



A not-so-subtle makeover for BMW's flagship sedan

These peach-colored pages were surprised to see company images of the **2020 BMW 7-series** sedan floating around online. Like its Mercedes-Benz S-Class and Audi A8 contemporaries, the pricey limo-like four-door will bristle with spoil-you-silly amenities and the latest leave-the-driving-to-us technology.

Lest there be any confusion as to the 7's origins, BMW's signature grille is massive. Given the 2019 X7 full-size utility vehicle will also receive similar bold brightwork, it could be that a styling trend is brewing at BMW that will spread to other sedans and utility models. The true tell could occur by late 2019 or early 2020 when the new-look BMW heads into showrooms.



Chevy engineer Zora Arkus-Duntov is credited with the racing success of the Corvette. His name will find its way onto the new mid-engine C8.



Will the new Corvette be a Zora?

According to sources, the name of the man credited with making Chevrolet's iconic sports car the success it is today — **Zora Arkus-Duntov** — will be emblazoned on the all-new **2020 Corvette**, or attached to a specific Corvette model. In a radical move, the engine of the eighth-generation Corvette — referred to as the C8 — will be behind the cockpit instead of in front of it. After seeing the prototype Corvette in the early 1950s, the Belgian-born GM engineer submitted a technical paper on maximizing its top speed (titled "Thoughts Pertaining to Youth, Hot Rodders and Chevrolet") to Chevy chief engineer Ed Cole. Arkus-Duntov was hired, but his idea to adopt a mid-engine design never materialized. He retired in 1975 and died in 1996. At this point it's unclear how his name will be used, but our best guess is that it will be affixed to a "Zora" high-performance variant. That would be fitting since Arkus-Duntov was also involved in the Corvette's racing program. All should be revealed later this year when the C8 rolls off the factory floor in Bowling Green, Ky.



The Atlas XT is an electric pickup that its maker claims has a 500-mile range.

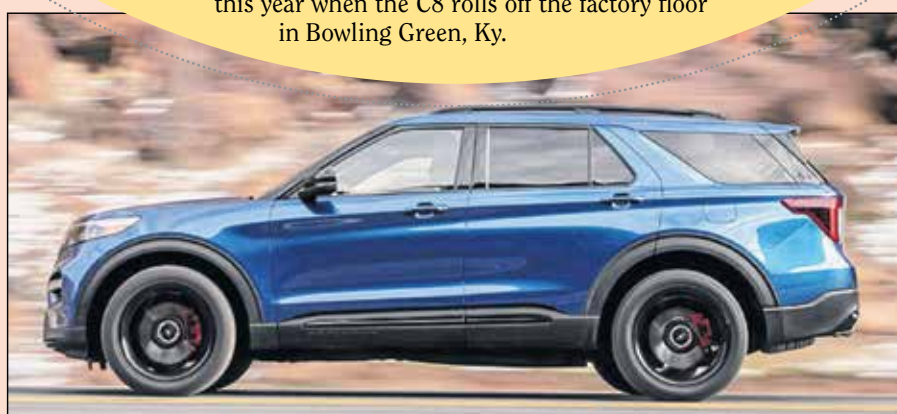
Another ePickup on the way

Though American automakers have been inching toward the idea of developing an electric-only pickup truck, it looks like some aren't waiting.

In December, Michigan-based start-up Rivian unveiled its battery-powered pickup RV1T. Now there's another on the way.

Arizona-based **Atlis Motor Vehicles** is also angling to beat General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler's highly profitable truck businesses to the punch — not to mention scooping Tesla's planned pickup — with the all-electric **Atlis XT**.

The company says the \$45,000 (starting price) pickup will have a 500-mile maximum range, carry up to 5,000 pounds and tow up to 35,000 pounds. Unloaded, the Atlis will accelerate to 60 mph from rest in a claimed five seconds and attain a top speed of 120 mph. The truck will apparently be built in the United States in 2020, although there's no word as to where.



The redesigned Ford Explorer for the 2020 model year switches to a rear-wheel-drive platform that's shared with the Lincoln Aviator.

Explorer heads into new territory

Ford has been making some bold moves of late, including the recent reveal of the **2020 Explorer**. The seven-passenger tall wagon will use the same rear-wheel-drive platform as the new-for-2020 Lincoln Aviator.

Although most models will undoubtedly come with all-wheel-drive, the engines — a 300-horsepower turbocharged four-cylinder and optional 365-horsepower turbocharged V-6 — will be positioned lengthwise and not sideways, as they have been in previous Explorers built on the front-drive chassis.

The new platform will shave off some 200 pounds, and among the range of standard active technology is side-wind mitigation to help reduce the effects of piloting the high-sided Explorer in gusty weather.

TEST DRIVE

2019 Hyundai Kona

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loud. Dry roads were in short supply during my test week, but it feels like about seven second fast from 0-60, which is very good for this segment. No worries with passing or merging. Engaging the Sport mode holds gears longer.

Dampening the responsiveness somewhat is the seven-speed DCT automatic. It's with you on hard acceleration, but

The value sweet spot for this car is the SEL trim with AWD.

sometimes slow to shift, at lower speeds. There's not a lot of difference between the two engines, when it comes to fuel economy. The EPA estimates for the 2.0L are 25/30/27, and 26/29/27 for the 1.6T. I managed 22 mpg overall.

Your choice of drive dictates a difference in rear suspension. Front-wheel-drive Kona's have a torsion beam axle, while all-wheel-drive models get a multi-link design. The latter is generally the more preferred setup, and the AWD

Kona feels agile, while maintaining a good ride quality for its size. The car's small footprint makes it easy to squeeze into merging traffic, and park in close quarters.

The dashboard design is clean and straight forward. A pair of bright, round dials dominates the instrument cluster. Atop the center stack is a touch screen — 7-inch on SE, SEL, Limited; 8-inch (with nav) on Ultimate. The infotainment system is compatible with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay on all trim levels, so you can tap into your favorite apps. Mid-tier, in easy reach below the vents, is a bank of buttons and dials for HVAC functions. The abundance of hard plastics throughout is consistent with the class, though less explainable at the top trim level. Wireless device charging is standard on Ultimate, unavailable otherwise.

The front seats are comfortably designed. On a bitter cold morning in the dead of winter, seat heaters can give you the will to press on — especially in those first few minutes, before the heat kicks in. Kona's three stage warmers (standard on SEL and above) are top notch, throwing enough wattage to allow your passenger seat to double as a warming tray for your commuter chow of choice.



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Subcompact vehicles are (by definition) dimensionally challenged, so the size-wise raps on Kona's cabin should be viewed through the prism of its class, and relative to its peers. Cabin stowage space is in short supply up front, as is rear cargo capacity, which measures 19-46 cubic feet. Here's how Kona stacks up against a sampling of the dozen-plus peers in this segment: CX-3 (12.4-44.5), EcoSport (20.9-50), Crosstrek (20.8-55.3), Encore (18.8-48.4), Trax (18.7-48.4) and HR-V (23.2-57.6).

Adults fit fine up front, but taller folk in row one will effectively erase the rear seat legroom behind them. On that metric, Kona's 34.6 inches of rear seat leg room compare with 35 inches in the CX-3, 36.7 inches in EcoSport, 36.5 inches in Crosstrek, 35.8 inches in Encore, 35.7 inches in Trax, and 39.3 inches in HR-V. Rear seatbacks fold to a mostly flat load floor, but you may first have to push the front seats up, to allow

the rear seat headrests to clear.

Kona is a fresh face in a booming segment, so the biggest challenge to carving out a piece of that market is getting noticed. Ultimate trim models like my test car are enjoyably loaded, but, cresting \$30,000, they take on the risks inherent in stepping up in weight class.

There are a whoole lot of nice options out there for car buyers at that price point. If you can do without the turbo's power, the value sweet spot for this car is an SEL with AWD. That car stickers for \$24,180 (delivered). If you want to sweeten the pot, you can add the Tech package (\$1,600 — sunroof, premium sound system, fog lamps, power driver's seat), which brings the price to \$25,780 (including destination).

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.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER