

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

VOLUME 18 NUMBER 6
NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2019

*VEHICLE COMPAROS/AWARDS
WEEKLY DRIVES / ROAD TRIPS
CAR BUYING FOR WOMEN
AUCTION RESULTS/SCHEDULES
BONDURANT SCHOOL NEWS
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Toyota RAV4
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ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

news & features

November-December 2019

A Week With	2019 Toyota RAV4 Adventure AWD .....10 For its fifth generation, this long-time hot seller heads for new turf after a complete transformation of style and substance.
Performance Driving School	Bondurant names new CEO/General Manager A .....13 As operations continue to build under new ownership, Bondurant High Performance Driving School hires a new chief.
Vehicle Comparo Event	Southwest Lifestyle Media Drive 2019 B .....14 We drive a lucky 13 vehicles representing the latest in popular key vehicle categories at this metro Phoenix-based non-trophy comparo event. By Joe Sage
A Week With	2020 Lexus LC 500 .....18 Last year, we liked the hybrid version of this car well enough to put it on the cover. How well do you think we'll like the V8? We drove it to one National Mountain and two high country towns to make sure.
Special Event	Barrett-Jackson Las Vegas 2019 results C .....21 Part 2019 wrap-up, part 2020 preview, here are the highlights.
Business	Cathy Droz: HER Certified® and related programs22 For dealerships looking to optimize their customer relationships and for female consumers looking to take charge of the vehicle purchase process, a landmark book and certification courses provide the solutions. By Joe Sage
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A Week With	2019 Hyundai Kona SEL FWD26 We drove 'em all in Hawaii. We drove the most expensive trim in Arizona last year. Now we drive one of the most affordable trims here and compare and contrast its bang for the buck.
Motorsports Collections	Zoomtown Lights holiday display at ISM Raceway E .....29
A Week With	2020 Lexus NX 300h .....33 This small hybrid crossover is more than the sum of its numbers.
Technology and Equipment	VMI: wheelchair accessible vehicle manufacturer F .....34 The critically helpful and useful mobility vehicle category is well represented here in Arizona by Vantage Mobility International. We take a tour of their factory and processes. By Tyson Hugie
Road Trip	Mogollon Rim campout G .....37 Think about a weekend change of season any time of the year, accomplished with this simple hour-or-so drive. By Tyson Hugie
Vehicle Comparo / Awards	NWAPA Run To The Sun 2019 H38 This three-day, two-state, 24-vehicle comparo event puts us on the open road in top performance, luxury and/or otherwise distinctively top-notch vehicles. Check out the winners. By Joe Sage

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COVER: The all-new gen-five 2019 Toyota RAV4 takes the familiar little crossover in an all-new direction—and the new RAV4 Adventure AWD model shows off its new personality especially well. **Photo: Joe Sage**



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START YOUR ENGINES : FROM THE PUBLISHER

This is a busy cycle in the year. We've driven in comparo events in Arizona, the Pacific Northwest and Texas—and could have done several more coast to coast. Of the three we did, one used to not do awards but now does (NW), one used to do awards but now doesn't (AZ), and the third still does awards but now announces them later (TX), so we'll visit that one in the next issue. With or without trophies, we all learn a lot from these.

In between, we zip around the home front in a variety of weekly vehicles, all Asian in this issue and all crossovers with the exception of the near-supercar Lexus LC 500, itself proof that rumors of the demise of "the car" have been greatly exaggerated.

When you're ready to buy, you can benefit from **Cathy Droz's** HER Certified® program, profiled in this issue. If you're a dealership, you can benefit yourself *and* your customers.

There's much else afoot, too, over the coming stretch of time, as we wait for a few more shoes to drop—from NASCAR results, to the opening of a shiny classic motorsports exhibit at Phoenix Art Museum, to Goodguys Southwest Nationals at Westworld, to the LA Auto Show, to new vehicle launch drives, more 2020 models in the fleet, the January collector auctions and a lot more, including of course things we don't even know about yet.

As those auctions loom, Barrett-Jackson has just wrapped up their 2019 calendar in Las Vegas; results and highlights in this issue can work as both summation and crystal ball.

Bob Bondurant himself encouraged us to relocate and fire up our operation here in Arizona two or three decades ago, so we watch with great interest as the torch has been passed to new ownership. In this issue, we bring you information on their new top hire, Franki Buckman, whose extensive résumé bodes great things.

Intrepid correspondent **Tyson Hugie** brings us along on a road trip or two, also polishes up his personally curated Acura collection for a dawn shoot, and takes us on a tour of VMI, the Valley's own mobility van upfitting factory.

Enjoy the ride!

Joe Sage - Publisher/ Executive Editor

ARIZONA DRIVER

MAGAZINE



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- SAMASouthern Automotive Media Association
- TAWATexas Auto Writers Association
- WAJWestern Automotive Journalists

- ACMLeMay—America's Car Museum
- Sturgis...Sturgis Motorcycle Museum & Hall of Fame
- USFRA ...Utah Salt Flats Racing Association
- USMA.....United States Motorsports Association

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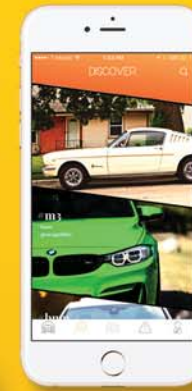
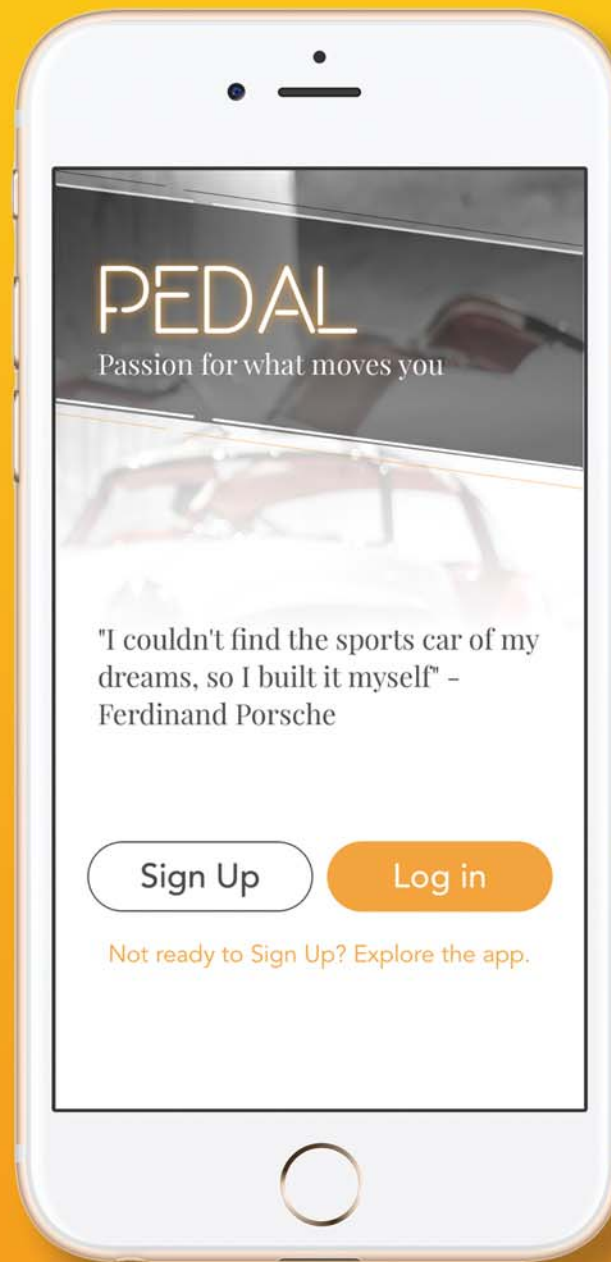
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Fine Art of Fine Automobiles

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AUTOMOTIVE NEWS UPDATE



Mercedes-Benz Unimog U 5023 crewcab

▼ As Mercedes-Benz G-Class celebrates its 40th anniversary this year (see our previous issue), a spotlight also falls on their famed Unimog, an even beastier beast by far. Unimog does duty fighting forest fires, climbing the Alps, performing European sea rescues and much more. The first Unimog, the 140.5-inch-long U 25 (10.6 inches shorter than a Mini Cooper)—conceived in 1946 and entering production in 1949—put out 25 hp from a 1.7L four-cylinder engine. The Unimog S—still the best-selling model today—followed in 1955, powered by an 80-hp 2.2L six-cylinder gasoline engine (also used in the concurrent 220 S luxury sedan). Addressing its thirst for gasoline, from 1965 the Unimog S was built exclusively with diesel engines. Model U 416—widely used as an aid convoy vehicle, on the rails in road-rail spec, as an ambulance, as a tractor unit variant, or converted to three axle or tracks—is the second-biggest-selling Unimog. By 1984, 250,000 Unimogs had rolled off the assembly line, a figure that has surpassed 350,000 by today. Unimog moved to a mid-engine placement in 2015 and now offers crew cab capability in the extreme off-road U 4023 (with a gross vehicle weight rating of 10.3 metric tons or 22,708 pounds) and U 5023 (14.3t or 31,526 lb GVWR). Power output from its 5.1L four-cylinder diesel is 231 hp (referenced by the last two digits of the model number), low compared to the G-Class, but the emphasis is on torque—900 Nm (664 lb-ft), fully on tap across the main operat-

ing range of 1200 to 1600 rpm. Unimog's selectable all-wheel drive, on-demand inter-axle and inter-wheel locks, plus eight forward and six reverse speeds with off-road reduction gear, conquer inclines up to 45 degrees (100 percent grade). Maximum tilt is 38 degrees and fording depth is up to 47.24 inches. Unimog has more than 650 service locations in over 130 countries and has been voted Special-Purpose Vehicle of the year for 15 years in a



SpeedKore 966-hp 1970 Dodge Charger "Evolution"

row by readers of *Off Road* magazine. Unimog is built at the world's largest truck assembly plant in Wörth, Germany. A dedicated Unimog museum opened in Gaggenau in 2006, with an in-house test track including that 100 percent gradient.

▼ Engineers and artisans at SpeedKore Performance Group, located between Milwaukee and Road America in Wisconsin,

are known for combining traditional craftsmanship with cutting edge technology applied to limited edition and one-off custom build high performance vehicles, using pre-impregnated carbon on classic and late model vehicles builds as well as a wide variety of aftermarket body panels, parts and accessories. SpeedKore's one-of-one 1970 Dodge Charger "Evolution"—displayed at McCall's Motorworks Revival during Monterey Car Week this summer—is a full-carbon classic featuring a 966-hp supercharged Dodge Demon 6.2L V8 paired with a Tremec 6060 6-speed transmission, dressed up with HRE Wheels, a 14-point roll cage and a full interior by Gabe's Custom Interiors. The vehicle has appeared on *Jay Leno's Garage*, Donut Media and Hoonigan. The SpeedKore 1970 Dodge Charger "Evolution" received one of five Goodguys gold awards at the 2018 SEMA Show, where their all-carbon-fiber 2017 Ford Mustang GT Fastback and 1970 Ford Mustang Boss 302 were also awarded the Best in Show design award from Ford Motor Company. For more information on these build and SpeedKore

carbon fiber parts, visit speedkore.com.

▼ Nikola Motor Company of Arizona has been awarded \$1.7 million by the US Department of Energy (DOE) to advance its fuel cell membrane electrode assembly (MEA) development for its zero-emission durable hydrogen commercial trucking technology, in partnership with Carnegie Mellon University, Northeastern University

and Georgia Institute of Technology. The joint grant was funded by the DOE's Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) Transportation Office under its FY19 Commercial Trucks and Off-Road Applications



Lotus Evija

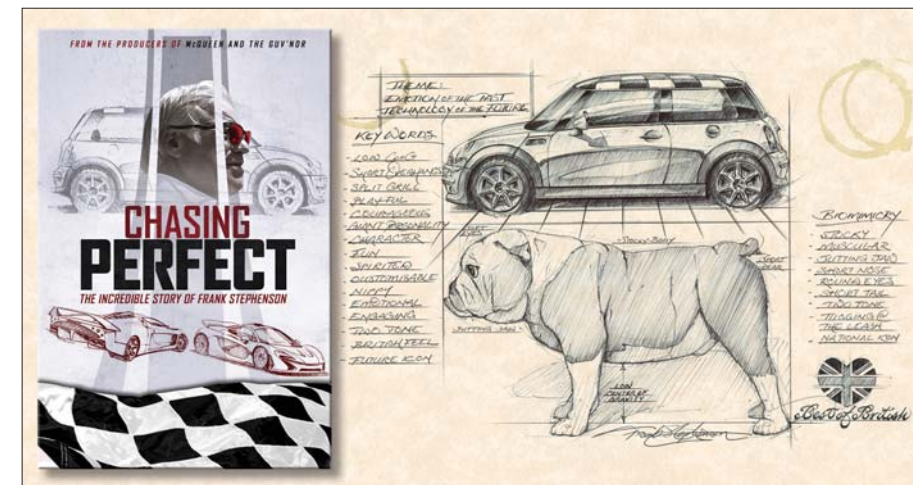
FOA. Nikola is pursuing a new approach and unique MEA architecture to satisfy the high power output and durability requirements of heavy-duty applications, bringing together advanced concepts in catalysts, ionomers, proton exchange membranes and gas diffusion layers in a robust MEA using appropriate, scalable fabrication methods. Nikola's hydrogen station partner NEL Hydrogen of Oslo, Norway was also awarded a two million dollar award from the DOE, with Nikola executives serving as the technical lead. There are currently more than 14,000 Nikola class 8 trucks on order, featuring up to 1000 hp and 2000 lb-ft of torque. Nikola has also announced a battery EV option for the urban, short haul trucking market. Nikola's trucks will be manufactured in Coolidge, Arizona, with testing starting on Arizona roads this year and full production expected in late 2022.

▼ The Lotus Evija, billed as the first pure electric British hypercar and making its world debut in London recently, has a target power output of 2,000 PS (1973 hp), making it also the world's most powerful series production road car. That power, combined with its ultra-lightweight carbon fiber monocoque construction—for which it also stakes a claim as the world's lightest production EV hypercar, at 1,680 kg (3704 lb)—is forecast to be good for zero-to-100 km/h (62 mph) in under three seconds, with a top speed over 200 mph. The car's pure electric driving range is targeted

at 250 miles (400 km). Its mid-mounted battery pack echoes Lotus mid-engine sports car heritage and weight balance. Lotus Evija—designed, engineered and hand-built in Hethel UK—also boasts

world-first main and dipped beam laser lighting technology, as well as comprehensive personalization and experiential customer programs. Production will be limited to just 130 cars, a tribute to its Lotus "Type" number 130, starting in 2020.

▼ *Chasing Perfect*, a documentary film by director Helena Coan, follows one of the worlds most influential car designers, Frank Stephenson, whose work ranges



from high-concept hypercars such as the McLaren P1 to everyday city vehicles such as the 21st century MINI. In a career spanning over 33 years, Stephenson applied his meticulous creative process to a vast cross-section of the automotive spectrum, having led design teams at Ferrari, Maserati, Alfa Romeo, Fiat, Lancia, MINI and McLaren, responsible for the shape of the MINI, Fiat 500, Ferrari FXX, McLaren

P1 and more. *Chasing Perfect* reveals Stephenson's inspiration and meticulous process behind each, for unique insight into his unrelenting chase for aesthetic perfection, leading to his vertical move into electric aircraft design at Lilium Aviation. "My inspiration for the design of the New MINI was the British bulldog. It's an English icon, positively quirky, and it has that low and wide stance with a tugging at the leash feel, the perfect influence," said Stephenson. The film is available on major VOD platforms, courtesy of 1091 Media.

▼ Hyundai Motor Group has developed the world's first Active Shift Control (ASC) technology. For the sake of fuel economy, conventional hybrid vehicles forgo torque converters, as these lose energy in transmission—an approach that, although fuel efficient, requires longer shift times to keep gear changes smooth. Hyundai ASC tech allows the hybrid's electric motor to also take control of shifts, with new control logic software mitigating slow shifts. The Hybrid Control Unit (HCU) monitors the rotational speed of the transmission, via a sensor inside the electric motor that takes readings a whopping 500 times per second to quickly synchronize its rotational speed with that of engine. With the synchronization, shift time is reduced by 30

percent (from 500 milliseconds to 350). This not only improves a hybrid vehicle's acceleration performance and fuel economy, but also the durability of the transmission by minimizing friction during shifts. Bonus—gear changes are also smoother, despite quicker shift times. The new technology premieres in the new Hyundai

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Sonata Hybrid and will eventually benefit other upcoming Hyundai and Kia hybrids.

▼ The latest addition to the **Alpine** A110 range, the A110S, features more power,

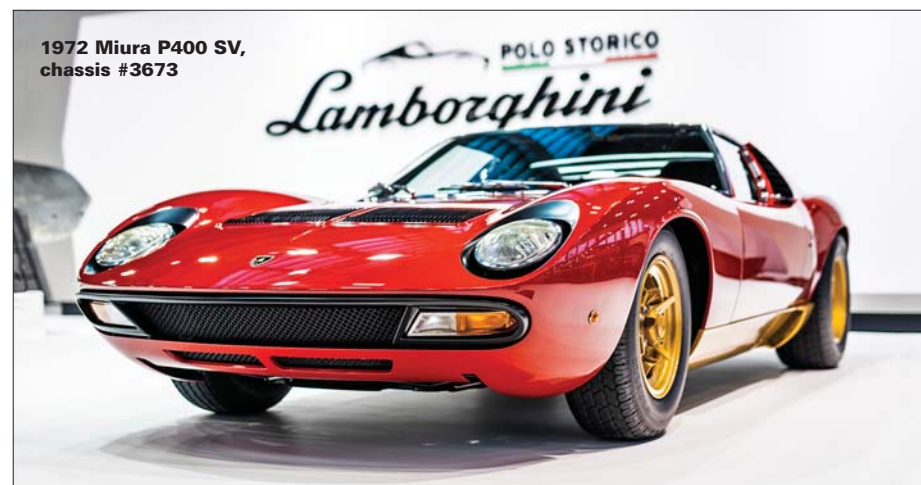


specific bespoke suspension settings and upgraded brakes, aimed at delivering an ever more intense Alpine driving experience with the same daily usability. The A110S shares its lightweight mid-engined two-seater layout with other models in the range, while its turbocharged 1.8L engine produces 292 hp, 40 more than the standard A110, while peak torque of 326 lb-ft is reached over a wider band, from 2,000 to 6,400 rpm. Active sports exhaust delivers a more emotive engine sound depending on selected driver mode. This model's Alpine high performance braking system includes 320mm bi-material brake discs and Brembo calipers. Wider Michelin Pilot Sport 4 tires (215/40R18 front, 245/40R18 rear) have been tuned specifically for the A110S. Ride height has been lowered by 4mm, new springs are 50 percent stiffer, and new hollow anti-roll bars are 100 percent stiffer. Electronic stability control is recalibrated for maximum advantage with this greater handling accuracy and improved grip—all without undermining the car's everyday driving comfort. Options for the A110S include a \$2664 carbon fiber roof panel that shaves 4.2 lb from its 2456-lb curbweight, plus \$1998 carbon fiber-backed versions of standard A110S Dinamica trimmed Sabelt bucket seats. The Alpine A110S also debuts a distinctive new \$5357 Thunder Grey Matt paint, which can also be ordered on A110 Pure and A110 Légende models. The Alpine A110 range starts at \$56,596. (All prices converted from pounds sterling and sub-

ject to fluctuation.) Orders started being taken in September; you can reserve now.

▼ The Pebble Beach Concours this year included a dedicated **Lamborghini** Miura

class, celebrating “the most iconic GT of the 1960s,” when fewer rules allowed more freedom for technicians and car designers. Miura was the fruit of an especially young group of technicians, ranging from the youngest, designer Marcello Gandini at 22 years of age, to the eldest at just 27. The Miura had its world premiere at the 1966 Geneva Motor Show and claims the mantle of first super sports car of the modern era—equipped with a



transverse mid-engine 4-liter V12 with four overhead cams, it was the fastest production car of that period. Each of 763 Miura originally built from 1966 to 1973 in Sant'Agata Bolognese is today considered among the most desirable classic cars to be owned and driven. Five examples, from all over the world, were accepted at Pebble, of which three were restored by Lamborghini Polo Storico in Sant'Agata

Bolognese. They included a 1967 Miura P400, chassis #3087, owned by Tom and Gwen Price of Belvedere, California; 1968 Miura P400, chassis #3303, owned by Jon and Kim Shirley of Medina, Washington; a 1968 Miura P400, chassis #3586 owned by The Kaiser Collection in Vaduz, Liechtenstein; a 1972 Miura P400 SV, chassis #3673 (shown), owned by Jean Todt of Paris, France; and a 1968/1975 Miura SVR, chassis #3781, owned by Shinji Takei of Japan. As an example of these cars' exceptional provenance, chassis #3303 is the 101st Miura P400 built, finished in February 1968 and immediately delivered to its first owner, the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, specially ordered with a chrome plated front bumper, a special steering wheel and a number of other cosmetic changes. The Shah took delivery of the Miura, specially equipped with studded tires, at his home in snowy St Moritz, Switzerland. The car was sold by the Shah just before being confiscated by Ayatollah Khomeini's government after the 1979 revolution, but was then smuggled out of the country and owned by the Shah's son for the next 30 years. A full restoration was undertaken in 2018 and the current owner bought it at the beginning of 2019. Lamborghini Polo Storico, inaugurated in 2015, is Automobili Lamborghini's depart-

ment dedicated to the restoration and certification of all Lamborghinis produced up to 2001, as well as the reconstruction of spare parts for classic Lamborghinis, for which more than 200 new code numbers were introduced in 2018 alone. Polo Storico also conserves and manages the company archives to support the conservation and preservation of all classic Lamborghini cars. ■

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Transformed.

BY JOE SAGE

RAV4 wraps up its third decade or so on our shores (now in its fifth generation for 2020, it first arrived in 1995) with a completely reimagined and redirected vehicle. The new RAV4 is significant—within Toyota, joining GR Supra as another new vehicle with above-average personality and soul; and beyond Toyota, potentially a harbinger of a new era of utilities that return to looking utilitarian, moving away from the curvy little lookalikes that have been ubiquitous industrywide in recent years.

Compared with other models of the new RAV4, the new Adventure AWD (based on the FT-AC concept shown at the LA Auto Show a year earlier; see sidebar) is as much an exercise in rugged style as anything. Functionally, it has the same power-

train, approach and departure angles, suspension and brakes. As with other upper trims, it gains always welcome ground clearance over base models by virtue of its 19-inch wheels. Tow capacity on a base RAV4 is 1500 pounds, upgradeable to 3500 with a tow package, but on RAV4 Adventure this is included. Its front fascia has a skid plate appearance to it, and its roof rack with optional cross bars screams “outdoors.” Engineering may not be all that different, but usage surely will be.

One look at the RAV4 Adventure AWD is enough to make you think of 4Runner, and that’s where the breakthrough is—compare it with the prior four generations shown at upper right, and you’ll see that even the thought of such an image compar-



son is new territory for RAV4. Our chart gives a brief look at RAV4 evolution, along with its position against its accomplished big brother.

4Runner has 33 percent more horsepower, but about that same difference in weight. It has over 50 percent more torque, but it also costs about that much more. Fuel mileage is also 30 to 40 percent lower in the bigger 4Runner. 4Runner offers a third row, but this means RAV4 has more second row

	1996 Gen 1	2013 Gen 4	2019 base	2019 Adventure	2019 4Runner
HP/TORQUE	120 / 125	176 / 172	203 / 184	203 / 184	270 / 278
LENGTH / WB	145.9 / 86.6	179.9 / 104.7	180.9 / 105.9	181.5 / 105.9	190.2-191.3 / 109.8
WHEELS	16x6.5	17x6.5 - 18x7.5	base 17x7.0	19x7.5	17x7.0 - 20x7.5
TURNING CIRCLE	33.5 ft	34.7-36.7 ft	base 36.1 ft	37.4 ft	37.4 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	7.7	6.3 in	base 8.4 in	8.6 in	4WD 9.6 in
APPROACH/DEP	27 / 28°	29 / 22°	19 / 21°	19 / 21°	AWD 33 / 26°
HEADROOM (F/R)	40.0 / -	39.8 / 38.9	(snrf) 37.7 / 37.7	(snrf) 37.7 / 37.7	(snrf) 38.6 / 38.6
LEGGROOM (F/R)	39.5 / -	42.6 / 37.2	41.0 / 37.8	41.0 / 37.8 in	41.7 / 32.9
CARGO (CU.FT)	26.8	38.4 / 73.4	37.5 / tbd	37.5 / tbd	47.2 / 89.7
TOW CAPACITY	1500 lb	1500 lb	1500 (3500 opt)	3500 lb	5000 lb
WEIGHT	2634 lb	3435-3600 lb	3370-3620 lb	3615 lb	4400-4805 lb
MPG	FWD 21/27/23	AWD 22/29/na	FWD 26/35/30	AWD 25/33/28	4WD 17/20/18
BASE PRICE	\$15,998	±\$23-28,000	\$25,850-36,630 (2020)	\$32,955 (2020)	\$36,020-49,765 (2020)



legroom. 4Runner leads noticeably in functional categories of approach/departure, ground clearance and towing. Most fundamentally, 4Runner remains a body-on-frame build, like the Tacoma pickup—and suspension, undercarriage and driveline are all tougher—while RAV4 is a unibody.

If you have 4Runner needs, the decision will be easy. If you have a 4Runner soul but seek purchase and fuel economy, the decision will also be easy. In an unprecedented way, each is now a halo for the other. If your needs and soul fall into an overlap zone between the two, take heart—for 2020, Toyota is adding a RAV4 TRD Off-Road grade, with upgraded suspension, wheels and tires, driveline disconnect, twin-tube shocks and other more serious off-road engineering. (And if your needs and soul fall outside any of this, there’s a RAV4 Hybrid with 40 mpg combined.)

Toyota themselves make a valid point when they say the new gen-five RAV4 has “the capacity to be both a segment leader and a segment disrupter.” ■



(Above, top left-right, lower left-right) Toyota RAV4 generations one, two, three and four have run through much evolution. Gen five, new for 2019 (main photo, left), takes things a step further, strongly (almost totally) echoing the FT-AC (Future Toyota Adventure Concept) from the late-2017 LA Auto Show (below)—and philosophically echoing the burly do-anything styling of 4Runner (below, bottom), including the classic SUV form it has maintained all along.

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	2.5L Dynamic Force 4-cylinder, alum block, alum head, 16v DOHC, VVT-iE intake, VVT-i exhaust
HP/TORQUE	203 hp / 184 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	direct shift 8-spd electronic control w sequential shift mode and snow mode
DRIVETRAIN	AWD w multi-terrain select, dynamic torque vectoring, rear driveline disconnect
SUSPENSION	F: indep MacPherson strut, hydraulic shocks, stblzr bar (25.5mm); R: trailing wishbone style multi-link, stblzr bar (23.5mm)
STEERING	rack-mt parallel elec pwr asst rack & pin-ion
BRAKES	F: 12.0 vented / R: 11.1 solid
WHEELS / TIRES	19x7.5 alum alloy / 235/55R19
LENGTH / WB	181.5 / 105.9 in
TURNING CIRCLE	37.4 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	8.6 in
APPROACH/DEPARTURE	19 / 21°
HEADROOM (F/R) W MOONROOF	37.7 / 37.7 in
LEGGROOM (F/R)	41.0 / 37.8 in
CARGO CAPACITY	37.5 / tbd cu.ft
TOW CAPACITY	(tow pkg incl w/Adventure) 3500 lb
WEIGHT	3615 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	regular unl / 14.5 gal
MPG	25/33/28 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$32,900
ADVENTURE GRADE WEATHER PKG:	heated/cooled front bucket seats, heated leather wheel, rain sensing/de-icing wipers.....1185
INFOTAINMENT:	8.0" touchscreen, Entune 3.0 premium 11-sprk JBL Clari-Fi audio, Dynamic Nav (3-yr trial), aux, USB media and charge ports, voice recog, Apple CarPlay, bluetooth, hands-free phone and more..1620
ADVENTURE GRADE TECH PKG:	intelligent clearance sonar, rear cross-traffic braking, digital rear mirror w HomeLink, wireless smartphone charging.....1265
MOONROOF:	power tilt/slide, one-touch open/close.850
OPTIONS:	two-tone (500); door sill protector (199); wheel lock (65); roof rack cross bars (315); all-weather floor liners, cargo tray (269).....1348
DESTINATION CHARGE	1095
TOTAL	\$40,263



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**BONDURANT NAMES NEW
CEO/GENERAL MANAGER**

Bondurant High Performance Driving School announces Franki Buckman—tenured track leader with a history of operational, sales and marketing success with motorsports programs and properties—as the company’s new chief executive officer and general manager. Buckman assumes responsibility for all operations of the School, including strategic and day-to-day oversight, the guest experience and team management.

Bruce Belser, one of the investors who purchased the School in May, turned the keys of the operation over to Buckman after having served as its top leader during its first six months under new ownership. His expertise in transition was considered critical to the operation, and he continues to hold an ownership stake in the company.

Buckman has been involved in the automotive industry since 1990, when she joined Pro Formance Driving Events and Motorsports, a national ride-and-drive company and sister organization to Arizona’s only CART professional Indy car team, fielding driver Scott Pruett at the time. There, she worked directly for the owners, experts in the field of automotive events including racing names like Breedlove and Unser.

She then spent 18 years at Firebird International Raceway in Arizona, working directly for NHRA Funny Car legend and track owner Charlie Allen, who originally enticed the Bob Bondurant School from California to Arizona. “I had the opportunity to work directly with Bob 25 years ago, and I’m thrilled to have the chance now to help carry on the unique method of driving instruction that the long-tenured team of trainers at the School still teach today,” said Buckman.

Since leaving Firebird Raceway in 2013, Buckman has been a media and event consultant to a wide variety of brands and companies in the automotive industry, including Ford, Chevrolet, Toyota, Lucas Oil Off Road Racing Series, Lucas Oil Drag Boat Racing Series, Harley-Davidson, Napa Auto Parts and more. Most recently, she worked for an Omnicom-owned advertising agency, developing Chevrolet Tier 2 advertising campaigns in multiple Southwest markets including the Phoenix area.

An Arizona native, Buckman lives in Chandler with her husband, a former racer himself and second-generation Indy car crew chief and mechanic. Buck-



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man’s sons also entered the motorsports industry and raced at an early age; her oldest son remains an active racecar driver today.

“The automotive industry, high performance driving events and motorsports in general are really more a part of who I am now. It’s in my blood,” says Buckman, adding “I look forward to being further immersed in the industry as part of a team representing a brand that I am not only familiar with, but truly believe in. I’m excited to work with a top-notch staff and team that’s proven over the years they are truly second to none, both in service and knowledge, and have been responsible for the consistent high-quality experience the Bondurant clients and guests receive every day.”

For School information, visit www.Bondurant.com or call 800-842-7223. ■



Sampler Pack

A one-day drive of the latest and hottest models for luxury, performance, economy, features and/or all of the above

by Joe Sage / Photos: Joe Sage, Brenda Priddy and manufacturers

The Southwest Lifestyle Media Drive is a privately organized vehicle comparo drive event (as opposed to a press association event, as most are), with invitations extended to members of Arizona-based media with automotive content.

THE VEHICLES: Included in the SWLMD vehicle mix are a full spectrum of what you may be shopping for—sedans, pickups, crossovers and SUVs. The common thread is that each is noteworthy—a new and/or recent arrival, and/or the cream of the crop in a lineup. Most are 2020 models, and 2019s here will carry forward very close to as-is. Horsepower, highway fuel mileage and base/as-tested prices as stated include the caveat that some did and others did not fold destination charges into price totals, some gave prices before and after options for this particular trim, while others gave prices for the lowest trim in their overall lineup, with or without options. Their relativity is thus a useful starting point; you'll dig deeper when shopping. Vehicles are presented here alphabetically.

THE ROUTE: Though the lineup included some serious 4x4s and performance vehicles, our driving was done as the majority of yours may be on most days, from our event base in downtown Chandler, on two suggested loops within the Valley grid and freeways, with freedom to randomize on our own.

THE FORMAT: This was a same-day drive event—and a drive event only, no awards. We took each for a spin, to gauge daily driver performance and features, but as a relatively small set of vehicles, they were not categorized by type, price or function, as at most. You might consider it a comparo of sorts, but much as when you vehicle shop in the real world, it's a comparison within the market at large, not a collection of one-on-one faceoffs.

Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio AWD (2019)
505 hp / 23 mpg hwy.....\$80,245 / \$88,540
Top of the alphabet is also tops in this group for both horsepower and price. Its horsepower is higher than average here by a considerably wider margin than its price, a value formula for this twisty-road or track performance utility—capable of zero-to-60 in just 3.6 seconds, with stopping power to match, dressed in a sexy Italian skin, right down to its 20-inch forged aluminum wheels. Alfa Romeo has just returned to the States over the past couple of years, still new news. This is the twin-turbo Quadrifoglio, the highest performance model, and of special note, add-ons increase its price by only 10 percent.

Chevrolet Traverse High Country (2020)

310 hp / 27 mpg hwy.....\$29,800 / \$52,490
Traverse is considered a midsize, what with Suburban and Tahoe being larger, but you'd be forgiven for taking Traverse as a full-size, with its spacious seven- or eight-passenger and 23-to-almost-100-cu.ft of cargo space. You're also likely to think it's a much pricier vehicle, even (or especially) in this top-of-seven-models High Country trim. New this year, all trims have the same 3.6L V6, and all have a new Buckle-To-Drive feature as part of a Teen Driver mode, forcing young drivers to adhere to the discipline of fastening seatbelts before shifting out of park.

Fiat 500X Pop AWD (2020)

177 hp / 30 mpg hwy.....\$24,490 / \$27,070
What's new about the Fiat 500X for 2020 is that thankfully it's a survivor, as the 500, 500 Abarth and 500e are discontinued in the US market (though still available as long as existing inventory lasts). Fiat 500X is a close

Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio AWD (2019)



Chevrolet Traverse High Country (2020)



Fiat 500X Trekking (2020)



cousin to Jeep Renegade (both are built in Melfi, Italy)—as with the Alfa Romeo wrapped in sexy Italian clothing. For 2020, Fiat 500X has an all-new 1.3L turbo four pumping 177 hp and 210 lb-ft of torque into its 3305-lb mass through an efficient, responsive 9-speed planetary gear automatic to an all-wheel-drive system with disconnecting rear axle that helps deliver 30 mpg highway.

Ford Explorer Platinum 4WD (2020)

365 hp / 24 mpg hwy.....\$58,250 / \$60,935
The sixth generation of this pioneering SUV is notable for its welcome return to rear-wheel drive (we put it through some hard 90-degree cornering, to celebrate). Explorer also seems bigger than its nominal midsize category (Expedition is larger), with a highly premium look and feel for its price. Platinum is the luxe-oriented top of four trims, while ST at \$3500 less is more performance-oriented (like Platinum, ST has the exceedingly popular 3.0L EcoBoost V6, but twin-turbocharged for 400 hp). Refined as Explorer may be, it is also tough, with a terrain management system and up to 5600-lb tow capacity.

Hyundai Kona SEL FWD (2019)

147 hp / 33 mpg hwy.....\$21,800 / \$24,570
We had driven this exact Kona for the week prior, featured in this issue. As a review vehicle in next-to-lowest trim rather than top, it reflects Hyundai's confidence in the value found through the whole lineup (all of which are in the \$20s). Content-rich even in this trim, one key difference is that upper trims have a 175-hp 1.6L turbo to this model's 147-hp naturally aspirated 2.0L, at a loss of just one MPG highway. AWD dings fuel mileage by three (we'd still go for that), so it comes down to parsing purchase price and features. Fun, stylish and surprisingly roomy, Hyundai Kona has been an instant hit.

Jeep Gladiator Rubicon (2020)

285 hp / 22 mpg hwy.....\$33,545 / \$56,385
Jeep Gladiator (launch feature in our May/June issue) looks a lot like a Wrangler and bears some of the same can-opener tricks—you can knock down the windshield, remove the doors and open up its available soft top (it was entered as a convertible in the Run To The Sun comparo, also in this issue). But it is its own animal, on a platform developed with corporate cousin Ram Trucks. Gladiator strikes us as a clever "end run," allowing FCA to reenter the midsize pickup segment as several others have recently done the same, but with a truck that has a uniquely different personality than any of the others.

Kia Soul X-Line (2019)

147 hp / 33 mpg hwy.....\$21,490 / \$22,615
We drove this exact same vehicle last spring (see our May/June issue). Kia Soul, one of several quirky little box vehicles introduced during the prior decade, is a survivor. It turns out its roominess, utility and fun factor have been enduring—and have evolved. It has shed its early "Hamstar" cartoon flavor and taken on what our prior review noted as more of a *Star Wars* Boba Fett persona—a more serious, purposeful flavor of quirky—and in this midrange trim still bearing the mix of value and notable style that attracts buyers across the spectrum. (And for \$6000 more, you can get a 201-hp turbo model.)

Kia Telluride SX (2020)

291 hp / 24 mpg hwy.....\$43,490 / \$46,860
Kia has continuously elevated its brand image—improving build quality to the point of taking the top spot for those measures; increasing content, with inclusions that are options on many brands, thus preserving their value position; instantly entering the performance category with the brand-image-expanding Stinger; and now bringing themselves instantly into their largest vehicle category yet with Telluride—a near-300-hp, up-to-eight-seater with quality, style, features and an overall premium feel you might equate with vehicles tens of thousands of dollars pricier. It should be a sure-fire hit.

Ford Explorer Platinum 4WD (2020)



Hyundai Kona SEL FWD (2019)



Jeep Gladiator Rubicon (2020)



Kia Soul X-Line (2019)



Kia Telluride SX (2020)



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Nissan Versa SR CVT (2020)
122 hp / 40 mpg hwy.....\$18,240 / \$21,490
 Sizes criss-cross again, as Nissan's all-new "subcompact" (and well-sub-\$20s) Versa for 2020—longer, lower, wider—could easily be taken for a midsize. In a lineup starting at just \$14,730, this example is top of three trims, with 17-inch wheels, sport interior, rear spoiler, keyless entry/start, LED headlights, heated mirrors, 7-inch touchscreen, blind spot warning and much more. Its 122 hp moves its 2729 pounds quickly, at 40 mpg highway. Versa offers a manual transmission, but only on base trim. Nissan says they are alone in having a sedan, a crossover and a truck all starting below \$20,000.



Nissan Versa SR CVT (2020)

Ram 1500 Limited Crew 4x4 (2019)
395 hp / 22 mpg hwy.....\$56,000 / \$69,000
 Ram 1500 is all new for 2019 (see our May/June 2018 launch feature), soon followed by all-new Ram 2500/3500 HD pickups. This Limited Crew 4x4 is top trim in a seven-level lineup (starting with Tradesman at \$34,845), with sumptuous yet burly leather, wood and metal interior, plus a wide range of trick features (such as the multifunction tailgate shown at right). The efficient new eTorque HEMI V8 has 410 lb-ft of torque, a 2300-lb payload and up to 12,750 lb towing. For 2020, they add a new EcoDiesel engine with 480 lb-ft of torque, the highest among half-ton diesels. Ram has moved up to second place in sales in the US, a huge achievement.



Ram 1500 Limited Crew 4x4 (2019)

Subaru Legacy XT (2020)
260 hp / 32 mpg hwy.....\$22,745 / \$35,895
 Subaru Legacy is all new for 2020, moving to the quieter, stiffer, safer Subaru Global Platform. The 2.5L boxer engine in most Legacy models is 90 percent new this year, delivers 182 hp, 35 mpg highway and a zero-to-60 time of 8.4 seconds. The XT model driven here has the brand's first turbo in eight years—260 hp, 32 mpg highway and zero-to-60 in 6.1 seconds. The XT's premium interior has increased passenger dimensions in all models, and a range of tech is anchored in the 11.6-inch display, with upgraded nav, 12-speaker Harman Kardon audio, and very welcome knobs on upper models. All are AWD.



Subaru Legacy XT (2020)

Subaru Outback Limited (2020)
182 hp / 33 mpg hwy.....\$33,445 / \$36,500
 Outback is also all new for 2020, also built on the Subaru Global Platform, and also offers the 260-hp turbo on XT models (including an Onyx Edition XT). The Outback at this event was a mid-upper-range Limited with the 182-hp engine, underscoring the mix possibilities of sedan or wagon bodies and the two powertrains, with the same improved chassis dynamics on all. As with Legacy, Outback is all-AWD and has a CVT with manual mode, while boasting 8.7-inch ground clearance, X-Mode for slick surfaces and inclines, adding roof rails with cross bars and tie-downs and a hands-free rear liftgate.



Subaru Outback Limited (2020)

Toyota Camry TRD (2020)
301 hp / 31 mpg hwy\$31,040 / na
 Surprised to see Camry and TRD in the same name? It's a first-ever for Toyota, and the good news comes in threes—301 hp, 31 mpg highway, all for \$31,040 base. Head north of 300 hp in a front-driver, and it's not unreasonable to expect some torque steer, but this TRD-developed Camry is so sure-footed through acceleration, cornering and braking, we paused to check again to make sure it wasn't AWD. Camry TRD will certainly add a new dimension to your thinking about the venerable midsize sedan, a well-known vanilla shake that has now had a big basket of the best red chiles tossed into the mix.



Toyota Camry TRD (2020)

Odds are good you may have just discovered something new, or perhaps confirmed an existing leaning or curiosity, about what's coming to market this year. It can be fun to see who wins a comparo award, but there's something to be said for the trophy-free approach, too. As in the real world, there are no wrong choices. ■

Trending.

by Joe Sage

We all seem to be told, all day every day, that this is a time of SUV dominance, with little interest in what's classically been thought of as the car. How, then, does this car's car, the Lexus LC—especially in head-turning Flare Yellow paint—clearly come off as a halo for the entire Lexus brand? Well, a halo vehicle is seldom-to-never the most common cookie-cutter in the kitchen.

There are two basic models of the LC: this naturally-aspired V8-powered 471-hp LC 500, and a 354-system-hp V6-hybrid LC 500h. The hybrid is rated at 35 mpg highway to the V8's 25. The V8 hits 60 mph in 4.4 seconds to the hybrid's 4.7. To avoid too much model-crisscross confusion (or arguably to ensure it?), the hybrid is available only as an F Sport, the V8 only as not-an-F-Sport. This pushes the hybrid's cost \$4500 higher than the LC 500, but as F Sport is typically a \$6000 add-on, the apples and oranges are yours to contemplate.

Both versions have the same stunning supercar-caliber sheet metal, while the LC 500 has the wonderful, rich and deep-throated sound effects that only a V8 can deliver. It's the closest most mere mortals can get to the (limited run and not currently available) super-supercar V10 LFA, at a quarter

of its price.

Starting with the same "L" as the Lexus LS large luxury sedan, the LC also starts with the same platform as the LS, though it weighs in at about a thousand pounds lighter, due to not only its svelte size and shape, but also extensive use of aluminum and carbon fiber build—in the case of our example even moreso, with a \$2960 carbon fiber roof package and a \$2395 carbon fiber grille and rear spoiler package both added.

The Lexus LC's low-slung, road-hugging drive experience ratifies its visual impression.

Our week with the LC 500 offered an event-packed weekend, including a car show and rat rod cruise in the Pinetop region and a VW bus camp-in and show in Jerome. Tough choice, so of course we thought about doing it all. Complex and lengthy as that can get, we instead decided to just head out and see where the spirits took us—which ended up being to Montezuma Castle National Monument, Cottonwood, Jerome, several miles up the switchbacks toward Prescott, and then back to Cottonwood for a well-deserved barbecue lunch.

This ultimately all-day route gave us the normal dose of Valley freeway time, plenty of Interstate time including the always competitive two-lanes-per-side (and may it always be that way) climb through Black Canyon, and the best of the high country's wide-open, curvy, climbing two-lanes.

Well-equipped as our sample was, it did not

have an optional Performance Package, which (at \$5960) includes elements of our \$2960 Sport Package, along with active rear steering, speed-activated rear wing and a couple of other details. We find the concept of active rear steering (which among other things cuts the turning circle by 4.8 inches) compelling in theory, but in practice, it never crossed our minds on our aggressive mountain switchbacks—the basic system is not lacking.

The LC 500 has an incredible set of brakes to back up all its power—a large 6-piston set in front and ditto 4-piston in the rear—which were put to the test when a full-size American luxury sedan abruptly changed into our lane on the I-17 nighttime downhill run as though we weren't even there—disaster averted in a split second. A shoutout, as well, to its Y-rated Bridgestone Potenza tires, one of three OE performance fitments (staggered, by the way—fatter in the rear).

A number of details are extra sweet, such as the pivoting operation of its keyless door handles. Less sweet, though incrementally improving over time, is the jumpy touchpad that controls the screen interface. We'd also like to see fewer vital functions requiring deep dive screen time, which proved challenging even for a savvy copilot.

We received a lot of thumbs-ups in the Lexus LC, and it turned a lot of heads. This is one very sexy entry in the greater Lexus lineup—and lights up the whole brand. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

BUILD unitized steel body, steel front/rear subframes
COEFFICIENT OF DRAG0.33
SEATING CAPACITYfour
ENGINE5.0L V8 (alum block/heads)
 DOHC 32v dual VVT-i, EFI, D-4S direct injection
COMPRESSION RATIO12.3:1
HP/TORQUE471 hp / 398 lb-ft
0-TO-60 / TOP SPEED4.4 sec / 168 mph (lim)
DRIVETRAINRWD
TRANSMISSION10-spd sport direct shift / paddles
REAR DIFFERENTIALTorsen limited slip (opt)
SUSPENSIONF: double-joint multilink; R: multilink
STEERINGelec power coaxial rack & pinion, spd-

sense
BRAKES4-whl pwr-assist disc, ABS, EBD, brake assist

F: 15.7 vented, 6-piston opposed alum calipers, high-friction pads; R: 14.1 vented, 4-piston opposed alum calipers, high-friction pads
WHEELS(std) 21-in cast / (opt) 21-in forged alum
TIRES(21" opt) F: 245/40RF21 / R: 275/35RF21
LENGTH / WHEELBASE187.4 / 113.0 in
TURNING CIRCLE35.4 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE5.2 in
HEADROOM (F/R)(w carbon fiber roof) 36.8 / 32.2 in
LEGROOM (F/R)42.0 / 32.5 in
CARGO CAPACITY5.4 cu.ft
WEIGHT5260 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY91 octane / 21.7 gal
MPG16/25/19 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE\$92,950
21-IN FORGED ALLOY WHEELS2650
HEADS-UP DISPLAY900
LIMITED SLIP DIFFERENTIAL390
AUDIO: Mark Levinson 13-speaker premium surround sound audio system1220
INTUITIVE PARKING ASSIST500
PREMIUM PAINT: Flare Yellow595
SPORT PKG W CARBON ROOF: 8-way power front seats w Alcantara inserts, carbon fiber roof2960
CARBON FIBER PKG: grille insert & spoiler2395
DOOR EDGE FILM90
PAINT PROTECTION FILM395
[GRP]: Trunk mat, cargo net, wheel locks, key gloves275
DESTINATION CHARGE1025

TOTAL\$106,348

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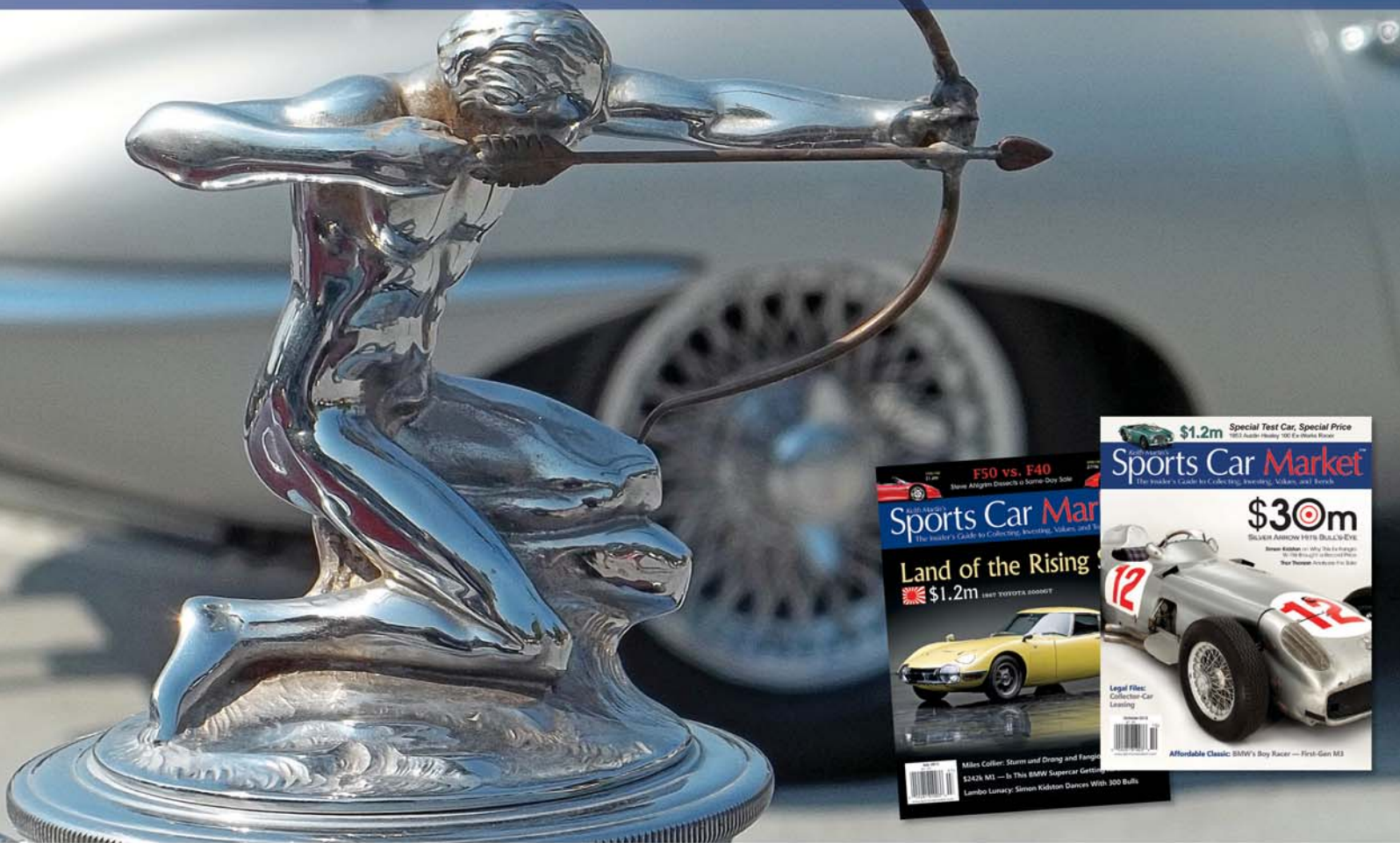
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SPECIAL EVENT : BARRETT-JACKSON LAS VEGAS 2019

Barrett-Jackson wraps 2019 auction season

Barrett-Jackson finished its 2019 season with its first 100 percent No Reserve collector car and automobilia auction in nearly a decade. With a diverse docket, Barrett-Jackson sold 677 vehicles for more than \$33.3 million, while over 352 pieces of automobilia brought in over \$855,800—both records for their Las Vegas event. In addition, \$560,000 was raised through the sale of charity vehicles, bringing the total auction sales to over \$34.8 million. “We’re excited to carry the momentum we’ve built up over the year to our 49th Annual Scottsdale Auction in January,” said Craig Jackson, chairman and CEO.

This year’s 12th Annual Las Vegas Auction at the Mandalay Bay Casino and Resort was also a gathering place for automotive legends, as well as celebrities from the enter-

tainment and sports industries. Among those in attendance were racing legend and Team Penske owner Roger Penske; Aerosmith band members Tom Hamilton, Brad Whitford and Joey Kramer; Las Vegas magicians and entertainers Siegfried and Roy; Cody Walker, brother of the late actor Paul Walker; TV personality Adam Ferrara; and Ford GT Le Mans winner Joey Hand.

Top vehicles sold during the 2019 Barrett-Jackson Las Vegas Auction included:

- 1 2017 Ford GT '66 Heritage Ed.....\$1,540,000
- 2 2019 Ferrari 488 Spider368,500
- 3 2013 Ferrari 458 Spider330,000
- 4 2005 Ford GT324,500
- 5 2006 Ford GT Heritage Edition324,500
- 6 1953 Corvette 235/150 Convertible...275,000
- 7 1953 Corvette 235/150 Convertible...220,000
- 8 1964 Corvette Custom Coupe203,500
- 9 1957 Dodge Power Wagon Custom...203,500
- 10 1963 Corvette 327/360 SW Fuelie ...187,000
- 11 2015 Rolls-Royce Ghost176,000
- 12 2017 Dodge Viper ACR176,000

The three charity vehicles sold in Las

Vegas included:

- 1 2009 Ford Mustang Custom Coupe “AV8R” for Reach Out Worldwide\$40,000
- 2 2018 Ford Fusion NASCAR Cup Series Car for United Way for SE Michigan.....\$250,000
- 3 2005 Ford GT for JDRF\$270,000

Barrett-Jackson’s 100 percent No Reserve Automobilia Auction included one of the finest collections of tin and porcelain signs. The top five automobilia pieces sold during at Las Vegas auction included four neon-porcelain signs and one gas pump as noted:

- 1940s-50s Chevrolet Super Service...\$37,950
- 1930s Ford V8 Neon Porcelain Sign...\$34,500
- 1950s Phillips 66 Porcelain w Neon...\$25,300
- Circa 1940s m/s 80 Gas Pump/ Ford...\$24,150
- Circa 1940s-early '50s Shell Oil sign...\$23,000

See elsewhere in this issue for Barrett-Jackson’s 2020 Scottsdale Auction schedule and location information.

For information on consignments, bidding, advance tickets and VIP Packages for Barrett-Jackson’s 2020 Scottsdale Auction, visit www.Barrett-Jackson.com. ■



H.E.R.: Honesty, Excellence, Respect

Giving women what they want in a car buying experience by Joe Sage

Cathy Droz is an accomplished automotive journalist, author, speaker and radio host whose passion for the automobile industry started early. Starting at age 10, she would help her dad buy a new family car every year, and by age 17 she had learned everything she needed to know to go it alone. Her parents encouraged this, as she went before the family with storyboards and brochure cutouts outlining her thought process and conclusion as to what vehicle they should buy that year. Her dad dropped her off at the dealership, where she asked all the questions, chose all the options and negotiated the deal. Her dad then came by just to sign the check. A star was born.

Droz's career soon led to her own full-service automotive advertising agency for years in metro Phoenix, giving her particular insights into the dealership environment. And working in automotive media, she has test-driven more than 500 vehicles, giving her deep knowledge of makes, models and features. Together, these foundations fed an ever-expanding knowledge base about the automotive purchase experience, and—being very familiar with it from the female buyer's side of the equation—she published her first book, *A Woman's Guide to Buying a Car with Confidence and Street Smarts—Don't Let These High Heels Fool You*. (Droz is originally a native of New York City, so you'd best believe she has the sharpest of street smarts.) The book's fundamental goal is to effectively educate the car-buying consumer and to make the search for that perfect vehicle a pleasant and rewarding experience.

HER Certified® and the H.E.R. Academy

In parallel with this effort, Droz is founder and CEO of HER Certified®—named for the interrelated goals of Honesty, Excellence and Respect—the industry's first comprehensive certified dealer program aimed at helping dealerships better serve female car buyers. HER Certified's "trifecta" full-service employee training is designed to ensure a dealership not only meets, but exceeds, a woman's expectations when buying (and when servicing) a vehicle.

Qualified dealerships who participate receive in-person sales training, on-line training (the H.E.R. Academy), downloadable workbooks, a personal copy of *A Woman's Guide to Buying a Car with Confidence and Street Smarts* for each participant, an award for the dealership to promote their achievement, and a hundred more copies of the book to hand out to customers.

Up to 100 employees are included in the program, which focuses on optimizing sales, service, finance and overall relationships with female customers. Everyone gets trained, even the receptionist. (Sometimes the program runs in two or three sessions within a day, as those in sales, service and finance successively break away for class.) Each employee must achieve a score of 85 percent or higher online (which is done at the individual's own pace), then receives a framable document.

Dealerships have learned plenty from this process, as has Droz herself.

Some dealers face their own challenges in becoming HER Certified. Ninety percent of dealerships are run or owned by men, who generally already feel they are doing a very good job with their female customers. Online reviews, however, sometimes suggest a different story. HER Certified is engineered to close that gap.

Women are supremely important to dealerships. Sixty-five percent of purchases are made by women, 85 percent are influenced by women, and these numbers—and women's buying power—are rising daily. Nonetheless, sales-

men tend to look at the man when both genders come in the door, even when specifically told that the woman is the buyer.

"I hear it all the time," Droz says. "Women are still afraid to go to a dealer by themselves to purchase a car for themselves. If they don't have a male in the household, they will ask a male neighbor to go with them, because they fear they will be ripped off or disrespected."

This is not just in the sales experience, either—it's especially true now in the service department, where customer service is extremely important, the dealerships make good profit, and long term relationships really develop.

"Most women want to work with another woman," Droz has found. The perhaps surprising downside is that there's a risk that if a female customer is then dissatisfied, she will feel as though a sister has dissed her.

Droz's book aims to build a woman's confidence so she can go in by herself, not bring a man along, know how a dealership operates—and know they have so much buying power. "They just need to do their research before they go in," says Droz. "Research is key. The internet provides so much information, including what your neighbor paid for the same vehicle."

This whole process also helps a dealer draw more women in an era when more people are avoiding traditional dealerships completely, utilizing more on-

A WOMAN'S GUIDE TO BUYING A CAR

WITH CONFIDENCE AND STREET SMARTS...



DON'T LET THESE HIGH HEELS FOOL YOU

CATHY DROZ

line research and sales resources.

The HER Certified program can raise a dealer's Customer Service Index (CSI) score, particularly with women customers. This is important—and also educational—for the dealerships, as it turns out women may not only rate them lower due to experiences in the buying process or the vehicle itself. Statistics show female customers also have a keen interest and concerns about factors beyond the purchase experience, such as the facility's cleanliness, amenities and general presentation. Surveys show dealerships being dinged for such items as a burned-out lightbulb in the restroom or lack of coffee creamer. These are easily remedied, but it has often taken the HER Certified process to put them on a dealer's radar.

Droz notes that much has changed in recent years, as family-owned dealerships are consolidated into corporate takeovers. "What I expected to be natural and what I expected to always be the way any car-buying situation should be has changed," she says.

"When a mom 'n' pop owned a dealership or two, they really concerned themselves with how it's run and how the place was kept up. Now, with huge chains taking over, it's all about the numbers. But when the big groups realize that if they treat people with Honesty, Excellence and Respect, then they can have the good numbers like in the old days. It should always be about customer service—for men and for women."

Droz has had women call after they have made an unhappy purchase or questionable deal, and they are sometimes a little embarrassed that they, as women, are now calling another woman who knew the things they didn't.

Women who have read the book, however (which she considers a more private experience) have contacted her to say how proud they are that they bought a car on their own, without a man, and negotiated a great deal. She says this has been the most rewarding aspect of her whole program. Everyone's a winner. The customer benefits from a better relationship, and the dealership benefits from better all-important referrals.

Smart Women Series

In addition to HER Certified within the automotive industry, Cathy (with three other women) has now embarked upon an event series that offers programs for women, in unique venues, on such topics as financial wealth, real estate, reinventing oneself and, yes, car buying.

The first program, directly tying in with Droz's HER Certified background, was *Women Auto Know*, held at Alfa Romeo/Fiat of North Scottsdale. It included a speaker on finance for women, a book signing, and discussions on how buying a car "doesn't need to be like a root canal." Men are also always welcome at these events.

More about Cathy Droz

Cathy Droz's HER Certified's dealership program participants are predominantly in metro Phoenix, while her book is sold globally. Droz has also been flown to manufacturers' headquarters to share her knowledge and methodology.

A champion of community service and leadership, Cathy is a member and past president of the Phoenix Automotive Press Association, a past president and executive board member for Silent Witness, a distinguished member of *Worldwide Who's Who of Entrepreneurs*, a 2016 *Phoenix Suns Amazing Women* award winner, a 2018 Honoree for *Outstanding Women in Business*, a volunteer for the NFL AZ Legends (an organization of retired players living in Arizona), and Alice Cooper's Solid Rock charity. She donates four percent of all revenue to help promote financial literacy in young girls via the Girl Scouts of America, explaining, "it is with the Girl Scouts that I learned and developed my leadership skills."

Cathy Droz lives in Phoenix with her husband Manny. They are proud of their three children and nine grandchildren (including two daughters and four granddaughters). Cathy's wish is that her efforts will create a better world for women, as a legacy to her family. ■



For more information, visit www.hercertified.com

Photo: Hark Studio

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SPECIAL EVENTS: JANUARY AUCTIONS

	FRI 10	SAT 11	SUN 12	MON 13	TUE 14	WED 15	THU 16	FRI 17	SAT 18	SUN 19
Barrett-Jackson										
Bonhams										
Gooding & Company										
RM Sotheby's										
Russo and Steele										
Silver Auctions Arizona										
Worldwide Auctioneers										

Arizona January Auction Week 2020

Barrett-Jackson
49th Annual Collector Car Auction Event
Nine days:
Saturday, January 11 - Sunday, January 19, 2020
Westworld of Scottsdale
16601 N Pima Road, Scottsdale AZ 85260
(AZ Loop 101 & Frank Lloyd Wright Blvd)

Bonhams
9th Annual Scottsdale Auction
Thursday, January 16, 2020
(viewing Tuesday-Thursday, Jan 14-16)
Westin Kierland Resort & Spa
6902 E Greenway Pkwy, Scottsdale AZ 85254

Gooding & Company
13th Annual Scottsdale Auction
Friday-Saturday, January 17-18, 2020
(viewing Wednesday-Saturday, Jan 15-18)
Scottsdale Fashion Square
4700 N Scottsdale Rd, Scottsdale AZ 85251
(Goldwater & E Highland Ave)

MAG Auctions
(Silver Auctions AZ now dba MAG Auctions)
Friday-Sunday, Jan 10-12, 2020
Peoria Sports Complex
16101 N 83rd Ave, Peoria AZ 85382

RM Sotheby's
21st Annual Automobiles of Arizona
Thursday-Friday, January 16-17, 2020
(preview Weds-Fri, January 15-17 unconfirmed)
Arizona Biltmore
2400 E Missouri Ave, Phoenix AZ 85016
(24th and Camelback)

Russo and Steele
20th Annual Sports & Muscle in Scottsdale
Wednesday-Sunday, January 15-19, 2020
(preview Weds Jan 15, sale starts Thurs Jan 16)
N Scottsdale Rd, east side just south of Loop 101 Fwy
Scottsdale AZ 85260

Worldwide Auctioneers
4th Annual Arizona January Auction
Wednesday, Jan 15, 2020
(preview Sunday-Weds, Jan 12-15 unconfirmed)
6460 E McDowell Road, Scottsdale AZ 85257
(McDowell Rd & 64th St/Galvin Pkwy)



Value & fun BY JOE SAGE

Over the past year and a half or so, Hyundai has grown its crossover/SUV lineup to five, adding at both ends of the size scale. At the big end, the three-row Palisade arrived this summer, while last year brought the sporty little Kona. In between remain Tucson, Santa Fe and Santa Fe XL.

Five Kona models have a 147-hp 2.0L engine in lower trim levels or a 175-hp 1.6L turbo in upper trims. Prices range from just \$19,990 to \$27,500 for core trims for 2019 (with a one-off \$30,550 Iron Man Edition also in the mix). Front-wheel drive is standard on all, with AWD just \$1400 on any.

Closely spaced prices can satisfy any budget, with inclusions plentiful from bottom to top. Kona product planners get a solid "A" for this staircase. (This continues brandwide, in fact, as even the big up-to-eight-seat Palisade starts at just \$31,550.)

We drove multiple trims of Kona at its launch, held appropriately on the Big Island of Hawaii—in sunshine and rain, from sea level to volcanic high

altitude. We then had a top-trim 1.6T Ultimate AWD for a week back home in Arizona, which we took on a healthy Cottonwood-Sedona loop. We've driven Kona at several awards comparos nationally, where it has won its category repeatedly. Here we have a more modest trim back home in Arizona.

This Kona SEL front-driver—just second up in the lineup, at \$21,800 base—brings you 17-inch alloys, leather wheel, blind-spot and collision warning, lane keep, heated front seats, keyless entry/start and more. A Tech Package added to ours at just \$1600 (see sidebar) is also a remarkable value.

Kona looks great in its wilder island-inspired colors—Surf Blue, Sunset Orange, Lime Twist and such—but this example in Chalk White shows off its curves and its black trim bits handsomely (all the moreso as SEL has less chrome, which some may even prefer, than upper trims).

It's a neat, tidy package, stylish, distinctive yet immediately brand-recognizable. Another "A."

We picked up two more adults at the airport, with luggage (they had hours to kill between inter-

national flights). Even with all seats up, there's almost 20 cubic feet for cargo (45.8 with rear seats down), and their five sizable pieces fit easily. The taller of the two gallantly got in the back, where legroom, at 34.6 inches, is in fact only an inch less than in the Sonata, Hyundai's biggest sedan. And we headed out on a Beeline Highway and Saguaro Lake day trip. That's a 700-to-800-pound payload, plus altitude gains, on that 147-hp engine—and it did great. The manumatic can be useful in town when the light turns green, but in motion, engine size made little difference. Our backseat rider was aware of the rear suspension on one rough stretch—FWD models have coupled torsion beam rear suspension, while AWD versions have multi-link (for even more value in the \$1400 AWD uptick).

Kona has been an instant hit and is a carryover model for 2020 (Iron Man is out, and a midrange SEL Plus is added). Prices increase by just \$110 to \$250, and with new treats added—available Sunset Orange with Ultra

Black interior in top trims; smart cruise control on Ultimate trim; 4.2-inch display, wireless charging, HomeLink auto-dim mirror, and leather wheel/shifter on a wider range of trims; a battery warmer system on top trims; new touchscreen navigation on SEL; and some new paint colors.

Smaller than the traditionally "subcompact" Tucson, Kona is called simply "small." As this increasing overlaps, you might skip over size naming conventions and just go try them on for size. You very well may find this smallest one is plenty big enough. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	.....2.0L DOHC D-CVET multi-point FI 4-cyl
HP/TORQUE	.....147 hp / 132 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd auto w/OD lock-up torque converter, electronic shift lock system, manual mode, torque-vectoring via braking
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD
SUSPENSION	.....F: MacPherson strut w coils, gas shocks, advanced valving, stblzr bar; R: coupled torsion beam axle (FWD only), gas shocks, advanced valving, stblzr bar;
STEERING	.....motor driven rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....F: 305mm vented disc; R: 284mm solid disc
WHEELS / TIRES	.....17x7.0J alloy / 215/55R17
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....164.0 / 102.4 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....34.8 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....6.7 in
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....(w sunroof) 38.0 / 37.8 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....41.5 / 34.6 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....19.2 / 45.8 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....2890-3065 lb
FUEL CAPACITY	.....13.2 gal
MPG	.....27/33/30 (city/hwy/comb)

SEL INCLUDES: keyless entry/start, heated front seats, rear privacy glass, leather-wrapped steering wheel, 17-inch alloy wheels, blind-spot collision warning.

BASE PRICE	.....\$21,800
TECH PKG:	power tilt-slide sunroof, 6-way power driver seat w power lumbar, fog lights, infinity premium audio, BlueLink 3 years, shark-fin antenna
CARPETED FLOOR MATS125
DESTINATION CHARGE1045
TOTAL\$24,570



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- Won't Bottom Out or Lose Their Bounce Over Time
- Reduces Discomfort Brought On by Standing On Hard Surfaces
- And They Just Feel & Look Great!
- Must Have for Every Garage!



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Zoomtown Lights

HOLIDAY SEASON AT ISM RACEWAY

Back for the second consecutive year, Zoomtown Lights at ISM Raceway will brighten the West Valley for guests with its one-of-a-kind drive-through holiday light show throughout the well-known NASCAR venue. The giant light show experience is over 1.6 miles long, includes more than 300 displays and utilizes more than three million LED lights to transform ISM Raceway into a winter wonderland.

"We're thrilled to bring back Zoomtown Lights and this unique holiday experience," said Julie Giese, President of ISM Raceway. "The thousands of guests that came out last year raved about the lights and displays, and especially the opportunity to drive in and around the race track. This season will be even bigger and brighter, and we're excited to continue this holiday tradition here in the West Valley."

Zoomtown Lights is a holiday experience unlike anything else in the Valley and is the only light show in Arizona that allows guests to drive inside the recently redeveloped Raceway and onto the same pit road used by NASCAR's elite.

While driving throughout the Raceway, guests enjoy a variety of holiday-themed displays, including snowfall canopies, trees of light and iconic nursery rhymes, as well as special motorsports-inspired displays such as Santa Claus in a stock car and a NASCAR hauler filled with toys.

Approximately 30 miles of steel were designed, cut, bent and welded to build the displays. There are over 400 frame units throughout the course and more than 30 different scenes. There are approximately three million points of light along over 50 miles of strung lights throughout the displays. The displays involved a nine-month manufacturing process and require over 7,000 man-hours to set up and take down.

Zoomtown Lights will be open to visitors every night from November 29 through December 31. The experience opens every day at 6 pm and runs until 9 pm Sunday through Thursday, 10 pm Friday and Saturday.

Admission starts at \$25 per car. Advance pricing is available now by calling ISM Raceway at 866-408-RACE (7223).



Dates:

November 29 - December 31

Hours:

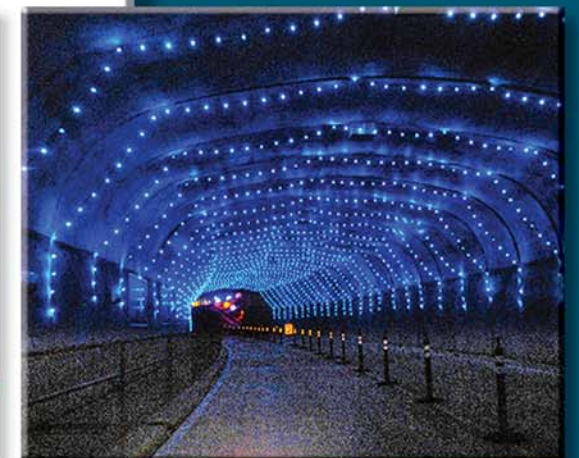
Sunday-Thursday6 to 9 pm
Friday-Saturday6 to 10 pm

Gate pricing:

November 29 to December 19:
Sunday - Thursday\$25 per car
Friday & Saturday\$30 per car
December 20-31\$30 per car
Bus Price (10-plus)\$50 per bus

Information: 866-408-RACE (7223)

Rain: In the event of rain, please check Facebook or Twitter for the latest updates: @ISMRaceway
Details subject to change



Family portrait

Brochure photo in real life: recreating a "family portrait" with all six original early 1990s Acura models.

Our correspondent, a world class Acura fan, owns all six, carefully acquired in the highest trim level available for each body style, all with manual transmissions, and in his preferred color for each.

By Tyson Hugie



I'd been wanting to do this for years. Or at least since May 2018, when I added the last piece to this puzzle. I decided to have a little fun bright and early on a Sunday morning and stage my cars like a photo that might have appeared in an early '90s full-line brochure from Acura, since these six cars are the complete roster of body styles available in Acura dealerships from 1991 to 1993 (after that, the Integra body style changed). Luckily, I only had one neighbor drive by at 6:00 am while I was on top of my stepladder looking like a goofball. Here are details on each of the cars (left to right below, top to bottom at right):

MODEL YEAR / MODEL	TRANSMISSION	COLOR	ODOMETER
1992 Acura NSX	5-speed manual	Formula Red	115,000 miles
1992 Acura Integra GS-R	5-speed manual	Aztec Green	251,000 miles
1994 Acura Legend GS Sedan	6-speed manual	Desert Mist	161,000 miles
1994 Acura Legend LS Coupe	6-speed manual	Desert Mist	566,000 miles
1994 Acura Vigor GS	5-speed manual	Arcadia Green	114,000 miles
1992 Acura Integra GS Sedan	5-speed manual	Torino Red	73,000 miles

I had some fun putting this together. The alarm went off at 4:45 am, and it took about an hour to set up the cars, then only about 15 minutes to shoot. But it took 16 years to put together the collection. Two cars came from Utah, two from California, one from Washington and one from Colorado. Not a single car was found on Phoenix Craigslist, despite my persistent digging. ■





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A WEEK WITH : 2020 LEXUS NX 300h

Numbers are only half the story BY JOE SAGE

If there's one thing that has come from this era of electrification, it's a burgeoning understanding of the value of torque. Case in point: when we received the Lexus NX 300h hybrid crossover for a week and saw its 154-hp engine rating (especially coming right out of a week with the 471-hp Lexus LC 500), we weren't expecting high performance.

Even at 194 hp, gasoline engine-electric combined (see sidebar), we had dropped horsepower by almost 60 percent from the V8 LC, but we had also dropped price by about the same. Despite this being a crossover, we had also dropped weight by more than 20 percent, though despite this being a hybrid, we had only gained 20 percent highway fuel mileage—however, city fuel mileage was more than doubled by moving to the NX 300h.

But the NX hybrid proved to be a bit of a rocket, all due to the immediate full dose of torque delivered by an electrified powertrain as soon as your foot depresses the pedal. Interestingly, total torque is not one of their published specifications. But it is there by the bucketload.

The NX's drive personality also benefits from its visual persona, especially in an unassuming coat of Nebula Gray paint. You know what they say about assuming, and assuming this is unassuming would be a big mistake. It's a sleeper—all the better to top-perform while laying low.

That sleeper persona gave us studies in relativ-

ity among our fellow travelers, such as choosing the freeway on-ramp with only a Corvette in it, rather than the one full of hybrids and econoboxes—and wailing right on up it with the 'Vette. Someone else actively tried to block us from a freeway lane change, so we gunned it to simply gain a spot well in front. Its stated 9.1-second zero-to-60 time and 112-mph top speed do not suggest any of this, but it's all on tap at normal cruising speeds.

And we surprised ourselves, entering a busy surface artery, waiting for a big gap in traffic, not expecting much pep out of this thing, finally getting that gap, only to realize we hadn't needed to wait—the NX kicks itself in the pants very nicely.

As our logbook repeatedly noted, "the numbers lie. It's ridiculously peppy. On the freeway, nail it and it just goes!" People will tell you all day long that electric torque is the big difference in the power experience, and you'll tell yourself this, too. We never tried it with four people, nor with a load of cargo, but the torque should apply the same.

The additional dimension is that it's a Lexus. We surmise we surprise some mainstream brand drivers with this—perhaps surprised a Lexus could even be a sleeper, or probably concluding, well, it's a Lexus, no wonder it's hot—confirming Lexus has delivered on their badge promise in both performance and its premium technology and features, all in \$39,000 compact crossover. Surprise! ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	.....2.5L Atkinson 4 EFI, DOHC 16v dual VVT-i
HYBRID SYSTEM	.....series/parallel system w gasoline engine, hi-voltage battery & elec motors
MOTOR GENERATORS	.....MG1: AC 650V, perm magnet: generator, engine start, charges hybrid battery; MG2: AC 650V, perm magnet: drives front wheels; MGR (rear): AC 650V, 67 hp (50kW): drive rear wheels; (MG2 & MGR): regeneration during braking.
BATTERY PACK	.....244.8V 204-cell sealed Ni-MH
DRIVETRAIN	....."full-time all-weather drive" AWD
HP/TORQUE	.....gasoline engine 154 hp / 152 lb-ft
TOTAL SYSTEM POWER	.....194 hp
TRANSMISSION	.....electronic CVT, power split for electronic all- or front-wheel-drive control system
0-TO-62 / TOP SPEED	.....9.1 sec / 112 mph (lim)
SUSPENSION	.....F: MacPherson strut, coils; R: trailing arm double wishbone, coils
STEERING	.....electric power steering
BRAKES	.....F: vented disc / R: disc
WHEELS / TIRES	.....(std) 17x7.0 / 225/65R17
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....182.3 / 104.7 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....6.7 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....39.8 ft
APPROACH / DEPARTURE	.....28.7° / 24.5°
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....(w moonroof) 37.4 / 38.1 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....42.8 / 36.1 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....16.8 / 53.7 cu.ft
TOW CAPACITY	.....1500 lb
WEIGHT	.....4180 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....87 octane or higher / 14.8 gal
MPG	.....33/30/31 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	.....\$39,070
.....PANORAMIC VIEW BACKUP MONITOR	.....800
.....INSIDE MIRROR: elec-chronic auto-dim, Homelink	.....125
.....TRIPLE-BEAM LED HEADLAMPS W AFS	.....1515
.....NAV SYSTEM: 10.3" display, 10-speaker premium audio, Lexus Dynamic Nav (w 3-year trial)	.....1860
.....INTUITIVE PARK ASSIST W AUTO BRAKE	.....535
.....POWER REAR DOOR W KICK SENSOR	.....550
.....PREMIUM PKG: 18" wheels, heated-vented front seats, prem LED DRLs, pwr tilt/slide moonroof, memory mirrors & driver seat, lumbar, BSM w RCTA	.....1270
.....DOOR EDGE GUARDS	.....140
.....PAINT PROTECTION FILM, 3M	.....429
.....CARGO MAT/NET, WHEEL LOCKS, KEY GLOVE	.....183
.....DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1025
TOTAL	.....\$49,702



VMI: Vantage Mobility International modified minivan manufacturing factory tour

By Tyson Hugie

Do you have a friend or family member who uses a wheelchair? A local Arizona company is an industry leader in mobility for folks with disabilities. It's a place called Vantage Mobility

International (VMI).

Ever since the original Chrysler minivan debuted in 1987—and even a bit prior—the founders of VMI have tasked themselves with customizing vehicles to make them wheelchair friendly. The WAV (Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle) industry has since become a large and important part of the automotive world. It's estimated there are around 30,000 new WAVs sold across the nation each year, from a variety of manufacturers.

VMI leaders and representatives took us on a guided tour of their manufacturing and assembly facility in Phoenix, where Director of Production Brian Crowe introduced us to the step-by-step process by which a new minivan, straight from Chrysler, Dodge or Toyota, or a Honda Pilot SUV (VMI is the first to pioneer this conversion)—goes through a complete transformation.

What starts as a cookie-cutter family hauler

gets stripped down to basically just a shell. The floor is lowered 10 inches or more via installation of a new frame. Precision welds are made where the doors are extended, the ramp is installed, and the engine is dropped so that the vehicle's center of gravity and sense of balance still remain largely the same. It takes about two and a half days from start to finish for the conversion to take place, and there are about 200 personnel making it all happen.

Because of the vast number of unique needs WAV customers have, the vehicles themselves are also heavily customizable. Some vans even have the ability to "kneel," like city buses, to lower the angle of the ramp and make for easier ride-up. There are features available such as an integrated remote for quick stow/deploy conversion functionality, power sliding doors, flexible seating configurations and rust-mitigation coatings on all steel

components. A van that's intended to be driven by a caregiver, for example, will need to be set up differently than one that will be operated by someone who is in a wheelchair.

One great thing about VMI's customization work is that any factory warranties on the vehicles from the manufacturer still apply. VMI has such a great relationship with the automakers, in fact, that its engineers are invited to take part in the design discussions when new models are undergoing development. VMI's Phoenix facility distributes its vans

to dealerships only, but its Atlanta operation sells converted vans directly to end users.

The leadership and executive teams at VMI are mostly all new to the organization—within about the last three years—and they are all passionate about what they do. There is a huge opportunity and a need to enable the great numbers of people around the country who have mobility challenges. The more the VMI team can do to make readily-available solutions for those needs, the happier they themselves will be. ■



HOW THEY'RE BUILT

Working closely with original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), VMI has developed a state-of-the-art mobility van conversion facility featuring the latest in assembly line technology and CAD software. Every accessible vehicle conversion goes through an extensive process that begins with the removal of interior components and undercarriage, and concludes with a 200-point inspection and extensive road test.

The process for building a VMI-converted Chrysler, Dodge, Honda or Toyota wheelchair accessible van is complex. Refined by the Lean Six Sigma methodology, this cutting-edge process can transform an ordinary vehicle into a new level of independence for wheelchair users.

Without compromising the integrity of the original chassis, drivetrain, brakes or suspension systems, Vantage Mobility Inc. completely reworks each van. The floor is replaced, lines lengthened, body cladding revised, suspension modified and seating adjusted to accommodate a wheelchair. Every wheelchair-accessible vehicle maintains the same integrity and character it was originally designed with, but then gets personalized for each customer with paint, style and finish.

To guarantee accuracy and quality in every detail, inside and out, the assembly line utilizes a series of checkpoints throughout the conversion process to ensure functionality and repeatability. Each system and step has been thoroughly engineered, tested and approved by the OEMs to deliver the perks and safety of the original vehicle, with user-friendly wheelchair-accessible capabilities. ■

SIDE-ENTRY MINIVANS: Chrysler Pacifica,

Dodge Grand Caravan, Toyota Sienna

SIDE-ENTRY SUV: Honda Pilot

REAR-ENTRY MINIVAN: Dodge Grand Caravan

PLATFORM LIFTS: Clearway, KlearVue,

Reliant, SlideAway

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Chillin' at 5000 feet

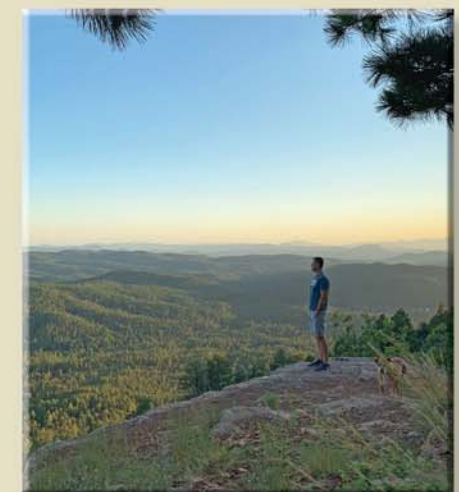
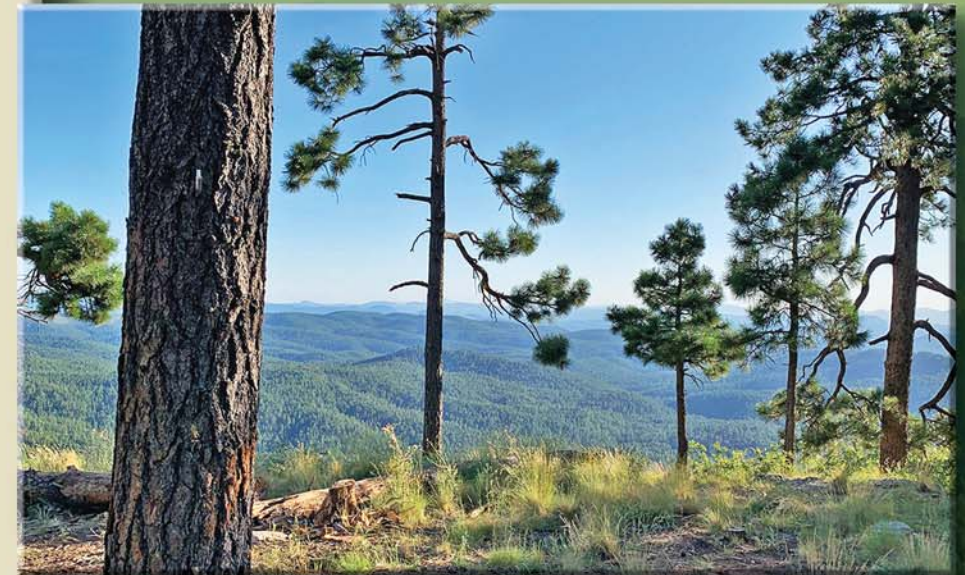
BY TYSON HUGIE

I had left town every weekend for six weeks. Exhausted didn't begin to describe how I felt. But when it comes to making the most out of my summer, I live by a motto my mom emphasizes: *carpe diem!* For that late August weekend's excursion, I ventured to the Sitgreaves National Forest in the mountain ranges about 2.5 hours northeast of Phoenix, a round trip of 250 miles, a spot where summer temperatures typically range about 20 or more degrees cooler than the Valley.

Four friends and I found a great campsite just off Young Road, a couple of miles down a narrow dirt road that overlooked the Mogollon Rim and offered fantastic views to the south. We set up camp and stoked the fire, then cooked burgers and brats over the flames. Nobody had any particularly good ghost stories to tell as dusk fell, but we spent a good chunk of time proposing potential names for Adam's soon-to-be new dog.

We managed to avoid any run-ins with local wildlife, and the overnight low dipped to a pleasant 60 degrees. Woody whipped up some delicious breakfast burritos with ham, bacon and green salsa for breakfast the following morning. All too soon, it was time to pack up the site and head back down to civilization. My 2013 Acura ILX fared well on the dirt road, though high grass in the median occasionally tickled the undercarriage (others had driven up in pickups and Jeeps). ■

The view from the Ponderosa forests, south across the Mogollon Rim. // Breakfast is served! // Sunset on the Rim, camp set up and tales around the fire. // One more look on a relaxed Saturday morning.





Dream drive event delivers much data

By Joe Sage Photos: Doug Berger and Bailey O'Bar for NWAPA

We cover 455 mountain, river and high plains miles in Washington State and Oregon over three days in 24 top trim performance vehicles worth a total of \$1.96 million and bearing 8870 horsepower



Run to the Sun is an annual event of NWAPA (the Northwest Automotive Press Association), a professional media organization in the Pacific Northwest, of which we are an outlier member. This was our sixth year participating. Routes comprise two-lanes through canyons, mountains, lava fields and historic Western towns, much like the Arizona high country (though there is more water up there, not least the mighty Columbia River). The vehicles are also very much in line with tastes in our state, making this event a solid bellwether for Arizona buyers.

The event is a statistician's dream, with many ways to total and compare prices, horsepower, fuel mileage and other key attributes for 24 vehicles in four categories.

There are also 24 drivers, a key distinguishing element of this event. Whereas most media comparos happen at a fixed location (track, off-road course and/or driving loop), most have wildly mismatched numbers of cars and drivers, more vehicles than it's mathematically possible to drive in a given period of time, bottlenecks around some vehicles and neglect around others, NWAPA Run to the Sun has a predetermined rotation of vehicles and drivers along a rally-style route of around 500 miles. Each driver is guaranteed to drive each vehicle—for a fulfilling period of time on a challenging route demonstrating real world performance. The driving and analytical opportunities this provides are unmatched.

Manufacturers enter vehicles they feel offer core appeal in Performance Coupe, Performance SUV, Convertible and Performance Sedan categories. Each is generally a high-powered model, an enhanced body style, a special edition or all of the above.

Time-Distance-Speed stats

The 24 segments of our route varied in length from eight miles (for which we had the Volvo XC90) to 39, the first leg from the airport to the hotel (for us, in the Hyundai Veloster N). The longest regular legs were two 26-milers (for us, in the Polaris Slingshot SLR and the Ford Explorer ST).

The route book's estimated times for the 24 legs ran from 14 minutes to 35 minutes (or 50 for that airport-to-hotel leg). Some legs have more highway, some more twisties, so time and distance do not run hand-in-glove. The shortest estimated time leg was for us 11 miles in the Kia Stinger, while the longest estimated time legs (not count-

ing the Day 1 hotel run) were for us in the Explorer ST and the Slingshot (the only one that matched its rankings for both distance and estimated time).

From that information, it's simple to calculate average speed, though a little misleading, with slow motion in and out of staging areas. But we can still compare. An eight-mile run up a twisty 689-foot climb from Antelope to Shaniko, Oregon averaged just 32.0 mph based on route book distance and estimated time (we ran this in the 400-hp Volvo XC90). The fastest segment, calculated at 57.6 mph per route book time and distance, was a 24-mile run from Mill Creek Bridge to the Madras Airport—beautiful open two-lanes (also reportedly populated by purpose-built state troopers), quick even with the last few miles local and slow. For this, we had the 505-hp Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio.

Horsepower-Price stats overall

Although every vehicle in this event is performance- and/or fun-oriented, there is plenty of variety in power. Only three little convertibles had under 200 hp. Sixteen vehicles ranged through the 200s to 400s. Five vehicles were above 500 hp, including two SUVs, two coupes and one sedan.

And although each is a top trim of some sort, there is plenty of variety in price. By base price, four were under \$30 grand and four were in six digits (topped by a \$327,000 base Rolls-Royce, the other three each 100-and-something). Price-attested range mostly runs in parallel, with exceptions—such as the least expensive base price of all (\$21,290 for the Fiat) jumping up into the \$40s (and eighth overall) when outfitted. Only two remained in the \$20s at this point, though the Slingshot nudged over \$30k by a hair only when its destination charge was included. Add-ons pushed the Lexus above a \$100,000 total price, while Rolls-Royce options added over \$100k to its price.

The core mission is an immersive experience with each vehicle. But at the end, each driver also votes for a "Most Fun" vehicle in each category, as well as one overall (the voting aspect was added just a couple of years ago).

Each driver's insertion point into their first car is different, but the overall sequence is the same for all, carefully choreographed for meaningful relativity within each category by event organizers.

Our narrative blends the universal sequence with how it fell for us individually—thus starting with our last two coupes from Day 3, then moving to the first coupe we drove on Day 1, continuing into Day 2 and keeping that category together.

MPG is highway (with one MPGe-combined, as noted). Prices are for base and ours as driven. Models are 2019 or 2020 as noted for each.

KEEP RIGHT >>

PERFORMANCE COUPES

HP RANGE: 275-755 (avg 468.3)
BASE PRICE RANGE: \$26,900-\$327,000
 (avg \$100,145 or \$62,336 without Rolls-Royce)
AS DRIVEN \$ RANGE: \$29,920-\$427,875
 (avg \$122,698 or \$71,835 without Rolls-Royce)

Note: Each driver arrives at the Portland Airport and dives into their first car at a predetermined point in the overall sequence. (Only four out of 24 people would happen to start with the first vehicle in any given category.) For us, the event began with car number three in the Performance Coupes category, Hyundai Veloster N, and ended, at the end of Day Three, with the first two in the coupe group as our last two driven. (It all makes sense if you visualize the two ends knit together on kind of a Mobius strip.) We're inserting those "first two" here, to give you the complete set all in a row.

("First two" coupes, driven at end of Day 3)

Dodge Challenger R/T Scat Pack WB (2019)
485 hp / 24 mpg hwy.....\$39,245 / \$56,600

The diverse Dodge Challenger lineup ranges from a \$27,295 rear-drive SXT up to the staggering 797-hp SRT Hellcat Redye at \$69,650, with GT and R/T trims and a couple of all-wheel-drive models along the way—a major achievement of which is keeping the prices usefully stair-stepped through them all. Most are in the upper \$20s to upper \$30s, followed by a \$20-30k jump into the SRT Hellcats—which puts the R/T Scat Pack at a very sweet spot, top dog just shy of the Hellcat price jump. It is accordingly popular. Ours adds \$15k or so in options, notably the Widebody treatment (\$6000 to mimic the much pricier Hellcat), as well as a wide range of creature comforts and tech/entertainment features. "Sublime" paint is literally the icing on the cake. Our next-to-last car

on Day 3, this 485-hp Challenger gave us a solid run on I-84 along the Columbia River back toward Portland.

Toyota GR Supra (2020)
335 hp / 31 mpg hwy.....\$55,250 / \$57,375

One of the most anticipated cars of the new model year, you can read about the GR Supra in depth, including the history of the Supra lineup and its rebirth, from its reveal at Barrett-Jackson in Arizona in January, in our March-April issue. With Supra's base price carefully kept below \$50k, our sample at Run to the Sun was one of just 1500 Launch Edition models at \$55,250, which brings you details from 19-inch forged matte black alloy wheels and red mirror caps, to your choice of black, white or in our case Renaissance Red paint. Dramatic styling, sophisticated suspension and above-30-mpg fuel mileage aside, Supra's defining attribute is its adherence to the badge's inline-6 engine heritage. As our last vehicle in the event—a nice finish—we didn't get to put Supra's suspension and handling to much of a test on the last stretch of I-84 to Gresham, but we enjoyed its 335 horses.

Day 1...

Upon our arrival in Portland, our particular rotation saw us start the event in what is officially the third of seven Performance Coupes—a category ranging overall from 275 to 755 horsepower and from \$29,920 to \$427,875, price as tested. A one-vehicle day, Day 1 comprised an afternoon drive segment from the airport to our overnight spot along the Columbia River on the Washington State side.

(The third coupe, our first car on Day 1)

Hyundai Veloster N (2019)
275 hp / 28 mpg hwy.....\$26,900 / \$29,920

We first drove the Veloster N at its launch event, held at Thunderhill Raceway, north of Sacramento, and through-

out that region. It's the first of a new N performance series from Hyundai, building on an extensive, successful rally heritage. We think of it first in the signature Performance Blue paint used on their World Rally Championship cars, though red, black and white are also available. And the Ultra Black paint with strategic red highlights on our event car was a knockout—a Batmobile for under \$30 grand. The extra long first leg has everything from Interstates to a Columbia River bridge to a twisty two-lane up to our hotel—and the Veloster N's 275 hp were quite potent for its 3100-or-so pounds (25 more horses than the standard Veloster, a ten percent boost, enough to move the car fully four spots higher among the 24 vehicles in this event). One of many engineering triumphs is a total absence of front-drive torque steer.

Day 2...

For our longest drive day, with fifteen segments, we resumed with the other four Performance Coupes, then moved on to all the Convertibles, all the Performance SUVs, then just the first of the Performance Sedans, before the day was done.

(Day 2: Performance Coupes cont'd)

Rolls-Royce Wraith Black Badge (2019)
624 hp / 18 mpg hwy.....\$327,000 / \$427,875

While Rolls-Royce stands apart by virtue of its price, their regular participation really sets the tone for the whole overall event in many ways. Wraith is a standout in their lineup—a sleek beauty with just two doors (hinged at the rear, opening like a flower or a voracious beast, depending upon your point of view), priced more than \$100,000 lower than the Phantom. We've felt a bit

PERFORMANCE COUPES SORTED LOWEST TO HIGHEST BY PRICE AND POWER

	\$ BASE	\$ AS TESTED	HP
Veloster Veloster Veloster	\$26,900	\$29,920	275 hp
370Z 370Z 370Z	\$35,070	\$38,855	332 hp
Challenger Challenger Supra	\$39,245	\$56,600	335 hp
Supra Supra Lexus	\$55,250	\$57,375	472 hp
Lexus Lexus Challenger	\$96,650	\$106,185	485 hp
Corvette Corvette Rolls-Royce	\$120,900	\$142,075	624 hp
Rolls-Royce Rolls-Royce Corvette	\$327,000	\$427,875	755 hp

WINNER: "MOST FUN COUPE"
2020 Toyota GR Supra

PERFORMANCE COUPES

Category drive sequence (at right, top to bottom):

2019 Dodge Challenger R/T Scat Pack Widebody

2020 Toyota GR Supra

2019 Hyundai Veloster N

2019 Rolls-Royce Wraith Black Badge

2020 Lexus RC F Track Edition

2020 Nissan 370Z Sport A/T Special 50th Anniv Ed

2019 Chevrolet Corvette ZR1 Coupe



ostentatious driving big Phantom sedans around metro Phoenix, but on open desert two-lanes, that all quickly faded away, as it also does in the inland Northwest, in what EPA calls a midsize car. Black Badge is described as being for the "darkly obsessed," for the "creature of the night." In Arctic White, ours didn't seem sinister, and it still benefits from Black Badge 21-inch alloy wheels, aerospace-grade carbon fiber composite surfacing and Mugello Red leather highlights in its black interior. The Black Badge also pushes the 624-hp engine's torque from 590 up to 642 lb-ft. The car is both blissful and potent.

Lexus RC F Track Edition (2020)
472 hp / 24 mpg hwy.....\$96,650 / \$106,185

Weeklong drives we've had in the LFA-supercar-inspired rear-drive Lexus RC in Arizona include the discontinued turbo-4 RC 200t with horsepower in the 200s (and highway mileage in the 30s), V6 models up to the 350 F Sport with power in the 300s, and the naturally aspirated V8 RC F with power in the 400s. Prices for V6 models run from the low to high \$40s for most, with F Sport models slightly topping \$50k. Some V6 models also offer all-wheel drive. The V8 RC F is a \$64,900 luxury animal—lightweight and enhanced for 2020, with more carbon fiber, aluminum, chassis stiffness, throttle response and V8 engine acoustics. Our car here sits above even that—the RC F Track Edition shaves more weight and adds launch control, bringing its zero-to-60 time from 4.2 seconds down to just 3.96. Recognizable by its carbon fiber hood and big rear wing, inside by Circuit Red leather seats with Alcantara accents, red carbon fiber trim and red carpets, Track Edition comes in Ultra White or Matte Nebula Gray (our example) and sits around \$100,000.

Nissan 370Z Sport A/T 50th Anniv Ed (2020)
332 hp / 26 mpg hwy.....\$35,070 / \$38,855

A move straight from the second-most-expensive to the second-least-expensive car in this group does not leave us wanting when it's the Z-car, which has maintained its personality and position through many decades of evolution, arguably currently bearing the highest degree of its original spirit since the original. What more appropriate than a 50th Anniversary Edition honoring exactly that—adding personality, pizzazz and collectibility, while keeping the price close to traditional Z-car altitude. The special package, with either a 6-speed manual or pricier 7-speed automatic transmission (ours had the automatic) adds two-color exterior (white with red, like ours, or silver with black), color-keyed wheels, 50th badging on front, rear and sides, upgraded leather power seats, Alcantara steering wheel, and 50th badging on the tach, carpeting and kickplates—all for \$2600.

Chevrolet Corvette ZR1 Coupe (2019)
755 hp / 20 mpg hwy.....\$120,900 / \$142,075

We spent a swan song week with a C7 Corvette Grand Sport in Arizona just prior to the July reveal of the new mid-engine C8 (see our July/August issue) and were excited to hear Corvette was entered in the event. Would this be the C8? Despite our high hopes, the swan would sing again, but what a song—a ZR1. The 2019 Stingray

KEEP RIGHT >>



CHALLENGER: 485 hp / 24 mpg hwy
 \$39,245 base / as tested \$56,600



SUPRA: 335 hp / 31 mpg hwy
 \$55,250 base / as tested \$57,375



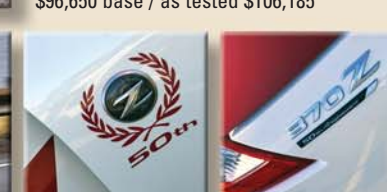
VELOSTER N: 275 hp / 28 mpg hwy
 \$26,900 base / as tested \$29,920



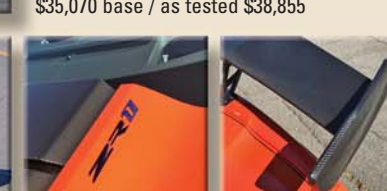
ROLLS-ROYCE WRAITH: 624 hp / 18 mpg hwy
 \$327,000 base / as tested \$427,875



LEXUS RC F: 472 hp / 24 mpg hwy
 \$96,650 base / as tested \$106,185



NISSAN 370Z: 332 hp / 26 mpg hwy
 \$35,070 base / as tested \$38,855



CORVETTE ZR1 (C7): 755 hp / 20 mpg hwy
 \$120,900 base / as tested \$142,075

starts at just \$55,900 (the C8 will also beat \$60k), with trims up to the low \$70s, then jumps to \$80,900 for the Z06, then to \$123k for the supercharged ZR1—or topping \$142 with our sample's creature comfort, tech and track performance packages. Its removable top could have put it with Convertibles, but it ran with the Coupes. Its Sebring Orange paint and carbon fiber highlights including its rear wing turned heads wherever it went.

GROUP ANALYSIS: PERFORMANCE COUPES

Our Coupe-splitting rotation meant we managed to both launch and wrap the whole event within this lustworthy group. Veloster is lowest in both power and price (both base and as-tested), a leader in the "buck" quotient of the bang-for-the-buck formula. Two others start in the \$30s (370Z and Challenger) add some more "bang" to those relatively modest bucks, at 335 and a whopping 485 hp, respectively, even if you don't build your Challenger up into the \$50s as our example did (none of which added to its power). Supra holds its \$50s turf, as promised at launch, though with power about the same as the Z-car's. For power approaching Challenger's, you're around \$100k in the Lexus RC F. Corvette of course starts out with far more affordable models, so the high-hp (755), high-dollar (the price of a decent condo) ZR1 halo car is appropriately here mostly to show off. The Rolls has fewer horses than the Corvette, but it's still massively powerful, and its price (that of a decent house) is only a topic of conversation for those who aren't buying.

AWARD: "MOST FUN COUPE"

2020 Toyota GR Supra

PERFORMANCE SUVs

HP RANGE: 228-577 (avg 397.0)

BASE PRICE RANGE: \$37,900-\$147,500 (avg \$122,029)

AS DRIVEN \$ RANGE: \$46,795-\$172,195 (avg \$85,124)

Mercedes-AMG G63 (2019)

577 hp / 15 mpg hwy.....\$147,500 / \$172,195

This was our third direct encounter so far this year with the Mercedes G Class. We drove the Mercedes-Benz G550 at NWAPA's off-road-centric Mudfest event this

spring, had the Mercedes-AMG G63 for a week in Arizona this summer (featured in our Sept/Oct issue)—and now this. This is a very popular vehicle in Arizona, and an AMG version is always going to be the most popular of all. Its form factor may make it look clunky to the uninitiated, but it hugs the road like any AMG performer. And with 577 hp, it quickly leaves the road behind. (Surprisingly, the AMG's off-road specs are almost the same as the G550's, which is to say exceptional.) Built for the military, perfect for the country club, brawny, capable, showy and elegant—the G dominates its turf.

Ford Explorer ST 4WD (2020)

400 hp / 24 mpg hwy.....\$54,740 / \$59,915

Ford Explorer is all new for 2020 (see the reveal feature in our Feb/March issue). The most notable in a litany of notables could be its return to a rear-drive platform for the first time in a decade—fundamentally better for stopping, better for going, better for cornering, in our opinion. As such, Ford has introduced a performance version, the Explorer ST—unexpectedly, perhaps, to the mainstream SUV buyer, but perfect for Run to the Sun (and in line with the other performance SUVs here, proof of a market hungry for such beasts). This hot Explorer, ours in Rapid Red (one of its few options, \$395) gets its 400 hp from a 3.0L EcoBoost V6, a variant of the powerplants that have quickly (and initially surprisingly) become top sellers in the F-150 pickup line.

Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio AWD (2019)

505 hp / 23 mpg hwy.....\$80,245 / \$94,340

The second most powerful SUV in this group (by just 12.5 percent) and second most expensive (by about 45 percent both base and total), the Alfa SUV delivers, on paper, a notable bang for the buck at the upper end of the seven vehicles in this set. Add to that its sexy Italian sheet metal, here lathered in Alfa Rosso red paint, then cap it off with high-performance, high-luxe Quadrifoglio trim, and it's a head-turner that you'd best turn your head quickly to catch. Despite its pedigree, several options are required to bring it up to our test vehicle's spec—upgraded Brembo brakes leading the pack (\$8000), AWD (\$1200) and a few others. We've driven this a number of

times, and its sports car DNA runs deep—it hasn't met a twisty road it doesn't want to dive right into.

MINI JCW Countryman ALL4 (2019)

228 hp / 30 mpg hwy.....\$37,900 / \$50,610

Since Arizona has plenty of backcountry and off-road opportunities, we've always had a sweet spot for the Countryman ALL4 among the many MINIs in the market. And with plenty of smooth freeways, Interstates and mountain two-lanes, we also have a sweet spot for John Cooper Works (JCW) builds of any MINI model. This entry—resplendent in logos and badging from a special cross-country tour—has it all in one package. Its base price is the lowest in the group, though as outfitted it bumps up to second place, while its highway fuel mileage is the highest apart from Volvo with its complex hybrid powertrain. MINI's horsepower is the lowest here, but you won't notice this behind the wheel—it delivers the oft-noted "go-kart" thrills of all MINIs, with AWD to mitigate torque steer we've noted in their front-drivers.

Acura RDX SH-AWD A-Spec (2020)

272 hp / 26 mpg hwy.....\$45,800 / \$46,795

Acura brought the smaller of their two SUVs, the two-row RDX, which starts at \$37,600 for the base trim with rear-wheel drive—but in SH-AWD (Super Handling All-Wheel-Drive, for four-wheel grip plus cornering and handling control) and with their A-Spec Package (\$3000), which automatically also adds a Tech Package (\$3200). A-Spec is mostly about tech, style and comfort, though 20-inch wheels, sport pedals, gloss black spoiler and A-Spec exhaust outlets all speak to a performance look and feel. (An available Advance Package, not on ours, includes the above and adds an additional array of tech, style and comfort features at \$4900, but this includes A-Spec, so is really just a \$1900 differential from our sample—and worth a look). All have the same powertrain.

PERFORMANCE SUVs SORTED LOWEST TO HIGHEST BY PRICE AND POWER			
	\$ BASE	\$ AS TESTED	HP
MINI	.....Acura	.....MINI	
\$37,900	.....\$46,795	.....228 hp	
Acura	.....MINI	.....Acura	
\$45,800	.....\$50,610	.....272 hp	
Ford	.....Ford	.....Ford	
\$54,740	.....\$59,915	.....400 hp	
Volvo	.....Volvo	.....Volvo	
\$67,500	.....\$86,890	.....400 hp	
Alfa	.....Alfa	.....Alfa	
\$80,245	.....\$94,340	.....505 hp	
AMG	.....AMG	.....AMG	
\$147,500	.....\$172,195	.....577 hp	

WINNER: "MOST FUN SUV"
2019 Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio AWD



PERFORMANCE SUVs

Category drive sequence (at right, top to bottom):

2019 Mercedes-AMG G63

2020 Ford Explorer ST 4WD

2019 Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio AWD

2019 MINI John Cooper Works Countryman ALL4

2020 Acura RDX SH-AWD A-Spec

2020 Volvo XC90 T8 E-AWD Inscription



Volvo XC90 T8 E-AWD Inscription (2020)

400 comb hp / 55 mpg comb.....\$67,500 / \$86,890

The Volvo XC90 has won awards wherever it goes, from day one. Beautiful and useful in its own right, it goes a big step further with the T8 Twin Engine Drive-E powertrain, combining a 2.0L turbocharged and supercharged four-cylinder engine (313 hp) with an electric motor (87 hp) for a combined 400 hp and 472 lb-ft of torque. Our sample also sports top-level Inscription trim (including AWD, which is an option on lower trims). This XC90 T8 approaches double the cost of the lowest-priced vehicle in this group, but it also approaches double the horsepower, double the seating and almost four times the fuel economy at the low end in the various ranges. The T8 version also approaches double the horsepower of a standard-powertrain XC90 (400 vs 250) and more than double (approaching triple) its fuel mileage. The vehicle includes an extensive suite of IntelliSafe safety technology features, enough to fill its own 22-page brochure.

GROUP ANALYSIS: PERFORMANCE SUVs

Some of these are fairly mainstream SUVs, while some are fairly rare exotics, while even the more mainstream brands are all higher-badged performance models—as is typical for this event. The killer AMG version of the durable-duty Mercedes G-Wagen is the only one over \$100 grand, though the Alfa Quadrifoglio nudges that mark as driven. This group is one example of base and as-built prices crisscrossing, with the MINI jumping from its only-one-under-\$30k base position to second place by price as driven. Acura's price is, as usual, complete at base except for destination charge. Ford's sporty Explorer also keeps option prices under control. Above those are three whose buyers probably don't particularly flinch at the tally as options are added.

AWARD: "MOST FUN SUV"

2019 Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio AWD

CONVERTIBLES

HP RANGE: 164-270 (avg 197.0)

BASE PRICE RANGE: \$21,290-\$38,395 (avg \$30,507)

AS DRIVEN \$ RANGE: \$30,994-\$52,015 (avg \$40,915)

One of our favorite stops at Run to the Sun the past few years is the tiny high plains town of Shaniko (where we also have an ice cream break). Last year, we blasted out of there in the highest-horsepower vehicle of the event, the Hellcat Redeye, heading to the next leg, at 26 miles less as the longest of the event, not counting the atypical first segment from airport to hotel. This is a top-of-the-world route, all to ourselves with an open throttle through long straightaways, surprise corners and twisty canyon stretches—also one of our favorites. This year, it was our first leg of the four-vehicle Convertibles category.

Polaris Slingshot SLR (2019)

173 hp / 20-28 est mpg hwy\$29,999 / \$30,994

First in the Convertibles category was a genre-bending entry, the Polaris Slingshot SLR, the upper of two primary models (and for \$1000 more, there's a third one

KEEP RIGHT >>



AMG G63: 577 hp / 15 mpg hwy
\$147,500 base / as tested \$172,195



EXPLORER ST: 400 hp / 24 mpg hwy
\$54,740 base / as tested \$59,915



MINI JCW: 228 hp / 30 mpg hwy
\$37,900 base / as tested \$50,610



ACURA RDX: 272 hp / 26 mpg hwy
\$45,800 base / as tested \$46,795



VOLVO XC90: 400 comb hp / 55 mpg comb
\$67,500 base / as tested \$86,890



that adds a taller windshield and a sunshade canopy). Part three-wheel car, part motorcycle, part drag racer, part corner carver, this vehicle's striking appearance always turns heads, and it's a flat-out blast to pilot. Whether a convertible by definition or not, it is most definitely an open vehicle. Set among others in a comparo, it may or may not help with the typical decision on a convertible purchase of your own, but however you categorize it, it is sure to inspire you. If your whole purpose in an open car is to be one with the road, wind and sky, this gets you closer to the original classic convertible formula than even the original classic formula itself.

Mazda MX-5 Miata Club RF (2019)
181 hp / 34 mpg hwy.....\$32,345 / \$38,955

To generalize hardly at all, nobody doesn't like the Mazda MX-5 Miata. Born in the late 1980s as a rebirth of the original classic affordable roadster formula, in an era short on ragtops, it has stayed close to its roots for three decades and counting. Mazda offered a fully retractable hardtop a few years back (basically indistinguishable from the soft-top and occupying virtually no trunk space when down). The fourth-generation Miata, now finishing its fourth year, has instead offered this Retractable Fastback (RF) model, for about \$6600 (or 25.7 percent) more. It still delivers solid roof security, but somewhat forgoes the wind-in-your-hair, bugs-in-your-teeth roadster experience, becoming more like a T-top (or the Corvette in this event, which was entered as a coupe). You can still choose a wide-open soft-top roadster (\$25,730), but you can't get both experiences from one car. Beyond that, the RF delivers near perfect front/rear weight distribution with a mix of cocoon and open air abandon.

Fiat 124 Spider Abarth (2019)
164 hp / 36 mpg hwy.....\$29,290 / \$41,695

The lowest-base-priced, highest-mpg entry in this whole event is also really the only conventional convertible in the category—a raise-it-up-lower-it-down ragtop covered open car, a two-seater in classic roadster format, to boot. That base price climbs noticeably in our example,

though not as dramatically as it seems at first glance (\$20s to \$40s is actually just \$10,910 before destination charge). Brembo brakes (\$2195) are the only directly driving-related add-on; the rest are comfort, convenience, tech and entertainment—and those could be skipped by a sports car purist, who may view the car as its own best entertainment. In fact, the Fiat 124 Spider starts at \$25,440, but the extra \$3850 for an Abarth brings you more than your money's worth of sporty upgrades.

Jeep Wrangler Unlimited Sahara 4x4 (2019)
270 hp / 24 mpg hwy.....\$38,395 / \$52,015

Some people would not think of a Jeep Wrangler first when shopping for convertibles. Then again, some would. Nonetheless, it seems an innovative entry, till you realize it offers more open air for more people than any other in the category. It also offers the most horsepower by far, via its new 2.0L direct injection eTorque turbo four-cylinder engine, which also offers decent fuel mileage for its higher size, weight and capacity among the group. Wrangler also offers more ways to vary your open or closed cockpit than any of the others—or than any others you can think of, really. And of course it's the only one with dead serious off-road chops. Top that off with the vastly upgraded suspension and handling of the new-in-2018 Wrangler JL, and you'll find it's also a champ on the paved open road, as we utilized it at this event.

GROUP ANALYSIS: CONVERTIBLES

This group of just four is evidence that Run to the Sun—originally an all-convertibles event—has evolved over time, as has the marketplace. There are convertibles available with far more power and far higher prices than the set entered at this event (think AMG, for example, and compare with their sedan entry below). Jeep is the only one in this group above 200 hp, considerably above, approaching 300, and this from its fuel-frugal new 4-cylinder turbocharged engine. But while even the Performance categories end up voting for “Most Fun” winners, and the Convertibles category is simply voted for “Most Fun in the Sun,” all convertible entries turned out to be

on the very affordable side (the base price average is \$30k, as built about \$40k). A couple definitely bent the envelope a bit on the conventional definition of a convertible. This set may not be quite what is expected by the buyer who is seeking relatively for their “what convertible should I buy?” question. But it definitely helps them think outside the box. Voting could have gone any which way on this group, depending upon people's interpretations of “convertible” and “fun in the sun,” but it went, perhaps somewhat ironically, to the only one that doesn't open up to the outdoors completely.

AWARD: “MOST FUN IN THE SUN”

2019 Mazda MX-5 Miata Club RF

PERFORMANCE SEDANS

HP RANGE: 228-630 (avg 346.0)
BASE PRICE RANGE: \$27,795-\$159,000 (avg \$56,300)
AS DRIVEN \$ RANGE: \$28,985-\$184,285 (avg \$61,629)

This group of seven specially outfitted sedans includes just two front-drivers. The rest are AWD, whether built off a front- or rear-drive basis.

Honda Civic Type R Touring (2019)
306 hp / 28 mpg hwy.....\$35,700 / \$36,620

There's Honda Civic—the now aggressively styled but generally modest and efficient sedan or coupe—and then there's Honda Civic Type R sedan, a tour de force of power and handling built upon that same unassuming package. Unassuming it's not, with air dams, rear wing, huge brakes, red highlights and other details—and this suits its driving personality perfectly. We were among the first to drive this model, at Run to the Sun a couple of years ago, and we spent a week with it at home in Arizona last year (see “Built from the Inside Out,” in our March/April 2018 issue). Power is mid-pack (or toward the upper end if you exclude the over-the-top AMG GT sedan), and its price is second-to-lowest—and as a Honda, the whole deal is baked in at base price. A front-driver, it demonstrates virtually no torque steer feel.

CONVERTIBLES SORTED LOWEST TO HIGHEST BY PRICE AND POWER		
\$ BASE	\$ AS TESTED	HP
Fiat.....Mazda.....Fiat	\$21,290.....\$38,955.....	164 hp
Slingshot.....Slingshot.....Slingshot	\$29,999.....\$30,994.....	173 hp
Mazda.....Fiat.....Mazda	\$32,345.....\$41,695.....	181 hp
Jeep.....Jeep.....Jeep	\$38,395.....\$52,015.....	270 hp

WINNER: “MOST FUN IN THE SUN”
2019 Mazda MX-5 Miata Club RF



CONVERTIBLES

Category drive sequence (at right, top to bottom):

- 2019 Polaris Slingshot SLR
- 2019 Mazda MX-5 Miata Club RF
- 2019 Fiat 124 Spider Abarth
- 2019 Jeep Wrangler Unlimited Sahara 4x4



Day 3...

The final day had eight legs, versus 14 the day before, but this is a half day, wrapping up at lunch in Gresham, Oregon (with a final drive or ride to the airport accomplished different ways by different people). After one sedan at the end of Day 2, Day 3 brought us the other six, then two Performance Coupes (sliced from the top of the official sequence and placed at the end in our rotation).

(Day 3: Performance Sedans cont'd)

Volkswagen Arteon 2.0T SEL R-Line w/ 4MOTION (2019)
268 hp / 27 mpg hwy.....\$43,560 / \$44,555

A new vehicle this year, though also an evolution of the prior Volkswagen CC, the VW Arteon has a longer wheelbase, shorter overhangs and complete repackaging of shapes and spaces inside and out. Its premium look and feel make an immediate impression—the grille has the precision finish of a wristwatch at the same cost. Pricing for the model grids out as 15 versions, but simplified, there are an SE or SEL (or SEL Premium), with or without 4MOTION all-wheel drive, with two available R-Line upgrades (with 19- or 20-inch wheels), all with the same engine. Ours was next-to-top—SEL, R-Line, 20s, AWD, everything but Premium (which is just \$3150 more). Mid-priced and mid-powered in the category, it's a stunner inside and out and an outstanding autobahn cruiser.

Volkswagen Jetta GLI 2.0T 35th Anniversary Edition (2019)
228 hp / 32 mpg hwy.....\$27,795 / \$28,985

Is it tough to follow the showpiece Arteon with a Jetta? Not really—when it's a Jetta GLI (which is treated as a separate model in the lineup, along the lines of GTI in the Golf lineup), has almost as many horses as Arteon (in a bit smaller and lighter package), fuel mileage in the 30s, and a price in the \$20s, and which was complete as-is (as with the Arteon) with no further options needed. Besides being a GLI, ours was the 35th Anniversary Edition, which for just \$2000 adds grey-with-red-stripe wheels, DCC adaptive damping and a fifth drive mode, Comfort. (There is also an Autobahn model, which adds power seats, remote start, upgraded infotainment and such, at just \$2200 above this model.) Jetta GLI is so compelling by comparison, VW has (surely purposely, to maintain positioning?) created it as a front-driver only.

Mercedes-AMG GT 63 S (2019)
630 hp / 20 mpg hwy.....\$159,000 / \$184,285

The Mercedes-Benz AMG lineup (now called Mercedes-AMG) has been growing by leaps and bounds. Within it, AMG GT models have been doing the same, from five models of GT roadster and coupe, to eight more cars (including CLA, C, E, CLS and S models, CLS being their original “four-door coupe,” the car that launched that trend and that term). Now they bring us their first four-door GT, introduced with a special presentation just before dinner on our first hotel night. As with the CLS, this was called a four-door coupe at the presentation, and it's listed with coupes on the AMG website, but it was entered in this event as a sedan, so—go figure. This has often been a good place in the automotive space for some flexibility



SLINGSHOT: 173 hp / 20-28 est mpg hwy
\$29,999 base / as tested \$30,994



MX-5 MIATA RF: 181 hp / 34 mpg hwy
\$32,345 base / as tested \$38,955



FIAT 124 SPIDER: 164 hp / 36 mpg hwy
\$21,290 base / as tested \$41,695



JEEP WRANGLER: 270 hp / 24 mpg hwy
\$38,395 base / as tested \$52,015



and interpretation. The priciest car in this category and second only to the Rolls-Royce in the event overall, as soon as they opened the hood, it was apparent you get your money's worth right there. You get it again inside, again in the underpinnings and again when you drive.

Subaru Legacy Touring XT (2020)

260 hp / 32 mpg hwy.....\$35,895 / \$36,795
Quickly reminding us you don't necessarily have to spend almost two hundred grand for your new sedan—even this top-trim model costs almost precisely just 20 percent of the prior car—we next moved to Subaru, a brand famous for its customer loyalty based on a formula of value, capability and reliability. All Subarus (with the rare exception of their Toyota-shared BRZ sports car) are all-wheel-drive only. Legacy is their largest of three sedans, though not the priciest at base level (that would be WRX). Its price is lower than Subaru's crossover lineup, with the fairly close exception of Crosstrek. Of six Legacy trims starting at \$22,745, this one—Touring XT—is tops, one of two with a 260-hp 2.4L turbo rather than the 182-hp 2.5L found in the four lower models. It includes every available feature, with nothing but destination charge added to its bottom line.

Kia Stinger GTS AWD V6 (2019)

365 hp / 25 mpg hwy.....\$46,400 / \$47,670
As Kia continually refines and expands its brand definition, it has gone in two new directions over the past year or two—most recently a big SUV (Telluride) and before that, performance (Stinger). You can find coverage of Stinger's full-line launch drive, as well as local drives in its smaller-engine-rear-drive and larger-engine-AWD versions, in our online archives. The bigger engine brags its horsepower and acceleration competitively against well known and far pricier Europeans and is at the core of our event sample, in GTS trim—a mid-level trim uniquely only in Federation Orange paint, only with 19-inch GT alloy wheels, outfitted with functional carbon fiber side vents, carbon fiber grille and carbon fiber mirrors, along with a number of additional features also found on prici-

er GT1 and GT2 trims—adding up to its very own sweet spot in the Stinger lineup. Ours included optional AWD

Genesis G70 AWD 3.3T Sport (2019)

365 hp / 25 mpg hwy.....\$45,750 / \$52,495
Genesis—split off a few years ago from Hyundai as a separate high-end companion brand—has a current lineup of three luxury sedans. G80 and G90 evolved from prior Hyundai Genesis and Hyundai Equus models, while G70 was all new two years ago (sharing some of its deep bones with cousin Kia Stinger). We've had the G70 in our Arizona fleet a couple of times, both RWD Sport trim and AWD Prestige. There are two engines for G70 (2.0T and 3.3T), rear-drive and AWD options, and even a manual transmission (on 2.0T RWD only). Our event G70 was 3.3T and AWD (thus automatic) and in Sport trim, matching our "value-priced autobahn scorcher" impression from our earlier Sport drive (powerful, notably premium, but economically priced—in this combination delivering both 25 mpg highway and 4.5-second zero-to-60 times). Note that the Genesis lineup is about to expand considerably, with a performance coupe and a couple of SUVs expected within the next year or two.

GROUP ANALYSIS: PERFORMANCE SEDANS:

Buyers have had a love affair with SUVs and crossovers for several years now, to the point that some manufacturers are even planning to discontinue many of their sedans (we suspect they may have a change of heart as winds may always shift again). You wouldn't know it by this highly desirable, highly developed group of car-cars. With most powered in the sensible-but-quick 2- and 300-something-horsepower range (and one 630-horsepower stunner) and most priced from the upper \$20s to upper \$40s (plus that stunner in the upper \$100s), all with practical four-door utility and most boasting multiple industry and consumer awards, this category (tied for largest in the event, with seven entries) is proof that the concept still has legs—fast, sturdy and durable legs.

AWARD: "MOST FUN SPORTS SEDAN"
2019 Mercedes-AMG GT 63 S

Note: Here are the last two in our particular rotation again—which were the first two in the overall sequence for this category (and for which we included the writeups in that section). See above for the complete seven-car Performance Coupe category presented together all in a row.

(Coupes described above, but driven here)

Dodge Challenger R/T Scat Pack WB (2019)
485 hp / 24 mpg hwy.....\$39,245 / \$56,600

Toyota GR Supra (2020)
335 hp / 31 mpg hwy.....\$55,250 / \$57,375

(Coupe award info above, with full group)

About the awards...

This has not always been an awards event—that aspect was added two years ago. Also of note, the awards, though done by the same categories as those driven, are not titled (and therefore presumably not judged) quite the same, nor are they voted as "Best," as is typical for most such events.

The Convertibles category is voted for a "Most Fun in the Sun" winner; three Performance vehicle groups produce three "Most Fun" awards; and an overall winner is also based on a "Most Fun" vote. You may be seeking to wrap your mind around a "best" judgment in each group, but with performance the nominal basis for entry and fun the stat-

**PERFORMANCE SEDANS SORTED
LOWEST TO HIGHEST BY PRICE AND POWER**

	\$ BASE	\$ AS TESTED	HP
Jetta	Jetta	Jetta	Jetta
\$27,795	\$28,985	228 hp	
Honda	Honda	Subaru	
\$35,700	\$36,620	260 hp	
Subaru	Subaru	Arteon	
\$35,895	\$36,795	268 hp	
Arteon	Arteon	Honda	
\$43,560	\$44,555	306 hp	
Genesis	Stinger	Stinger	
\$45,750	\$47,670	365 hp	
Stinger	Genesis	Genesis	
\$46,400	\$52,495	365 hp	
AMG	AMG	AMG	
\$159,000	\$184,285	630 hp	

WINNER: "MOST FUN SPORTS SEDAN"
and OVERALL "MOST FUN TO DRIVE"
2019 Mercedes-AMG GT 63 S



PERFORMANCE SEDANS

Category drive sequence (at right, top to bottom):

- 2019 Honda Civic Type R Touring
- 2019 Volkswagen Arteon 2.0T SEL R-Line /4Motion
- 2019 Volkswagen Jetta GLI 2.0T 35th Anniv Edition
- 2019 Mercedes-AMG GT 63 S
- 2020 Subaru Legacy Touring XT
- 2019 Kia Stinger GTS AWD V6
- 2019 Genesis G70 AWD 3.3T Sport



ed basis for winning, take 'em for what they are.

Also, those assessing these vehicles and granting their scores are not writing a check for purchase, nor feeding their ongoing appetites for fuel, service or parts, so some of the priciest vehicles often win, even if they're a less likely buy.

Every vehicle entered is the cream of the crop, a special model with a big dose of performance, styling, features and other panache.

The addition of awards to this event has been welcomed by some, quietly lamented by others, considered by some to be of benefit to the manufacturers, to the writers by others and to you, the audience, by others still.

Be all that as it may, voting in an event with so few vehicles is statistically interesting. Six cars in one category, for example, could get four votes each from the 24 judging drivers, a six-way tie. Yet a shift of just one vote in this example—now one car with five votes, one with three and four with four each—would give the winner a 25 percent higher tally than most of the rest, 67 percent higher than the lowest, but it's still just one vote that brings home the gold. However, it's also possible one vehicle receives 19 votes and the other five receive just one vote each—a significant and clear win—but we don't see this information.

For the overall winner, this effect is even more dramatic. Votes spread evenly would mean just one vote for each of 24 vehicles, and one vehicle with two votes could determine the winner.

We tend to contemplate such things a lot at all comparos. Then when final announcements are made, they generally make reasonable sense. But we feel for all who entered—a sizable and costly endeavor—moreso when the numbers could be so exceptionally close and the results can seem unusually subjective in the final analysis.

We did find it interesting that a sedan won overall, as we've all been hearing that these are dead and as good as gone and that people are only interested in SUVs (after decades of peaceful coexistence). The winning Mercedes-AMG GT 63 S was indeed entered in the sedan category, though officially described as a four-door coupe (though that's still a "car"), so there seems to be some wiggle room in even this interpretation of things. ■



CIVIC TYPE R: 306 hp / 28 mpg hwy
\$35,700 base / as tested \$36,620



VW ARTEON: 268 hp / 27 mpg hwy
\$43,560 base / as tested \$44,555



VW JETTA GLI: 228 hp / 32 mpg hwy
\$27,795 base / as tested \$28,985



AMG GT 63 S: 630 hp / 20 mpg hwy
\$159,000 base / as tested \$184,285



SUBARU LEGACY: 260 hp / 32 mpg hwy
\$35,895 base / as tested \$36,795



KIA STINGER: 365 hp / 25 mpg hwy
\$46,400 base / as tested \$47,670



GENESIS G70: 365 hp / 25 mpg hwy
\$45,750 base / as tested \$52,495

THE INSIDE TRACK: BRIEFS & RUMORS



Ford Mustang Shelby GT500

▼ The 2020 **Ford Mustang Shelby GT500** is boasting supercar acceleration, care of a 760-hp 5.2L V8, with a special nod to its Tremec 7-speed dual-clutch transmission, as well as the car's advanced brakes (its 16.5-inch rotors are the largest in any domestic sports coupe) and cooling systems—a build that has recorded zero-to-100-to-zero in 10.6 seconds. The transmission is engineered to deliver those horses and 625 lb-ft of torque more consistently than a manual transmission, while its program can upshift in as little as 80 milliseconds. “In many ways, this is like having two transmissions in one,” says Pat Morgan, Ford Performance powertrain manager. “On one hand, it enables performance at the outer reaches of straight-line quickness with minimal torque interruption, yet provides an incredible amount of finesse and control in track environments for maximum stability and predictability at the limits of lateral acceleration.” Power is transmitted to a 3.73:1 Torsen limited-slip independent rear suspension via a carbon fiber driveshaft, for reduced rotational mass and torsional distortion, with larger halfshafts and a redesigned rear suspension hub for added strength. Five drive modes—normal, sport, track and drag, plus one for slick conditions—cover conditions from ultra-smooth road shifts in normal mode to forceful powershifts in drag mode—a personality for every type of performance driving. But shift speed is not everything. “Contrary to popular belief,” says Morgan, “fast shifts do not always equate

to better road performance. In every driving situation, we emulated what professional drivers do, whether it's a smooth, precise heel-and-toe shift of a professional track driver or a much more forceful powershift like drag racers.”

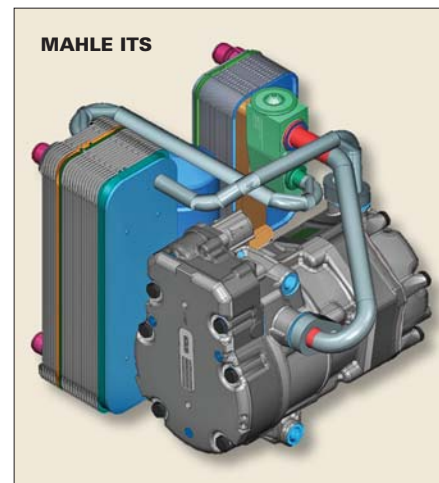
▼ **McLaren** Automotive has launched a McLaren Vision Collection of sunglasses and ophthalmic frames available at independent eyewear specialists. Lightweight



McLaren Vision Collection

and strong, the eyewear combines McLaren DNA with L'Oréal Group optical expertise in industry-first 3D-printed titanium frames with the option of face-scanning technology for a perfect tailored fit. The line boasts the first use of five Leica Eyecare sun lens types, each specifically designed for driving, skiing, sailing, city life or playing golf. Frame prices range from \$323 to \$2,008 for the Bespoke range.

▼ Modern electric vehicles (EVs) present complex challenges for efficient thermal management throughout the year—a system should place as light a load as possible on the drivetrain battery. In winter, due to the lack of traditional steadily available waste heat from an engine, most EVs today rely on direct resistive electric heaters to heat the cabin and traction battery, an extra load that can reduce the cruising range of a fully charged EV by up to half in cold temperatures. Similarly in summer, cruising range is shortened by the additional energy required to cool the drivetrain battery and the interior of the vehicle. **MAHLE GmbH** has developed a compact and economical Integrated Thermal System (ITS) based on a heat pump, that can increase winter cruising range by up to 20 percent. In addition to significantly reducing battery power consumption, it is easy to control and can be readily adapted to future vehicle architectures. In field tests, MAHLE has demonstrated that its ITS reduces the loss of cruising range substantially, especially at cold ambient tem-



peratures. A test vehicle, when equipped with conventional electric heating, started with a cruising range of 100 kilometers (62.1 miles). When equipped with the ITS, cruising range increased to 116 kilometers (72.1 miles). Central to the system's architecture is a semi-hermetic refrigerant circuit, comprising a chiller, a coolant-cooled condenser (i-condenser), a thermal expansion valve and an electric drive com-

pressor. The i-condenser and chiller have the same function as the condenser and evaporator in a conventional refrigerant circuit, but in this case, instead of exchanging heat with air, the refrigerant exchanges



Elaphe In-Wheel-Drive

heat with coolant, thus generating hot and cold coolant flows. The ITS uses R1234yf as a refrigerant and conventional vehicle coolant as the medium for heat transport between the cooling circuit and the various heat sources and sinks in the vehicle. In addition to low cost and environmental benefits, the ITS presents design flexibility and adaptability as added advantages. Control optimization and other tests are currently being run in the MAHLE climatic wind tunnel on vehicles with the ITS installed. MAHLE is working with American OEMs on implementing additional performance and cost optimizations.

▼ As Lexus has announced they will bring in-wheel hub motors to the mainstream for their new EV platform, **Elaphe Propulsion Technologies** has pulled the curtain back on developments at their new Zala-Zone vehicle proving ground in Hungary, where they are testing their high-performance in-wheel motors installed on production vehicles—on a high speed oval, handling course and other road modules including slopes, hills and water basins. Results include zero-to-100 km/h (62 mph) acceleration times of 3.38 seconds with cold tires on cold asphalt and skid pad cornering performance of 1.20g max lateral acceleration (which they pointedly compare with Ferrari LaFerrari's 1.16g). Elaphe's in-wheel motors are designed for integration in vehicles from small cars to SUVs and light commercial vehicles with little or no compromise or re-engineering of existing

wheel hubs and mechanicals. Notable for extremely high torque, low weight and unique compact packaging around standard knuckles and friction braking systems, the Elaphe L1500 in-wheel motor

claims the highest torque densities of electric motors on the market: 1500 Nm (1106 lb-ft) without using any gears. A single in-wheel motor fits inside a 19-inch or larger rim and can achieve a power output of more than 110 kW (147 hp). The L1500 is compatible with all drive layouts—rear-, front- and four-or-more-wheel drive. The L1500 D-version in-wheel motor is optimized for low-volume series production, and earlier versions have been tested on



Hyundai gross vehicle weight calculation development

passenger cars and off-road-vehicles. Low-volume series production was slated to begin in the fourth quarter of 2019.

▼ **Mitsubishi** Motors North America is moving its headquarters from Southern California to Franklin, Tennessee (a Nashville suburb), part of a comprehensive re-invention of Mitsubishi in the US, from corporate leadership to dealer relations to

the customer experience—efforts taken across the entire Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi global alliance to bring the partners closer together in procurement, development and cost efficiencies. Mitsubishi's new home allows them to focus on these efforts, while benefiting from cost savings through proximity to their sister company Nissan. The move began in August and should be completed by the end of 2019.

▼ **Hyundai** Motor Group is developing a system that estimates the gross vehicle weight of a light duty commercial electric vehicle (EV) and optimizes performance utilizing acceleration sensors to calculate a current gross weight estimate—a first-ever for the industry. Achieving this on the move means an EV's torque output can be optimized to maximize estimated remaining range, reducing potential wheel spin and traction loss when a vehicle is carrying less payload, also modifying torque output based on topography. The new tech uses acceleration instead of weight sensors, so it can be applied to a vehicle not equipped with pricey air suspension. This approach estimates gross weight through Newton's law of acceleration—the less mass and the more energy put on matter, the faster it moves—so while pushing an object at constant speed, its weight can be calculat-

ed depending on its acceleration rate. The vehicle thus estimates the distance it can drive, based on accurate measurement of current weight and speed, and adjusts its maximum torque output. Owners benefit by saving unnecessary vehicle-related costs, important in turn to Hyundai, as price competitiveness is considered key to the success of future light duty commercial EVs for small businesses. ■

UPCOMING FEATURES

Arizona Auction Week 2020



Phoenix Art Museum Legends of Speed exhibit



2020 Jeep Wrangler EcoDiesel launch drive



2020 Hyundai Sonata launch drive



2020 Mercedes-AMG GLC 63S



2020 GMC Sierra 2500HD Duramax



K1 Speed indoor electric kart racing



2020 Jaguar I-PACE EV



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All-Steel Toolboxes

The Greasemonkeys have the feeling their full line of durable all-steel portable toolboxes with lift-out tray and a variety of the most cool car guy graphics (five styles now and more coming!) just may be too good to stash tools in—we may have to call them "deco-boxes"!

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— Sincerely, Pam

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