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General Motors Corporate News

Auto; Almanac

Windsor Star
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Section: Driving
Source: The Windsor Star

DRAWING BOARD

Fisker Atlantic concept: Boutique electric-car producer Fisker will introduce a second vehicle and construct it at a former General Motors plant in Wilmington, Del. As with the existing Karma, the upcoming four-door Atlantic uses a gasoline engine as a generator to replenish the electric-drive motor's battery pack, similar to the system used in the Karma. However the smaller (by about 35 centimetres) Atlantic will reportedly use a BMW-based four-cylinder instead of the Chevrolet four-cylinder in the Karma. Expect pricing to start at close to US \$50,000.

EBAY WATCH

1975 Bricklin SV1, sold, US \$7,500: The Canada-based company founded by Malcolm Bricklin produced about 2,850 vehicles between 1974 and 1975 before going bankrupt. The SV1 is more curiosity than collectable, but can still draw crowds as well as interested speculators. This low-kilometre example features a 360-cubic-inch (5.9-litre) V8 from American Motors (Ford V8s were also installed on later models). Although not pristine, this Bricklin seems solid enough for show duty and the price was certainly fair. Visit www.ebaymotors.com

TOP GEAR

Metal Rescue, about US \$12 and up, www.metalrescue.com: Metal Rescue is a water-based product that the manufacturer states will start to work to mere minutes on even the most corroded part and will finish most jobs in a few hours. You can use your bare hands (no heavy rubber gloves required) when working with this non-toxic product that does the job without the use of solvents or acids. Metal Rescue will also not remove the paint from any metal surface.

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Ford gets another nod from Moody's

The Daily News (Nanaimo)

Thu May 24 2012

Page: D7

Section: Driving

Source: Reuters

Ford Motor received its second "investment grade" credit rating on Tuesday, allowing the secondlargest U.S. automaker to reclaim its Blue Oval insignia and other assets it mortgaged in 2006 to fund its turnaround plan.

Moody's Investors Service's upgrade of Ford to Baa3 from Ba2 reflected its confidence that Ford can weather future downturns.

Moody's also affirmed its Ba1 rating on General Motors and said the largest U.S. automaker is on track to regain an investment-grade credit rating within the next year. Moody's decision on Ford comes less than a month after Fitch Ratings made a similar move. The upgrade allows Ford to enjoy lower borrowing costs and expands the number of potential buyers for its bonds.

It also represents a symbolic win for Ford, which nearly collapsed six years ago before mortgaging most of its assets to borrow \$23.5 billion to finance a restructuring.

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Truck lovers have reason to celebrate

Calgary Herald
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Source: Calgary Herald

Albertans love their trucks. Paced by our love of anything with a decent payload capacity, buyers have driven new vehicle sales in Wild Rose country to one of the highest in the country.

And from rugged pickups to off-road-capable SUVs, Albertans have a plethora of options at their disposal.

Take Ford's perennial F-150, which is back with its Baja-desert capable Raptor SVT, complete with its own off-road performance package.

The Ram 1500, meanwhile, now comes in an Outdoorsman model, featuring extensive all-terrain and trailer-towing packages.

It's joined by the all-new luxury-inspired Longhorn edition, which counts power-adjustable pedals and heated premium-leather seats among its upscale luxuries.

General Motors continues to do what it does best: produce honest work-ready pickups.

For 2012, the Chevrolet Silverado arrives with a new front end, improved safety features and a hybrid model that's one of the best on the market.

Import makers are also making some noise. While the Toyota Tundra is mimicking the dimensions and attitude of its domestic rivals, it is also matching them under the hood with a 381-horsepower 5.7-litre V-8.

For Nissan, the 2012 Titan represents the first and last stop for many drivers, with a 317-h.p. 5.6-L V-8.

Fuel efficiency, not surprisingly, is also figuring prominently in the pickup truck sector.

GM, for example, is offering its Flex Fuel engines and also a hybrid engine option, while the GMC Sierra, boasts the XFE model, a real-wheel-drive non-hybrid version that has been optimized for maximum fuel economy with features such as low rolling resistance tires, lightweight aluminum wheels and a lowered and lightened suspension. The F-150 lineup also includes a turbocharged V-6 EcoBoost power plant with the power of a V-8.

And for drivers who prefer the utility of a pickup but not necessarily its size, SUVs such as the Kia Sportage, Mazda CX-9 and Hyundai Santa Fe are combining sure-footedness with a more comfortable ride.

They're joined by a growing number of luxury sport utes on the market today, including Lexus' bestselling RX, Acura's high-flying RDX, the stylish Land Rover LR4 and Cadillac's iconic Escalade.

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General Motors Product News

Cadillac Escalade

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Source: Calgary Herald

Overall: An Escalade with flexibility; rear cargo area can expand to accommodate larger loads, or haul five in style.

Drivetrain: 403-horsepower 6.2-litre V-8 with active-fuel-management technology, including cylinder deactivation.

? Although it might still surprise some to see a pickup truck wearing the (gigantic) Cadillac crest and wreath, the EXT's ability to transform into a full-fledged cargo hauler at will has its appeal.

Sharing a platform with the Chevrolet Avalanche means the classy Caddy has the same multipurpose utility as its sibling.

The EXT can carry a 4x8 sheet of plywood with the Midgate dropped and the rear seat folded, or it can coddle five people in leather-clad luxury with plenty of room for hats and formal gowns.

Less obvious deviations from the Avalanche appear under the skin where a 403-horsepower 6.2-litre V-8 with variable valve timing funnels the power to all four wheels via a six-speed automatic transmission. It's the same powertrain found in the Escalade sport utility vehicle and is not available in the Avalanche, so EXT has a measure of exclusivity.

Although the Escalade sport ute and the Chevy/GMC trucks offer a hybrid option, the EXT does not, which is a bit of a puzzle, but likely has to do with the EXT's low production volume.

The dual-purpose nature of the EXT's design has proven popular among well-heeled buyers thanks to a number of features including Bose-brand surround sound audio system, high-intensity-discharge headlights, power adjustable pedals, 14-way power heated leather front bucket seats, towing package, ultrasonic rear park assist, electronically controlled shock absorbers, three-piece rigid tonneau cover and 18-inch aluminum wheels.

There are very few EXT options aside from navigation and entertainment systems, a climate package that includes a heated steering wheel and heated and cooled seats, a 22-inch chrome-wheel package and a power sunroof.

A blind-spot alert system adds to peace of mind.

Illustration:

• / The Escalade comes in an EXT trim that can coddle up to five people in leather-clad luxury or carry a sheet of plywood with the Midgate down.

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Chevrolet Tahoe

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Source: Calgary Herald

Overall: Unlike the larger Suburban, Tahoe can be had in a plethora of configurations, ready to haul, tote or cruise quietly at will.

Drivetrain: Both 5.3-litre engines are E85 capable; Hybrid returns with a 6.0-L V-8 coupled to twin electric motors.

? General Motors is awfully proud of its pickups, so generally any new technology is bound to debut in the Silverado first.

Eventually, things trickle down to the full-sized Tahoe and extended-length Suburban because they're all so closely related.

The standard engine is a 5.3-litre V-8 (available in two strengths) hooked to a six-speed automatic transmission.

A hybrid version also returns with its gas/electric system that features a 332-h.p. 6.0-L V-8 matched to two electric motors built into the transmission. Fuel savings are said to be in the 25 to 30 per cent range for all-around driving (50 per cent in city) when compared with the 5.3-L V-8.

The hybrid system can operate at low speeds on electric power alone, and can assist the V-8 during acceleration or when climbing hills.

Regular Tahoe models with the 5.3-L V-8 make 14.4/9.5 (city/highway) L/100 km.

Inside, seating versatility remains a strong selling point, especially since all models come with a standard third row bench to seat the same number of people as the Suburban.

The second row effortlessly flips and folds out of the way for access to the rear seat. An optional power flip/fold feature is available and works with the touch of a button.

Illustration:

- / The hybrid Tahoe can operate at low speeds on electric power alone.

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Chevrolet Silverado

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Source: Calgary Herald

Overall: Feeling the pressure from Ford's EcoBoost economy and Ram's style, Chevrolet keeps its Silverado ready with smart changes for 2012.

Drivetrain: A 4.3-litre V-6 engine leads the Silverado lineup as the base offering in all those designated as "Work Trucks." Three V-8s in 4.8-, 5.3- and 6.2-L displacements become standard as cab sizes increase; the hybrid is also E85 compatible.

? While Ford is touting its new fuel-saving EcoBoost V-6 engines in the F-150 and Ram is making hay with its clever storage options and upmarket interior, Chevrolet is just continuing to build honest work-ready pickups.

Not much has changed for 2012, but there are new front ends on the Silverado that mimic the larger HD models, and there are a few technology changes that should keep GM in the mix with improved safety, such as standard trailer-sway control.

And don't forget that GM beat the competition by bringing the industry's first gas-electric hybrid pickup to market, and it remains the only example out there.

The two-mode system, available in two- or four-wheel-drive 1500-series (half-ton) crew-cab short box models, operates at up to 50 km/h using only its two 60-kilowatt electric motors (housed inside the continuously variable transmission). At higher speeds, a 322-horsepower 6.0-litre gasoline engine works in tandem with the electric propulsion. The rear-seat-mounted battery pack recharges by capturing braking energy.

Other fuel-saving goodies include 18-inch low-rolling-resistance tires and electrically operated (as opposed to belt-driven) air-conditioning and power-steering units.

The 2,540-kilogram hybrid gets an impressive 9.7/9.1 (city/highway) L/100 km for the 4x2 model, while the 4x4 units are rated at 9.8/9.1.

For "regular" Silverado models, five suspension grades continue to be offered, from smooth ride and off-road to towing to "maximum street performance" with 20-inch wheels.

Then there are three different box lengths, three cab variations, three trim levels and all kinds of power choices.

The base engine is the grey-whiskers 195-h.p. 4.3-L V-6, while the base V-8 is a 4.8-L unit with 295 h.p.

At the top is the 403-h.p. 6.2-L V-8 (offered in crew cabs only), previously exclusive to the Cadillac Escalade SUV and EXT truck. In the middle is the popular 315-h.p. 5.3-L V-8.

Illustration:

• / The 2012 Silverado features five different suspension grades, from smooth ride to 'maximum street performance.'

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Chevrolet Silverado HD

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Source: Calgary Herald

Overall: Everything you'll likely ever need in a work vehicle; lots of power, a roomy and comfortable "office."

Drivetrain: Base 6.0-litre V-8; torquey 6.6-L turbo-diesel V-8 is smooth, quiet and ideal for knocking your house off its foundation.

? Where serious hauling and towing needs to be done, there's not much short of an eighteen-wheeler that can top the Silverado HD.

And for the 2012 model year, the 2500-series' maximum towing capacity has been increased to 8,150 kilograms from 7,700, while fifth wheel-fitted one-ton units jump to 10,400 kilograms from 9,000.

Other than a few more optional niceties such as ventilated front seats and an upgraded radio for LTZ models, the current HD is a mirror image of the new-for 2011 version that introduced added stiffness to the big pickup's 11 separate boxed frame assemblies.

As well, the rear leaf springs were beefed up with a 2,800-kilogram gross rear-axle rating on the 2500 HDs, up from the previous 2,720-kilogram mark (ratings for the one-ton 3500 HD single and dual rear-wheel models were similarly increased).

The base 6.0-litre V-8 puts out 360 horsepower and 380 pound-feet of torque. For serious grunt work, there's the optional (and very popular) 6.6-L turbo-diesel V-8 rated at 397 h.p. and an earth-shaking 765 pound-feet of torque.

Both base and optional engines employ six-speed automatic transmissions: a GM-developed Hydramatic comes with the 6.0; and the turbo-diesel employs an Allison built unit.

Chevy has added its "smart exhaust brake system" to the turbo-diesel that, when coasting, holds compressed exhaust gasses inside the engine's cylinders, creating resistance, which in turn slows down the truck without touching the brakes. The result is less wear and tear on the brake hardware and greater control for the driver, especially when hauling or towing heavy loads downhill.

Included is a stability program that reduces the trailer's tendency to wiggle around, while hill-start assist prevents the HD from rolling backward when on an incline.

The list of standard HD equipment on the WT (Work Truck), LT and LTZ trim levels is tremendous, as is the options list. You can, quite literally, outfit the HD from bare-bones basic to over-the-edge luxury.

Illustration:

• / The 2012 Silverado HD is powered by a base 6.0-litre V-8 that cranks out 360 horsepower, or an optional 6.6-L turbo diesel rated at 397 h.p.

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Canada first to get new Chevy Trax sport-ute

The Winkler Times

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Section: Autonet

General Motors has announced the addition of the Trax compact sport utility vehicle that will be available in over 140 markets around the world, but Canada and Mexico will have the distinction of being the countries to launch the vehicle in the fourth quarter of 2012.

The Trax is a variant of the Buick Encore that will be coming to the North American market in 2012. Like the recently released Chevrolet Orlando, which is sold in Canada but not the United States, there are currently no plans to bring the Trax to the U.S. market.

The Trax is a five-seater GM describes as having "a muscular exterior design and wide athletic stance" that help exhibit its "SUV toughness and capability."

GM notes the exterior design of the Trax will "(evolve) the global Chevrolet design aesthetic", while the vehicle's interior and details will be "executed to standards usually found in more expensive vehicles."

"Trax is an important addition to the Chevrolet portfolio in Canada," said Marc Comeau, vice-president of sales, service and marketing for Chevrolet in Canada. "We believe Trax will be a popular choice with Canadians looking for the convenience and utility offered by a small SUV, which will be ideal to drive in urban centres and cities across Canada."

The Trax will presumably compete with smaller offerings from competitors, such as the Jeep Compass, Mitsubishi RVR, and Volkswagen Tiguan. GM claims class-leading cargo space in its new vehicle. GM has yet to officially announce powertrain options,

France will host the official global debut of the Trax at the 2012 Paris Motor Show in September. The small SUV joins several other brand new or redesigned Chevrolet products being released in 2012, including the Spark minicar, Malibu sedan, and Traverse wagon.

Quebecers happiest with insurance; BC not so much

There are consumers, it turns out, who are satisfied with their auto insurance, and results from a new survey say Quebecers are the most happy with their insurance, while British Columbians are the least happy.

The survey, which was conducted by Canadian company InsurEye Inc., asked drivers from B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec how they feel about their car insurance. Manitoba and B.C., which both use a single, government-run insurance company, fared worst.

In fact, B.C. drivers were unhappy across all three criteria used in the survey -customer service, value for money, and claims service. All insurers were based on an overall five-star scale, and B.C. had the lowest overall ranking, finishing at 3.62/5.

Quebec had the highest overall satisfaction rating at 4.1/5, which could be attributed to the province having the lowest average insurance premiums at \$76/ month. Quebecers weren't just happy about their value for money though -they also ranked customer service very high.

Ontario was the province with the third-highest overall satisfaction, with insurance companies scoring 3.88/5. This is despite Ontarians facing the highest premiums in Canada, averaging \$149/ month, with a quarter of drivers in the province actually paying over \$190/month.

InsurEye said that while premiums in Ontario may be high, the result is better claim satisfaction, which Ontarians rank highest of the three criteria.

Saskatchewan's overall satisfaction finished just ahead of Ontario's at 3.9/5. InsurEye said both Alberta (3.77/5) and Manitoba (3.75/5) are both showing signs of decreasing customer satisfaction.

"Not having enough competition limits choices and very often translates into a low customer satisfaction," said InsurEye Inc. Co-Founder Dmitry Mityagin. "As we see, consumers are less concerned about paying too much and more concerned about not having enough choice. Competition motivates insurance companies to listen to the customers and further improve their product offerings."

Ford reduces traditional summer shutdown

For as long as the industry can remember, the North American manufacturers have idled their operations for a couple weeks over the summer but Ford is putting an end to the practice, at least partly.

The carmaker is reducing the shutdown at 13 of its plants (six assembly plants) from two weeks to just one, in the hopes of producing some 40,000 more vehicles. It's part of Ford's plan to boost its capacity by 400,000 units. Naturally, the move had to be accepted by the United Auto Workers union, and it was included in the last national contract.

The manufacturers have traditionally used a summer shutdown to use a skeleton crew to execute widespread maintenance without the need to vary production output.

"We are working most of our North America plants at maximum capacity and we are adding production shifts in three of our assembly plants," said Jim Tetreault, vice president of North America Manufacturing. "Requiring more capacity from our plants is a good problem to have and having the flexibility to add a week of production in our plants goes a long way toward solving it."

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Toyota Camry Hybrid vs. Buick Regal eAssist; Auto Comparo

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Section: Wheels

The Toyota Camry Hybrid and Buick Regal eAssist represent two different approaches to hybrid technology.

One is a full-blown hybrid able to run entirely on electricity for periods at a time while the other is hybrid light, adding just enough technology to make a dent in fuel costs but keeping development costs to a minimum.

Not surprisingly, the former approach has a much greater impact on fuel economy.

The Camry Hybrid is Toyota's latest generation of Hybrid Synergy Drive, which combines a four-cylinder Atkinson-cycle gasoline engine with an electric motor for a combined 200 horsepower.

The two motors feed into a planetary-gear transmission that lets each operate independently, meaning it can run in electric vehicle (EV) mode under the right conditions.

The Buick Regal eAssist combines a conventional 2.4-litre gasoline engine with a beefy, belt-driven combination alternator/motor to 'assist' the gas engine, allow for engine shutdown at idle and recapture energy during braking.

Now, before we get into the comparison, there's a little reality about all hybrids that you should know: if your goal is lowest cost of ownership of a vehicle, a hybrid anything isn't for you.

There are cheaper cars that get fuel economy that's as good or only slightly worse than hybrids. You have to save a LOT of fuel to just break even on a hybrid.

Where hybrids make sense is when you're already in the market for the underlying car. The jump in price from a fuel-sipping \$14,400 Yaris to the \$27,000 Camry Hybrid is virtually insurmountable in fuel savings, but the jump in price from a non-hybrid Camry to a hybrid is worth considering.

Similarly, getting eAssist in a Regal is quite cheap relative to other Regals.

2012 Buick Regal eAssist

The base price of the comparable Regal (Canadian comfort package plus) is \$31,195. The base price of the Regal eAssist 1SU is \$34,335. That doesn't quite tell the whole story about the price difference, however.

The eAssist adds 17-inch alloy wheels, EZ start keyless start, ultrasonic park assist, tire inflator kit, universal home remote, 120-volt outlet and body coloured door handles with chrome inserts (in addition to the 115-volt lithium-ion battery pack and alternator/motor). The Regal closest to that in terms of equipment is the Canadian comfort package convenience group at \$34,390.

According to the Fuel Consumption Guide prepared by Natural Resources Canada, fuel savings - at the NRCAN standard for fuel-consumption testing - would be about \$400 per year.

So from a base Regal, payback is about three years out. From a comparably equipped Regal, you're saving money out of the gate.

The eAssist is certainly a worthwhile consideration for Regal shoppers. The electric drive adds near-V-6-like power to the four-banger, and the car is just as luxurious as any other Regal. And like the other Regals, the drive characteristics are outstanding.

You do give up some cargo ability to drive the eAssist, however. The hybrid battery pack is mounted just behind the passenger-side rear seat.

Which means it intrudes somewhat into trunk space and that only the driver's side rear seat folds to accommodate longer items.

Aside from that, if you like the Regal, there's no reason to dislike the eAssist.

2012 Toyota Camry Hybrid

The hybrid comes in two versions: LE and XLE. In keeping with Toyota parlance, LE is the base model and XLE is the more-equipped version.

The LE starts at \$26,990 while the XLE adds \$2,000. For that, you get an upgraded audio system, fog lamps, power driver's seat, 17-inch alloy wheels instead of the 16-inch steels with covers, leather-wrapped steering wheel and shift knob and access to options not available on the LE, including heated seats, power moonroof, leather-trimmed ultra suede seating surfaces and a cool new navigation system.

Toyota has had about 14 years now to refine and further develop its hybrid synergy drive system, and it shows. The auto-stop and restart feature, which shuts down the engine under the right conditions when stopped, as at a red light, and instantly restarts when it's time to go, works the most seamlessly of all in this iteration. In some previous models, there was some shudder on restart.

Refinements to the battery pack mean the hybrid now has more cargo space than the previous model.

NRCAN's fuel consumption guide suggests a savings of about \$500 per year from the four-cylinder and \$700 per year from the six. Payback is then about six years out from the four-cylinder model, but the fairest comparison is to the V-6, given the V-6-like power of the hybrid powertrain.

In that case, payback is immediate, since the V-6 starts about \$900 more than the XLE Hybrid.

Conclusion

The NRCAN rating for the Regal is 10.7 litres per 100 km city and 6.3 on the highway. For the eAssist, it's 8.3 city and 5.4 highway. My city driving combined with some minor highway travel averaged 9.5.

The NRCAN rating for the Camry (four-cylinder) is 8.2 city and 5.6 highway. For the hybrid, it's 4.5 city and 4.9 highway. My average, with roughly the same cycle of driving as with the Regal, was 6.5 litres per 100 km.

I also found that if I really paid attention to fuel-saving driving techniques, I could get the average to below six.

The Camry Hybrid is clearly the fuel-sipping champ of this duo. And if the goal is to have a mid-size sedan with the best fuel-economy and lowest price of the two (the Camry Hybrid is about \$7,000 less), it's the winner.

But the Regal presents its own compelling arguments, particularly if you're looking for a bit more luxury and a bit more panache than the Camry can offer.

Kelly Taylor is a veteran AJAC member and co-host of The Road Trip on CJOB, heard every Saturday from 10 a.m. till Noon Central. Listen online, or download the podcast at CJOB.com.

(Email: honkyourhorn@live.ca, Tweet @RoadTripCJOB)

Illustration:

- The 2012 Toyota Camry Hybrid, left, faces off against the 2012 Buick Regal eAssist. Kelly Taylor photo
- The 2012 Toyota Camry Hybrid. Source: Toyota
- The 2012 Buick Regal eAssist. Source: GM

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