. Only 500 models are planned worldwide, but that number might go up if demand for the \$155,000 coupe warrants. Deliveries are expected to begin in 2019.

Fiat Chrysler CEO Sergio Marchionne outside the New York Stock Exchange in 2014 when Ferrari stock went public.



PHOTO: SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES

Detroit Auto Show move?

No, the city's major showcase of all things automotive — officially known as the North American International Auto Show — isn't about to leave town, but starting in 2020 it will be decidedly warmer for the thousands of patrons who each January must brave the city's unpredictable winter climate to attend. Word is the show's organizers have narrowed the month to either June or October, with a final decisions coming soon. Given that an October date would be only a few weeks ahead of the increasingly popular Los Angeles International Auto Show, smart money would be on a June date. Naturally, the manufacturers that spend big money to show their vehicles at these and other shows will certainly hold sway on the final decision. At this point, a growing list of them — mostly Germany-based luxury brands — have already announced they won't be participating in the 2019 Detroit show in January.



Detroit in January. Brrrrr. Would a June show date be better?

Sergio Marchionne, FCA head, passes away at 66

Sergio Marchionne, the CEO of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, passed away in a Swiss hospital on Wednesday. He had been in intensive care for nearly a week since suffering a stroke during cancer surgery. Marchionne, 66, had been preparing to retire from FCA sometime next year.

Born in Abruzzo, Italy, in 1952, Marchionne emigrated to Toronto, Canada, with his parents at age 13. He was a relative latecomer to the automotive industry, having first served as an executive in the in the financial and biotech fields.

But the Agnelli family, which has a controlling interest in Fiat, tapped him to lead the ailing Italian automaker in 2003. He cemented his reputation as a strategic wizard by returning Fiat to profitability in two years, but his biggest challenge came after the financial meltdown of 2008, when the U.S. government bailed out American automakers. It's unlikely that Chrysler, then owned by a hedge fund and the most precarious of the Big Three, would have survived in any real form without Marchionne's action.

The merger of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles was completed by 2014. Marchionne negotiated its purchase from a joint ownership of the United Auto Workers

pension fund and the U.S. and Canadian governments for \$4.9 billion, with an added \$5.5 billion pension liability. It is now the world's seventh largest automaker, based on 2016 figures, with a market capitalization estimated at between \$16.1 billion to \$38.4 billion.

FCA oversees a vast spectrum of auto brands, from the American stable of Chrysler, Jeep, Dodge, Ram and Mopar parts service, to European makers ranging

executive office nearer to the engineering department.

But, as *Autoweek* pointed out, his legacy remains in the vehicles produced under his tenure: The **Alfa Romeo Stelvio** crossover and **Giulia Quadrifoglio** sports sedan, the 707-hp **Dodge Challenger Hellcat** and the sleek **Fiat 124 Spider** roadster. His time as CEO also saw the successful and popular update of the **2018 Jeep Wrangler**, an off-road focused **Ram 1500 Rebel** with a Hemi V8 and the revitalization of **Maserati**, which introduced its first SUV, the **Levante**. Critics who worried about the Italian influence on iconic Chrysler brands were put at ease by the stylish and fast-selling **Jeep Renegade**.

And that's in addition to becoming known for posterity as the man who saved Chrysler.

General Motors' Bob Lutz famously divided execs into "bean counters" and "car guys." But for someone with an accounting background, Marchionne had a true passion for automobiles. Who else can say they saved *two* car companies?

FCA announced that he will be succeeded by Mike Manley, the British-born former head of Jeep and Ram. Marchionne is survived by his partner Manuela Battezzato and his two sons.

Who else can say they saved *two* car companies?

from Fiat to luxury marques Maserati and Alfa Romeo. Ferrari was spun off as a separate entity in 2014, but still bore the imprint of Marchionne.

He was known to carry four cell phones: One for Europe, one for Asia and one each for North and South America. Still, he was rarely seen in a suit and tie, preferring a casual dark, wool sweater.

Considered blunt and hard-charging, Marchionne ruffled many feathers in Italy after orchestrating mass layoffs at Fiat. Upon taking over Chrysler, he eliminated layers of management, and moved the ex-

TEST DRIVE

2018 Mercedes-Benz E400

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pushing intruding breezes over the top. AIRSCARF is a neck-level heating system, that wafts warm air from the head restraints. As I've noted in the past, the latter is a wonderfully decadent feature, as befits a luxury automobile.

I've read a couple of auto reviewers mildly complain because AIRSCARF doesn't have the capacity to blow cold air for hot weather use. I have two thoughts on this. First, that's not a bad idea. Lastly, this has got to be the dictionary definition of a First World Problem.

The option sheet chips in with two more climate control possibilities. Ventilated front seats are \$450. A Warmth and Comfort package extends heatable capability to the steering wheel, door armrests and center console, and hastens the onset of warmth in the standard heated front seats. The package costs \$1,050, and both of these options require that you also add a Premium package (see below).

Collectively, this makes for a really comfortable, open-air environment. Wind flow is well managed. There's moderate turbulence in the cabin with all the windows down. But roll up the front windows and raise the pop-up wind blocker in back (the AIRCAP in front does so automatically) and air flow is reduced noticeably. Once you clear the traffic, dropping the back blocker keeps breezes at bay, while lowering the "shields-up" cabin vibe.

There is currently no AMG version of the E400 Cabriolet. While that may well change before the virtual ink is dry on this column, for now, this a classic luxury convertible, not a high performance car.

As such, I suggest enjoying it for what it is. Open, four-place premium cars are rare commodities, and this is a fine one. Set the Driver Select Mode on Comfort (sport settings aren't all that sporty, and they introduce some impact harshness on bumps) and let the nine speed automatic



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The 2018 E400's tight convertible top keeps the cabin cozy, and optional packages offer further warming features. A 12.3-inch digital instrument cluster graces the dash.

shift itself (it's not a dual clutch automatic, manumatic shifting isn't very rewarding). Handling is confident, ride quality in Comfort mode lives up to its label. Cowl shake is minimal. All-wheel-drive means you can use the car year 'round, if you choose to.

The nine-speed transmission is linked to a 3.0-liter biturbo V-6. With 329 horsepower and 354 lb.-ft. of torque, the motor is capable of ushering the E400 to sixty from a standstill in a suitably swift, 5.3 seconds (AWD), and 5½ seconds (RWD).

The character of the powertrain fits the job description for a luxury touring car: smooth and quiet. EPA says you can expect 20 mpg's in the city, 25 highway, and 22 combined. Not stellar numbers, but also not likely to be a major concern of anyone shopping in this segment.

Options of all kinds are there for the taking. This includes three versions of the Premium Package. They're priced at

\$3,250, \$5,750 and \$9,350, respectively, and again, all require that you add the \$450 Ventilated seats. The Premium packages are cumulative, so the top-most bundle's 27 items includes nine from package one and 14 from package two. Parking assist, blind spot/cross traffic alerts and the 590 watt, 13-speaker Burmester sound system highlight package one.

Dynamic LED headlights with automatic high beam controls and a 12.3-inch digital instrument cluster are among the package two inclusions. And if you're looking for active safety technology (steering, cruise control, lane keep, lane change, brake assist) and the desirable surround view system, they're only found in Premium Package Three.

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.

