



Toyota RAV4 gets an off-road version

At last week's Chicago Auto Show, Toyota unveiled a special **TRD Off-Road** version of the **2020 RAV4**. The variant of its popular crossover will get a beefed-up suspension with revalved twin-tube shocks and new internal rebound springs, 18-inch TRD wheels painted black and shod with severe snow-rated Falken Wildpeak A/T Trail all-terrain tires and matching black exterior trim. It will be powered by the same 203-horsepower, 2.5L inline-four as the standard RAV4.



For the Dodge Charger to take better advantage of power levels that have crept up over the years, it needs wider tires than this. Just such a model is in the works.

Changes in store for Charger

And by changes, sources are saying that a number of long-overdue alterations to the **Dodge Charger's** sheetmetal are in the works for the 2020 model year, but likely limited to a slightly altered grille and rear end. Most noticeable, though, will be a wide-body option — similar to the Dodge Challenger — that flares out the fenders to accommodate wider rubber. To get the look, Charger customers will need to opt for the high-performance **Hellcat** (above, top) or **R/T Scat Pack** models. Since smaller-displacement powerplants (with electric assist) are expected to replace both engines sometime in 2021, the window of opportunity to acquire this kind of V-8 muscle is beginning to close.



Mazda will celebrate the Miata's 30th birthday with special orange edition.

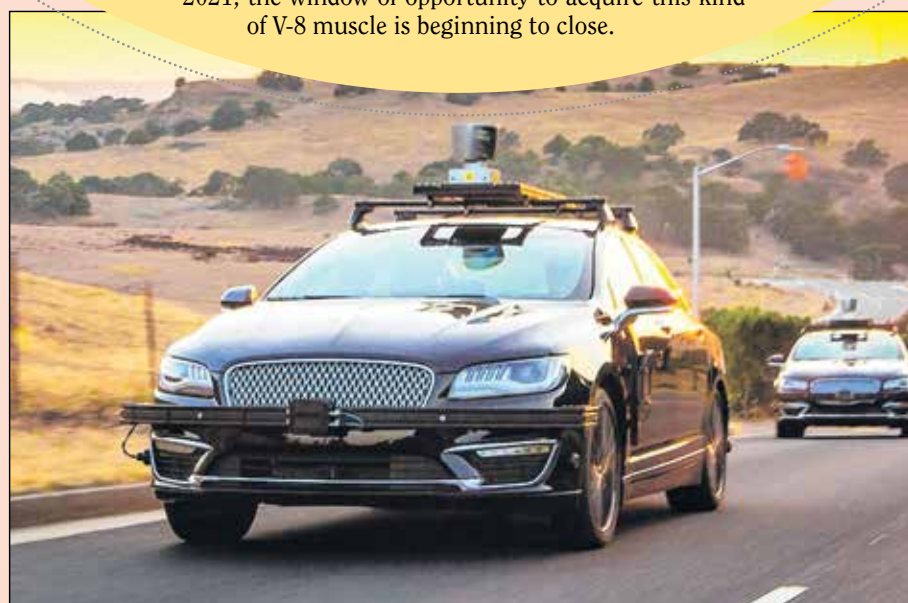
An orange anniversary for Miata

Admittedly, orange is an odd color for a car. Lately, we can think of only the Dodge Dart and Subaru Crosstrek that shipped any quantity of tangerine-colored vehicles. But Mazda will be celebrating three decades of its landmark MX-5 with an orange-hued special edition **30th anniversary Mazda Miata**.

Specifically, the hue is Racing Orange, and the special Miata will feature orange piping and orange interior louvers and accents, as well as unique Rays ZE40 RS30 forged aluminum wheels with, you guessed it, orange brake calipers. (RF hard top convertibles have an orange roof; rag tops will be black.)

The special edition will also be outfitted with the Club trim's limited-slip differential, Bilstein shocks (manual only) and front shock tower mounts.

Three-thousand 30th Anniversary Miatas will be sold globally, with 500 of those reserved for the U.S.



Amazon goes in on autonomous

Retail/tech behemoth **Amazon** is paring with Silicon Valley-based venture capital firm Sequoia Capita to invest \$530 million into autonomous-driving startup **Aurora**.

Amazon joins a group of large firms competing in the field. Google is already deep into development on self-driving cars with its **Waymo** subsidiary, as is **Uber** and General Motors' **Cruise** division. Though less well known, Aurora has already partnered with several major automotive players, including the Volkswagen Group and Hyundai.

While everyone's end result is to create a fully self-driving vehicle, Amazon might be eyeing a further goal of using the technology to field a fleet of autonomous delivery drones. Sci-fi dreaming? Hey, the future belongs to the dreamers. And also those with half a billion bucks to throw around.

TEST DRIVE

2019 Honda HR-V

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Staying with safety, Honda Sensing is a suite of driver assistance and active safety technology. Offered as standard equipment on mid through top trim levels, the package includes: Forward Collision

The compensation for limited oomph is solid fuel economy: 26 city/31 highway/28 combined.

Warning, Collision Mitigation Braking, Road Departure Mitigation, Adaptive Cruise Control, Lane Keeping Assist and Lane Departure Warning.

All HRV's are fitted with a 1.8L four-cylinder engine (rated at 141 horsepower and 127 lb. ft. of torque) and linked to

a Continuously Variable Transmission. A six speed manual transmission was formerly offered on FWD models, but is no longer available.

The engine is loud at full throttle, though it quiets down when cruising. HR-V is on the low end of the segment, with respect to acceleration. There's enough power on hand for normal, 'round town driving, but since it takes time to gather speed, you need to pick your spots, when it comes to highway merges or passing.

The compensation for limited oomph is solid fuel economy. EPA estimates for AWD HRV's are 26 miles per gallon city, 31 highway, 28 combined. FWD versions check in at 28/34/30. I logged 23 mpg's during my recent week behind the wheel. HR-V ride quality belies its size, and the subcompact dimensions mean that it isn't choosy about the size of parking



TEST DRIVE this vehicle at these preferred dealerships:

Lia Honda
1258 Central Ave., Albany, NY 12205
518-438-4555 www.liahondaofalbany.com

MOHAWK HONDA
1780 Freemans Bridge Rd., Scotia, NY 12302
518-370-4911 www.mohawkhonda.com

spot you find. The electric power steering has a nicely weighted feel, and it feels nimble.

HR-V's trim levels expand from three to five this year. Sport — which slots in one rung above the base model — gets 18-inch rims, sport pedals and model-specific, blackout trim inside and out. Touring — the new range topper — features multi-element LED headlights and fog lights and leather trimmed seats.

The revised lineup now looks like

this: LX (MSRP \$20,520), Sport (new - \$22,220), EX (\$23,720), EX-L (\$25,320) and Touring (new - \$28,540). Those numbers are for Front Wheel Drive. Upgrading to AWD adds \$1,400 to the sticker price, and destination charges are \$1,045.

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.