

Run to the Sun

Lewis and Clark never had it so good



For a coastal state, central Oregon has more in common with our own inland Western state than most—from dry hills and winding mountain roads, to volcanic parks and lava fields, punctuated by rivers, lakes and small towns with plenty of individual character.

When it comes to multi-vehicle media drives, Run to the Sun—an annual two-day event of the Northwest Automotive Press Association—has less in common with many others.

The main difference is that this is not a competitive event. No winners are chosen, and no awards are given. As such, we don't have to keep detailed track of drive experiences. There is no voting. We can simply take it all in.

With that in mind, we bring you the 25 vehicles we drove—about two and a half million dollars' worth (from a \$20,695 Mitsubishi Lancer or \$21,400 Ford Fiesta to a \$370,000 Rolls-Royce)—with a few basic facts and an impression or two. To put 25 drivers behind the wheel of 25 cars, and keep the ball rolling, everyone had the same sequence, but a different daily start. These are ours.

Central Oregon's terrain was ideal for two days in 25 road hungry performance cars. Below, the Dodge Challenger SRT Hellcat approaches switchbacks on OR 218, Antelope to Shaniko.

DAY ONE

1: Lexus IS-F (2014) : The IS-F is top dawg in the Lexus IS series. With 416 hp, it beats the pants off the regular IS at 204 hp, and this was that kind of drive. Whereas the regular IS gets 30 MPG highway, the IS-F still gets 23 MPG, a solid rating for a high-performance 5.0L V8 sedan. Our sample had a base price of \$63,350 and was out the door for \$67,419 with a \$2490 hard disk nav system, backup camera and Lexus Enform, plus park assist and trunk mat/net. A sleeper four-door in traffic, this road-burner was a great way to start the event. So far, there is no IS-F for model year 2015.

2: Ford Fiesta 5-Door Hatch ST (2014) : At just \$21,400 base—\$25,955 total for ours with Molten Orange paint, nav (just \$795), Recaro seats and 17-inch painted wheels—the Fiesta ST showed off its bang-for-the-buck attributes immediately. We were encouraged to really nail it, and nail it we did. Its 1.6-liter GTDI EcoBoost I-4 engine and 6-speed manual put out 197 hp, com-

pared to a regular Fiesta's 120 hp. The ST weighs just 164 pounds more than the regular 5-speed Fiesta (or 114 more than an automatic, but the ST is 6-speed manual only). That's still just above 2700 pounds, so this thing is a rocket. And it still gets 35 MPG highway (compared to 39 MPG for

the base Fiesta). This hot little hatch rocks.

3: Honda Civic Si Coupe (2014) : The Civic Si Coupe has had a complete makeover, and our car's Orange Fire Pearl shows off the new styling well. Base price is just \$22,990, and our highly-featured sample (including 360-watt 7-speaker audio) had no options. Summer tires add \$200, or a satellite-nav system with voice recognition adds \$1500. Fuel mileage is 31 MPG highway and the engine rates 205 hp—a few more than the Fiesta ST, but without as responsive a transmission.

4: Fiat 500c Abarth Cabrio (2014) : There are legions of Fiat 500s taking to the streets, but watch for the Abarth badging on this hot version of the car. Abarth has a performance heritage from way back, and we previously drove this on the track in Nevada. A hot little number. This 2512-pounder has a 5-speed heavy duty manual transmission, 160 hp (and 183 lb-ft of torque) and a highway fuel economy rating of 34 MPG. For 2015, it will also be available with a 6-speed automatic.

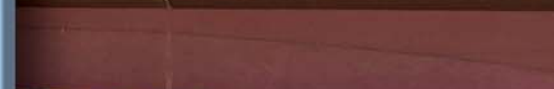
5: Mitsubishi Lancer SE (2014) : Mitsubishi is famous for its high-performance Lancer Evolution, a head-on competitor for the Subaru WRX STI. But there are only three event-fleet samples in the US, with none available that week. So, the regular Lancer made a nice intermezzo—straightforward and friendly and with a very friendly price of \$20,695—the lowest in the group. Note that 2015 is slated to be the last year for the Evo. The twin-clutch auto MR will run through the end of the year, and the manual GSR through next spring. Expect a higher-powered and tricked-out special edition, in a run of 2000, to mark the end of its era.

6: Hyundai Genesis RWD 3.8 Sedan (2015) : This knockout premium sedan from Hyundai was completely reengineered and launched last spring for 2015 (see our May/June issue for a complete writeup). Horsepower and interior space match or in most cases beat a long list of well-known expensive competitors. Typical of Hyundai, our car included everything, at a base price of \$38,000.

The Genesis Sedan has big value, style and performance. This rear-drive 3.8L V6 model rates 311 hp and 29 MPG highway. AWD adds \$2500, and a 420-horse V8 model starts at \$51,500.

7: Acura TLX 2.4L Tech (2015) : This sports sedan is an all-new entry for 2015 and comes in three flavors: a four-cylinder and two V6 models, the V6 also available with AWD. We had the base front-wheel-drive four, with a price of \$35,025 and no further options. With everything from dual-zone climate, to 10-way power driver's seat, to voice-activated nav, it didn't need any. The car has 206 hp and is rated 35 MPG highway.

8: Chevrolet SS Sedan (2014) : This was one of our most anticipated drives of the day: a powerful rear-drive sedan sourced from GM's Holden in Australia and ready for solid police duty or solid highway fun—all in a spacious, family-ready four-door sedan. Clearly more about power than hyper-



The 2015 Dodge Viper rules the road on US 97, passing over the gorge at Peter Skene Ogden State Park north of Terrebonne, Oregon, oblivious to hundreds of feet of open air below.

miling, the SS has a 415-hp 6.2L V8 and 6-speed automatic (this one) or Tremec 6-speed manual (great news), clearing 21 MPG highway, thanks in part to weight kept below 4000 pounds. Included is magnetic ride control, as on the Cadillac XTS flagship sedan. Turning circle is tight and handling is nimble. With a base price of \$43,475, plus a power sunroof and gas guzzler tax, this SS is yours



for \$46,670. You might not find this satisfying a performance sedan at twice the price.

9: Mercedes-Benz S550 4MATIC Sedan (2014)

: Just knowing this is the Mercedes-Benz flagship sedan tells you a lot. Knowing it goes for \$128,545 tells you the rest. Base price is \$95,900, but you need most of the option packages: audio is \$6400, keyless entry/start requires a \$4500 package, heated seats (and wheel) add \$2600, electronic driving aids Mercedes had first (blind spot, lane keep, pre-brake, etc.) still cost \$2800 extra, and so on. If you have the price of entry, you will likely never think twice about anything you might have bought instead. (If you have two or three times that price of entry, see Bentley and Rolls-Royce, below.) This all-wheel-driver has 449 hp and 516 lb-ft of torque, yet achieves 26 MPG highway.



10: Kia K900 (2015) : Introduced earlier this year (see our March/April issue, plus another drive in this issue), the flagship Kia K900 leapfrogged the previous year's Cadenza by moving to V8 power and rear-wheel drive. Its 420-horse 5.0L engine rates 23 MPG highway, even hauling 4555 pounds of Kia luxury; a 3.8L V6 offers 311 hp and 27 MPG. This was number six of six four-door sedans we drove in a row, and we could have happily driven it all day. But two-door sports beckoned next.

We would wrap up day one with the Jaguar F-Type, Viper, Nissan GT-R and BMW i8... quite a run. These were shorter legs, but among the most challenging—switchback climbs up the McKenzie Pass Highway to 5325 feet above sea level, heading up through forests, then impressive buildups



of lava for dozens of square miles, with dramatic views of Mt Jefferson and The Sisters peaks.

11: Jaguar F-Type R Coupe (2015)

: This was next after our run of four-door sedans, and the difference was even more striking than you might imagine. Its 550-hp 5.0L supercharged V8 and 8-speed QuickShift transmission propelled the luxurious coupe like a well-planted rocket, to blend metaphors. With a base price of \$99,000, ours added panoramic sunroof, intelligent lighting, front sensors, rear camera, black trim pack and red seatbelts, all for a total of \$103,975. As mentioned, there was no voting, but we heard quite a few people say this was their favorite car of all.

12: Dodge Viper SRT (2014)

: The Viper is big news wherever it shows up, but the big news this



week was a \$15,000 price drop. This brought our test car down from a base of \$99,885 (\$120,480 with one extensive package plus gas guzzler tax) to just \$84,885 (\$105,480 as outfitted). If you already own one, you can get \$15,000 toward a new one, or a second one. Our drive leg with the Viper was one of the livelier ones—with extremely narrow, tight switchbacks, all at an aggressive pace, and oncoming traffic at times, even a truck with horse trailer. Earlier Vipers had been known as a handful to handle, but this cooperated under all challenges. With 645 horses from the 8.4L V10 under its long hood, connected to the rear via six-speed manual, every stretch was a satisfying thrill. It's all that. And if that's not enough for you, for \$10 grand more, you can check out the new Viper GT, then midyear watch for the TA at \$100,995 and the GTS at \$107,995—all with the same powerplant, but distinguished by an array of fitments and features. In case it's a factor in your Viper decision, the car is rated 19 MPG highway.

13: Nissan GT-R Black (2015)

: We already know the GT-R as a powerful yet very accessible supercar. We've spent two-lane highway time in it before, at speed, and time with it in metro Phoenix and found it just fine—in fact, super—as a daily driver. Instruments and controls are especially clear, and highly e-customizable. Power is smooth from its 3.8L twin turbo V6, with a remarkable 545 hp and 463 lb-ft of torque. This was our ride on the final climb, as eons-old piles of lava rock reached higher and higher on both sides of our little ribbon of road—an impressive entry to the summit, where we would meet up with the rest of the group. Base price is \$111,510 and ours included floor mats (and destination charge) for a total of \$113,400. No gas guzzler tax—fuel mileage from this pleasant monster is 23 MPG highway.

14: BMW i8 (2014)

: If you had asked us at the



start which cars we were most excited to drive, the BMW i8 was one. Since its show circuit concept in 2011, we've had our eye on it. Another concept and a prototype followed in 2012 and 2013. Its innovative and intricate electric-gasoline powertrain—a hybrid, but that seems so mundane—telegraphed the neck-snapping performance of an electric supercar, with a dash of practicality, serving up the range an electric-only cannot. A three-cylinder direct-injection turbo produces 228 hp and 236 lb-ft of torque. Add an eDrive electric motor with 129 hp and 184 lb-ft, and you have an AWD system totaling 357 hp and 420 lb-ft. Expecting to feel like Will Smith in a sci-fi supercar, we were surprised by a disappointingly conventional drive experience. Our route was back down the other side of the pass into Sisters, Oregon, with slower speed limits, so some track time might give us a different feel. Our last impression was egress. Scissor doors that do not open all that wide struck us as stylish, but—with also a very high door sill—an obstacle to practical use. The BMW i8 starts at \$136,650. Add-ons and upgrades are in the thousands. On the plus side, expect a 0-to-60 time of 4.4 seconds and equivalent fuel mileage in the 135 MPG range.

DAY TWO

15: Alfa Romeo 4C (2015)

: When it comes to which cars we most anticipated driving, the Alfa Romeo 4C would be the first. (We had already driven the Challenger SRT Hellcat, after all; see our previous issue.) This would be a great way to start our second day, departing our high country motel on a chilly early fall morning. From the punch of the start button, a well-developed growl expresses the car's promise. This is an automatic, but unlike any you've seen, with a pushbutton setup on the console, tucking under the instrument panel in a compact way that would never accommodate a manual if it had to. The Alfa is so much fun to drive, you won't particularly care about that. The car has full mechanical steering—as with everything on this car, to optimize road feel and driver connectedness. The 4C's mid-mounted 237 hp and 258 lb-ft of torque power a magical 2300-pound package. Base price is \$53,900. Our sample added a convenience

KEEP RIGHT >>

US 97 presents hills, curves, rivers and gorges, plus spectacular views of Mt Bachelor, The Sisters, Mt Jefferson and Mt Hood.

Two and a half million dollars worth of sheetmetal and powertrains blasts its way up the hairpin turns from I-84 along the Columbia River in Oregon, through Mayer State Park, on US 30, the old Mosier-The Dalles Highway.



package, black leather, red brake calipers, very cool racing exhaust (just \$500) and a few other features for a total of \$64,045, very tricked out. You may be tempted to compare the Alfa with a Boxster, Cayman, Miata or any number of things. But sports cars are an affair of the heart. If this one moves you, ask it out. We did, and we had a blast.

16: Dodge Challenger SRT Hellcat (2015) : We drove this—and the whole 2015 Challenger lineup—several weeks earlier, including track time. (See our Sept/Oct issue.) You know the fundamentals: 707 hp in the muscle car with the most comfortable cabin. Our Run to the Sun time in the Hellcat confirmed what we had learned earlier, when we had road time in all Challenger models. The Hellcat is one blindingly capable supercar track car that is also a very manageable road car—something that is hard to say about the top-horsepower pony models it competes with. The police were out for this leg, but it didn't matter—at any speed, you can feel the heat and enjoy the beat.

17: Rolls-Royce Wraith (2014) : We did a launch drive of this wonderful land yacht in Arizona last

winter (see our Jan/Feb 2014 issue), spec'ed exactly the same: \$284,900 base, \$370,850 total. The least expensive option was a \$700 umbrella; even the destination charge is stratospheric at \$2500. With weight approaching three tons (5380 lb), its 6.6L V12 delivers 624 hp (590 lb-ft) and 21 MPG highway. Classic build techniques make even routine touches feel special. You could drive it for weeks on big 'bahns, but it is surprisingly nimble on the two-lanes. And unsurprisingly blissful.

18: Bentley Continental GT V8 S Convertible : We personally wouldn't specify the Glacier Blue paint (though some loved it). Color aside, the Continental GT is one of our favorites. We favor the coupe's style, but who doesn't like a convertible? And this was one of the few at this event with "Sun" in its name. The V8 S Convertible is newest in the lineup. After the Rolls, this seems a bargain, at \$216,200 base, tricked out at \$251,070 (audio \$7300, sports exhaust \$2480 and so on). Other specs are not far off the Rolls, at 5445 lbs (or 5060 hardtop), with its 4.0L V8 making 521 hp, 502 lb-ft and 0-to-60 in 4.5 seconds (up from the basic Continental GT). With all this, the car still

rates 24 MPG highway. This one is also unsurprisingly blissful, but with a different kind of edge.

19: Scion FR-S (2014) : We came back down to earth with this pure sports coupe at \$24,700 (no options, though it is well equipped, with everything from keyless entry/start to 300W 8-speaker audio and touchscreen display). Its 2-liter boxer engine puts out 200 hp, and the car weighs only 2758 lb with its 6-speed manual (auto available). This is bliss of a different sort, pretty universally praised as a return to sports car roots of light weight, low cost, fun and value—and it delivers 30 MPG highway manual, 34 MPG automatic.

20: Mazda MX-5 Miata Grand Touring PRHT (2015) : Basically identical to the 2014 model we reviewed in our last issue, this is a car everyone loves and has loved since it was invented. Now available with a miraculously fast power hardtop, its 2-liter I-4 has 167 hp and gets 28 MPG highway. A \$29,450 base price rises to \$32,935 with sport suspension and a premium package (keyless, SiriusXM, xenon, Bluetooth). Specs, price and purpose may suggest comparison with the

FR-S, and we drove them back-to-back. But they are different animals. The Scion is more spartan and raw, while the MX-5, in this trim, is more polished and balanced. They are both wonderful, approachable sports cars, and your decision may just come down to whether you want a convertible. But, especially with the superb power hardtop, the Miata is almost sure to win the day.

21: Audi S4 quattro S tronic (2014) : We're big fans of the Audi quattro drivetrain, and we've never met an S we didn't like. An Audi A4 starts at \$35,500 (and an A3, much like an A4 from a few years prior, at \$29,900). This S4 has a base of \$49,500 and totaled \$55,045 with paint, nav and sports differential (a surprising option on an S). Its supercharged 3.0L four rates 333 hp and 28 MPG highway, all with the surefootedness Audi quattro has mastered for decades. You can save about \$1400 by getting a 6-speed manual instead of the 7-speed S tronic automatic—to us, a win-win.

22: Subaru WRX STI Launch Edition (2015) : Our cover car two issues ago, this segment-topper, arguably monopolizer, pleases almost everybody, unless they just don't like its big rear wing, and if they drive it, then pretty much everybody, period. At \$37,395, the fun does not come cheap, but it will last for many years—because of Subaru reliability and because it just doesn't get old. A 2.5-liter boxer four with 305 hp in a 3386-pound AWD body and chassis means rally durability, though just 23 MPG highway. It was great when we had it around town on a daily basis, and it was great on these open highways, twists and hills.

23: Mercedes-Benz C400W4 Sedan (2015) : Fully refreshed for 2015, this C-Class is a close competitor with the Audi S4, two cars prior. At 329 hp, with 7-speed auto (only) and 4MATIC all-wheel drive, at a base price of \$48,590 and with

29 MPG highway, it sounds very close. Our sample quickly climbed to \$63,705 with nine options, from panoramic sunroof to leather, air suspension, an upgraded multimedia setup and more. The drive experience hits the expected high spots, with an emphasis on style and features.

24: Cadillac ATS 2.0T Coupe (2015) : As the CTS Coupe is to the CTS Sedan, so is the ATS Coupe to the ATS Sedan. These are wonderful American midsize and compact premium cars, with the CTS Coupe bearing a distinctly sportier and more personal look and feel and the ATS Sedan bearing the 3-Series-killer size and price intended. The ATS Coupe combines and nails all of the above. With a 272-hp 2.0L turbo and 6-speed automatic—sadly no manual at this time—and 33 MPG, its base of \$37,995 (\$39,440 with heated seats) seems a decent deal for a rear-driver (AWD available) at this level, sort of an American Audi A5 at a steep discount.

25: Volkswagen Golf GTI Autobahn (2015) : VW brought its latest Golf and Jetta models to Phoenix, just a few days after this event. The Arizona media hordes had one desire: to drive the GTI. Lucky for us, we just had, for some time and distance up in Oregon. The Golf is all new for 2015, longer and wider, more spacious inside. At a base of just \$30,695—and just \$31,865 with wheel locks, trunk mat, first aid kit and destination charge—this 6-speed Tiptronic hot hatch has 210 hp, 258 lb-ft, and gets 33 MPG highway. Watch for a new Golf R next year, this time with a manual and both 2-door and 4-door models.

That GTI brought us to the finish line, back at the Portland airport. A fantastic two days, in the literal sense of the word. Twenty-five cars that are on anybody's wish list, and not a bad one in the bunch. We look forward to next year. ■

The McKenzie Pass Highway (OR 242) took us to the Dee Wright Observatory at the summit of the Belknap Crater Lava Fields. Towering fields of sharp black volcanic rock make this a good place to stay on the pavement.

We regroup to swap cars at the Rowena Crest Viewpoint on US 30 in Mayer State Park, Oregon, high above the Lewis and Clark Memorial Highway (Interstate 84) along the Columbia River Gorge. Yonder hills are in Washington State.

