

# ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

VOLUME 5 NUMBER 5  
SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2006



## Perfect Fit?

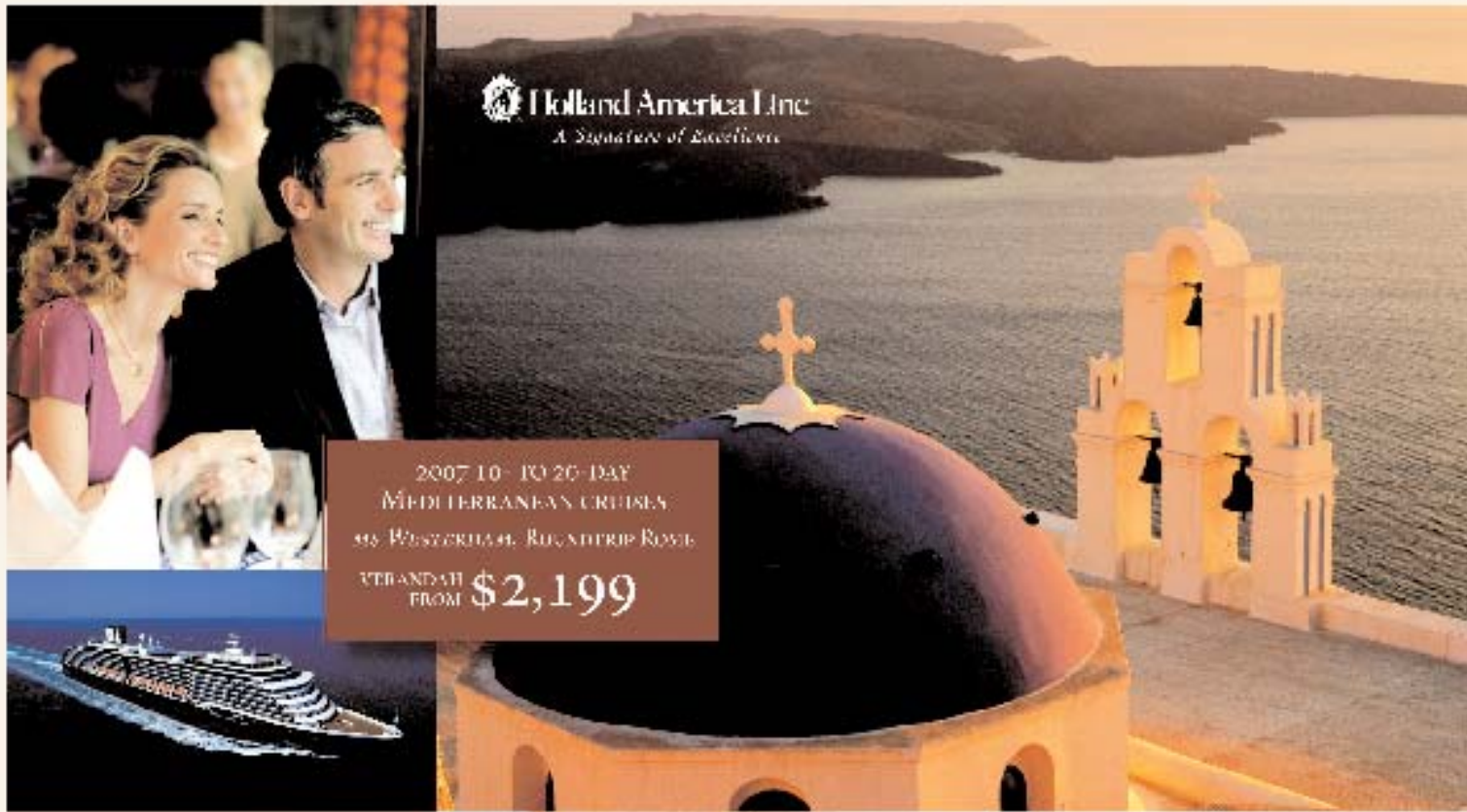
- As gas prices head sky-high, Honda and others get small in the US market

### Plus...

- Honda Civic Si test drive
- Honda Element 4x4 test drive

### And...

- Russo and Steele sets more Monterey records!



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SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2006

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The time seems right for a wave of economy cars, with gas at three bucks a gallon (for now?), and the Japanese, who have had these and even smaller cars in their domestic markets for years, are indeed bringing us that wave. No hybrids or other exotic tricks... just small cars... but done with the latest engineering and style. Check out:

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**START YOUR ENGINES : FROM THE PUBLISHER**

Three-dollar-a-gallon gasoline has found few friends, but has spurred considerable interest in a wave of new smaller vehicles, which are hitting the ground running in the US market. Small vehicles from the Volkswagen GTI and Audi A3 to the less performance-oriented Chevy Aveo have been around for awhile, the A3 being of course the newest (but derived from the GTI and Audi TT). Meanwhile, the Japanese and Koreans have had a vast array of teeny machinery in their domestic markets, as has Smart in Europe, but they have thought the US market not only is formidable in terms of regulations and crash-testing expenses, but generally not very interested in the smallest of the small, what with our great highway expanses, altitude changes, tremendous variety of weather conditions... and our proven record of buying the biggest of the big. Whether this is all about to change remains to be seen, but what is already changing is the availability of alternatives.

In this issue, we test drive the new Honda Fit, introduced six years prior in Japan as the Jazz (and far from the smallest of what they offer at home). Coming to market at the same time as the Toyota Yaris (also covered in this issue) and Nissan Versa (ditto), Honda has a heritage that pretty much guarantees a good chance for acceptance in the American market.

Check out our experience driving these little cars, and you might find the future is far more interesting than you may fear.



Joe Sage  
Publisher/  
Executive Editor

# ARIZONA DRIVER

MAGAZINE

**PUBLISHER/EXECUTIVE EDITOR:**

Joe Sage

**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:**

Jill Amadio, Joe Connor,  
Pilar Covarrubias, Mark Cox,  
Larry Edsall, Dan J. Gardner,  
Gary Goldzweig, Chip Keen,  
Bob Kroener, Jim Rogers,  
Bill & Barbara Schaffer, Tim Sharp

**CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS:**

Jean-Pierre Brietta, Rich Cox,  
Luis DeBonoPaula, Larry Edsall,  
Dan J. Gardner, Randy Lorentzen,  
Jim Pyle, Dick Reed

**DESIGN & PRODUCTION:** AdZoneAZ

**ADVERTISING SALES:** 480-948-0200

## ARIZONA DRIVER MAGAZINE

PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY BY ADZONE ARIZONA LLC  
Arizona Driver Magazine  
PO Box 13387 - Scottsdale AZ 85267  
www.azdrivermag.com

Arizona Driver Magazine and  
Arizona Rider Magazine are registered  
tradenames of AdZone Arizona LLC.

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**QUIZ : CAR SMARTS**



- Which US state is considering, or has instituted by now, an 80 mph speed limit on selected highways?
  - Montana
  - Texas
  - Wyoming
  - Nevada
- How much fuel will a top-fuel dragster burn during its typical quarter-mile run?
  - 4 to 6 gallons
  - 10 to 12 gallons
  - 16 to 18 gallons
  - 22 to 24 gallons
- How many vehicles were on the US and Canadian roads as of 2005?
  - 148.8 million
  - 191.3 million
  - 222.7 million
  - 258.2 million
- Which exotic car will be first production car to get carbon fiber wheels?
  - Mosler
  - Ferrari F430
  - Mercedes-Benz SLR
  - Saleen S7
- Which car had the highest percentage of buyers under 30 (first 4 months of 2006)?
  - Scion tC
  - Volkswagen GTI
  - Mazda3
  - Subaru Impreza
- What percentage of the vehicles on the road have a misused or missing gas cap?
  - 4 percent
  - 9 percent
  - 12 percent
  - 17 percent
- How many jobs do the US brand manufacturers (GM, Ford and DaimlerChrysler) provide per 100 cars sold?
  - 5.4 jobs /100
  - 13.3 jobs /100
  - 18.5 jobs /100
  - 23.4 jobs /100
- What size engine has the largest percentage of the market (Jan-May 2006)?
  - 4-cylinder
  - 6-cylinder
  - 8-cylinder
- Which country has the largest number of global vehicle manufacturers headquartered within that country?
  - United States
  - Japan
  - China
  - Germany
  - India

- What percentage of vehicles sold in 2005 had a stability control system?
  - 8.7 percent
  - 12.4 percent
  - 18.3 percent
  - 26.5 percent
- What was the average spent to advertise each new car sold in the US in 2005?
  - \$198
  - \$325
  - \$457
  - \$618
- How many gallons are in a barrel of oil?
  - 42 gallons
  - 50 gallons
  - 55 gallons
  - 60 gallons
- Which of the 10 largest manufacturers makes the most vehicles per employee?
  - Toyota
  - General Motors
  - Honda
  - Hyundai
- How fast is the new Dodge Charger 5.7-Hemi police car from 0 to 100 mph?
  - 14.51 seconds
  - 16.24 seconds
  - 18.05 seconds
  - 19.76 seconds
- Which two-seat sports car sold the most vehicles from January-May of 2006?
  - Mazda MX-5 Miata
  - Nissan 350Z
  - Pontiac Solstice
  - Saturn Sky
- What is the base price of the new turbo-charged Pontiac Solstice GXP roadster?
  - \$21,995
  - \$23,995
  - \$25,995
  - \$27,995
- Malaysian students recently made it into the "Guinness Book of World Records" cramming how many into a MINI Cooper?
  - 15 people
  - 17 people
  - 19 people
  - 21 people
- What percentage of the average barrel of crude oil is refined to make gasoline for automobiles?
  - 22.4 percent
  - 43.9 percent
  - 58.7 percent
  - 71.2 percent
- How many AMG models does Mercedes-Benz currently offer?
  - 8 AMGs
  - 10 AMGs
  - 12 AMGs
  - 14 AMGs
- What brand has a tire called the "Dune Grappler" that is distinguished by a flame-like pattern on the tread and sidewalls?
  - Nitto
  - Cooper
  - Avon
  - Kumho
- Which car company posted the highest Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) rating for the 2005 model year?
  - Honda
  - Toyota
  - Nissan
  - General Motors

- What coin is suggested to be a depth gauge to measure tire tread depth?
  - quarter
  - dime
  - nickel
  - penny
- How much copper is used in the average new vehicle?
  - 15 pounds
  - 35 pounds
  - 55 pounds
  - 75 pounds
- How many miles of Interstate Highways are there in the US?
  - 18,000 miles
  - 31,000 miles
  - 46,000 miles
  - 70,000 miles
- How many famous Mercedes-Benz "Gullwing" SL300 sports cars were built during the full production run (1954-1957)?
  - 1,400
  - 4,200
  - 6,500
  - 8,100
- How many \$1.2 million Bugatti super-cars are built annually in its French factory?
  - 50 cars
  - 100 cars
  - 200 cars
  - 300 cars
- What would it cost to buy a set of four 30-inch TIS W Collection wheels with Pirelli 315/30R-30 114V Scorpion Zero Asimmetricos tires on them?
  - \$15,000
  - \$25,000
  - \$35,000
  - \$45,000
- Who of the Big Three US automakers sold the most rear-wheel drive cars last year?
  - Chrysler
  - Ford
  - General Motors
- In the US, what percentage of cars priced \$100,000+ are a Mercedes-Benz product?
  - 10 percent
  - 25 percent
  - 50 percent
  - 75 percent
- What percentage of 29.5 million AAA service calls last year were for tire problems?
  - 6.1 percent
  - 13.2 percent
  - 21.0 percent
  - 28.7 percent
- How much have the sales of ultra luxury cars (priced at \$140,000) or more risen during the last five years?
  - 200 percent
  - 300 percent
  - 400 percent
  - 500 percent
- How many flex fuel vehicles are available for 2006?
  - 5 flex fuel vehicles
  - 12 flex fuel vehicles
  - 19 flex fuel vehicles
  - 26 flex fuel vehicles

ANSWERS ON PAGE 8 >>

>> ANSWERS (quiz on page 7) >>

1. Answer: b. Texas is considering, or may have instituted, 80 mph speed limits on portions of Interstates 10 and 20 in West Texas.
2. Answer: b. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, a top-fuel dragster will burn 10 to 12 gallons of fuel during the burnout, backing up to the start line and quarter-mile run.
3. Answer: d. As listed by the 2005/2006 ADESA Global Vehicle Marketing report there were 258.2 million vehicles on the roads in the US and Canada.
4. Answer: a. Mosler will offer a Dymag super lightweight carbon fiber and magnesium wheel on the \$189,000 Mosler MT9005 sports car. The front 18-inch wheels weigh 14 pounds, 10 pounds less than the standard aluminum wheels. The Florida-built M9005 is powered by a Chevrolet Corvette engine.
5. Answer: a. According to the Power Information Network, 48.4% of Scion tC buyers during the first four months of 2006 were under 30. (Volkswagen GTI 37.4%. Mazda3 36.2%. Subaru Impreza 35.6%.)
6. Answer: d. According to *Service Tech Magazine*, 17% of vehicle gas caps are misused or missing, allowing gas to evaporate from the tank. The result is 147 million gallons of gas escaping into the atmosphere annually.
7. Answer: d. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the US carmakers (GM, Ford and DaimlerChrysler) employ 23.4 people for each 100 cars produced annually.
8. Answer: b. According to the Power Information Network, the six-cylinder engine commanded the largest portion of the US market, in 41.7 percent of vehicles sold from January 1 to May 14, 2006. (4-cylinder 32.1 percent. 8-cylinder 23.8 percent.) Year over year, 4-cyl. vehicles were up 2.6% and 8-cyl. models down 1.3%.

9. Answer: c. According to the *Automotive News Data Center*, Auto Resources Asia and R.L. Polk Marketing Systems GmbH, China has the most global vehicle manufacturer headquarters, at 13 (Japan nine. India six. Germany five. US four [GM, Ford, Paccar, Navistar]. South Korea, Sweden and France two each. Italy, Iran, UK and Malaysia one each).
10. Answer: c. According to Chrome Systems, *Ward's Automotive Reports* and *Automotive News Data Center*, 18.3 percent of the vehicles sold in the 2005 model year had a stability control system.
11. Answer: c. According to the National Automobile Dealers Association (NADA), \$457 was spent advertising each new vehicle sold in 2005.
12. Answer: a. When we hear the price of a barrel of oil quoted, it is 42 gallons.
13. Answer: d. Based on calculations done by *Automotive News Data Center* on their Top Global Vehicle Manufacturers list, Hyundai-Kia Automotive Group makes 36.7 vehicles per employee. (Toyota 31.0. GM 25.7. Honda 24.7.) The results don't take into account more complex cars built by some of the manufacturers.
14. Answer: b. According to tests done by the Michigan State Police evaluation program, the 5.7-liter Hemi Dodge Charger police car accelerates from 0 to 100 in 16.24 seconds and has a top speed over 145 mph.
15. Answer: b. According to the *Automotive News Data Center*, there were 12,653 Nissan 350Zs sold from January through May 2006. (Pontiac Solstice 9,700. Mazda Miata 7,958. Saturn Sky 1,787 [The Sky was not available during that entire five-month period].)
16. Answer: c. Pontiac set the price of the new turbo-charged Solstice GTP at \$25,995 including \$600 destination charge. The high-performance roadster engine is boosted to 260 hp, up from the 177-hp version.

17. Answer: d. A team of 21 students from a college in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, took four minutes to stuff themselves into a lime green 1999 MINI Cooper. They waited the 20 seconds and made it into the "Guinness Book of World Records." The team repeated the feat for a TV crew that showed up late.
18. Answer: b. According to the American Petroleum Institute, 43.9 percent of a barrel of oil goes to making gasoline. (Misc. products 23.7 percent. Diesel/fuel oil 22.4 percent. Jet fuel 9 percent. Lubricants 1 percent.)
19. Answer: d. Mercedes-Benz currently offers (as of August 2006) 14 different AMG models: C55, CL55, CL65, CLK63, CLS63, E63, E63 wagon, G55, ML63, R63, S65, SL55, SL65, and SLK55. Pricing runs from \$55,225 for the C55 to an estimated \$180,000 for the S65. Horsepower runs from 355 for the SLK55 to 604 for the CL65.
20. Answer: a. Nitto offers a tire called the Dune Grappler, which has a heavy-duty tire tread pattern that resembles flames.
21. Answer: a. Honda had the highest Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) rating for 2005: 25.1 mpg. (Toyota 23.5 mpg. Nissan 21.7 mpg. GM 20.3 mpg.)
22. Answer: d. Bridgestone Firestone suggests vehicle owners stick a penny in the tread of a tire with the top of Lincoln's head going in first. If the top of the head is visible, the tire should be replaced.
23. Answer: c. According to the Copper Development Association, the typical US-built car contains about 55 pounds of copper – 45 pounds for electrical and 10 pounds of non-electrical components. Typical luxury vehicles have about 1,500 copper wires totaling one mile in length. Copper prices have been soaring from \$1,600 per ton in mid-2003 to \$9,800 per ton in 2006.
24. Answer: c. There are more than 46,000 miles of Interstate Highways in the national network.
25. Answer: a. The Mercedes-Benz "Gullwing" 300SL one of the most recognizable and significant sports cars of all time; the company only built 1,400 of them.
26. Answer: a. Currently the Bugatti plant in The Molsheim, France builds only 50 new Bugattis annually, but that may have to change because customers currently have to wait 14 months to take delivery. They are currently talking about speeding production to 70 cars per year. Bugatti is owned by Volkswagen.
27. Answer: d. According to *DuPont Registry's Celebrity Car* magazine, a set of four 30-inch TIS W Collection wheels with Pirelli 315/30R-30 114V Scorpion Zero Asimmetricos tires will set you back \$45,000. For that, you could also buy three Nissan Versas or two nicely equipped Pontiac Solstices or a new Volvo C70 hardtop convertible.
28. Answer: b. Ford sold 380,000 rear-wheel drive cars in 2005 as compared to 243,000 for Chrysler and 142,000 for General Motors.
29. Answer: c. According to Mercedes-Benz, every other car (50 percent) sold in the United States for over \$100,000 is a Mercedes-Benz.
30. Answer: b. According to the Rubber Manufacturers Association, 13.2 percent of the service calls received by AAA last year were for tire problems.
31. Answer: d. Sales of ultra luxury cars, costing at least \$140,000, has risen from 5,000 to 25,000 or 500 percent during the last five years.
32. Answer: c. According to *Automobile Magazine*, there are 19 different flex fuel vehicles (able to burn E85 ethanol) available for 2006 — six Chevys, one Chrysler, four Dodges, three Fords, two GMCs, one Lincoln, one Mercury and one Nissan. ■

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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## PENSKER WILL MARKET THE SMART IN US

Roger Penske's UnitedAuto group was chosen to be the distributor of the Smart car in the United States. The Smart brand is owned by DaimlerChrysler and has been in a state of flux for the last couple of years as the German company changed its mind back-and-forth about the US market. Now, the Smart is being readied for the US market, starting in 2008. DaimlerChrysler decided to outsource the sales to Penske because of his excellent track record, independent thinking and because he already sells the Smart at a couple of his dealerships in the United Kingdom. Initially there will be only one version, the two-seater ForTwo, sold here. Penske's sales plan calls for recruiting 30 to 50 franchisees at first with a goal of selling 50 cars per month. The Smart is expected to have a base price of about \$15,000 and it will be available with lots of novel add-ons. Also, look for some out-of-the-box style marketing, much as BMW used to bring the Mini Cooper to the US market. ▼



Smart ForTwo

Saab Aero X concept



The Saab Aero X concept car displays the aggressive approach the manufacturer is taking as they develop a production version. Jet heritage? Wow.

## BMW'S X5 & Z4 BUILT WITH METHANE

This summer BMW will start using methane gas produced from a nearby landfill to power their Spartanburg SC paint plant. Methane is a byproduct of decomposing trash at a privately owned landfill. The raw methane is converted into a clean industrial gas before it supplies an estimated one-third of the energy for the plant. Until the system goes operational, they do not know how much BMW will save using the process; however, a similar system was installed in 2002 to fuel turbines that provide the power for the assembly plant, saving the company more than \$1 million a year in energy costs.

## AUDI A5 IN THE WORKS

Audi is set to get a new coupe and convertible, probably by 2008. Slotted to be the A5 in the Audi hierarchy, the car will lead a corporate move to a more muscular and sharper edge styling (see the Audi TT in *Auto News Update*, *AZDriver* July-August 2006), and it will be the first developed from Audi's new modular platform plan. It will be a little larger than the current A4 convertible and, like the A4, the A5 convertible will have a cloth top to save weight, as opposed to the

trend toward retractable hardtops used by other manufacturers. The new platform calls for the engine to be moved back to improve weight distribution and to fit the higher hood required for new European pedestrian safety regulations. The engine will be a direct injection V-6 with quattro all-wheel drive. There is little doubt that the twin clutch manual/automatic DSG transmission will be the transmission of choice. The car is expected to get its formal introduction by the end of 2007.

## SAAB AERO X OK FOR PRODUCTION

▲ The Saab Aero X sports car concept has been cleared for takeoff with some modifications. Gone will be the interesting jet fighter-like canopy that functioned as the windows and roof. The production model will have a traditional wraparound windscreen and folding soft-top. Look for this two-seat convertible, possibly bearing the historic Sonett name, to arrive in about two years. It will be built on the same platform as the Pontiac Solstice and Saturn Sky, but with a unique aerodynamic body and Saab engines. The base engine will be a 2.0-liter four-cylinder rated near 200-hp, with an optional 2.8-liter turbo V-6 with about 250-hp. The transmissions include a six-speed manual

and possibly a VW/Audi style DSG with a with double clutch. The Sonett will have a tight sports car-style suspension and sharp steering. Evidently, a 2+2 coupe is in the works for later.

## JEEP DROPS A DIESEL, ADDS ANOTHER

Jeep says it will drop the diesel version of the Liberty for the 2007 model year because it does not meet pending Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) emission standards. However, they will add a 3.0-liter V-6 CRD (common-rail diesel) option to the Grand Cherokee. The 215-hp diesel engine is built by Mercedes-Benz, but will not have the Mercedes Bluetec emissions-reducing technology. The Jeep V-6 diesel is rated at 376-lb.ft. of torque, which should make it the best towing vehicle in its class. The Grand Cherokee CRD will be available in the 45 states that don't subscribe to the strict California emission standards.

## PONTIAC MOVES TO ALL RWD CARS

In an effort to revive Pontiac's sagging sales, look for the brand to be converted to entirely rear-wheel-drive (RWD) cars. Although plans are not finalized, the

KEEP RIGHT >>



Jaguar XK

### JAGUAR ACCENTS THE XK WITH AN R

Just weeks after the debut of the new Jaguar XK coupe and convertible, the company has pulled the wraps of the XKR version of both cars. Powered by a supercharged version of the 4.2-liter V-8 the top cat gets 420 horsepower, compared to the standard trim of 300 horsepower. The lightweight aluminum monocoque-construction cars are stiffer than the previous generation and have a 34 percent better power-to-weight ratio. The suspension is stiffer and the brakes are significantly larger. The car gets a cosmetic supercharging too with sportier grille, more aggressive front bumper, vented hood, dual exhaust pipes, aluminum-look side power vents and multiple R logos. Prices are expected to start at \$85,000 for the coupe and \$92,000 for the soft top when they pounce on the showrooms in December. ▼



Jaguar XKR



Hyundai Entourage

With crossovers moving in, many say minivans are moving on. Not so, says Hyundai, and with 14 in the marketplace now, they might be right.

>> AUTO NEWS UPDATE - cont'd

“excitement” brand is expected to drop all front- and all-wheel-drive models after the current generation and offer only RWD sedans with more of a performance orientation. The plan is expected to be rolled out at the Detroit auto show in 2007, and it would then take General Motors about five years to make the conversions. Also, the Grand Prix will become a higher-priced sedan and a new GTO will possibly be built on the upcoming Camaro architecture.

#### HYUNDAI MINIVAN FAMILY-READY

▲ Hyundai will become the 14th company to offer a minivan when the Entourage is introduced later this year. Developed from the Kia Sedona, the Entourage will be powered by a DOHC 3.8-liter V-6 rated at 242 hp and 251-lb.ft. of torque. It rides on four-wheel independent suspension with a five-speed automatic transmission driving the front wheels. The large 172.3 cubic feet of interior space is slightly larger than a Honda Odyssey. The well-equipped base model, the GLS, comes with stability and traction control, four-wheel disc brakes with antilock and brake force distribution,

tire pressure monitor, 16-inch wheels and front side airbags and curtain airbags for all three rows for \$24,495. The Limited model is \$29,495 and adds dual power sliding doors, 17-inch wheels, heated leather seats and power tailgate.

#### NISSAN AND SUZUKI TO SHARE

Worldwide, Nissan and Suzuki have plans to share several new vehicles in the next couple of years. Nissan will supply Suzuki with a pickup for sale in North America starting in 2008, although it was not announced which pickup will become a Suzuki. They will also provide Suzuki with a minivan, which will go on sale in Japan later this year. Suzuki plans to build new subcompacts for Nissan, with one new subcompact to be sold mostly in Europe in 2008 and a small minicar that will be sold in Japan starting later this year.

#### HOMEMADE FUELS

Are you tired of the high price of gasoline, diesel and other fuels? Now you can make ethanol at home, in your own still. Dogwood Energy, of Tullahoma TN, is selling plans, recipes, supplies and all the other materials and knowledge needed to produce 180- to 190-proof grain alcohol in your garage. The fuel can be made

from corn, barley, kitchen scraps or dozens of other organic materials using your own still. They also claim the fuel, which needs to be mixed with gasoline, can be made for about 65 cents per gallon, but cannot be drunk. Details are at <http://dogwoodenergy.com> including the form to get a federal permit to make the moonshine for your car. The company is located just a short distance from the famous Jack Daniels distillery. They also have all the information on making wood pellets and biodiesel fuels.

#### BMW GIVES FOUR YEARS OF ASSIST

BMW will offer four years of free connection to its BMW Assist emergency service for all the new vehicles sold in the US beginning with the 2007 model. The program normally costs \$240 a year. The system signals the call center if the airbags deploy, giving emergency officials the location of the vehicle, severity of crash and number of occupants. It even tells them if the seat belts were being used. Owners can still pay an extra \$120 a year for a concierge service that adds services like travel planning, dining reservations, shopping assistance for event

KEEP RIGHT >>

## FORD BRINGS BACK THE MUSTANG SHELBY GT 500

Ford's Special Vehicle Team (SVT) and legendary Cobra creator, Carroll Shelby have collaborated on the newest Cobra chapter. The 2007 Ford Shelby GT 500 looks the part with its aggressive front-end design, Le Mans racing stripes and unmistakable Cobra logos. The new GT 500 gets its power from a supercharged 5.4-liter V-8 rated at 500 horsepower. Independent tests are showing 0 to 60 mph times of about 4.9 seconds. A heavy-duty six-speed manual transmission drives the rear wheels. The brakes are four-piston Brembos with 14-inch discs in front and 11.8-inch vented discs in the rear. It also has wide 18-inch tires all around with 255/45ZR in the front and 285/40ZR in the back. The GT 500 will be produced in both coupe and convertible versions with prices expected to start in the \$45,000 range. ▼



Ford Shelby GT 500



Chevrolet Camaro concept

The Camaro just might outdo the Mustang in the retro game, capturing the essence of the '60s cars while being more contemporary at the same time.

>> AUTO NEWS UPDATE - cont'd

tickets along with many other personal, helpful services.

### NEW SMALLER GM ENGINES

The Chevrolet Colorado and GMC Canyon midsize trucks will get new, larger-displacement engines for the 2007 model year. The standard 2.8-liter four-cylinder is bumped to 2.9-liters resulting in about six percent more horsepower and three percent more torque to produce 185 horsepower and 190-lb.ft. of torque. The previous 3.5-liter, which is optional in the trucks and standard in the H3, will be increased to 3.7-liters with 242 horsepower and 242 lb.ft. of torque (up 22-hp and 17-lb.ft. respectively). Both engines have variable valve timing.

### A DIESEL IN FORD F-150'S FUTURE

Ford is working on a 4.4-liter V-8 diesel engine for use in the F-150 pickup and possibly the Expedition SUV. Suppliers and industry sources say the engine is far along in development, but still needs three to four years before launch. The engine is said to be a larger version of 3.6-liter V-8 Ford was developing for possible use in the Range Rover. On a

related note, Ford-owned Volvo senior vice president for research and development said they want to have a diesel car in the US by around the end of the decade, provided they can create an emission system that can meet European and US standards.

### CAMARO COUPE & CONVERTIBLE

▲ General Motors is moving quickly to bring back both coupe and convertible versions of the Chevrolet Camaro, thanks to the popularity of the concept car. The Camaro is being developed from the Australian Holden Commodore sedan, which goes on sale later this year. One of the biggest challenges facing engineers is keeping the weight down, with the goal of the Camaro weighing about the same as the Mustang. To compete with the upcoming Ford Shelby GT 500, GM could use the 5.4-liter LS7 engine from the Corvette ZO6. Watch for the coupe to go on sale in 2009, then the convertible within a year.

### VOLKSWAGEN MOVES TO DSG

Volkswagen has started a program to replace their transverse-mounted automatic transmissions with the direct-shift gear box (DSG). Over the next five years, the plan is to use the DSG because it gets

better fuel economy, is smoother shifting and has greater reliability. All VWs currently sold in the US, with the exception of the luxury Phaeton and Touareg SUV, use a transverse mounted engine and will be affected by the change. The DSG works like two automatic transmissions side by side, with one serving the odd gears (1-3-5) and reverse, while the second serves the even gears (2-4-6). The system uses two clutches and rapidly switches from one to the other with no interruptions between shifts. The DSG shifts automatically or can be changed manually by buttons on the steering wheel or the shifter. The transmission was developed in-house by VW engineers. The DSG will be priced at about half the price of the current automatic transmissions used by Volkswagen.

### FORD ADDS MORE ALL-WHEEL DRIVES

Ford will offer an all-wheel-drive (AWD) version of the Ford Fusion, Mercury Milan and Lincoln MKZ this fall. Ford officials expect the AWD option to give the Ford products an advantage over competitors like the Toyota Camry and Honda Accord, which don't offer AWD. The system

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continuously monitors and predicts traction needs seamlessly delivering torque to all four wheels before wheel slippage occurs. An active, on demand coupler can deliver up to 100 percent of the torque to the rear wheels.

#### HOT VW SCIROCCO GETS GO-AHEAD

Volkswagen officials have approved the production of a Scirocco coupe as early as 2008. The contemporary styling takes design cues from the Audi TT. It is expected to ride on the current Golf or Rabbit platform with power possibly coming from the recently introduced 1.4-liter four-cylinder Twincharger engine that has both a supercharger and turbocharger. It's expected to produce from 140- to 170-horsepower. The optional engines would likely be the turbocharged 2.0 currently used in the GTI. Another option could be the 280-hp 3.6-liter V-6 and the 4Motion all-wheel-drive system. Pricing of the low volume Scirocco is likely to start at about \$28,000. The Scirocco was originally produced from 1974 through 1992.

#### CHRYSLER SHOWS NEXT-GEN SEBRING

Chrysler pulled the next generation Sebring out of the garage for its public debut at the Chelsea, Michigan, Proving Grounds in late June. The mid-size sedan combines a striking new design with class-leading safety with new technologies. Some of the unique new features include a drink holder to heat or cool the front passenger's beverage, and a Harmon/Kardon information, entertainment and safety navigation system with a 6.5-inch Thin Film Transistor display with touch screen and voice activation. The screen shows three-dimensional graphics and animation as well as multiple font sizes and styles. The audio system has a 20-gigabyte hard disc drive Music Juke Box. There is also Sirius® Satellite Radio and Bluetooth®. The front-drive Sebring comes with a choice 2.4-liter four-cylinder with four-speed automatic transmission or a 2.7- or 3.5-liter V-6 (235-hp) with a six-speed automatic.

#### NEW LAND ROVER LR2 DUE IN 2007

The Land Rover Freelander replacement, the LR2, is starting to be seen in print (see *Briefs & Rumors*, *AZDriver* July-August

2006). Designed for the American market the LR2 is taller and wider than the Freelander, and about the same length. The design shows a strong family resemblance. Power comes from a Volvo designed inline 3.2-liter 6-cylinder engine rated at 230 horsepower. Land Rover says 0 to 60 mph times should be about 8.4-seconds. Full time all-wheel drive borrowed from the Volvo XC90 will be standard, along with a 6-speed automatic transmission with a manual shifting mechanism. The all-wheel drive is more for on-road than the hardcore systems used in the bigger Rovers. The LR2 appears to be directly aimed at the BMW X3 SUV and should have a base price of just under \$30,000 when it reaches dealerships early next year. Fully loaded the price could move into the low \$40,000s.

#### MERCEDES GULLWING RETURNING?

Mercedes-Benz AMG is rumored to be working on a gullwing style sports car built on the current SL platform. It will likely replace the \$450,000 SLR, which has not sold as well as expected. The gullwing will get an exclusive engine, the new 6.2-liter AMG V-8 with twin turbochargers boosting output to about 750 horsepower. The interior is more spacious than the SLR, but not as luxurious. Pricing is expected to be about \$150,000 to compete with grand touring coupes like the Bentley Continental GT and the Aston Martin DB9. It's not expected to reach the streets until 2011.

#### BETTER THAN Z06: A CORVETTE Z07?

Corvette planners and engineers are working on a super version of the Corvette Z06 inspired by the C6.R LeMans racer. The Z07 (or possibly Z06R) will start by increasing displacement of the current Z06 7.0-liter V-8 engine and adding a supercharger to raise the horsepower to the 650 range. It will get unique styling with more carbon fiber body panels and a large hood vent, which will not only suck in more air, but will help keep the supercar anchored to the road. It's expected to be priced to undercut competitors, at about \$100,000. ■

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*.

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AUTO · HOME · LIFE

# Timing is everything

by Joe Sage



Hop behind the wheel of the Honda Fit Sport, and you will find not only a comfortable cabin, but 5-speed paddle shifter, MP3 connectivity and more.

With one eye on the gas gauge, one on the wallet, and a third on what's coming down the pike, literally and figuratively, we looked forward to our week with the Honda Fit with great anticipation.

The Japanese have no shortage of small cars in their domestic fleets, but the smallest of the small haven't made it to our shores lately, and even this is not the smallest of the small, not by a long shot. We do, however, suddenly have the Toyota Yaris, Nissan Versa and Honda Fit arriving pretty much simultaneously. And the Koreans are sending us a new Hyundai Accent, while Smart is finally (we hope) set, once again, to gain US distribution. The MINI opened the door a bit, but gas at three dollars a gallon has made a lot of people want to see what's on the other side of that door. The time is right to give small cars a try.

With a name like Fit, the puns just flow like water in a monsoon storm, but we're trying hard to resist them, because really the name just... err... fits. It's short and sweet, like the car itself. (Dang. Impossible to avoid all puns.) Actually, Fit is too short a name in this case, as we tested the Honda Fit Sport. Honda is famously short on options, which makes choosing and buying quite easy. Both feature a 1497cc in-line 4-cylinder 16-valve SOHC aluminum alloy powerplant, putting out 109 hp and 105 lb-ft of torque. Both have LEV-2 CARB emissions ratings. Both achieve virtually the same gas mileage, although the Sport with automatic is a point lower on the highway end (5-speed manual, 33/38 city/highway; 5-speed automatic, 31/38 for the Fit and 31/37 for the Fit Sport). There is no difference in the body construction or suspension, both with MacPherson strut front and torsion-beam rear suspensions, 21mm front stabilizer bar, and electric power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering. The Fit Sport does have 15" alloy wheels with P195/55 all-season tires, compared with 14" P175/65s for the standard



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Perhaps less distinctive than the front view, the rear of the Honda Fit Sport nonetheless features very well-executed fit, finish, utility and design detail.



Fit. The Fit Sport also features steering-wheel-mounted paddle shifters (with the automatic transmission), Drive/Sport mode with instrumentation (an indicator), and cruise control with illuminated steering-wheel-mounted controls. A 200w 6-speaker sound system with 5-mode equalizer and MP3/WMA links replaces the 160w 4-speaker sound system of the base Fit. The rest is largely cosmetic, with performance undertones, such as body-colored spoilers underbody and at the rear roofline. Base prices are \$15,170 (manual; \$15,970 auto) for the Fit Sport versus \$13,850 (manual; \$14,650 auto) for the base model Fit.

The conundrum presented therein is the usual one: when buying an inexpensive small car, do the savings justify bumping up to the better model with all it adds? Or is savings the whole point, so go with the base model? That is a decision, as always, for the individual buyer's budget and needs (or desires)

Our test vehicle was top-of-the-line as far as price and fitment, i.e. the Honda Fit Sport with 5-speed automatic and paddle shifters, though we would have loved to try the manual. We'd have to admit we had less interest in trying the standard Fit, by comparison, though for long-term purchase, if it suits the buyer's budget, we are sure they would find much the same enjoyment from that model.

And enjoyment we did find. Other than the aforementioned MINI, this is the first of the new wave of really small cars to hit our test fleet, and it was a great place to start. These are, of course, not the absolute first very small cars on the road; witness the Chevy Aveo and its predecessors and stablemates. However, those have been pretty well overrun on the road by the ubiquitous BMW and Mercedes fleets of the Valley freeway set. From inside the Fit Sport, we quickly experienced the expectations of the larger predators. Pull up to a two-lane red light, and in the rearview mirror, you'll see the big sedans and SUVs jockeying for position in the other lane. A quick launch when the light turns green is



Honda teamed with House of Blues Entertainment to create this one-of-a-kind Fit for a summer charity auction. Can major SEMA efforts be far behind?

clearly not what they expect from this little car. But they are surprised! As were we, pleasantly so. Although the specifications and statistics will not have you bragging at the Porsche club meeting, in normal use, this is one balanced, peppy and sure-footed car. Leaving a light, ripping through a corner, accelerating up the on-ramp to a freeway, the Honda Fit Sport very much holds it own. An M5 could still eat it for breakfast, but the surprise factor gives the Fit and edge for now.

The car also does very well with its style points. MINI benefited from its inherent panache, as well as from being available at the same dealerships as BMW. A Honda may be a Honda, but the stylists did a great job with this vehicle. Personally, we're more enamored with the front view than the rear quarter, but in the available space, they've developed a car that has contemporary cues, superior fit and finish, and as with the ride, a fine sense of balance. This is a car that boasts its smallness and avoids any stigma from that, at the same time.

That leaves only the inside, and inside the car delivers as promised: a package that is seemingly miraculously larger inside than out. The aforementioned exterior styling balance masks, or perhaps enhances, the fact that this small car has a tall greenhouse and large interior volume, with spacious front seats and comfortable controls. We did not give the back seat a tryout in our tenure, but as the accompanying photographs attest, it is a real back seat, with room for legs and feet, which of course some tiny cars seem to leave out of the equation. The rear storage space, enhanced by split folding rear seats, will get you through a weekend's errands with room to spare.

Mildly sporty sedan without a trunk, sport hatchback, small crossover wagon, small car period, however this car is classified to you, it is a fully capable small car, with admirable design and engineering, tremendous value, and we would anticipate the usual Honda reliability. ■





# Entry-level sophistication from Toyota

By Barbara and Bill Schaffer



## Toyota Yaris S sedan

### STANDARD EQUIPMENT:

Air conditioning; Electronic power steering; Side rocker panels, Driver side vertical seat adjustment; 60/40 split folding rear seat; Tilt steering wheel; AM/FM w/ CD & MP3. Base Price:..... \$14,050  
Options: Power package (15-Inch alloy wheels, Anti-lock brakes, Power door locks, Power windows, Power outside mirrors, Audio with LCD display, Cruise control, Upgraded interior trim, Tachometer \$1,425; Rear spoiler with LED stop lamp \$435; Carpeted floor/cargo mat \$150; Rear bumper protector \$65.  
Total Options.....\$2,075  
Freight.....\$580  
Price as Tested.....\$16,705

### DIMENSIONS

EPA Size .....compact  
Weight.....2,326 lb.  
Wheelbase .....100.4 in.  
Length.....169.3 in.  
Width.....66.5 in.  
Height .....56.7 in.  
Fuel Capacity .....11.1 gal.  
Cargo Capacity.....12.9 cu. ft.

### MECHANICAL

Engine .....1.5L DOHC 4-Cyl.  
Horsepower .....106@6000  
Torque .....103@4200  
Transmission .....4-Spd. Auto  
Drive .....Front wheel  
Brakes.....Disc/Drum ABS  
Tires .....185/60R15

### PERFORMANCE

0 to 60 mph.....est. 9.0 sec.  
EPA economy rating .....34/39 mpg  
Our actual fuel econ .....35.6 mpg

### COMPETITORS

Chevrolet Aveo, Ford Focus, Honda Fit, Hyundai Elantra, Hyundai Accent, Kia Spectra, Kia Rio, Nissan Versa, Saturn Ion, Scion xA, Suzuki Aerio, Suzuki Reno



The 2007 subcompact Toyota Yaris has replaced Toyota's entry-level Echo, which wasn't a runaway sales success. The new Yaris boasts EPA ratings of 34 mpg city and 40 mpg highway – not quite the numbers advertised by the hybrids, but the Yaris is about \$10,000 cheaper to buy. Of course, fuel economy varies depending on how heavy footed you are on the accelerator, (one of us gets at least about 10 percent better fuel economy than the other, who has bigger shoes).

What took them so long? Toyota's Yaris was first launched in Europe in 1999, was named the European "Car of the Year" and has since become Toyota's best-selling model in that market. It also was named "Japan Car of the Year" the same year. Now eight years later, Toyota is bringing the Yaris to North America. Again, we ask, what took them so long?

Coming in a three-door liftback or a four-door sedan, the Yaris is economical, stylish and fun to drive. It has short overhangs, a low center of gravity and a chrome-trimmed front grille that is centered between sharp character lines. Before bringing the pair to the US market, they were refined to make them a little more sophisticated and less Spartan in an effort to expand the appeal. The rear of the Liftback features a more substantial appearance with large taillights and a wide rear door for easy cargo area access. The rear of the sedan has a wide trunk

that extends down to the bumper molding, which provides a more substantial appearance.

Inside we found the interior of both models surprisingly spacious, with a higher quality of material than we expected. The instrument panel in the center of the dashboard was a bit disconcerting, but after a little driving time we found it very convenient from either front seat. It also allowed us to keep a closer eye on each other's speeds. At night, it was strange to see no lights in front of the steering wheel, which we actually thought was less distracting.

There's no secret to how the Yaris gets good fuel economy. It starts with a lightweight 2,300 pound vehicle and then propels it with a little 1.5-liter four-cylinder engine with variable valve timing with intelligence (VVT-i) rated at 106 horsepower. The combination of those two elements produces 34 mpg for city driving and up to 40 mpg for highway driving, or 39 with the optional automatic transmission. We think those fuel economy numbers are realistic, too. We drove both the liftback and the sedan and averaged 35.6 mpg for both cars.

The drivetrain is a typical front-wheel-drive configuration and includes front disc brakes and rear drum brakes. The steering is an electronic rack-and-pinion system. The suspension is a tried and true MacPherson strut in the front, while

the rear uses a simple torsion bar to save weight and money. Nevertheless, the system produces a very smooth ride. The handling is a little on the soft side with some body roll, but this is not the kind of car that is normally driven hard.

The Liftback and the sedan come in the entry-level CE and the LE plus the sedans adds the sport-themed Yaris S. The CE Liftback is modestly equipped with features like hand-crank windows, air conditioning, tilt steering wheel, four-way adjustable front seats, audio prep package, front and rear cup holders, advanced front seat airbags and liftback luggage cover plus several other small features.

The CE Liftback starts at \$12,430 including the destination charge. The LE Liftback adds AM/FM/CD audio system with MP3 capability and MP3 mini-jack, 15-inch steel wheels with covers and a rear wiper. The 4-door S sedan has a base price of \$14,630 including delivery.

Aside from the basic configuration, the liftback and hatchback are both cars are very different in design and have few shared body parts. Under the surface they both start with the same unibody platform, but the sedan gets stretched 3.5-inches in the wheelbase and measures 19.3-inches longer. This creates 3 cubic feet more interior space. Both cars also have just short of 13 cubic feet of cargo space and both rear seats

fold down (except on the CE sedan) to expand cargo space.

The modestly equipped CE sedan has all the same features of the CE liftback plus six-way adjustable front seats and side mirror remote over the liftback standard equipment. The LE Sedan adds 60/40 split rear seat, rear defroster and the Yaris S sedan adds front and rear under bumper spoiler, side rocker panels and special badges. The 4-door SE sedan has a base price of \$14,630 including delivery. Of course, there is optional equipment that I strongly suggest. The power package that adds power door locks/windows/outside mirrors, cruise control, AM/FM/CD with LED display, 15-inch alloy wheels and anti-lock brakes for just \$1,425. It's a big value!

Yaris performance is very respectable for such a small engine. The buff magazines show 0 to 60 mph times in the 9-plus second range. We recorded 69 mph in our own acceleration test of about one-eighth mile.

The Yaris is good basic transportation, economical to operate and relatively fun to drive, all for a very affordable price.

Toyota has tried to appeal to a broad market with the Yaris As a three-door hatchback it has more of a sporty, but economical appeal, while the sedan works better for a family or empty nesters who occasionally take friends or grandchildren along. ■



# Lives Changed Forever BY UNDERAGE DRINKING AND DRIVING

- Traffic crashes are the number one killer of teens, and nearly one-third of teen traffic deaths are alcohol-related.
- National traveling photo exhibit highlights far-reaching effects of underage drinking and driving and free MADD victim services

**D**aimlerChrysler has teamed up with Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) to produce "After the Crash," a national traveling photo exhibition that provides a glimpse into the lives of 10 families changed forever by underage drinking and driving. The exhibition aims to educate teens and their parents about a tragic consequence of underage drinking—devastating motor vehicle crashes—as well as the ongoing and critical need for victim support.

In 2004, nearly 2,000 people were killed and another half million injured in alcohol-related traffic crashes involving an underage drinking driver. Research continues to show that young drivers (age 15-20) are more often involved in alcohol-related crashes than any other comparable age group. Traffic crashes are the number one killer of teens, and nearly one-third of teen traffic deaths are alcohol-related.

The stories highlighted in the exhibition also demonstrate the need for MADD's victim services, including: emotional support, guidance through the criminal justice system and community referrals for financial assistance. As friends, family and survivors struggle to

navigate through the grief process, many are also confronted with unexpected legal and financial challenges. Victims can find support by calling 1-877-MADD-HELP (1-877-623-3435), which connects them to trained staff and volunteers who can provide emotional support and practical information. Last year, MADD's network of trained advocates provided assistance to more than 38,000 victims/survivors.

Jan Withers, whose story is featured in the photo exhibit, is a drunk driving survivor who has become a MADD victim advocate. Fifteen years after an underage drunk driver killed her daughter, she dedicates her time to guide other victims/survivors through the grieving process.

"There is no timeline on grief. It's an eternal timeline," said Withers. "The support of MADD's victim services was critical to my survivorship, and now I work to instill that same hope in others." By calling a local MADD affiliate, a victim/survivor will be put in touch with an advocate who can provide comfort, help and guidance. Victim advocates can assist with the criminal justice proceedings and, in many cases, will accompany victims to court. They also may be able to provide a list of local

professional counselors, civil attorneys and clergy who are skilled at working with crash victims. Victim advocates can also help victims apply for government Crime Victims Compensation funds.

"After the Crash," featuring the photography of Pulitzer finalist Jeffrey Lamont Brown, ([www.jeffreybrown.com](http://www.jeffreybrown.com)), will travel to 10 cities, displayed in major shopping malls from late summer through the fall. MADD staff and volunteers will be on site at each location to provide information about their victim services.

For more information about the exhibit and the families featured, please visit:

[www.afterthecrash.org](http://www.afterthecrash.org)

DaimlerChrysler also promotes teen driving safety through its Road Ready Teens program, which is an effort to reduce teen traffic crashes through increased awareness about the risks and responsibilities teens face as new, inexperienced drivers. For more information, visit:

[www.roadreadyteens.org](http://www.roadreadyteens.org).

MADD's mission is to stop drunk driving, support the victims of this violent crime and prevent underage drinking. For more information, visit:

[www.madd.org](http://www.madd.org) ■



Survivor Stephanie Collings was severely injured in an impaired driving crash, Collings is one of the subjects featured in the exhibit.



Chrysler Group COO Eric Ridenour, left, and MADD National President Glynn Birch, center, celebrate the opening of "After the Crash." Joining them is MADD Victim Advocate Jan Withers, who was among the subjects featured. "After the Crash" will travel to 10 cities this fall.

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## MVD Licensed Driving School Programs

**DrivingMBA's** primary objective is to keep teen drivers and all of us safer on the road. Stories about teen drivers continue to be featured in newspapers and publications across the country. **DrivingMBA** is the only driving school in Arizona that uses state-of-the-art driving simulators to train its students. The airline industry has been using this type of technology for decades to train pilots. The military also uses this type of technology to train soldiers, AND **DrivingMBA's** equipment is the same equipment that is being used by police academies throughout the country, including here in Arizona, for its advanced driver training. The effectiveness of this type of driver training is indisputable, and **DrivingMBA** has documented results that prove its driver education program works.

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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# The Universal Appeal of the Element

By Barbara and Bill Schaffer



Sunset Orange Pearl is the must-have color this year, especially on the new fully-painted body style.



Other than a brief drive in the new Element SC a few weeks earlier, it had been a couple of years since we had driven the Element, so we were anxious to spend some time in the boxy little Honda. For 2007, the Element has been updated inside and out to give it a fresh new look, and we think it's a big improvement. We drove this one to Palm Springs, for a break from our usual hardship duty. Other than being a practical hauler of everything from bikes and surfboards to nursery plants and antiques, the four-passenger Element turned out to be a wonderful road trip car. The ride was comfortable, the vehicle is quiet, and it offered plenty of performance to make those high-speed merges into fast-moving Southern California traffic.

The styling upgrades for the 2007 Element include a new grille and headlights, along with composite body panels on the fenders that are more dent-resistant than the previous steel panels. The composite panels are black on the base LX model, but are body colored on the EX and SC, giving those models a much cleaner, sophisticated look.

The new SC "Street Custom" gets 10 exclusive features not found on other Element models, including a sport-tuned suspension with lower ride height, 18-inch alloy wheels (a Honda first) and cosmetic

enhancements like an "aero" grille, projector beam headlights and unique painted bumpers. Inside, the SC has carpeted floors, center console with storage, piano black trim and exclusive interior fabrics.

All versions of the Element are powered by the same 2.4-liter, 166-hp four-cylinder engine with a standard five-speed manual transmission and optional five-speed automatic. The engine is a DOHC configuration with Honda's i-VTEC variable valve timing system and a new Drive-by-Wire™ electronic throttle system. Like all other Hondas we've driven, the manual transmission in our tangerine-colored Element was typical Honda, easy to shift with well-spaced gears and precision linkage.

Both the LX and EX models are available with front- or four-wheel drive (4WD) making them perfect for snow country or heading into the desert sand.

Element pricing starts at \$19,495, including destination charge, for the two-wheel drive LX with manual transmission. A 4WD EX with manual is \$22,905, while the new sporty SC goes for \$24,090 with automatic transmission or \$800 less with the manual.

While not luxurious, the Elements are well equipped with features like removable rear skylight, heat rejecting glass, power windows and locks, cruise control and



audio with AM/FM and CD. EX and SC models have XM Satellite Radio and MP3 capability. We enjoyed nearly everything about the Element on our trip, except that it did not come with a navigation system. There is also a high level of safety equipment. The new Element exceeds government requirements, with side curtain airbags, driver and front seat passenger side airbags, Vehicle Stability Assist™, Tire Pressure Monitoring System, Occupant Position Detection System, anti-lock brakes and a pedestrian safety system.

Weighing in at about 3,500 pounds, the Element isn't designed to be especially fleet of foot, but it does turn 0 to 60 mph in under 9 seconds. It is, however, quite well balanced and agile, with a tight 34.9-foot turning radius.

EPA fuel economy ratings are 21 mpg city and 24 mpg highway with manual transmission and AWD. Surprisingly, the automatic with AWD gets a 21/26 rating. Our actual fuel economy during our trip to and from Palm Springs averaged 23.7 with 70- and 80-mph freeway driving.

The Honda Element turned out to be a good road car. The interior is very roomy, comfortable and quiet. With its spacious cargo capacity which can be expanded from 26.0 cubic feet to 77.1 cubic feet with the rear seats removed and easy-to-clean interior, it would be a great vehicle for owners with an active lifestyle. ■

## OUR DRIVE

Is it possible to consider the Honda Element without thinking of the terms Swiss Army knife, can opener, or Transformer? Those are good things, as this is one very versatile machine.

We reported on the 2004 Honda Element in March/April 2004, a full two and a half years ago. If anything has changed in the interim, it's the familiarity of the vehicle in the real world. In 2004, with the likes of the Element and Scion xB testing the limits of style and utility at the same time, we received a number of reactions keyed around the narrow demographic niche those vehicles were seeking. We figured this, too, was a good thing, from a marketing standpoint, and we were sorry that those outside the targeted demographic might miss this great all-around vehicle.

While Barbara and Bill took their SC to Palm Springs, we took the EX on rough roads to the northeast of metro Phoenix. (We also drove it on Valley streets and freeways, where we found it perfectly comfortable and pavement-worthy.)

Departing the pavement for the dirt was smooth and easy. The Honda AWD system maintains traction and stability well, and grip and handling were as good on smooth but hilly dirt roads as on the paved roads approaching them. When the road got rough and narrow, we found the Element still fully capable. We never took the vehicle off-road, but as long as undercarriage clearance allows, the short approach and departure angles, great AWD and general apparent ruggedness of the Element should be more than enough for normal outdoor adventure. On the highways, the limited 3/4-rear visibility was less than we'd wish, but that comes with the overall package. All in all, the Element is a keeper. ■



# Winner of a lot of awards, for a lot of reasons



By Barbara and Bill Schaffer



The Hollywood Foreign Press Golden Globes and the Academy Award Oscars are two of the biggest honors a movie can receive. In the automotive world, the *Motor Trend* Car of the Year Award and the North American Car of the Year presented at the Detroit auto show are two of the biggies. For 2006, the Honda Civic nabbed both prestigious awards and then went on to win the truck of the year awards from both organizations, making Honda the first company to ever win both awards in the same year.

The Civic has always been one of Honda's bread and butter cars, usually ranking in, or near, the top 10 in US sales, generally behind the mid-size Accord. As the Civic started to near the end of its last five-year product cycle, its luster was dulled by newer, more innovative and better-performing competitive compacts.

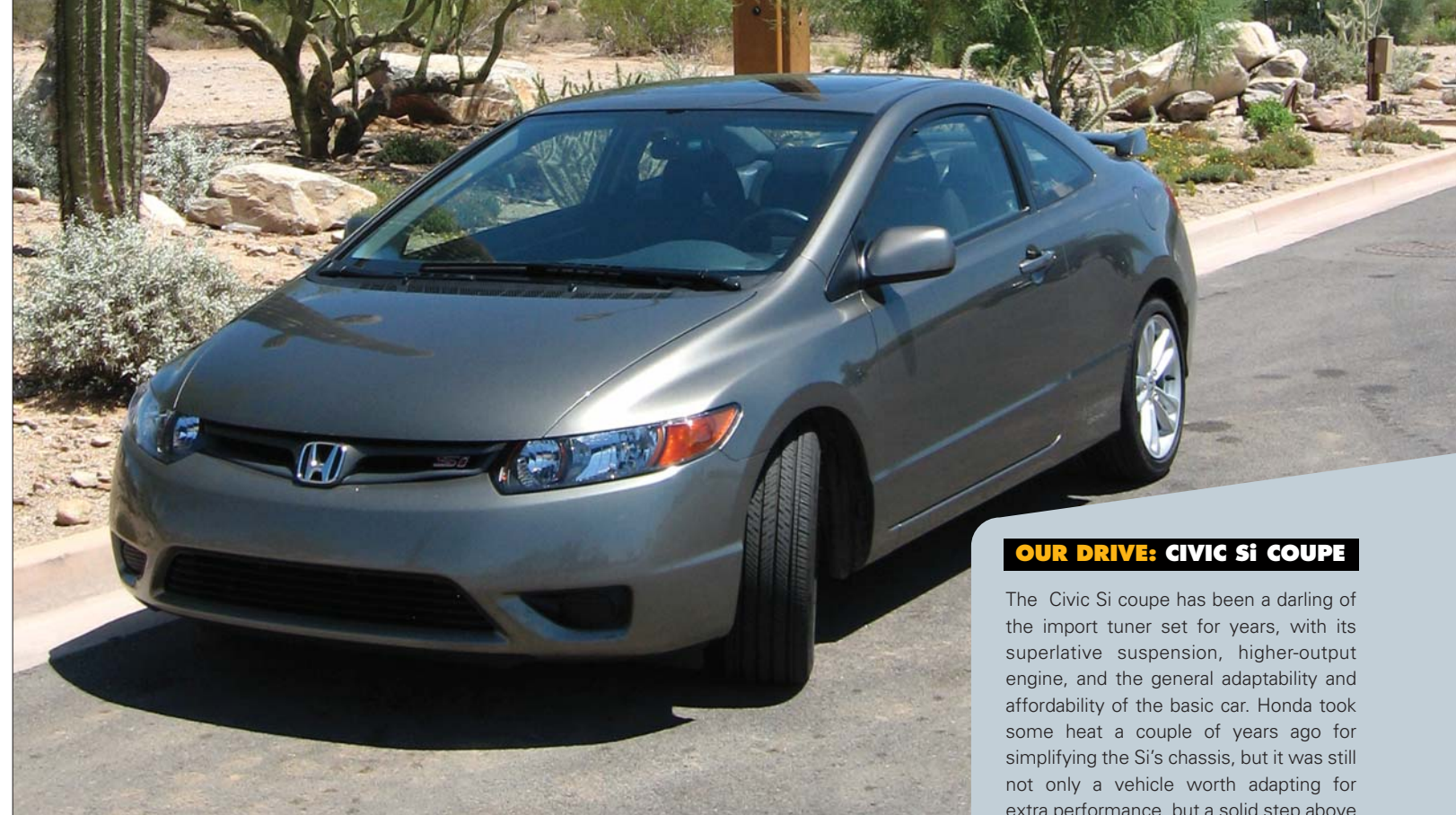
A few months ago, we attended the introduction of the full Civic model lineup and drove all the new Civic family, including the coupe, sedan, Hybrid and racy Si coupe. Now we've finally had a chance to drive the EX sedan on our home turf to see how it handles our day to day driving challenges. The Civic sedan heads a bit more upscale and is a bit larger than the previous model. Sliding behind the wheel for the first time, the most obvious

change we noticed was the sophisticated level of interior appointments. The dash appears higher in the cabin, but is set back far from the front seats, making the passenger compartment feel much more open. The instrument cluster is split, with the tachometer and some indicators mounted conventionally behind the wheel, while a large digital speedometer and two gauges can be seen in the area just over the wheel and below windshield level. This adds up to the most convenient instrument panels we've ever seen.

The Civic sedan and coupe get a new generation 1.8-liter inline four-cylinder engine producing 140 horsepower (up 13 from the previous generation) with a standard five-speed manual transmission, or optional new five-speed automatic. The engine gets a new version of the i-VTEC "intelligent" valve control system and moves up a step to the ultra low ULEV-2 emissions level.

Acceleration times for the Civic sedan are about 8.6 seconds from 0 to 60 mph. The EPA rates fuel economy at 30 mpg city and 40 mpg highway. We averaged 32.7 mpg during our week of testing.

The gasoline powered Civic sedan comes in three model levels: DX, LX and EX, each with a choice of manual or automatic transmission.



## OUR DRIVE: CIVIC Si COUPE

The Civic Si coupe has been a darling of the import tuner set for years, with its superlative suspension, higher-output engine, and the general adaptability and affordability of the basic car. Honda took some heat a couple of years ago for simplifying the Si's chassis, but it was still not only a vehicle worth adapting for extra performance, but a solid step above the standard issue Civic for a stock buyer. The whole Civic lineup has been upgraded so much this year that any performance gaps are narrowed further, and the Si coupe is the one in the lineup that gets our attention.

The Si starts with chassis modifications which include high performance springs, dampers and sway bars (front and rear), larger 17-inch alloy wheels, Michelin Pilot HX 215/45 R17 tires (with an Exalto PE2 high performance package available), 11.8-inch ventilated front disc brakes, and 10.2-inch solid rear disc brakes. The Civic Si engine is an all-aluminum DOHC 2.0-liter inline four-cylinder with 16 valves, a high-performance version of the i-VTEC system and a specially tuned high-volume intake manifold. The Civic Si produces 197 horsepower at 7800 rpm, and 139 lb-ft. of torque at 6200 rpm. At nearly 100 horsepower per liter, it has one of the highest specific outputs of any production engine in the world. Plus, it meets strict Low Emission Vehicle-2 (LEV-2) tailpipe emissions standards.

Honda has produced an Si that get the blood flowing (and the checkbook out) in any aspiring tuner, but more to the point will give an extra measure of thrills to the everyday driver. Bottom line? We get a lot of cars, but after having this one for a week, we really hated to see it go. ■

We drove the EX sedan with automatic, and it had a long list of standard equipment including moonroof, keyless entry, electronic brake distribution and brake assist. For the driver and passengers, major features include air conditioning with filtration, power windows and locks, tilt and telescoping wheel, AM/FM/CD and XM-ready audio system with speed sensitive volume control, and many more convenience and comfort features.

Sedan prices start at \$15,110, including destination charge, for the DX with manual transmission, and go up to \$19,610 for the EX with automatic. Other than color, the only option available is the navigation system for the EX model, for an additional \$1,500.

Long known for its solid construction, ride quality and precision handling, the Civic Sedan is better than ever with an enhanced four-wheel independent suspension geometry, longer wheelbase, larger wheels and tires and new generation four-channel brakes.

The Civic body has a futuristic, high-tech "Advanced Personal Compact" design theme incorporating a sweeping roofline, ultra-sleek windshield angle and exceptionally aerodynamic shape. It also introduces Advance Compatibility Engineering™ Body Structure with innovations that

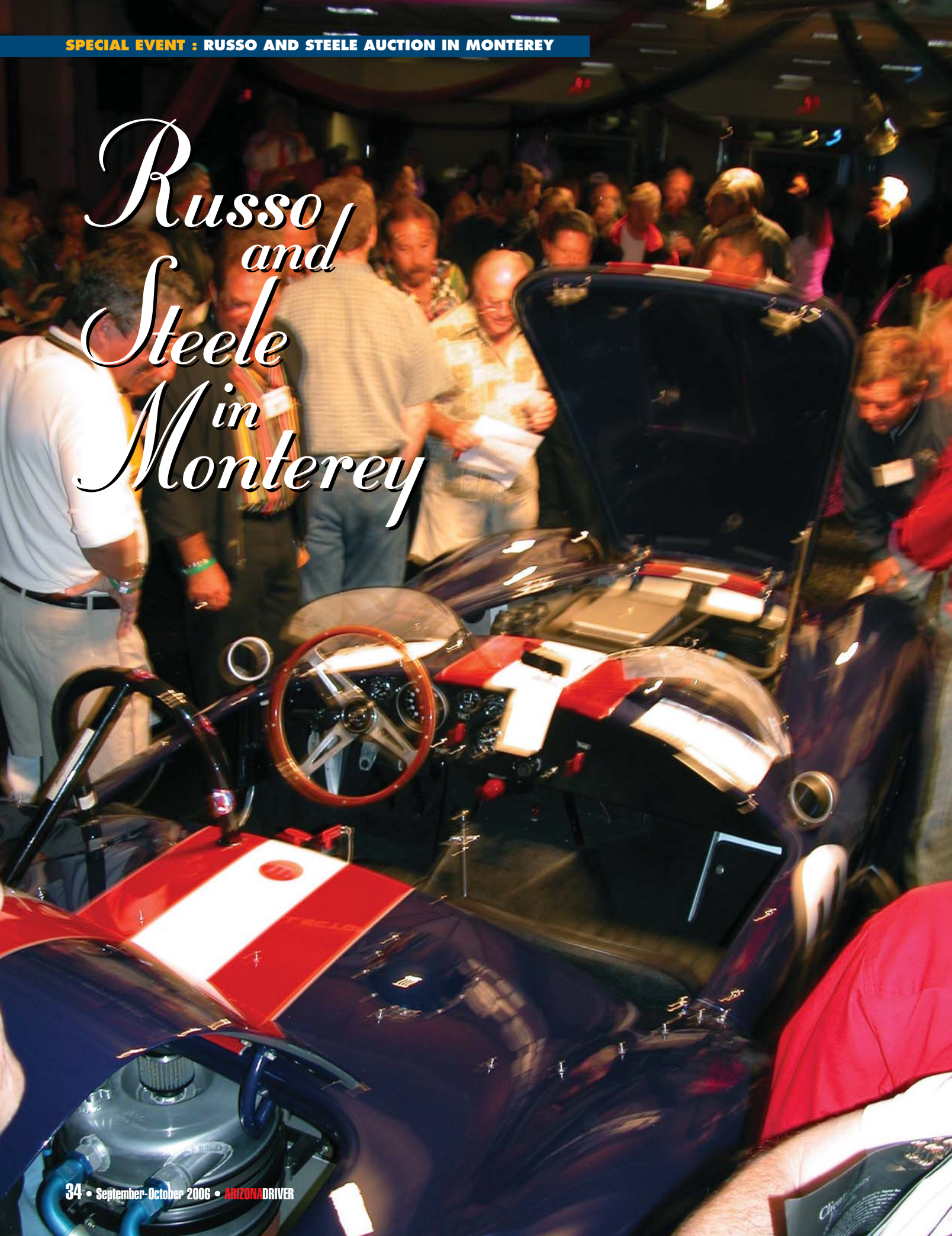
add to the aerodynamics with small wheel openings, minimum gap between tire and body, and ultra-tight body panel fit.

Honda safety engineers went the extra distance on the Civic by including front and side airbags, side curtain airbags, three-point belts with automatic tensioning, and active head restraints, in addition to all the regular safety equipment. It all fits into a high-energy absorbing frame structure made up of 50 percent high-tensile strength steel.

As part of Honda's new four-car suite of Civics, the sedan is expected to make up about 54 percent of the Honda's ambitious 300,000-unit sales projections for the first year. The coupe makes up 28 percent, the hybrid about 9 percent and the sporty Si should round out the sales with about 5 percent of the total. At the February Chicago Show, Honda also introduced an Si performance sedan, scheduled to arrive in the late fall.

The Civic sedan is one of the most refined economy cars we've driven. It left the impression of a much larger and more substantial car its size would indicate. The new Civics will raise the standard for entry-level cars. It will be interesting to see how the other manufacturers will try to beat out the Civic this time. We think the Civic will be back on top once again. ■

# Russo and Steele in Monterey



Everybody knows that Russo and Steele runs one of the five popular auctions in Scottsdale and Phoenix in January (along with the Barrett-Jackson, RM Classic, Silver and Kruse auctions). Some people know that the local outfits—Russo and Steele, Barrett-Jackson—also run “off-season” auctions: Barrett-Jackson in West Palm Beach, Florida, and Russo and Steele in Monterey, California.

The Russo and Steele Monterey auction took place on August 18 and 19, during one of the hottest automotive schedules in existence, when the Monterey Historic Races run at Laguna Seca, and the glitterati and Ferrari-ati gather for the Pebble Beach Concours d’Élegance. Knowing this is a can’t-miss week in Monterey is easy; getting a hotel room is a lot harder. But you do want to go.

For six years, Russo and Steele has set a new high standard for bringing the finest race cars in the world to the auction arena. For Monterey sale this year, they presented over a dozen vintage race cars at No Reserve. For the non-auction veteran, that means there is no hidden minimum sale price; while some sellers shy away from this inherent risk, others see it as the best way to generate higher interest, and often the prices do, indeed, run higher than with a reserve. Russo and Steele also has a more direct relationship with their sellers, working through past relationships and intense networking to sign up the cream of the crop. Early consignments for Monterey this year ranged from a 1959 Stanguellini Formula Junior to a Land Speed Record Walkey Streamliner, and even a full competition 1965 Shelby 427 Cobra.

#### Expanded to two nights for 2006

This year, the Russo and Steele “Sports and Muscle in Monterey” Collector Automobile Auction demonstrated the growing strength of their event with the addition of a second night, Friday evening, August 18th, marking the first time they hosted two full evenings of auction excitement on the Monterey Peninsula.

Russo and Steele’s name is derived from Ferrari red and American steel, as they have focused since their inception on fine European sports machines and American muscle cars, as well as rods and customs. By auction night, they had consigned 155 of the above. Highlights at Monterey included the ex-Lothar Motschenbacher

1965 Shelby 427 Cobra Full Competition (CSX3012), a beautiful example that is one of only 22 full competition models to leave the factory; the very first Ford Factory Trans Am Car, a 1967 Shelby factory Mustang driven by the late, great Jerry Titus; the 1989 LSR Walkey Streamliner land speed record racer, which set many records in the wheel-driven category of land speed records at places like Bonneville, El Mirage and Lake Gairdner in Australia; the 1938 Blue Crown Special Indy Racer, built by Joe Lencki and Fred Offenhauser in Chicago, which competed in the Indianapolis 500 on five occasions (1939 through 1947); and the ex-Richard Petty 1971 Plymouth Hemi Road Runner stock car, a fully-documented Petty team car believed to be the car that Richard Petty drove to victory in the ‘71 Daytona 500, and still retaining nearly all of its original parts.

#### Monterey Sales Top \$13 Million

Festivities began on Thursday, August 17th with a VIP cocktail reception and charity auction at their Preview Area, located a half block south of the Marriott Hotel on Calle Principal, an exclusive event open only to Russo and Steele registered bidders and guests, which benefited local non-profit organization “My Museum.”

The Russo and Steele 2005 Monterey auction hit \$10.6 million in sales in just one night. (Their January auction in Scottsdale exceeded \$20.1 million. Each of these figures doubled its previous year’s results.)

The sixth annual Russo and Steele “Sports and Muscle in Monterey” collector automobile auction soared into record figures as two evenings of spirited bidding exceeded \$13 million in sales, for a resounding \$13,153,000.00 in total. In the first time the Scottsdale-based company has held a two-night sale in Monterey, all 155 cars were sold at No Reserve.

Three different television programs captured the action and excitement at Russo & Steele Monterey. Voom’s Treasure HD, the high-definition program on collecting (found on dish network channel 9473), covered both nights of the entire auction. Voom also aired two 1-hour preview shows that had interviews with Drew Alcazar, president of Russo and Steele, and John Bemiss, Consignment Director. Additionally, The Learning Channel filmed a segment of their “Wrecks to Riches” show that featured the Mercury Cougar prepared by

#### AUCTION SCHEDULE

Friday, August 18: 5-11pm  
Saturday, August 19: 5-11pm

#### COMPLIMENTARY PREVIEW

Thursday, August 17: 10am-5pm  
Friday, August 18: 10am-5pm  
Saturday, August 19: 10am-5pm  
(Free admission to preview cars.)  
All Russo and Steele cars were available for complimentary inspection at the Preview Area, one half block south of the Marriott Hotel on Calle Principal.

#### CHARITY SILENT AUCTION AND PREVIEW RECEPTION

benefiting Monterey County Youth “My Museum”  
Thursday, August 17: 6-9pm  
Held in the Russo and Steele Preview Area, one half block south of the Monterey Marriott on Calle Principal (next door to Montrie’s Restaurant). This event is complimentary to Russo and Steele registered bidders.

#### VIP BIDDER’S RECEPTION

Friday, August 17: 3-8pm  
Saturday, August 19, 3-8pm  
Held in the Monterey Marriott.  
Cocktails and early sign-up for credentials.

Barry’s Speed Shop. And The Discovery Channel filmed a segment featuring a 1953 Custom Studebaker Hot Rod, for a one-hour, behind-the-scenes special covering the entire Monterey auction weekend, on Discovery HD Theater this fall.

Some numbers of note from the auction include \$291,500 for a 1969 Chevrolet Camaro Yenko; \$167,200 for a 1970 Oldsmobile 442 convertible; \$206,800 for a 1969 Lamborghini Miura; and \$412,500 for a 2005 Porsche Carrera GT. Russo and Steele continues to sell American muscle cars for strong numbers, as a 1970 Pontiac GTO Judge convertible brought \$162,800, and several Shelby American automobiles hammered for some very solid figures. And the Ferrari market shows strength, with an over-market-estimate result of \$149,600 for a 1970 Ferrari 365 GT 2+2.

“This sale illustrates that Russo and Steele has become one of the preeminent events on the Monterey Peninsula during ‘car week,’” said Drew Alcazar, president of Russo and Steele. The rapidly growing company has not only expanded their Monterey sale to two nights, but also has plans to expand their upcoming January 18-21, 2007, Scottsdale event to five full days of festivities. ■

# THE INSIDE TRACK: BRIEFS & RUMORS



BMS M6 Convertible

■ A convertible version of the **BMW** M6 has been spotted testing in Europe. Look for the V-10-powered soft top to premier at the Paris auto show in September. BMW is also expected to add a six-speed manual transmission as an option to the controversial seven-speed SMG automatic to the M5 sedan this fall, and to the M6 coupe next spring.

■ There is a rumor that **Honda** will be offering a hybrid version of the new Fit small car sometime in 2007, and that the new Honda CR-V will have a hybrid model later this year.

■ The lower priced version of the **Porsche** Cayman went on sale starting July 29 with a base price of \$49,400. Derived from the Boxster, the Cayman S coupe was introduced in 2005 with a 295-horsepower engine, while the base model will have 245 horsepower making it capable of a top speed of 160 mph and accelerating from 0 to 62 mph in 6.1 seconds.



Porsche Cayman

■ After being slotted within a week of January's North American International Auto Show in Detroit for the last 25 years, the prestigious **LA Auto Show** is making the move to November/December. This will help set the West Coast show apart from Detroit and raise its prominence in the world market. This year, for the first time, the show starts with press days on November 29 and 30, and the public days following December 1-10.

four-door front-wheel-drive sedan will get the same 5.3-liter (303-hp) V-8 used to power the faster Chevrolet Impala SS. The LaCrosse Super will have a bolder grille and larger, chrome-trimmed rear bumper. The interior will be upgraded, and there will be 18-inch alloy wheels, four-wheel vented disc brakes and the MagneRide suspension system. Buick claims the Super will accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in under 6 seconds.

■ **Ford** is planning to offer a more fuel-efficient version of the full-size Expedition SUV, probably by 2010. Power choices currently under consideration include a V-8 diesel or gas/electric hybrid. The changes would likely push fuel economy of the Expedition to the mid 20s and add about \$2,500

for either of the potential new fuel saving engines.

■ **Mercedes-Benz** will offer their 4MATIC all-wheel-drive system on the 2007 model S550 sedan starting in November. The AWD system has now been integrated into the new seven-speed transmission to make room enough under the car for the center differential. About 20 percent of the S550 buyers are expected to order the estimated \$3,000 option.

■ Next summer watch for **Buick** to add a Super version of the new LaCrosse. The

■ **Kia** will add a new five- and seven-passenger wagon called the Rondo early in 2007. Designed to compete with vehicles like the Mazda5, the Rondo will be powered by a 2.4-liter (158-hp) four-cylinder engine with an optional 2.7-liter (185-hp) V-6. It will be marketed as the Carens in other global markets.



Kia Rondo

■ **Honda** CEO Takeo Fukui said they will develop a four-cylinder diesel engine by 2009 that will run as clean as a gasoline engine. The plan calls for two engines in North America – the four-cylinder and a V-6 (no timetable was given for the V-6). Fukui said both engines will meet the complex and rigid new emission standards, which is expected to be a major technological achievement.

■ The next generation **Chrysler** Sebring convertible could be offered with a choice of a cloth soft top or a retractable hard top, according to rumors. Both top systems are being developed by Karmann and are due in 2007 for the 2008 model. The hardtop version would in effect take the place of a coupe, which is no longer being offered. A new sedan is scheduled to debut a year earlier.

■ The next generation **Cadillac** CTS, due late in 2007, will be redesigned with Escalade-style chrome grille slats and wheels. The beltline will be moved higher and the windows will be shorter, giving it a more chopped top look. The high performance CTS-V will lose its Corvette engine as it's fitted with a more sophisticated supercharged Northstar V-8. The interior will be all new and more luxurious.



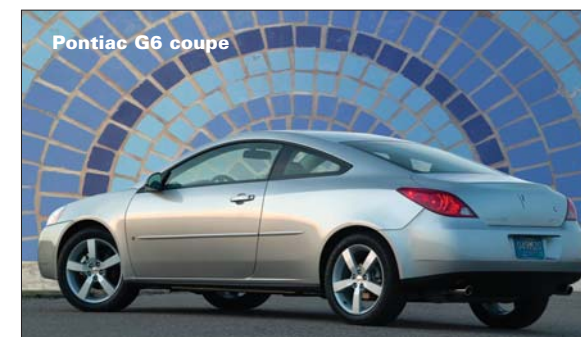
Maybach 62

■ In May, DaimlerChrysler CEO, Dieter Zetsche, personally delivered the keys to a **Maybach** sedan to King Juan Carlos I of Spain. The king did not actually buy the 612-hp ultra luxury sedan, but it was being lent to him to get his opinion. The \$300,000 plus car is a special model with sterling silver accents on the shift lever, covers on the console and rear ashtrays.

■ **Low-sulfur diesel** fuel was mandated for service stations starting June 1 of this year. The federal rule requires refiners to remove nearly all sulfur from the diesel fuels sold in the US. The new fuel must represent at least 80 percent of the fuel offered by stations beginning October 15. The sulfur reduction takes the content from 500 parts per million down to 15 parts per million.

■ **Audi** will fill its "seven" name-numbering gap sometime in 2008 when the first A7 unveils. The A7 is expected to emulate the Mercedes-Benz CLS with a sleek coupe-like roofline and other dynamic styling treatments including hidden rear door handles. Shortly after the A7, the next generation A8 is due with power expected to come from a V-12 diesel and new V-10 gasoline engine.

■ **Pontiac** will offer a new 3.6-liter V-6 in the 2007 G6 GTP coupe and sedan. The double-overhead-cam V-6 will replace the 3.9-liter (227-hp) V-6 currently being used in the GTP performance models. The new engine goes into the cars starting in August. The new engine yields a 0 to 60 mph time of 6.9 seconds, or about 0.3 seconds better than the current engine, along with a 1- to 2-mpg improvement in fuel economy.



Pontiac G6 coupe

design and a direct competitor to the Mercedes-Benz SL with a folding hardtop and room for two bags of golf clubs in the trunk. Engine choices would likely include the new 300-hp turbocharged in-line six-cylinder, the new 400-hp 4.4-liter turbo V-8 or a 500-hp V-10 from the M5 and M6. A decision is expected by the end of 2006.

■ **Volkswagen** is working on an entry-level car that may be sold under the Dodge nameplate in the United States, South and Central America and possibly Europe. A DaimlerChrysler official said anonymously that the two companies are talking

about sharing technology which could lead to a new vehicle about the same size as the previous-generation Jetta. Currently Chrysler is building a minivan, based on the next generation Dodge Caravan that will be marketed in the US by Volkswagen.

■ There is talk about a revised **Hyundai** Tiburon showing at the Los Angeles auto show in December. We have heard that the facelift has design cues from the new Ferrari 599 (the current model already resembles a Ferrari). The suspension is revised and the upgraded brakes will have cross-drilled rotors. Reports also suggest that an all-new sports coupe will debut in 2008, possibly with rear-wheel drive and a 300-hp 3.8-liter V-6 engine.

■ **BMW** is "thinking about" building a replacement for the Z8 roadster, which was dropped in 2003. The most likely version would be a more contemporary

■ **Audi** says they will build the smaller Q5 SUV in Germany beginning in 2008. They did not indicate how soon the Q5 would find its way to North America.

■ One of the new vehicles that may be coming out of the **Porsche** brain trust is a smaller SUV. Look for it to be something very different, possibly a radical 3-door vehicle with strong design elements from the 911. In the past Porsche has done some successful 911 and 959 rally cars that may act as inspirations.

■ **Mitsubishi** will offer its first CVT (continuously variable transmission) in the 2008 model Lancer sedan when it goes on sale in March 2007. The CVT is



Hyundai HCD8 concept

expected to improve fuel economy by up to 20 percent. Plans are also in the works for a diesel engine in a future vehicle.

■ **Porsche** will offer a Targa version of the venerable 911 early in 2007. It will have a large transparent glass roof that slides back to give the passengers the feeling of a convertible, but with all the security of a coupe. It will be available in both 2- and 4-wheel drive.

■ **Lexus** is expected to make some additions to its smallest model, the IS sedan. Look for a BMW M3 competitor, called the ISF, with the 4.6-liter V-8 from the flagship LS 460 and the new eight-speed automatic transmission with paddle shifters. The price will likely be just over \$50,000 when it comes to market late in 2007. Also on tap is a convertible version IS with a retractable hardtop, expected sometime in 2008. ■

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*.

# UPCOMING FEATURES

## Valley Auctions



As January approaches, the annual fever strikes and the early listings start to pile up, as we prepare for Russo and Steele, Barrett-Jackson, RM Classic and others coming our way.

## Ford Expedition Tailgate Tour at Cardinals Stadium



While the marketplace brings smaller SUVs in the face of high gas prices, Ford introduces a new beefier Expedition, at Cardinals Stadium, for those who know they really need one.

## Auto Shows: Phoenix, LA, Detroit



From concepts to new model reveals, the upcoming auto shows give us plenty to show you. We'll be bringing back reports, so tune in to see what's just over the horizon.

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#### Thursday, January 18th

Grand Opening Evening Sale

- Gates open for preview at 10:00 A.M.
- Auction of Vehicles 5:00 P.M. - 10:00 P.M.

#### Friday and Saturday, January 19th - 20th

- Gates open for preview at 10:00 A.M.
- Memorabilia Auction Begins at 1:00 P.M.
- Auction of Vehicles to follow until 11:00 P.M.

#### Sunday, January 21st

- Gates open for preview at 10:00 A.M.
- Champagne Brunch begins at 11:00 A.M.
- Select Auction of Vehicles to follow NOON - 5:00 P.M.

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