

CHICAGO AUTO SHOW

FEBRUARY 2020

The big auto shows come in basically two flavors. There are dealership-group-backed consumer shows in just about every major city, where the curious can kick tires and sit in seats without the usual one-on-one sales pitch of a dealer visit. And there are big international shows, several of which happen in America. As in Geneva, Paris, Shanghai and other exotic locales, the Los Angeles, Detroit and New York shows are of international caliber, venues for global vehicle reveals, planning conferences and more.

Chicago arguably sits somewhere in between, as the oldest US auto show still running today, holding a more-than-the-sum-of-its-parts aura. LA starts the major-show cycle at the end of the prior year, then the calendar continues through Detroit, Chicago, Geneva, New York, and forward from there. This cycle has profound impact on the manufacturers, who have to carefully decide what to reveal, when and where, at considerable cost and with significance to timing. (Through all this, there is also increasing automotive presence at various huge tech and electronics shows, including CES in Las Vegas.)

This year something new is afoot. After decades of Detroit's North American International Auto Show (NAIAS) running in frigid January, it moves this year to summer. Over time, this will likely inspire more OEMs to have more major reveals in Chicago, and checking the pulse of this is one reason we attended this year. There was some movement in that direction, while overall, the new schedule seems to be still getting its legs. Let's visit the highlights.

CHRYSLER revealed new "utility-vehicle-inspired" styling for its hot-selling Pacifica minivan in Chicago, along with a slew of other details including available automatic mechanical-electronic all-wheel-drive (absent since 2004 and added without sacrificing its Stow 'n Go seating or its built-in vacuum cleaner, and available on all trim levels), new five-times-faster customizable Uconnect 5 including Alexa, a new birds-eye-view rear-child-seat FamCAM™, and a new total of 97 standard safety features (plus 19 more optional). A new Pacifica Pinnacle luxury model has quilted Nappa leather seats with a feature extremely popular at its reveal—matching lumbar comfort pillows. Driving dynamics have been upgraded with the addition of a rear sway bar and revised suspension tuning front and rear. Ride height is increased by almost an inch. And Pacifica still claims the only hybrid in its segment.

DODGE introduced Black and Redline Stripe appearance packages for Durango SRT—with a 475-hp 470-lbft 392-cubic-inch HEMI® V8, the most powerful and fastest three-row American SUV (capable of zero-to-60 mph in just 4.4 seconds, as well as delivering class-topping 8,700-pound tow capacity). The Black package adds Midnight Grey Metallic and Gloss Black exterior accents and offers optional 20-by-10-inch Matte Vapor wheels. The Redline Strip package is immediately recognizable by a full-length Satin Black center stripe with Redline Red accent tracers along each edge. Either package is available on a Durango in any of ten paint colors: Billet Silver, DB Black, Destroyer Grey, F8 Green, Granite Crystal, Octane Red, Reactor Blue, Redline, White Knuckle and Vice White. The Durango SRT Black package starts at \$1,495, Redline Stripe at \$1,295. Both are available to order starting in March.

Our first stop in Chicago was with **FORD**, the night before full media reveals, where we were given a confidential pre-reveal of their stunningly rich new Ford GT Liquid Carbon, which shows off the supercar's lightweight carbon fiber weave body (surprise to us: not everybody seems to have known this), paintless, bearing only a special clearcoat. This limited edition runs about \$750,000, compared with about \$500,000 for a base Ford GT, and will be limited to about a dozen copies (already spoken for). Also revealed was a new Gulf Racing Heritage Livery model (about \$115,000 above base and now featuring number 6 in lieu of number 9 as on last year's, honoring back-to-back Le Mans wins in 1968-1969). For the first time, carbon fiber wheels are available on the Heritage Livery model (instead of standard aluminum alloy). The whole Ford GT lineup for 2020 has a 13-hp boost and vastly improved cooling technology.

Following an embargoed media reveal in Miami the week prior and a Korean reveal before that, small-volume luxury spin-off brand (formerly part of Hyundai) **GENESIS** revealed their first SUV, the GV80, based on a rear-drive platform and offered with 2.5L or 3.5L turbocharged engines. Other brand firsts introduced on the GV80 include electronic suspension control, active road noise cancellation and an "active motion driver's seat" (with seven air cells to reduce fatigue from long hours of driving). Styling inside and out—from its Crest Grille to advanced quad lights to "power lines" above each wheel—comes from a collaboration among Genesis Design studios located in South Korea, the United States and Germany. The GV80's body structure is of hot-stamped, high-strength steel, with lightweight aluminum doors, hood and tailgate. The vehicle includes a wide range of safety, technology and luxury features.

Having introduced an all-new 2020 Sonata midsize sedan just a month and a



• 2021 Chrysler Pacifica



• 2020 Dodge Durango SRT Black and Redline Stripe



• 2020 Ford GT Liquid Carbon and Gulf Racing Heritage Livery editions



• 2021 Genesis GV80



• 2020 Hyundai Sonata Hybrid

KEEP RIGHT >>

half earlier (see our launch drive feature in the JanFeb 2019 issue), **HYUNDAI** revealed its next iteration at Chicago: the Sonata Hybrid (see our launch drive feature in the upcoming May/June issue). With a 54 mpg highway rating on its Blue model (51 on SEL and Limited), it boasts best-in-class fuel mileage, topping its two main Japanese rivals. And at 192 net horsepower, it even tops the regular gasoline Sonata. Driving range is estimated at an impressive 686 miles, and if you want even more, add the solar roof system (providing enough electricity for an estimated annual range extension of some 700 "free miles"). Picking up from the regular Sonata, the Hybrid offers top front legroom and headroom in the segment, integrated aerodynamics-boosting details throughout, and active control making shifts 30 percent faster and smoother.

Auto shows, once open to the public, are fun for the whole family. And Hot Wheels are fun for kids of all ages. **JAGUAR** brought it all together with the North American reveal of a new 2021 Jaguar F-TYPE and its range of four-, six and eight-cylinder engines, while also celebrating a Jaguar and Hot Wheels collaborative effort that set a *Guinness World Records* title. The record-setting track (built at the Show) measured 69.5 feet and had seven loops unassisted by power boosters—the most ever, breaking the previous record by two loops. Jaguar and Hot Wheels also announced a new Jaguar & Hot Wheels Ultimate Track Challenge, in which college-level engineering students partner with a local Jaguar dealer to build the most complex, record-setting Hot Wheels track imaginable, meeting demanding Hot Wheels and *Guinness* parameters. The prize: a \$50,000 to that college or university's scholarship fund.

JEEP® had wide-ranging reveals at Chicago. First was Gladiator Mojave, the first Jeep to wear a new Desert Rated badge for high-speed off-roading and sandy conditions, benefiting from Gladiator's best-in-class approach-break-over-departure angles and 11.6-inch ground clearance, adding specially-tuned FOX 2.5-inch internal bypass shocks with external reservoirs, FOX front hydraulic jounce bumpers, reinforced frame, one-inch front suspension lift with silver front skid plate, stronger axles with cast-iron steering knuckles, and standard 33-inch Falken Wildpeak A/T tires outside, aggressive front seats with integrated upper bolsters inside. Other reveals included High Altitude models for both Gladiator and Wrangler, with premium features outside and in, from gloss black 20-inch wheels to extensive LED lighting to full leather interior. Rounding things out in a separate Mopar booth was a limited-edition Jeep Wrangler JPP 20 showcasing Jeep Performance Parts, including 2-inch lift, Rubicon Warn Winch, LED light package and more. All of the above become variously available for order and delivery this spring and summer.

A great many people, when first exposed to **MERCEDES-BENZ** vans, have the same inspired response: can they turn one of these into a camper or RV? Extensive upfitter programs have made this possible with Sprinter in particular for some time. At Chicago, they revealed their "first new modern, practical pop-up camper van" for the US market, the Mercedes-Benz Metris Weekend—built with Driverge Vehicle Innovations (located adjacent to Mercedes' North Charleston SC factory) in partnership with Peace Vans. The rig, an immediate hit with the media corps, has seating for five and sleeping for four—two in the pop-up roof area and two "downstairs" in a bed that folds out from the multipurpose rear seat, which itself has four different rail-mounted positions to accommodate varying cargo needs, while front seats swivel 180 degrees to create a full campsite lounge. A second battery powers your devices, extendable via additional optional off-grid and solar panel power features. Camping upgrades include an 8-foot awning, mosquito/bug screens for



• 2021 Jaguar F-TYPE (with Hot Wheels and Guinness World Records)



• 2020 Jeep Gladiator Mojave

the rear hatch and sliding doors, a quick-attach rear liftgate tent, roof racks for surfboards, skis or storage, and a pullout rear kitchen.

It was the old, new and even newer on the horizon for **NISSAN** Frontier, starting with a press-days-eve reveal of an all new 49-hp-more-powerful standard 3.8L V6 (built in Tennessee with 93 percent new parts versus the prior engine) and 9-speed automatic. This will go into 2020 model year Frontiers starting this spring, a jumpstart of the all-new 2021 Frontier coming next year. The evening then moved to a celebration of a million-mile rear-drive, 4-cylinder, 5-speed-manual Frontier owned by Chicagoland delivery driver Bill Murphy, who bought it new in 2007 already determined to take it to a million; he achieved this just the week before the Chicago show. Despite the stop-and-go nature of his work, Murphy drove with mission in mind, getting 801,000 miles out of his original clutch and replacing his timing chain only preventively at 700,000 miles. Nissan surprised him with the gift of a new V6 automatic Frontier.

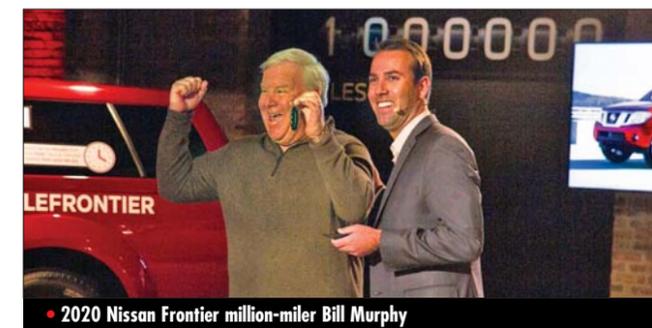
Among the **SUBARU** hardware at Chicago were samples of their limited production run of 500 WRX and 500 WRX STI Series. White models, previously revealed at the LA Auto Show in November, in exclusive Ceramic White paint, with matte bronze 18-inch wheels (WRX) or 19-inch forged BBS wheels and Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tires (WRX STI), Bilstein sport-tuned suspension, and Brembo brakes with red or silver calipers. The WRX has 268 hp and 6-speed manual, the WRX STI a turbocharged 310 hp. Capturing the most attention, though, may have been Subaru's soft-and-cuddlyware, as they continued their mission to unite pets with loving homes by hosting adoption events during the show, where attendees were invited to meet pets from three shelters in the Chicago area and potentially adopt and take one home. Even before the public days, many media wondered whether one could fit in their luggage.

TOYOTA brought a wide range of products to Chicago, from GR Supra special builds including Heritage Edition and Hyperboost Edition concepts, to a first look at the 2021 Highlander, to the new RAV4 Prime, capped off by a collection of six total 2021 4Runner, Sequoia, Tacoma and Tundra models evoking the great outdoors on the one hand, and urban night moves on the other. Low-volume-run Trail Special Editions of these pickups and 4Runner (in Army Green, Cement, black or white) feature black badging, black-with-tan-stitch seats, a variety of special tires (Kevlar A/T on the Tacoma), additional cargo and lockable storage features, even a cooler that keeps ice frozen for seven days in the 4Runner. Even lower-volume Nightshade Editions of the pickups and Sequoia (in black, Magnetic Gray, and two or three shades of pearl or white) tackle the late life with dark or black wheels, black trim details and darkened badging. Both Special Editions will arrive later this year as 2021 models.

VOLKSWAGEN showed a new facelifted 2021 Atlas seven-seat SUV, picking up a three-bar grille extending into front lights from the new Atlas Cross Sport, and with interior, tech and driver-assistance features upgraded. The steering wheel is new and all but base trim have an 8-inch infotainment screen. Options include leather with contrast stitching, VW Digital Cockpit, Fender premium audio, ambient lighting, three-zone climate, heated rear seats, vented front seats, wireless charging and remote start. The chassis is the same, but new front and rear bumpers make the vehicle almost three inches longer. R-line trims have distinct bumper, side skirts, R-line badging, and available 20- or 21-inch aluminum-alloy wheels. The 2021 Atlas offers a 276-hp V6 or a 235-hp 2.0L turbo four (now even on top trim), 8-speed automatic and available AWD (new on the 2.0T). V6 models can tow up to 5,000 pounds. ■



• Mercedes-Benz Metris Weekend pop-up camper



• 2020 Nissan Frontier million-miler Bill Murphy



• Subaru WRX STI — and pet adoption program



• 2021 Toyota Trail Special Edition Tacoma-Tundra-4Runner



• 2021 Volkswagen Atlas