

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

VOLUME 5 NUMBER 2
MARCH-APRIL 2006

Pontiac Solstice
Hyundai Sonata
Honda Pilot
Auction Results

EUROPEAN SPORTS, AMERICAN MUSCLE, HOT RODS AND CUSTOMS

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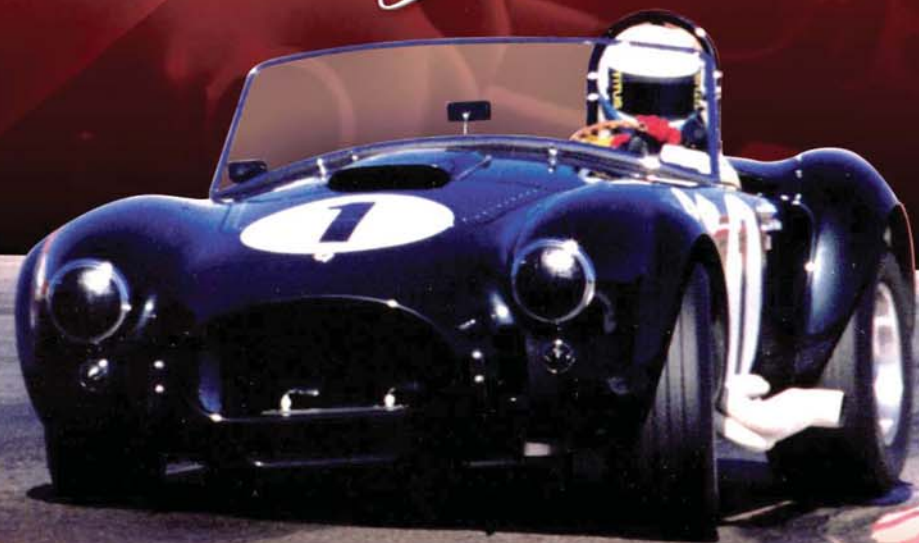
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The import sedan scene gets a lot more interesting, as the Koreans take on the reigning champions of Japan, as well as competing Americans and Europeans.

By Joe Sage, Barbara and Bill Schaffer

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Mazda Miata launched a new wave of affordable two-seater sports roadsters a couple of decades ago, long after the MG, Triumph and the rest had faded away. This brought a great wave of Porsche, BMW, Mercedes and other higher-end offerings. But Bob Lutz at GM saw a niche that could use a little competition, and here it is.

By Barbara and Bill Schaffer

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COVER: Pontiac Solstice GXP. Photo courtesy General Motors. See pages 10 and 22-25 for more information on the Pontiac Solstice.



START YOUR ENGINES : FROM THE PUBLISHER

This month, you will find as much excitement in the Auto News Update section as anywhere, from the Pontiac Solstice GXP featured on our cover, which takes GM's bare-bones two-seater and adds a bit of meat to its bones, to the MINI Cooper S John Cooper Works GP, which does much the same thing with this small car only moreso, then word of the new BMW M6, a Ford F-250 Super Chief concept that will knock the socks off you and maybe the gas pump, hints of the new Lexus flagship, as revealed in their concept cars, progress on Nissan's Skyline GT-R for the states, whether it may be badged Nissan or Infiniti ultimately, and of course much more.

The announcement of the Solstice GXP is timely, as Barbara and Bill have just reported in on the Solstice for this issue. It appears that Pontiac has come up with something just about anybody would like to have in their garage.

In addition, we report on the all-new Hyundai Sonata, with which the Koreans are expected to give the Honda Accord, Toyota Camry and others a serious run for their money. Add in a test of the benchmark Honda Pilot, which maintains its solid position in the vast pool of SUV offerings.

And we check on the results for the Barrett-Jackson and Russo and Steele collector car auctions from January.

Also check out a couple of items of interest in our Arizona Rider section, in which Harley-Davidson becomes Official Motorcycle of the NHRA, and more.

Enjoy the ride!



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QUIZ : CAR SMARTS



- How much more are teenage drivers distracted when driving and talking on a cell phone than adults?
 - no more distracted than adults
 - twice as distracted than adults
 - 4 times more distracted than adults
 - 8 times more distracted than adults

- What percentage of American drivers, who have been stranded by the side of the road, say a stranger has helped them?
 - 39 percent
 - 42 percent
 - 51 percent
 - 64 percent

- What percentage of Americans indicate they would choose a different vehicle if their top color choice was not available?
 - 15 percent
 - 24 percent
 - 39 percent
 - 51 percent

- How many vehicles in the US are equipped with event data recorders (all so known as black boxes)?
 - 500,000
 - 4 million
 - 18 million
 - 30 million

- On an average how many meals per person are purchased in a restaurant and eaten in a vehicle annually?
 - 8 meals eaten in a vehicle
 - 19 meals eaten in a vehicle
 - 32 meals eaten in a vehicle
 - 58 meals eaten in a vehicle

- What percentage of Chevrolet Silverado buyers are retired?
 - 6 percent
 - 12 percent
 - 17 percent
 - 22 percent

- How many 16- and 17-year olds are issued their first driver's license each day?
 - 5,000
 - 9,000
 - 14,000
 - 20,000

- Who had the first unibody SUV platform?
 - Jeep Grand Cherokee
 - Toyota RAV4
 - Nissan 4Runner
 - Ford Explorer

- How many cars and trucks were flooded by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005?
 - 100,000
 - 350,000
 - 500,000
 - 1 million

- About how much of each Chrysler Group car is made from recycled steel?
 - 22 percent
 - 33 percent
 - 41 percent
 - 49 percent

- When did Toyota start using the Land Cruiser name?
 - 1948
 - 1954
 - 1960
 - 1966

- How many 16- and 17-year olds reported driving under the influence of illicit drugs last year?
 - 750,000
 - 950,000
 - 1.25 million
 - 1.5 million

- Xenon (High Intensity Discharge) lights were sold in the largest percentage of new vehicles in which of the following in 2005?
 - North America
 - Europe
 - Japan
 - Other

- When was the first turbocharger patented?
 - 1905
 - 1920
 - 1935
 - 1950

- What is E85 fuel a mixture of?
 - 85% diesel and 15% gasoline
 - 85% ethanol and 15% gasoline
 - 85% gasoline and 15% ethanol
 - 85% hydrogen and 15% ethanol

- When did General Motors pass Ford Motor Company to become number one?
 - 1921
 - 1931
 - 1941
 - 1951

- What limited-edition car was featured in the 2005 Neiman Marcus Christmas catalog?
 - Pontiac Solstice
 - Lexus GS 450h
 - Cadillac STS-V
 - Audi Q7

- What is the maximum recommended speed for a tire with a "Y" speed rating?
 - 126 mph
 - 148 mph
 - 168 mph
 - 186 mph

- What percentage of advertising money spent worldwide came from automakers?
 - 6.3 percent
 - 11.9 percent
 - 18.5 percent
 - 24.2 percent

- How many of the 7,200 General Motors dealerships in the US are owned by minority entrepreneurs?
 - 362
 - 622
 - 859
 - 1,018

- What was the base price of the Porsche 944 when it was introduced in the US market in the summer of 1982?
 - \$14,500
 - \$18,500
 - \$22,500
 - \$26,500

- Where did Honda sell the most vehicles in 2005?
 - China
 - Europe
 - Japan
 - United States

- What is the estimated cost of auto insurance fraud annually?
 - \$550 million
 - \$1 billion
 - \$3.2 billion
 - \$6.3 billion

- Which manufacturer had the most engines on the Ward's 10 Best Engines list for 2006?
 - Audi
 - General Motors
 - BMW
 - Ford

- Which vehicle brand was mentioned the most in rap music songs in 2005?
 - Cadillac
 - Bentley
 - Mercedes-Benz
 - Rolls-Royce

- How many deaths are attributed annually to drivers using cell phones?
 - 1,200
 - 2,600
 - 4,400
 - 6,100

- When did Mercedes-Benz offer its first diesel powered passenger car, the 260 D?
 - 1936
 - 1946
 - 1956
 - 1966

- Which of the following "exotic" car brands was the biggest seller for the 2005 model year?
 - Dodge Viper
 - Cadillac XLR
 - Maserati
 - Bentley

- Until 2005, when was the last time Chevrolet beat Ford in annual car sales?
 - 1979
 - 1986
 - 1994
 - 2000

- Which state was first to issue driver's licenses and registration plates?
 - Michigan
 - New York
 - Connecticut
 - Massachusetts

ANSWERS ON PAGE 8 >>

>> ANSWERS (quiz on page 7) >>



1. Answer: c. According to studies done by Ford, teen drivers are four times more likely to be distracted while driving and talking on a cell phone than adults.
2. Answer: d. According to a survey done for Michelin Tire, 64 percent of Americans have had a stranger help them after being stalled beside the road.
3. Answer: c. According to research done by Du Pont, 39 percent of Americans say they would choose another vehicle if their color choice was not available.
4. Answer: d. According to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) an estimated 30 million US vehicles are equipped with event data recorders or black boxes. Currently not all manufacturers supply NHTSA information about the boxes. NHTSA is proposing standards on the information the boxes gather to standardize the data gathering process.

5. Answer: c. According to Harry Balzer, Vice President of the NPD Group, the annual average number of meals purchased in a restaurant and eaten in a vehicle annually is 32 per person. That's up from 19 per person in 1985.

6. Answer: d. Chevrolet says 22 percent of the Silverado pickup buyers are retired.

7. Answer: b. Each day more than 9,000 driver's licenses are issued to 16- and 17-year olds across the country.

8. Answer: b. In 1996, when Toyota introduced the RAV4 compact SUV, it was the first "off-road" style vehicle to be built on a unibody platform.

9. Answer: c. According to Automotive News there were more than 500,000 vehicles flooded because of Hurricane Katrina in August.

10. Answer: b. According to Jason Vines, Vice President-Chrysler Group Communications, approximately 33 percent of the steel used in each new Chrysler product is from recycled steel.

11. Answer: b. Toyota started using the Land Cruiser name for its off-road vehicle in 1954.

12. Answer: a. According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy 750,000 16- and 17-year-olds surveyed said they had driven under the influence of illicit drugs.

13. Answer: c. 32 percent of the new vehicle buyers in Japan in 2005 ordered Xenon (High Intensity Discharge) lights. Europe- 13.5 percent. North America - 5.1 percent. Other - 2.6 percent.

14. Answer: a. The first exhaust gas turbocharger was patented in 1905 by Swiss engineer Dr. Algrtrf Buchi.

15. Answer: b. E85 fuel is a mixture of 85% ethanol (made from corn) and 15% gasoline. It is being promoted by General Motors, which currently has 1.5 million vehicles on the road capable of running the mixture.

16. Answer: b. General Motors passed Ford in sales in 1931 to become the largest US auto company and has maintained that position ever since.

17. Answer: b. 75 special edition Lexus GS 450h hybrids were sold in the 2005 Neiman-Marcus Christmas catalog. A 3.5-liter direct-injection V-6 gasoline engine with a high-output electric-motor rear-wheel drive powers the GS 450h with a combined power in excess of 300 hp. The catalog price for the car was \$65,000.

18. Answer: d. A tire with a "Y" speed rating is designed for speeds up to 186 mph.

19. Answer: d. Automakers were the largest advertiser worldwide in 2005 spending \$22.69 billion to advertise, or 24.2 percent of the total.

20. Answer: a. According to General Motors, 362 of the 7,200 GM dealerships are owned by minorities: Hispanic - 158, Black - 98, Asian American - 54, American Indian - 52.

21. Answer: b. The Porsche 944 had a base price of \$18,500 when introduced in the US in summer 1982.

22. Answer: d. Honda sold 1.45 million vehicles in the US in 2005, while selling only 720,000 in Japan, 285,000 in Europe and 260,000 in China.

23. Answer: d. According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau estimates, auto insurance fraud was \$6.3 billion per year nationwide.

24. Answer: a & b. Out of the 10 best engines on the 2006 Ward's list, the Audi 2-liter turbo four-cylinder from the A3 and the 4.2-liter V-8 from the S4 were on the list along with two GM engines: the 2.0-liter turbo four-cylinder from the Chevrolet Cobalt SS and the 2.8-liter Turbo V-6 from the Saab 9-3 Aero. Other top engines with one each were BMW 3.0-liter inline 6-cylinder, DaimlerChrysler Hemi V-8, Ford 4.6-liter V-8 from the Mustang, Mazda turbo 4-cylinder from the Mazdaspeed 6, Nissan's venerable 3.5-liter V-6 and Toyotas new 3.5-liter V-6 from the Lexus IS 350.

25. Answer: c. According to American Brandstand 2005, a report by Agenda Inc., a San Francisco-based marketing firm, Mercedes-Benz was mentioned 100 times in songs that reached the Top 20 during 2005. The next four brands receiving the most mentions in descending order were Nike (obviously not automotive), Cadillac, Bentley and Rolls-Royce.

26. Answer: b. According to the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis there are an estimated 2,600 deaths and 330,000 injuries caused by drivers using cell phones annually.

27. Answer: a. Mercedes-Benz introduced its first diesel-powered passenger car, the 260 D, at the International Automobile and Motorcycle Show in Berlin in 1936.

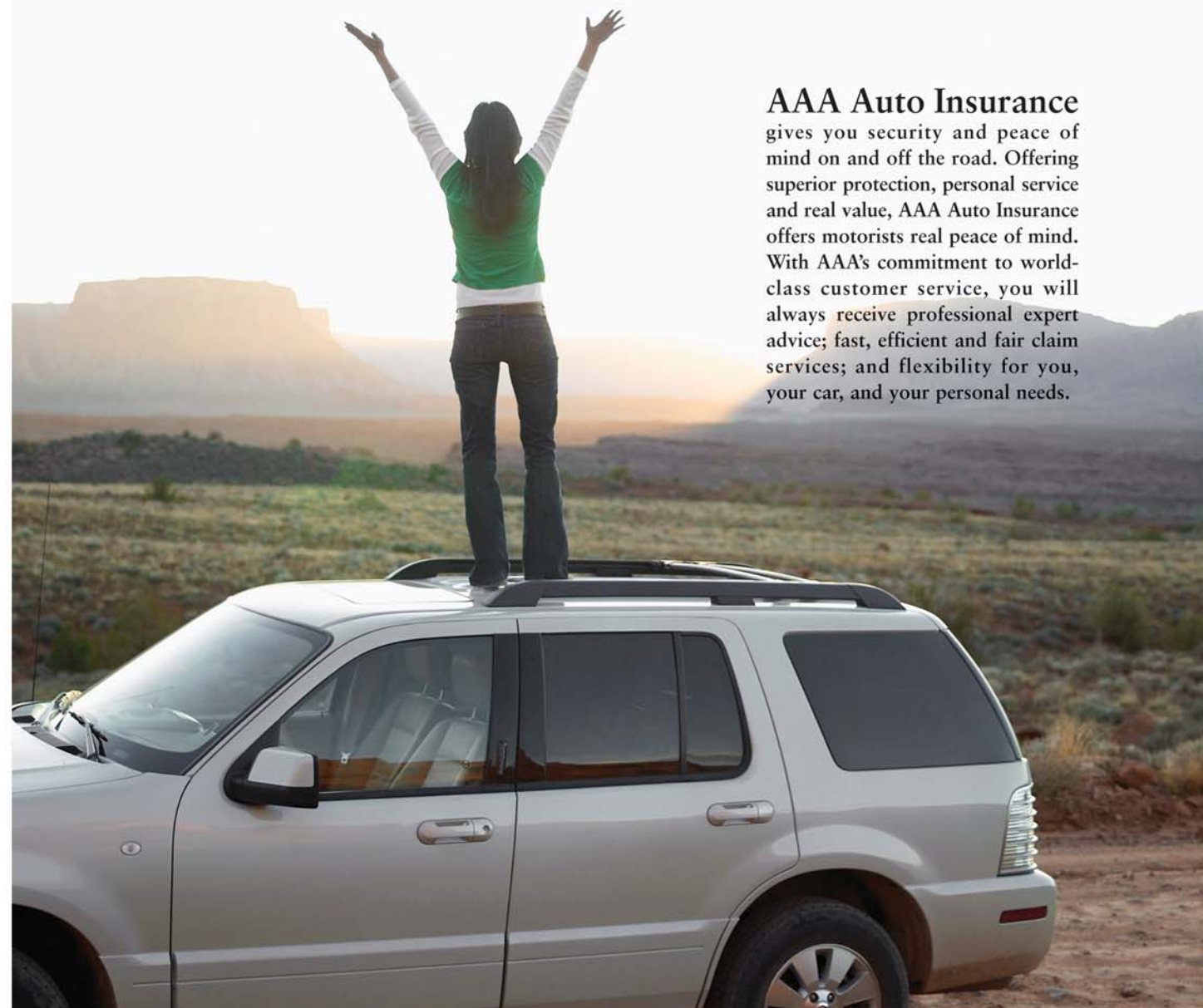
28. Answer: b. The Cadillac XLR sports car topped the "exotic" list with total sales of 3,730 for 2005. Bentley - 3,654. Maserati - 2006. Dodge viper - 1,652.

29. Answer: b. For the first time since 1986, Chevrolet beat Ford in annual car sales for 2005.

30. Answer: d. Massachusetts was the first state to issue driver's licenses and registration plates in 1903.

The Car Smarts quiz includes news and trivia from industry sources, trade journals and consumer magazines compiled for *Arizona Driver* by **BILL & BARBARA SCHAFFER** of *Auto Digest*.

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PONTIAC SOLSTICE GXP

Pontiac is planning an aggressive move with the popular new Solstice sports car. For 2007, Pontiac will offer a turbocharged version of the two-seater producing 260 horsepower and 260 lb.ft. of torque. The special edition, called the GXP, develops an impressive 130-hp per liter — that's 47 percent more than the current standard version. The GXP is expected to accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in 5.3 seconds with either the standard five-speed manual transmission or the optional five-speed automatic. The GXP package will include a sport suspension, four-wheel disc brakes with anti-lock, limited-slip rear differential and 18-inch polished aluminum wheels. Pricing has not yet been announced. (See our review of the base Pontiac Solstice starting on page 22.) ▼



Pontiac Solstice GXP

MINI Cooper S John Cooper Works GP



As the MINI paradoxically prepares to grow larger next year, this year's GP bucks the trend, with more power and noticeably trimmed weight.

A HOTTER MINI

▲ MINI has added a new high performance GP version of the popular MINI 3-door, just one year before the next generation is due. The limited edition GP (Grand Prix) model gets changes to the intercooler and engine, which boost horsepower to 218 hp. The GP also goes on a diet and loses 88 pounds. The result is a 0 to 60 mph time of less than 6.5 seconds and a top speed of about 145 mph. Limited to only 2000 special edition models, the GP comes in a unique gray metallic paint with contrasting silver roof and dark red exterior along with a silver roof and dark red exterior mirrors. A new body kit includes a deeper front bumper and other cosmetic upgrades.

IS THE STING RAY COMING BACK?

General Motors is rumored to be considering a V-6 version of the Kappa sports car, otherwise known as the Pontiac Solstice and Saturn Sky. The V-6 version could take a Sting Ray name and fall into the Chevrolet corral. Motor Trend magazine claims insiders say a test mule based on the Solstice is already running at GM test facilities, but has to be approved by top GM officials. The engines being tested are the 3.9-liter pushrod V-6

rated at 240 horsepower and the 3.6-liter (255-hp) DOHC from the Cadillac CTS. Styling could be somewhat retro like the Corvettes of the 1950s and 1960s.

PORSCHE DEBUTS CAYENNE TURBO S

Porsche introduced its latest and fastest SUV offering at the recent Los Angeles Auto Show. The Cayenne Turbo S, with its massive 520-horsepower turbocharged V-8, has enhanced chassis dynamics and a more sophisticated all-wheel-drive. Porsche engineers also modified the suspension, software controls for the Active Suspension Management system and upgraded the brakes. It has an optional SportDesign exterior body kit to set it apart from the other Cayennes. The 4.5-liter turbo V-8 produces 530-lb.ft. of torque at 2750 to 3750 rpms. The 0 to 60 mph acceleration time is pegged at just 4.8 seconds and the top speed is 167 mph. It can still be taken off road, but hopefully at a slower pace.

MERCEDES-BENZ "ENDURING PASSION"

Starting from the historical branding, Leslie Butterfield tells "The story of the Mercedes-Benz Brand" from a marketing standpoint. "Enduring Passion", published by John Wiley and Sons, Ltd. of England

carries the reader from the start of two divergent automotive companies through their marriage of convenience and up to present day Mercedes-Benz and the leadership of Dr. Dieter Zetsche. Butterfield, an advertising man, provides a fresh look at the most famous brand. The 272-page book is filled with historical black and white photos and colorful new product photos. It is on sale now for \$49.95.

AUDI AND THE SKI JUMP

Have you seen the ads for the Audi A6 that was driven up a snowy ski jump? It's true. In replicating the feat, done first in 1986, Audi went to the same Pitkavouri ski jump in Kaipola, Finland, and drove a stock A6 4.2 quattro, equipped with studded tires, up the 37.5-degree slope. To prove it wasn't a one-time event, Audi engineer Uwe Bleck drove up the ramp eleven times with an average speed of 37 mph. For added safety, engineers did install a rollback safety device that would prevent the car from sliding back down the ramp. The test was done to celebrate 25 years of the quattro all-wheel drive system and to film this impressive commercial.

KEEP RIGHT >>

THE BMW M6 IS BACK

BMW used the Los Angeles International Auto Show to introduce the most sophisticated and powerful 6 Series coupe ever, the M6. Boasting 10 cylinders and 507 horsepower, the M6 promises to be one of the most impressive performing cars on the market. The five-liter engine revs over 8,000 rpms driving the rear wheels through a F1 inspired 7-speed Sequential Manual Gearbox. Engineers have also reduced the 6 Series weight by using some carbon parts to maximize performance. Zero to 60 acceleration times are 4.6-seconds and the speed is electronically limited to 155mph, but gets to 124 mph in just 14 seconds. The new M6 is expected to arrive at BMW showrooms in the spring of 2006. ▼



BMW M6 Coupe

Infiniti GT-R



Perennial worldwide favorite, the Nissan Skyline GT-R (see *The Fast and The Furious*) will finally make it to US shores, badged as an Infiniti.

>> AUTO NEWS UPDATE - cont'd

GT-R GETS AN INFINITI BRAND

▲ After years of rumors, that Nissan would bring the Skyline GT-R sport car to the United States, it was finally a done deal. However, the big question has been, "Will it be a Nissan or an Infiniti?"

Automotive News now is reporting that the Japanese super car will indeed be an Infiniti, because potential buyers are more likely to shell out an estimated \$65,000 for that nameplate. That makes sense. The GT-R, which is projected to debut at the 2007 Tokyo auto show in final form, as a 2008 model. The specs will include a twin-turbo with 400-plus horsepower and all-wheel drive.

AUDI TO RUN DIESEL AT LE MANS

Audi plans to be the first manufacturer to campaign at the legendary Le Mans race with a diesel-powered car. The Audi R10 is powered by a totally new 5.5-liter, 12-cylinder bi-turbo TDI (Turbo Direct Injection) engine. The engine produces more than 650 hp and 1,100 Newton metres (811 lb.ft.) of torque, significantly exceeding the power produced by the majority of previous Audi racing cars, including the victorious R8 predecessor.

The engine is hardly recognizable as a diesel because it runs so smoothly, plus it uses two diesel particle filters to clean the exhaust. The enormous diesel torque required engineers to outfit the car with special gearboxes. The usable powerband is between 3,000 and 5,000 rpms, which is exceptionally low for a racing engine; as a result, the driver is required to change gears far less often. Plans call for testing the R10 in the 12-hour race at Sebring (USA) in March, prior to the Le Mans race in June.

NEW HYUNDAI PLANT, LARGER SANTA FE

As Hyundai gets ready to open its new Alabama manufacturing facility early in the year, the Santa Fe compact SUV being built there gets some major changes. At seven inches longer and two inches wider and higher, the new Santa Fe is about the same size as the Toyota Highlander, and that's room enough for a third row of seats to expand seating to seven. When not needed, the third row seats fold flat into the floor. The chassis has been revised to offer a more car-like ride. A new 3.3-liter V-6 engine will power North American models, while European models will get either a 2.2-liter four-cylinder diesel or 2.7-liter gasoline V-6.

The Santa Fe is expected to compete with the Ford Escape and Jeep Liberty.

CAR AND DRIVER'S TOP TEN

Car and Driver magazine's 24th annual top ten cars listed the following for 2006: Best Sport Sedan — Acura TSX
Best Sports Compact — Audi A3
Best Luxury Sport Sedan — BMW 3 Series
Best Performance Car — Chevrolet Corvette
Best Full-Size Sedan — Chrysler 300
Best Muscle Car — Ford Mustang GT
Best Family Sedan — Honda Accord
Best Roadster — Mazda MX-5
Best Sports Coupe — Mazda RX-8
Best Luxury Sports Car — Porsche Boxster
Car and Driver limits its list to cars that have a base price of \$71,000 or less.

LINCOLN TO CHANGE NAMING SCHEME

Lincoln will change its model names to alphanumeric names like those used on Acura, Cadillac and other upscale brands. First to make the switch will be the Aviator, which will become the MKX. This is a crossover that shares the same mechanicals as the Mazda6 (also the Ford Fusion, Mercury Milan, Lincoln Zephyr and the upcoming Ford Edge). According

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NEXT LEXUS FLAGSHIP

If the Lexus LF concept cars are an accurate representation, the next generation LS sedan should be trendsetter. The gorgeous styling will be certain to turn heads, while the technical features will push the flagship Lexus to the forefront of the luxury market. Reports have the big sedan power coming from a choice of a traditional V-8 engine rated at more than 300 horsepower or as a hybrid with nearly 400 horsepower when combined with the electric motor. The LS is also expected to have available all-wheel drive with advance wet-road electronic control system. It will also be available in a version stretched by four or five inches. ▼

Lexus LF-A concept



Mercury Milan

Like what you see? Mercury sent an urban-guerrilla marketing team to six cities, to entice young professionals to visit the showroom. Done deal.

>> AUTO NEWS UPDATE - cont'd

to current statements, the Zephyr so far will keep its name, but a pair of full-size sedans coming to the luxury lineup will get the new naming style.

MERCURY'S GUERRILLA MARKETING

▲ In an effort to reach out to young urban professionals, Mercury hit the road with their new Milan sedan for a little one-on-one interaction. In six major cities teams of twenty-and thirtysomethings in matching shirts and slacks bought coffee, paid for haircuts and ordered appetizers for the people they wanted to tell about the new Milan. According to Laura Soave Stoppa, marketing manager for the Milan, they wanted to create a buzz and excitement without the pressure of the showroom environment. The paid young specialists got prospective customers' attention with the perks, told them about the Milan and then gave them a certificate good for a \$50 American Express gift card if they went to a dealer for a test drive. The company that arranges the programs said a two-week six-city program costs less than a 30-second commercial on the "Desperate Housewives" television program.

FORD'S ADAPTIVE LIGHTING SYSTEM

Several automakers are offering adaptive lighting systems that allow the driver to see better through corners. All systems currently on the market actually turn the lights to illuminate the road in the direction the driver is turning. Rather than using just one light, the Ford system uses a light cluster that takes up about the same space as a conventional light assembly. The cluster has light-emitting diodes, or LEDs, which also illuminate the sides of the road when the driver turns the steering wheel. With no moving parts, the system is easier to manufacture and repair. It debuted at the Detroit auto show and should be ready for production within three years.

AUTO ACCIDENT DOCUMENTATION KIT

No matter how cool you think you are, a traffic accident can make you react irrationally. A company called DocuDent has come up with a great way to do the right thing if you're involved in any kind of traffic accident. The \$14.99 DocuDent kit contains bilingual accident forms on which to record a driver's contact information, license and registration numbers, as well as the year, make and model of the other vehicle. It contains a

"what to do" reminder sheet and place to secure information and registration cards for handy access. The kit also includes a refillable camera with flash kit to document actual body damage along with a pen, whistle, tape measure, flashlight and extra battery in case it is dark. The kit fits neatly in your glove box and is available on line at www.docudentusa.com or by calling 800-966-9166.

ACURA TURBO IN RDX PROTOTYPE

Acura's highly anticipated RDX prototype SUV debuted at the Detroit auto show powered by an innovative 2.3-liter four-cylinder turbocharged engine and the company's new Super Handling all-wheel drive system from the RL sedan. The four-cylinder engine generates 240-hp and 260 lb.ft. of torque and is the first Acura engine to use forced induction technology. The variable flow turbocharger is able to provide dramatic performance, while maintaining excellent fuel economy. The RDX is built on the company's all-new global truck platform and is equipped with Honda's Advanced Compatibility Engineering that helps disperse collision forces over a larger frontal area, thereby making

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>> AUTO NEWS UPDATE - cont'd

the vehicle much safer in an accident. The vehicle has the utilitarian features of an SUV but with handling and performance more in line with a sport sedan. Prices have not been announced. The RDX is being built at Honda's Marysville, Ohio, plant and will go on sale in summer 2006.

FORD BACKSEAT SAFETY

Ford displayed the first inflatable safety belt for rear seat passengers at the Detroit auto show, using a small tubular airbag that deploys along the rear shoulder seatbelt upon impact. The inflated portion of the belt limits head motion and can absorb the impact forces of a crash. Also debuting in Detroit was a seatbelt reminder for backseat passengers. The Belt-Minder will chime every 30 seconds for the first five minutes of a trip to remind the backseat passenger to buckle up.

VOLKSWAGEN LOOKING AT 3-WHEELER

Volkswagen may be building a three-wheel vehicle, technically a motorcycle. With two wheels in front, the GX3 is driven by a 1.6-liter four-cylinder engine (125-hp) driving the single rear tire. The GX3 can carry two people, get 46 mpg and accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in just 5.7 seconds. It sounds like a great commuter car or sports car for weekends. If it is built, the GX3 is expected to sell for less than \$17,000 and could be ready for the market as early as 2007.

VOLKSWAGEN RESURRECTS SCIROCCO

Volkswagen officials have given approval for the recreation of the Scirocco coupe. Based on the Golf platform, the Scirocco started in 1974 and morphed through a few generations into the Corrado, which was dropped in 1994. The new coupe is expected to have a base model powered by VW's new 1.4-liter (140-hp) supercharged and turbocharged four-cylinder engine. Other engines, all which may not make it to the US, include a 170-hp four-cylinder, the 2.0-liter 200-hp turbo four-cylinder and a 3.2-liter (250-hp) VR6 engine. Front-wheel drive will be standard with 4Motion all-wheel drive as an option. If the horsepower race continues a 300-hp GTI might be down the road. Transmissions will likely be a six-speed manual and six-speed DSG automatic shifting manual.

HONDA ENTRY LEVEL VEHICLE IS FIT

As the Honda Civic gets bigger, it leaves room at the bottom of the Honda lineup for a new entry level car, and the Fit will fill that position this spring. The Fit is a stylish, premium, entry-level five-door hatchback. It looks small on the outside, but inside there is the same amount of room as an Audi A4 and almost as much as the new Civic. The interior is reconfigurable with four distinctive seating and cargo carrying setups. Fit is powered by a 109-hp 1.5-liter four-cylinder VTEC engine with a five-speed manual transmission or an optional five-speed automatic with wheel-mounted paddle shifters. The Fit comes with a long list of standard features and many customizing options.

NISSAN MOVING TO TENNESSEE

Nissan announced that it is moving its US headquarters from Gardena, California, to Franklin, Tennessee, this summer. The move will include 1,300 employees working in sales, marketing, legal, human resources, communications, product planning, advanced planning and advertising. The company will take temporary offices in Nashville while a new \$70 million facility is being built in Franklin — 15 miles from downtown Nashville. The company plans to take all its existing employees to Tennessee, but acknowledged not everyone wants to move. Nissan will still maintain sales and parts offices in the Los Angeles area, along with its design studio in the San Diego area.

MERCEDES-BENZ LEADS TOWARD DIESEL

At least five manufacturers have announced plans to add fuel-efficient diesel powered vehicles to their lineups in the near future. Mercedes-Benz is leading the march by offering five vehicles with their new 3.2-liter four-valve per cylinder V-6 diesel engine. The new engine will replace the current diesel being offered in the E-Class sedan and it will be added to the GL, ML, S-Class and R-Class. The engine employs the new BlueTec emissions system. Mercedes diesels available this fall in 45 states will use a combination of new low-sulfur diesel fuel, which will also be available starting this fall along with particulate filters and traps to reduce emissions. Starting in 2008, the BlueTec system adds a urea-injection

Ford F-250 Super Chief concept



Ford's F-250 Super Chief concept pickup truck display many of the design cues expected to be seen adopted throughout the Ford car and truck lineup.

system to reduce the oxides of nitrogen. It will then meet California (and four other states') tougher clean-air standards. Mercedes parent DaimlerChrysler plans to use the BlueTec system in future Chrysler group diesel vehicles.

FORD'S DESIGN RENAISSANCE

▲ Ford's latest all-new products and concepts are showing a new Ford "look". According to Ford's Executive Director of North American Design, Peter Horbury, the styling reflects "the clean look of Ford cars" of the 1960s with inspiration from Ford's iconic Mustang. The new Ford style includes a three-bar chrome grille, broad shoulders, the absence of side lines and a slightly arched "powerdome" hood. There will also be quad headlights and dual exhausts. Previous Ford designs took inspiration from European cars like Volkswagen and Audi and tended to give the brand a fuzzy unfocused look. Cars built after the Five Hundred are starting to show the all-new Ford look.

OVER THE TOP LEXUS FLAGSHIP

Pushing the luxury sedan envelope beyond the competition, Lexus has introduced its new LS sedan to try to steal the spotlight from the upcoming Mercedes-

Benz S-Class. The new LS 460L introduced at the recent Detroit auto show gets a new 380-hp V-8 engine with 36 percent more horsepower than the previous model. It produces 0 to 60 mph times of 5.5 seconds. The big news is an eight-speed automatic transmission, besting Mercedes' seven-speed. The audio system is an unbelievable 19 speaker Mark Levinson system with an internal hard-drive server that can store 4,000 songs. The rear seat of the long wheel base version is offered with reclining rear seats with an extendable ottoman, a cooler and separate DVD entertainment system. It also boasts an intelligent parking system to help drivers park in those tight spots with only braking assistance required by the driver. A short wheelbase is also offered on the "ultimate Lexus" and a hybrid version will be introduced at the New York auto show in April.

MINI TRAVELLER GETS APPROVAL

Mini got the OK to start producing the concept version of the Mini Traveller shown at recent auto shows. Designed from scratch, the Traveller concept has evolved between the last four major auto shows into the model that will be produced. It has increased rear passenger space and storage areas. Still a two-door,

the Traveller will have a cargo box in the luggage compartment and the rear section of the roof will open for easier loading. Four seats will swivel to the side for easier access to the rear seat. Prices and dates were not announced, but it will likely be available within the next three years. Mini is owned by BMW.

AUDI S8 SPEED, AUDIO UPGRADES

The Audi S8 gets a performance upgrade for 2007 from a new 5.2-liter V-10 engine derived from the Lamborghini Gallardo. The 450-hp S8 accelerates to 60 mph in 5.0 seconds and has a top speed limited to 155 mph. (Audi officials have indicated the top speed would reach near 200 mph if unlimited.) The S8 will sell for an estimated \$95,000.

A new \$6,800 audio option is the first application of a 1000-watt Bang and Olufsen audio system in a vehicle. It uses 14 speakers, each with its own amplifier and two tweeter domes, which rise from their hiding places beside the A-pillars. The sound is reported to be dazzling. ■

Auto News Update includes a summary of auto news from industry sources, trade journals and consumer magazines compiled for *Arizona Driver* by **BILL & BARBARA SCHAFFER** of *Auto Digest*.

Hyundai hits the right notes with the new Sonata.

By Joe Sage • Photos by the author



The new larger 2006 Hyundai Sonata has 121.7 cubic feet of interior volume to move it out of the midsize rating and into the EPA's "large car" category.

This is Hyundai's top-of-the-line sedan, and surely a symphony was more work and of more significance to Ludwig von Beethoven than a sonata; but truly, Hyundai has come to the table with a significant step into the broader marketplace, with the 2006 Sonata.

We anticipated the arrival of our test Hyundai Sonata favorably. We knew the Koreans had been making fantastic strides in style, features and quality, and we'd already been seeing the Sonata on the road. A lot. Our expectation was that we would find a vastly improved machine. We expected it to be somewhat like a mainstream junior high kid... not-popular but not-unpopular, having all the right attributes, but not really being vaulted into the cliquiest circles... with the Hondas, Toyotas and other class stars.

Some suggest that the proper comparison for this vehicle is with other \$25,000 cars, and in this realm the Hyundai Sonata does very well, indeed. Others suggest that, if it's their top-of-line model, the correct comparison is with the tops of the other lines. Well, it doesn't do half-bad there, either, and indeed for less cash.

Features are extensive and complete, and they are generally well executed. Controls are largely comfortable and easy to use, perhaps much moreso than a lot of more expensive but overly-tricked competitors. The K.I.S.S. theory, coupled with an eye on budget, arguably creates a win-win scenario. The ride is still a bit soft, what we can't help thinking of as "Buicky." From the first moment, we backed our test Sonata from its parking spot down a sloped curb, turning to back into the street, the floatiness was apparent, though not horribly so... really depends what you're used to. This ride effect is evident on normal surface street curves and turns, also. Not only does it depend what you're used to, but of course it also depends what you want... so if your tastes lean more toward "plush" than toward "road feel," then this is a plush plus for you.

Our vehicle was fitted with Michelin Pilot HX MXM4 225/50 R 17 V-rated rubber, which should supply supple grip and a comfortable ride, as well.



KEEP RIGHT >>



>> cont'd

We pulled the Sonata out onto a Valley freeway and were immediately impressed with the acceleration and the smoothness of the ride. In fact, a German sedan saw the Korean car on the merging double ramp and started accelerating from behind us... adios, muchacho! We left him in our Pacific Rim dust, and all at comfortable and legal speeds (of course). The smooth ride, however, became noticeably harsher as soon as we passed from rubberized asphalt to the old stuff. Our Michelins had decent sidewall depth and generally would tend toward the softer side, but different rubber could make a difference in this observation. As it was, though, any additional noise definitely makes it into the cabin, which seems to demonstrate reflect a need for more sound dampening in general.

Hyundai is taking the Japanese makers head-on, and making significant progress. Japan is the world's number two industrial economy, and Korea remains well behind that. But Hyundai has been at it for 40 years now, and since hitting the US market in earnest, it would seem that the Koreans are, indeed, doing as the Japanese originally did: they have learned to study, copy and improve. And they are doing it in a gigantic industry and in big, comprehensive waves, each quite well executed. The basics are there, the features are there, the styling has come light years (some might suggest the Bangle-BMW series looks more Korean than this Hyundai, at this point)... and we're sure they'll effectively tackle any minor shortcomings further.

Definitely worth checking out. ■

VEHICLE TEST : 2006 HYUNDAI SONATA



Hyundai Sonata puts major pressure on the competition

By Barbara and Bill Schaffer

The completely redesigned 2006 Hyundai Sonata is here to challenge the big boys like the Toyota Camry and the Honda Accord and frankly, it's doing a great job. The sizes of the three cars are virtually identical, the engines are almost the same size, and the initial quality appears very close. In fact, the 2004 J.D. Power and Associate Initial Quality Study listed the Sonata as the leader in the entry midsize segment, outpacing American and European competitors for the first time. And for 2006, the Sonata appears to be even better than before. It's wonderfully equipped with many amenities and technology, offers good ride and handling, advanced styling and is priced below the competition.

The only significant differences are on the window sticker, often a few thousand less for the Hyundai, and a warranty that is five years or 60,000 miles for the Sonata and three years or 36,000 miles for the competitors. The Hyundai also has an industry-best 10-year or 100,000-mile powertrain warranty.

The new Sonata sports a clean fascia, sharply angled headlight assembly, raked hood, and a sleek forward motion appearance swooping down toward a clean-cut grille.

Inside you'll find major improvements to quality and material making it more competitive with the Japanese brands.

The Sonata rides on a sophisticated four-wheel independent suspension with double wishbones in the front and a five-link rear suspension in the rear, providing a very smooth, quiet ride while still retaining better than average handling. It's a little softer than I would choose, but for the average driver it's great. Engineers have obviously worked hard to dampen interior noise through its rigid design and tight fit which nearly eliminated wind noise.

A 235-hp 3.3-liter V-6 engine powers the

Sonata's front wheels through a smooth five-speed automatic transmission with Shiftronic® manual control for those drivers that prefer to be more in touch with the shifting. The technologically advanced all-aluminum engine utilizes a Continuously Variable Valve Timing (CVT) system and a four-valve per cylinder double overhead cam configuration. The V-6 engine is standard equipment on the top level LX version and an option on the GLS model we drove.

The Sonata GLS is very well equipped, especially considering the cost. Standard equipment includes items shown in the sidebar, plus keyless entry with alarm, leather-wrapped steering wheel, driver's lumbar support and other features for \$20,895. Sonata GL starts at \$17,895, powered by a 162-hp 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine, with a five-speed manual transmission and available four-speed automatic with Shiftronic.

In addition to electronic stability control and traction control the Sonata features front seat side airbags, side curtain airbags, front active head restraints and 4-wheel anti-lock brakes for driver and passenger safety. Hyundai was the first non-luxury brand to include side impact airbags on all its models, standard.

Hyundai claims 0 to 60 mph acceleration time in the 7.5 second range. My personal acceleration test gave a speed of 74 mph in the approximate one-eighth mile distance from where I pull onto our main road.

EPA figures have the V-6 Sonata at 20 mpg for city driving and 30 mpg on the highway. We actually averaged 27.8 mpg during our week of combined driving.

The Sonata is an impressive vehicle offering style, comfort, economy and value and it is worth looking at if you are in the market for a mid-size sedan.

For several years we've been amazed at the value offered on all the Hyundai vehicles. Compound that with the good fit and finish and add in the industry leading warranty and the Hyundai Sonata looks like one of the best buys in the mid-size market. ■

2006 Hyundai Sonata

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Electric Stability Control; Traction control; 16-Inch alloy wheels; Power windows, locks and mirrors; AM/FMCD/MP3 audio system; Air conditioning; Cruise control; Tilt wheel; Premium cloth seats; Fog lights; Floor mats; Solar glass.

Base Price: \$20,895
Options: Power sunroof\$850
Power driver's seat\$250
Auto-dim mirror, HomeLink, compass . \$250
17-Inch Euroflange alloy wheels\$150.
Total Options\$1,500
Freight\$600
Price as Tested\$22,995

DIMENSIONS

EPA SizeLarge
Weight3,458 lb.
Wheelbase107.4 in.
Length188.9 in.
Width72.1 in.
Height58.0 in.
Fuel Capacity17.7 gal.
Cargo Capacity16.3 cu. ft.

MECHANICAL

Engine3.3L DOHC V-6
Horsepower237@6000
Torque228@3500
Transmission5-Spd. Auto.
DriveFront wheel
BrakesDisc ABS
Tires225/50R17

PERFORMANCE

0 to 60 mph7.5 sec.
Speed to mailbox74 mph
EPA economy rating20/30 mpg
Our actual fuel econ27.8 mpg

COMPETITORS

Buick Century, Buick LaCrosse, Chevrolet Malibu, Chrysler Sebring, Dodge Stratus, Ford 500, Honda Accord, Kia Optima, Mazda 6, Mitsubishi Galant, Nissan Altima, Pontiac G6, Suzuki Verona, Toyota Camry, Volkswagen Jetta

Pontiac Builds Some Actual Excitement.

By Barbara and Bill Schaffer



- Pontiac's first production two-seat roadster
- 170 hp 2.4L Ecotec engine
- Built on new rear-drive Kappa platform
- Near 50/50 weight distribution
- Four-wheel independent SLA suspension
- AM/FM and CD stereo with six speakers
- Standard Aisin five-speed manual transmission
- Available Hydra-Matic 5L40-E five-speed automatic transmission
- Eighteen-inch five-spoke aluminum alloy wheels



Robert Lutz, GM Vice Chairman, Product Development, proclaimed that General Motors would build a roadster for the masses; and they did it; and it is good. The Pontiac Solstice sports car is the best thing GM has done in years—with the possible exception of the Corvette Z06 (which is nearly three times the price of the Solstice).

First shown at the 2002 Detroit auto show as a concept vehicle, the 2006 Solstice is now a part of the Pontiac lineup. We've been reading a great deal about it and were excited to get it for a full week of testing. The only downside is that we could only take one child at a time. (Now that we think about it, there are times when that could be a very good thing.)

In keeping with traditional sports car architecture, the Solstice starts from the new General Motors World rear-drive platform. The unibody frame is engineered to provide extra strength and rigidity by using unique details like an enclosed tunnel that houses the transmission and driveshaft.

The sleek and progressive design of this classic roadster has a low and aggressive stance. It features a long clamshell hood and a short rear deck. The sides of the Solstice are clean with fluid lines and wide 18-inch wheels and tires that are pushed as far toward the corners as possible.

The body color extends into the cabin, giving the Solstice a seamless appearance when the top is down. Cockpit-style instruments are intuitively placed around the driver and the pedals are placed perfectly for easy heel-and-toe driving.

The 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine powering the Solstice is the GM Ecotec, but the name sounds more like something powering an economy sedan



The Pontiac Solstice is mounted on top of a rigid frame which provides for an efficient short and long arm suspension at all four wheels. This setup is a fundamental engineering factor in providing the new two-seat roadster with its excellent handling characteristics and road feel.

than a sports car. Nevertheless, the 170 horsepower does a very good job with 0 to 60 mph acceleration times arriving in 7.4 seconds. For those of us who always cry for "more power" there is a turbocharged version in the works with an estimated 260 horsepower. That should really make the Solstice a standout.

Fuel economy is more in keeping with the engine name. The EPA rates the Solstice at 20 mpg for city driving and 28 mpg on the highway. We averaged 24.7 mpg in combined driving.

We were impressed by the five-speed manual transmission that clicked between the gears with the same precision we get from some expensive German cars. An available option is a GM-developed five-speed automatic transmission. A limited-slip differential option divides power equally between both rear wheels during normal conditions, but in low-traction situations switches the power to the wheel with the best traction.

The Solstice has a manually operated top that lowers behind the seats in a separate, fully enclosed compartment with no visible convertible top stack. The top operation is a little bit cumbersome, and it was necessary to flip up two wings on the rear edge of the cloth top every time we got into the trunk. Like all sports cars, the Solstice is a little difficult to get in and out of when the top is up. The top may not be the easiest to use, but it does a good job of sealing the interior and keeping wind noise down.

Standard equipment on the Solstice leans more to the mechanical than convenience and luxury. It comes with five-

spoke painted wheels, four-wheel disc brakes, racing style seats, AM/FM/CD audio and tilt wheel for a starting price of \$19,995 including delivery. To dress it up, there are several option packages including leather seating, polished wheels, XM radio, CD changer, power locks, keyless entry, cruise control, power windows, air conditioning and anti-lock brakes, which jump the price to \$25,000. Still, that's not a bad price for an exciting and fully loaded roadster.

The Solstice is aimed squarely against the popular Mazda Miata, and Pontiac has hit a home run. It has actually been outselling the Miata early in the first couple of months of 2006. It's just as much fun to drive as the Miata, and performance figures are very close, as is the driving experience. The Miata might have a little more refinement than the Solstice, but drivers will enjoy either of these great cars.

This vehicle was quickly conceived and developed, initially in a four-month period, and it's very well done. It shows that GM still has the leadership and talent to build great cars. The Solstice has unique roadster styling that sets it apart from anything on the market, and then it delivers with performance and handling to match. It has captured the hearts of sport car enthusiasts, and it has certainly captured our attention.

With its fantastic looks, good performance and near perfect 50/50 balance, the Solstice has hit this home run for the Pontiac brand at a time when the company needs it most. ■



2006 Pontiac Solstice

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

18-inch alloy wheels; Racing-inspired sport seats; AM/FM/CD stereo; Rear window defogger; Rake-adjustable wheel.

Base Price: \$19,420

Options:

Air conditioning\$960
 Carpeted floor mats\$60
 Limited slip differential\$195
 4-Wheel antilock brakes.....\$400
 Premium pkg. (Leather seats, etc.) ..\$590
 18-Inch polished wheels\$495
 Monsoon audio\$395
 Audio w/ in-dash 6-CD changer\$495
 XM Satellite radio.....\$325
 Power package (power locks, outside mirrors and windows, keyless entry).....\$625
 Convenience pkg.(cruise control, driver info center, fog lights)\$465
 Total Options\$5,005
 Freight.....\$575
 Price as Tested.....\$25,000

DIMENSIONS

EPA SizeTwo-seater
 Weight.....2,860 lb.
 Wheelbase95.1 in.
 Length..... 157.2 in.
 Width.....71.3 in.
 Height50.1 in.
 Fuel Capacity13.8 gal.
 Cargo Capacity(top up) 3.8 cu. ft.

MECHANICAL

Engine2.5L DOHC 4-Cyl.
 Horsepower170@6600
 Torque166@4800
 Transmission5-spd. man.
 Drive.....rear wheel
 BrakesDisc ABS
 Tires245/45R18

PERFORMANCE

0 to 60 mph.....7.4 sec.
 EPA economy rating20/28 mpg
 Our actual fuel econ24.7 mpg

COMPETITORS

Mazda MX-5 Miata

Arizona

ATTRACTIONS & EVENTS

Chiricahua State Park
HCR 2, Box 6500 • Willcox AZ 85643
520-824-3560

Grand Canyon National Park
PO Box 129 • Grand Canyon AZ 86023
923-638-7888 Visitor Info Recorded Message

Lake Havasu State Park
699 London Bridge Dr. • Lake Havasu AZ 86403
928-855-2784

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument
10 Organ Pipe Drive • Ajo AZ 85321-9626
520-387-6849 Visitor Information

Petrified Forest National Park
PO Box 2217
Petrified Forest National Park AZ 86028
928-524-66228 Visitor Information

Saguaro National Park
3693 South Old Spanish Trail
520-733-5153 Visitor Info Rincon Mtn District

Sport Compact Drag Racing
Every thursday at Firebird Raceway
www.dragracing.com/phx

Wupatki National Monument
Flagstaff Area National Monuments
6400 N. Hwy 89 • Flagstaff AZ 86004
928-679-2365 Visitor Information
928-526-1157 Visitor Information, HQ

California

ATTRACTIONS & EVENTS

Palm Desert Visitor Information Center
72-990 Highway 111 • Palm Desert CA 92260
800-873-2428 • www.palm-desert.org

MOTOR MUSEUMS

Petersen Automotive Museum
6060 Wilshire Blvd. (at Fairfax) • LA CA 90036
323-930-CARS • www.petersen.org

Colorado

ATTRACTIONS & EVENTS

Colorado Activity Centers, Inc.
737 N. Tenmile Drive - Suite 35
PO Box 129 • Frisco CO 80443
800-777-8642 - www.coloradoinfo.com

MOTOR MUSEUMS

Shelby American Collection
5020 Chaparral Court
PO Box 19228 • Boulder CO 80308-2228
www.shelbyamericancollection.org
303-516-9565

Nevada

ATTRACTIONS & EVENTS

Las Vegas Tourism Bureau
6120 W. Tropicana Ave. • Las Vegas NV
www.lasvegastourism.com

MOTOR MUSEUMS

Imperial Palace Auto Collections
Fifth floor parking facility of Imperial Palace.
702-794-3174
www.imperialpalace.com/auto.html

National Automobile Museum
The Harrah Collection
10 Lake Street South • Reno NV 89501
775-333-9300 • www.automuseum.org

New Mexico

ATTRACTIONS & EVENTS

New Mexico Department of Tourism
800-733-6396 x 0643 • www.newmexico.org

Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce
PO Box 1928 • Santa Fe NM 87504
8380 Cerrillos Rd. Suite 302 • Santa Fe NM 87507
505-983-7317 • www.santafechamber.com

RESORTS / LODGING

Inn on La Loma Plaza
315 Ranchitos Road • Box 4159 • Taos NM 87571
800-530-3040 • www.VacationTaos.com

Inn on the Alameda
303 East Alameda • Santa Fe NM 87501
505-984-21221 • www.innonthealameda.com

Utah

ATTRACTIONS & EVENTS

San Juan County Tourism
117 S. Main Street • Monticello UT 84535
800-574-4386 • www.southeastutah.org

Southern Utah Scenic Tours
PO Box 1113 • Cedar City UT 84720
888-404-8687 • www.utahscenicstours.com

RESORTS / LODGING

Desert Rose Inn & Cabins
701 W. Highway 191 • Bluff UT 84512
888-475-7673 • www.DesertRoseInn.com

Mexico

RESORTS / LODGING

Puerto Peñasco Mexico Online
Beachfront home rentals in Rocky Point.
623-935-0507 • www.puerto-penasco.com

ATTRACTIONS & EVENTS

Baja California State Tourism Office
Blvd. Diaz Ordaz s/n
Edificio Plaza Patria Nivel 3
CP 22400 Tijuana BC
(66) 81-9492

Chihuahua State Tourism Office
Calle Libertad No. 1300
Edificio Agustin Melgar, 1er Piso
CP 31000 Chihuahua, Chihuahua
(14) 29-3421

Sinaloa State Tourism Office
Av. Camarón Sabalo esq. Tiburon
Edificio Banrural 4 Piso
CP 82100 Mazatlán, Sinaloa
(69) 16-5160

Sonora State Tourism Office
Centro de Gobierno
Edificio Estatal Norte 3er Nivel
Comonfort y Paseo Río
CP 83280 Hermosillo, Sonora
(62) 17-0076

Of national interest

MOTOR MUSEUMS

Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village
20900 Oakwood Blvd. • Dearborn MI 48124
www.hfmgv.com • 313-271-1620

Imperial Palace Auto Collections
(see Nevada listings)

Motorcycle Hall of Fame Museum
Pickerington OH 43147
www.motorcyclemuseum.org • 614-856-2222

National Automobile Museum
(see Nevada listings)

National Corvette Museum
350 Corvette Drive • Bowling Green KY 42101
www.corvettemuseum.com • 800-53VETTE

Petersen Automotive Museum
(see California listings)

Shelby American Collection
(see Colorado listings)



Information is derived from a variety of sources and may not be final or accurate; check all info. Listings do not necessarily represent any specific affiliation with nor endorsement by *Arizona Driver* magazine.

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SAN DIEGO WILD ANIMAL PARK

SeaWorld
ADVENTURE PARK
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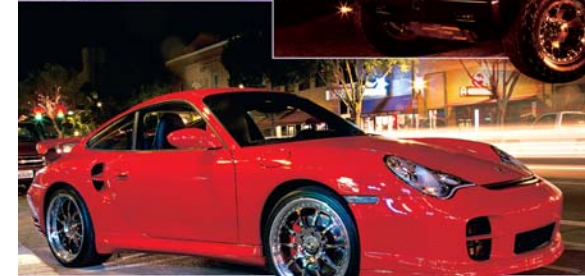
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TEENS' SAFETY INSIGHTS CAN HELP SAVE LIVES

Bridgestone Firestone will give winners of essay contest more than \$20,000 in prizes in exchange for ideas on how to improve driver safety education

Sharing their unfiltered opinions can sometimes get teens in trouble, but now it can help them pay for college. Starting this week, teens from around the country can log on to www.SafetyScholars.com and submit essays on various driver safety issues for an opportunity to earn \$2,500 college scholarships, new laptops, sets of Bridgestone Firestone tires and \$500 gas cards.

The site www.SafetyScholars.com is the newest component of the company's ongoing commitment to safety education. Bridgestone Firestone North American Tire, LLC (BFNT) and legendary racer Mario Andretti will officially launch the program and website in April, in conjunction with the start of National Tire Safety Week (for information on National Tire Safety Week visit: www.betiresmart.org). Firestone has worked with Andretti to develop a comprehensive program to educate young drivers on tire and driver safety. Now the company is looking to teens for their insights and ideas to help shape the curriculum and find creative ways to get the message to new drivers.

Teens notice that their peers get

increasingly risky behind the wheel as they get older and gain more driving experience, according to a BFNT-sponsored online survey of teen drivers. More than half (54 percent) of 19-year-olds surveyed felt that teens are generally not safe drivers, compared with 35 percent of 16-year-olds who felt the same way. BFNT and Andretti are asking teens to use the same insights into their peers' habits to find the best way to teach teens about the importance of tire and driver safety.

SafetyScholars.com makes a wealth of safety information available to young drivers with just a click of a mouse. Visitors to the site can download a copy of a safety booklet that encourages new drivers to learn their "M.A.R.I.O.S." (Mario Andretti's Real Information On Safety). In his travels across the United States for BFNT, Andretti frequently speaks to students about the safety tips and good habits covered in the M.A.R.I.O.S. booklets, such as alert and defensive driving, tire safety and seat belt use. The site also includes information from Firestone Complete Auto Care's award-winning Car Care Academies, BFNT's

TireSafety.com Web site and on the innovative BFNT-sponsored teen driver training program, Driver's Edge.

"Tires are the only things connecting your vehicle to the road, so, as a tire company, Bridgestone Firestone strives to educate drivers on how essential tire safety is," said John Gamauf, president of consumer tire replacement sales, BFNT. "Beyond that, we are parents and grandparents and community members who are deeply committed to keeping all drivers safe on the roads at all times. We're excited to be adding SafetyScholars.com to the array of driver safety and education programs and initiatives that our family of companies developed or sponsors, from Buckle Up Baby to Car Care Academies to Driver's Edge."

To participate in the Safety Scholars program, students aged 16 to 21 must compose an essay, 500 words or less, on automobile safety-related topics they feel are important to their peers, such as seat belt use, drinking and driving or tire safety. The submission should discuss effective ways to improve driver safety and should also include ideas on the best and most effective way to communicate to and educate young drivers about the safety messages discussed in the essay. Essays will be accepted through July 31, 2006, with finalists being named in the fall of 2006. Complete rules are available at www.SafetyScholars.com.

The top 10 finalists, selected by a panel of judges affiliated with BFNT's driver safety initiatives, will each receive a \$500 gas card and a set of Bridgestone- or Firestone-brand tires. Each of the top three finalists will also receive a \$2,500 scholarship and a laptop computer.

So log on and tell your story. Not only can your ideas help win prizes—they can also help save a life. ■



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Whether your teen has never been behind the wheel, has driving experience or has their driver's license, DrivingMBA is the only driving school with a driver training program to meet their specific needs. Don't let your teen get their driver training through trial and error. The errors are costly. They not only cost you in insurance rate increases, vehicle damage, but the most significant cost, the loss of life. Whether it is you, your teen, friends or family, even someone you don't know, a car collision can change lives forever. Make sure your teen is prepared to handle all types of driving situations.

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LIBER- HONDA

By Joe Sage and
Barbara & Bill Schaffer



When the Honda Pilot debuted in 2003 it was quickly received very well in the sport-utility segment, with the flexibility of an eight-passenger interior, the largest cargo carrying capacity in the segment and best-in-class safety, fuel efficiency and emissions. And it has stood the test of time.

DESIGN – The Pilot is Honda’s version of the popular Acura MDX, with more of a family orientation and complete with a multitude of storage spaces, 12-volt electrical outlets and fast-food holders throughout the vehicle.

The exterior styling is uninspired but a timeless design that will look fresh for years. Like all Honda products, the Pilot is very well built and is simple in design and operation. The Pilot comes in three very well equipped models, the basic LX, mid-level EX and top-of-the line EX-L complete with all the goodies like heated sets and a navigation system.

MECHANICAL – All models are powered by a 244-horsepower, 3.5-liter VTEC, V-6 engine and paired with a five-speed automatic transmission and innovative VT-M-4™ (Variable Torque Management 4WD) full-time four-wheel drive.

PERFORMANCE AND HANDLING – With its muscular V-6 engine, the Pilot offers

respectable performance with 0 to 60 mph times of 8.2 seconds. With its four-wheel independent suspension, variable assist rack and pinion steering and front and rear stabilizer bars the Pilot drives more like a family sedan than a truck.

Fuel economy is a little better than the average SUV. We averaged 19.5 mpg; EPA ratings are 18 mpg for city driving and 24 mpg on the highway.

COMFORT – To make egress and ingress easier for the third row passengers, the Pilot features a second row that is now adjustable fore and aft with an improved slide feature. The third row seating is small and best left to youngsters or petite, agile adults.

All models are equipped with air conditioning, cruise control, AM/FM/CD/cassette stereo, driver and front passenger front and side airbags, as well as power windows, mirrors, keyless entry and door locks. The EX and EX-L models add more conveniences and special features as part of a standard package.

PRICE RANGE – See information in sidebar. We appreciate Honda’s simplified pricing that builds vehicles with a generous level of standard equipment so customers don’t have to add a long list of options to reach the right equipment level. ■



OUR DRIVE

In the realm of SUVs, the Honda Pilot wouldn’t seem to offer many surprises. Based on the same chassis as the wildly popular and capable Acura MDX, the Pilot offers a more conservative style and a lower price point. But, as with all Hondas, it is nonetheless fully equipped. Honda is a very small, family-owned company, and they keep things quite basic: option lists are not their thing. Since pricing is so reasonable, as well, this is a very nice approach, with as little as the mid-to-upper \$20s bringing you a very complete package in the Pilot.

From the moment we sat down in the driver’s seat, the verdict seemed clear: if you like this car, it has no shortcomings and will do the job well. As your test pilot is over six feet tall, we did notice that the seat doesn’t go back as far as we’d like, and the tilt steering wheel doesn’t rotate high enough to be able to see all the instruments. The first could be customized to fit; the latter, not.

Controls are clean, simple and functional, and they include a navigation screen as complete (and intuitive and actually useful, unlike some) as what’s found on the more expensive Acura... right down to automatically changing to a rear TV image when backing up. Nice. And at a Honda price.

Some controls seem slightly odd, such as a three-knob radio on which the center knob is power and volume, counterintuitive to most drivers. The HVAC (heat-vent-air conditioning) controls are also centered, just above that, so ultimately it could become an easy habit. Most such test-drivers’ quibbles are not at issue for an owner, who has more than our typical week to get used to these and only these controls on an ongoing basis.

Prices on the Honda Pilot start at \$26,996 for the very well equipped LX two-wheel-drive, and climb to \$35,245 for the EX-L with 4-wheel-drive and navigation, plus \$595 delivery. ■

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THE INSIDE TRACK: BRIEFS & RUMORS

■ **Audi** will call its new mid-engine sports car the R8. The all-wheel-drive two-seater, shown as the Le Mans concept at the 2003 Frankfurt auto show, is scheduled to start production during the fourth quarter of 2006, but will likely not make it to the states until mid- to late 2007. The \$100,000 supercar will share many of its components with the upcoming Lamborghini Gallardo. (Both Audi and Lamborghini are owned by Volkswagen.) Power will likely come from a V-8 and possibly a V-10 engines.



Audi Le Mans concept

■ **Suzuki** has announced a new US version of its small SX4. The five-door vehicle is about the same size as the Chevrolet Aveo or just a dash smaller than the Kia Rio. The all-new SX4 has available all-wheel drive that allows the driver to switch between two-wheel, all-wheel drive high and all-wheel drive lock modes



Suzuki SX4

to best to tailor the system to the conditions. It's attached to either a five-speed manual transmission or four-speed automatic. Prices have yet to be announced. The SX4 will arrive as a 2007 model late in the summer of 2006.

■ **Volkswagen** will offer a full hybrid capable of running in both an electric-only mode and in combination with its gasoline engine by 2007, according to

reports. It was not divulged if it will be a new vehicle or if one of the current models will be adapted to the compo-

nents, which are coming from Continental AG and ZF. Audi, a subsidiary of VW, also plans to offer a hybrid version of the upcoming Q7 SUV.

■ **Mercedes-Benz** is replacing the electronic Sensotronic Brake control system with a conventional hydraulic system. Because the Bosch system was recalled twice recently, customers have lost confidence in the expensive system. Low volume cars will still use the system until the next iteration.

■ **Saab** is expected to show a two-seat sports car at the Geneva International Auto Show in March. A Saab spokesperson says it will have the DNA of the Saab Sonett from the 1960s. A 250-hp V-6 engine will power the two-seat front-wheel drive. Saab is also rumored to be working on a smaller (BMW X3 size) SUV called the 9-4X.

■ **Nissan** and Nippon Paint Co. have developed a clear paint that will repair itself. Scratch Guard Coat contains an elastic resin that prevents scratches from reaching the inner levels of the painted surface. If it is scratched by a car wash or tree branches, the

clear surface blends back to original state within a day, to a week depending on the temperature. Nissan said the Scratch Guard Coat will be used on one of their SUV products in the near future.

■ **Audi** is expected to add a coupe with an A5 designation for the 2007 model year. Seated between the A4 and A6 sedans (and Avants or wagons) the larger coupe resembles the Novulari concept, first shown at the 2003 Geneva Motor Show. The body is expected to be entirely aluminum with power coming from a variety of four-cylinder and V-6 engines, with a possible S version powered by the potent 4.2-liter V-8. A convertible version, displacing the A4 convertible, is expected in 2008.

■ The **Cadillac** Escalade SUV promises to be the most outrageous ever, with optional 22-inch wheels along with a new all-aluminum 403-hp V-8 engine and six-speed automatic transmission. The new Escalade goes on sale in the spring of 2006 as a 2007 model.

■ With the success of Ford's Mustang and the upcoming Dodge Challenger in the works, **Chevrolet** may be trying to get a piece of the hot rod coupe business by bringing back the Camaro. The concept shown in Detroit looks like a customized version of the 1969 Camaro both inside and out. It sported a 6.0-liter (400-hp) V-8, but production models would likely start with a V-6 and a base price in the \$20,000 range.



Camaro concept



Lincoln MKS concept

■ **Lincoln** says the MKS concept shown at the Detroit auto show is a strong indication of what their long overdue full-size sedan will be like. The MKS is built on a platform developed by Volvo and used most recently on the Ford Five Hundred sedan. It will have available all-wheel drive, a 4.4-liter 315-hp V-8 engine and a six-speed automatic transmission.

■ The world's fastest production car, the \$1.2 million, 252-mph **Bugatti** Veyron, is rumored to be getting a baby brother. The yet to be named baby Bugatti is expected to launch in 2008 at a more refined price of \$130,000. The entry-level Bugatti will likely be a front-engine 2 + 2 powered by a Volkswagen VR6 or V-8 engine, probably with all-wheel drive. It is expected to compete with cars like the Bentley Continental GT (also owned by Volkswagen).

■ **Volkswagen** will get a new minivan, and it will come from the king of the segment, Chrysler. VW announced that production of the minivan, based on the next generation from Chrysler and Dodge, will start in 2008.

■ **Ford's** new Edge crossover and its corresponding Lincoln Aviator will get a new 3.5-liter, 250-hp V-6 engine with the new six-speed automatic transmission that was developed jointly with General Motors. The transmission is capable of handling up to 300-hp, so it's quite possible we'll see modified version of the engine in future models. The engine is expected to find its way into about 20 percent of the new Ford vehicles within the next four years. It's also designed to accommodate hybrid technology.

■ **Volkswagen** is bringing back a Golf R, but not until 2007 as a 2008 model. Renamed the R36, to represent the new 3.6-liter V-6 engine, it will be lower and wider than the version shown at the 2005 Frankfurt auto show. With 280-hp the two-door will be the fastest Golf ever with 0 to 62 mph times of 6.2 seconds and a top speed of 155 mph. Features include a sophisticated all-wheel drive system and an optional twin-clutch DSG gearbox with manual and automatic shift modes.

■ **Mercedes-Benz** is taking their SUV line up a notch with the all-new GL-Class. Introduced at the 2006 Detroit auto show, the new seven-seat luxury SUV falls into the full size category. Power goes to all four wheels from the company's 4.6-liter V-8 engine rated at 355-hp and the new seven-speed automatic transmission. It shares many components with the middle-size M-Class



Mercedes-Benz GL-Class

SUV and the new R-Class crossover. The larger SUV will be built at the company's Vance, Alabama plant along with the R-Class and M-Class.

■ **Chrysler** is already rumored to be working on SRT versions of two upcoming vehicles, the Dodge Caliber (a crossover-style vehicle replacing the Neon) and the Dodge Nitro (a medium-size SUV). Both will be available in all-wheel drive. The Caliber SRT4 will get about 300 horsepower from a new turbo-charged version of the 2.4-liter four-cylinder, while the Nitro will get a V-6 also with about 300 horses.

■ **Buick** is expected to replace the Rendezvous and Rainier in 2007 with the Enclave concept. The drivetrain and suspension will include a 270-hp V-6 engine



Buick Enclave concept

with a six speed automatic transmission, all-wheel drive and four-wheel independent suspension. The production model is expected to seat seven when it goes on sale within the next year and one-half. It's designed to compete with the Lexus RX 330 and Acura MDX and be priced somewhere in the \$37,000 to \$38,000 range like those vehicles.

■ It appears the next **BMW** 3 Series convertible, due in 2007, will sport a retractable hardtop instead of the traditional cloth top. Spy photos of a 3 Series coupe have shown a three-part roof. They say the convertible will get a sportier front styling when it debuts at the Geneva motor show next March. Other upcoming convertibles with retractable hardtops are the Volvo C70, Volkswagen Eos and next-generation Sebring convertible. ■

Briefs & Rumors is a summary of auto news from industry sources, trade journals and consumer magazines compiled for *Arizona Driver Magazine* by **BILL & BARBARA SCHAFFER** of *Auto Digest*.

Russo and Steele

*\$20 Million in Sales,
Best Sales Results in
Auction's 6-Year History*



6025



6082



6115



6204



6114

Russo and Steele Collector Automobile Auctions continued its six-year tradition of record-breaking sales on January 20th, 21st and 22nd at their "Sports and Muscle in Scottsdale" sale. Total figures for the action-packed auction exceeded \$20,000,000. Strong numbers were realized on a 1967 Shelby 427 Cobra at \$605,000.00 and a 1971 Plymouth Hemi 'Cuda at \$715,000.00. Early estimates from Russo and Steele officials noted that over 82 percent of the 400 cars offered were sold, and that the number of bidders was up by over 50 percent over their 2005 Scottsdale sale. Additionally, several collectible Ferraris, Corvettes and Shelby automobiles exceeded pre-auction estimates.

"The energy level on the auction block was absolutely electric," commented Drew Alcazar, president of Russo and Steele. "The collector car hobby is experiencing phenomenal growth, led by American muscle cars. The values are going vertical as more and more affluent baby boomers are entering the hobby."

Russo and Steele is passionate about offering the finest in European Sports and American Muscle, Hot Rods and Customs in an intimate setting. Now in its sixth year, Russo and Steele has established itself as Scottsdale's most exciting collector car auction. They have built an extraordinary reputation on quality, integrity, professional discretion and camaraderie amongst enthusiasts.

Russo and Steele is rapidly establishing itself as the premier auction for multi-million dollar significant race cars.

Russo and Steele's next auction will take place on August 19th and 20th in Monterey, CA. This sale will be concurrent with the Monterey Historic Automobile Races at Laguna Seca, the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance and Concorso Italiano. ■

Shown at left:

1967 Shelby Cobra 427
Consignment # 6025
Final Bid: \$ 605,000.00

■ Only 22,000 original miles, only three owners from new. The most complete unmolested original Cobra offered for public sale. With the cars of Shelby American at the forefront of the hobby, many cars with "stories, issues, and suspect or damage history" are emerging and being sold to unsuspecting buyers at premium prices. Sadly, many cars have also been heavily modified with S/C accoutrements or raced extensively and crashed. Careful research and complete documentation along with the full report from the Shelby American Automobile Club supports the outstanding history of this correct original Cobra. Absolutely "as new" in condition and correct in all respects including the original color combination and in the factory delivered configuration.

1971 Plymouth Hemi Cuda 426
Consignment # 6082
Final Bid: \$ 715,000.00

■ This Bright Blue Metallic (GB5) 1971 Cuda "R" Code is a Numbers Matching 426C1D/425 Horsepower (E74) Hemi. The car is fully documented by the nationally recognized authority on MOPARS, Galen Govier. His report reveals the true authenticity of all V.I.N. Stamps, Casting Dates, VIN Plate and components on this fine collector piece. The report dated mid-year 2005 rated the overall condition of this car a 99.5 out of 100.

1970 Plymouth Hemi Super Bird
Consignment # 6115
Final Bid: \$ 379,500.00

■ This is a very rare HEMI Super bird, one of only 76!! This automobile also comes fully loaded, including factory build sheets and Galen Govier's detailed inspection and assessment paperwork. Also this car has a numbers matching engine and transmission. It is a vitamin C orange with white interior.

1969 Ford Mustang Boss 429
Consignment # 6204
Final Bid: \$ 308,000.00

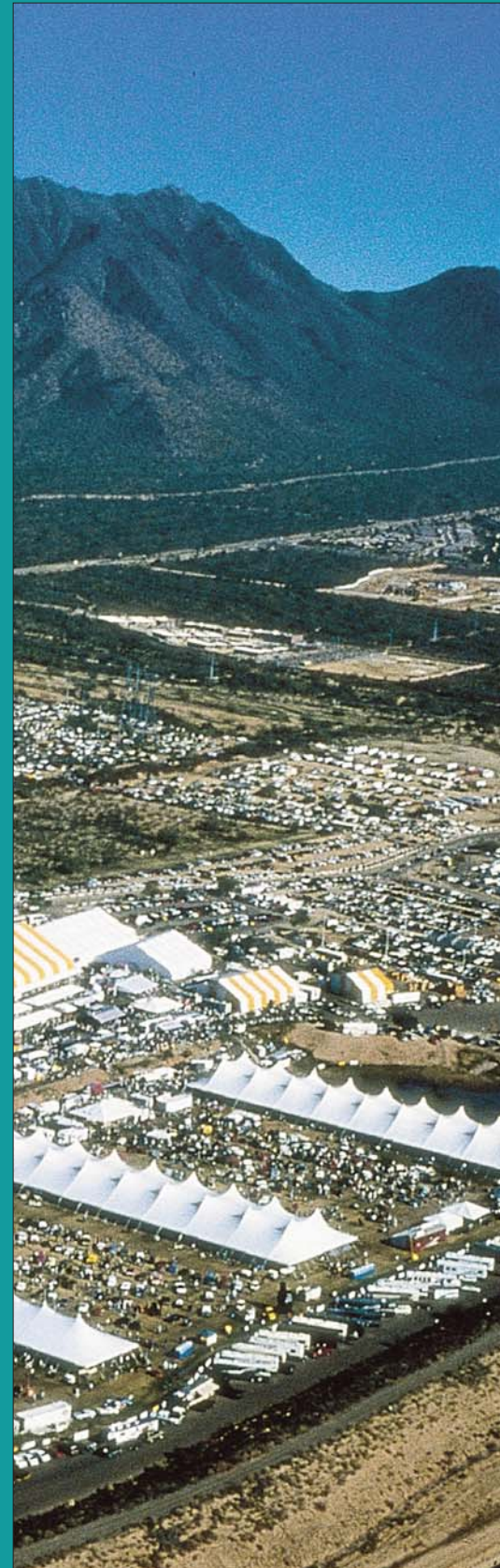
■ This is a 1969 Boss 429 Mustang with a 4 speed transmission. The car has had a Rick Parker restoration. This is the earliest known production. The exterior is black, with a black interior. All numbers are matching. The car has excellent documentation that includes the Build Sheet, Invoice, Original Warranty Card, with the Marti Elite Report. With only 93 produced, this is a very Rare car.

1954 Buick Skylark
Consignment # 6114
Final Bid: \$ 181,500.00

■ There were just 836 Buick skylarks produced in 1954. Each came fully equipped with leather interior, full power equipment, special ornamentation, and open wheel wells with Kelsey Hayes wire wheels. This low mileage example received a complete professional restoration completed in 2003. It is finished in its original color, condor yellow. This beautiful skylark has received numerous awards including "best of show" at the national Buick skylark meet at the Peterson museum in 2004.

Barrett-Jackson

*\$100 Million in Sales,
Record Attendance at
35th Anniversary Auction*



Strong demand for collector cars broke numerous world records and pushed total sales to over \$100,000,000 at the 2006 Barrett-Jackson Scottsdale Event, held from Tuesday-Sunday, January 17-22, 2006, at WestWorld. With record attendance inside the largest tent of its kind in the world, spectacular vehicles attracted high bids such as \$4,320,000 (including bidder's fees), for a Futurliner Parade of Progress Tour Bus and \$3,024,000 for a 1954 Pontiac Bonneville Special concept car, during the 35th Anniversary Barrett-Jackson "World's Greatest Collector Car Event."

Sales beat the \$61,687,526 record set at the 2005 auction. 1084 cars crossed the auction block during the nine-day event; all were sold at No Reserve. 4,852 bidders representing all 50 states and 14 countries registered. These bidders had a combined purchasing limit in excess of \$1billion.

Six vehicles reached or exceeded the million dollar mark. Those vehicles include a pristine 1970 HEMI 'Cuda convertible, selling for \$2,160,000, the oldest existing

Corvette at \$1,080,000, a 1952 Chrysler D'Elegance for \$1,188,000, and a 1970 Chevrolet Chevelle SS LS6 Convertible at \$1,242,000. In addition, an unrivaled selection of HEMI-powered automobiles, street rods, muscle cars, classic and European sports cars were sold on the auction block as celebrities such as Carroll Shelby, Edsel Ford, Sammy Hager, Bob Seger, Michael Anthony, Alice Cooper, Billy Gibbons, Bill Goldberg, Ian Ziering, Luis Gonzalez, Randy Johnson and Chip Foose watched.

The auction is a lifestyle event, featuring fashion shows and a pavilion where patrons were pampered with spa treatments, shopped for high-end jewelry and clothing and had access to some of Arizona's most prestigious resort communities. Two evening Galas were held during the week; one for bidders and VIPs and one benefiting Childhelp USA, the auction's charitable beneficiary. Early estimates indicate that over \$2 million was raised for the charity. ■

Two Harley Earl Masterpieces Sell For A Combined \$6.8 Million At Barrett-Jackson

Vehicles to Be Centerpieces of Private Collection

A 1950 General Motors Futurliner Parade of Progress Tour Bus and 1954 Pontiac Bonneville Special concept car designed by the legendary Harley Earl will be rejoined as the centerpieces of a private collection after selling for a combined US\$6,800,000 at the 35th Anniversary Barrett-Jackson "World's Greatest Collector Car Event." The Futurliner crossed the block at \$4,000,000, while the Bonneville Special fetched \$2,800,000, with both being sold at "no reserve." The Barrett-Jackson auction continues through January 22, 2006, at WestWorld in Scottsdale.

"To have both of these magnificent vehicles cross the block during the same event was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said Barrett-Jackson Auction Company President and CEO Craig Jackson. "Now they will have the distinction of remaining together for years to come, just as they were intended."

With thousands of excited fans filling the nine-story auction tent with booming cheers, two bidders remained

neck and neck through the final gavel of the Futurliner bus. After a miscommunication during the bidding process, the high bidder deferred the sale to his opponent, who had purchased the Bonneville Special mere minutes before.

"This is the way we believe that Harley Earl would have wanted the sale of these masterpieces to come to a close," added Jackson. "It was a deafening, adrenaline-pumping experience that anyone would enjoy experiencing again in a heartbeat. We promised excitement for our 35th anniversary celebration, and can truthfully say that we delivered on that promise."

With multiple million-dollar plus sales occurring throughout the auction weekend, Barrett-Jackson continues to set the standard for the collector car market by elevating consignment standards, breaking records and serving as the barometer for market trends. Each event is broadcast by the SPEED Channel television network.

UPCOMING FEATURES

Audi Q7



Audi, who once committed to avoiding the SUV craze, has now come around with the large high-performance Q7. We will drive it on Mount Palomar, near San Diego, and report back.

Porsche Cayman



What do you get when you cross a Boxster and a 911? The new Porsche Cayman is a Boxster with a roof, but that potent combination might put some fear in its big brother.

The new wave of small cars— Honda Fit, Toyota Yaris, Nissan Versa



Gasoline is creeping higher and higher, or maybe creeping is not the right word. That makes the timing very good for the Japanese, who are finally bringing their smaller cars here.



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