



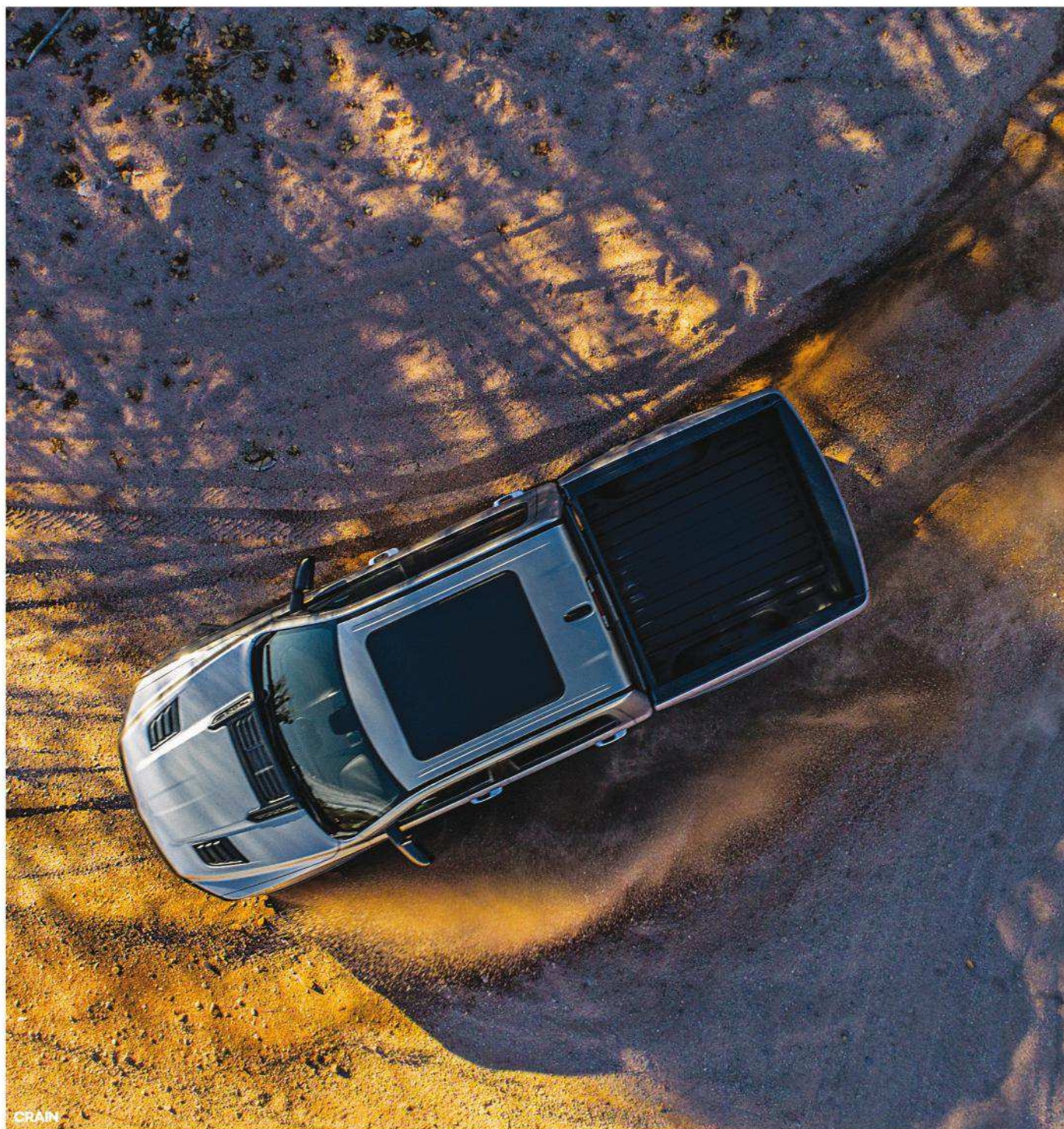
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## SPRINGTIME IN DETROIT



**UH-OH! IT'S THE** first issue of spring 2018, and of course, the changing of the seasons has taken us all completely by surprise.

Having finally pushed his '51 Packard over the line to running/driving status, Graham set his sights on his disassembled Metropolitan. Then he bought another Packard, a highly original '48 that he's prepping for road-trip reliability and a return to its original Cavalier Maroon.

Jake's '63 Pontiac is behaving itself as usual, though he recently came by to make a couple of tweaks to his 2014 Mustang track car. Watching him remove and replace fasteners without once turning to my now-tried-and-true Mini-Ductor was ... well, I'm jealous. Is that how it is for Californians?

Andy and Wes are both close to having Alfas on the road this spring, Andy having just emerged victorious from a battle with the window regulator in his Spider Quadrifoglio.

Jimmy found an incredible crew of guys who managed to get his Subaru rally-ready well in advance of Rally America's 100 Acre Wood Rally, where he finished fourth in class. That gives him more time to help Wesley and me with the 911 recommissioning, which has us sick with "while we're in there ..." syndrome.

The Carroll garage regularly hosts two to five guys and a growing mountain of beer cans. Yesterday, we pressurized some crushed oil lines with air, then heated them with a torch until they returned to tubular form. To our disbelief, it worked. Though when one of them cracks and dumps all my oil at once, I'll know exactly what happened.

All of this is going on in the hours we have left when we're done making Autoweek. This issue has our Packard mechanic thinking deeply about the new Ram 1500, a pickup that represents fresh ideas about what pickups are, how they're built and how we use them. J.P. Vettraino drives the Mercedes CLS, and we get the story from the Australian GP. There's also a good look at the state of Acura and Mazda's IMSA programs after Sebring from Steven Cole Smith.

That's right. After Sebring. Summer's just around the corner ...

**RORY CARROLL**  
PUBLISHER

You can reach me directly on Twitter [@rory\\_carroll](https://twitter.com/rory_carroll) or at [rcarroll@autoweek.com](mailto:rcarroll@autoweek.com)



### ABOUT THE COVER

The modern pickup is no longer a humble workman's tool: These are among the most popular vehicles in America, after all. So when a truck builder goes back to the drawing board, as Ram did for the 2019 1500, it's a big deal. Our first impression? The new Ram brings the goods on all fronts, from capability to comfort to technology. And in the Rebel trim shown here, it'll happily keep on trucking after the pavement ends. Plus, we think it looks cool enough to feature on the cover—and let's not pretend that looks don't count for something. Read up on the 1500 starting on page 12.



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The Volkswagen Beetle has reached the end of the line (again): [bit.ly/aw-beetledead](http://bit.ly/aw-beetledead)



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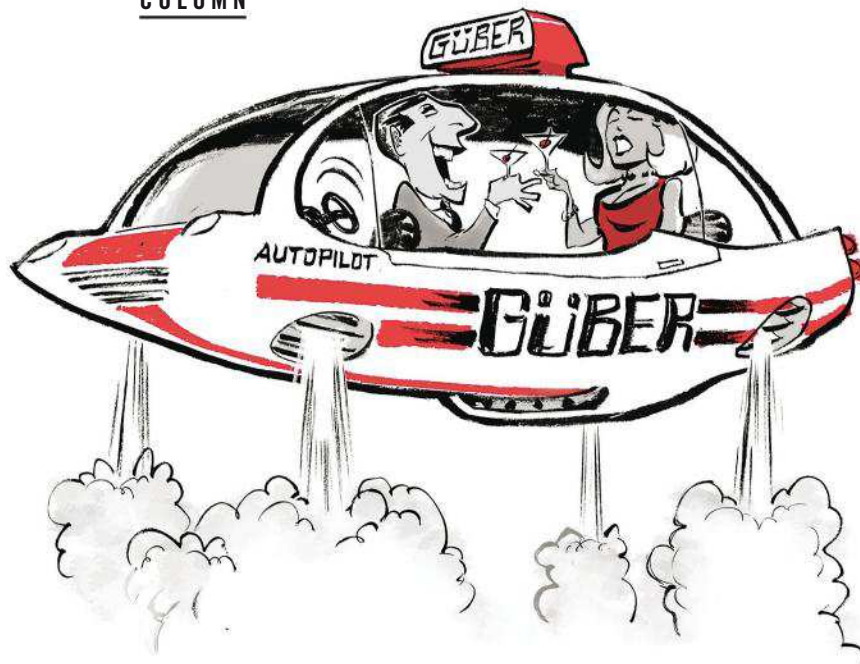
## TRAVELS WITH FARLEY

BY CORY FARLEY

# WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW...



Been thinking some lately about the future of driving, and I can't figure it out.



Self-driving cars? Who knows? People smarter than I think they're inevitable, and people dumber than I find them appealing. Personally, I have no interest. It's a measure of how far down that road we've already come, though, that when I say I'd rather drive myself, fans of autonomy assure me the cars will be "perfectly safe."

Maybe they will be. It's been a long time since I've seen the Blue Screen of Death (Post-millennials, Google it). But I remember and don't want the transportation equivalent enlivening my commute.

Really, though, my apathy is more basic: I like to drive. Decades after I first struggled with a clutch, I'm still working on making my inputs imperceptible, timing my progress so I never have to brake, floating through traffic like a wraith.

That's another aspect of the future to ponder: competence. It seems to be ... gone. Going, anyway.

"Competence is vanishingly rare," a Princeton-educated, mostly retired friend told me recently. "It's like nobody looks past the fenders."



This guy grew up in California, then lived in Manhattan for 25 years making his fortune. He knows freeways. He knows traffic. He still likes to drive, too, so when retirement began to weigh on him, he signed up with Uber. Mostly he ferries late-arriving passengers from the airport to their hotels.

He likes to drive, particularly, in snow. I'm a California native, too, and even after 30 years in the land of Real Winter, I enjoy the challenge of a slippery road (and the freedom to say, "Nah, I'll just stay home and read" if I don't want to deal with it).

I'm sure the Significant People have a significant boatload of staggeringly bright engineers on this issue. They might even have answers. Still, I wonder if a robot will remember that there's often black ice near the bushes by the river or that the kids on Prickly Pear Road play ball in the street all summer.

Another worry is, well, speed, and the regulation thereof.

On a road trip, I sometimes push the limit a little. I'm not talking 30 through a school zone, but where it's safe, you might catch me at 80, 85. West of the Rockies, that's pretty much moving with traffic. You're not likely to be cited if you don't make a spectacle of yourself.

But what if the cops are, in effect, riding with you?

I'm not an expert on autonomy, but I can read. What I read says that cars will talk to each other and to our benevolent cybernetic overlords, who will steer us around traffic and crashes to get us there sooner, safer and more efficiently. But ...

How can they do that unless they know everything, and what if there are things we don't want them to know? ♦



Senior Contributing Editor **CORY FARLEY** dares you to pry the steering wheel from his cold, dead hands, nerd.

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## “TRACKING DOWN THE TRUTH,” CAR LIFE, J.P. VETTRAINO, JAN. 22

I was alarmed when your Jan. 22 magazine showed up in the mail with the story on the BMW Veritas. I ran to the barn to see if my car was still there. It was. Your article sure did get the juices flowing about my boyhood venture into the car business. The process I undertook so many years ago wasn't easy. I started by doing a test fit of the mold on an old pickup. Entry and exit proved unacceptable. Then I tried a more practical approach (early '30s Dodge) with good visibility, and the door worked. The above photo shows what came out of the barn. It is now getting new tires, a wax job and a few other things. We drove it until our kids came along; it is now on its way back with a few safety modifications for our grandkids to scare themselves in. Thank you for firing up the juices.

— JOHN SPEARS, CHEHALIS, WASHINGTON

## “RADICAL NOTION,” CAR LIFE, BLAKE Z. RONG, MARCH 12

Thank you so much for the article on Radwood! As a guy who got his license in 1986 at age 16, cars of the '80s were the everyday transportation of my formative years behind the wheel. Lots of them were quirky compromises and were even dismissed when new. However, my brother and I would study the minimal yearly changes on all the cars, and they are held in a special nostalgic place in my heart. In the past year, I became a member of the Malaise Motors Facebook group, and my spark for these cars was reignited. As you pointed out, there are lots of folks born long after these cars were built. If there is a common thread to this younger generation of enthusiasts, it's that they are so positive and inclusive of each member

and what cars they own or are into. As one of the “old guys,” my obscure knowledge of yearly changes can even help every now and then.

— JAYME DEIBLER, PITTSBURGH

Blake Z. Rong's writing for this piece is outstanding. I'm a former magazine writer/editor, and this is the first such complimentary letter I've been moved to send in decades. The second-to-last paragraph, in particular, is brilliant. Bring us more of him!

— DAVID GODOLPHIN, CONCORD, MASS.

Thanks for the article on Radwood. I often wondered if the cars of the '80s/'90s would be celebrated like the '50s. IROCs, Trans Am GTAs and C4 ZR-1s were my version of the revered old cars. It made me feel good, even after arriving the day I turned 40.

— CAMERON MATAKA, VIA EMAIL

## SOCIAL CALL



@AutoweekUSA Junkyard Treasure: 1983 Mitsubishi Starion



@KiraroYuuki Drift car!



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## UNDER THE HOOD

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## Cars in Corktown rescheduled

**OUR MAY 5** Cars in Corktown event has been rescheduled for June 16. That's the bad news. The good news is The Factory, where our Corktown events are held, is undergoing a few more renovations, so the facility promises to be better than ever when we return there. More details to come on the June event as they develop.



## You asked for 'em ...

**THAT'S** right—we're talking the now-coveted Autoweek keychains! After a vintage Jean Behra helmet keychain Autoweek offered years ago appeared on the cover of the first issue of our redesign (Sept. 18, 2017), we got inundated with desperate pleas from longtime readers who remembered having one back in the day and wanted another and newbies who just thought it looked cool. So we're getting a tribute version ready for the masses. Well, not really the masses. We are, however, putting a limited quantity (700) on sale in May. Further details are forthcoming at [autoweek.com](http://autoweek.com), so be on the lookout. Drive on.



## Corrections

**THE STORY** “Strike an Arc!” in the March 26 issue should have indicated Josh Welton prefers Miller helmets. Also in that issue, the story “High School Shop Class, Restored” should have identified one of the instructors as Les Blahuta.





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## BIKES

2018 HONDA GOLD WING

# KING OF THE ROAD

Honda's touring icon gets—dare we say it?—sportier without losing the smooth



BY MARK VAUGHN

**IF THERE IS SOMETHING** more comfortable than a 2018 Honda Gold Wing motorcycle, it probably has the words “barca” and “lounger” on it somewhere.

For the last 43 years, the Gold Wing has been an icon of two-wheeled luxury. A high-water mark of carcass-cradling comfort. It's the Cadillac of motorcycles—and not the current BMW-chasing Cadillac, although it does offer way more performance than you'd expect in a big, big bike. I mean the old, luxury Cadillac, with all the tail fins and accompanying features. And it seats two!

The Gold Wing is all new again. It gets a new frame, with—now get this, people—double-wishbone front suspension (yes, that can be done). It also gets an optional dual-clutch automatic transmission that is sure to attract and keep older riders who might appreciate its smooth, clutchless operation while enticing newer riders with its simple, twist-n-go functionality.

Let's start with that dual-clutch transmission, or DCT. There have been DCTs on a few other Honda motorcycles, but those were five-speed boxes; this is a seven-speed. To get the DCT to fit required the whole new frame and even a new engine, though this one remains a flat-six. The 1,833cc powerplant now packs four valves per cylinder instead of two and is more fuel efficient than last year's flat-six. It sits a little farther forward on the 66.7-inch wheelbase for better balance and sportier handling.

The double-wishbone front suspension is exactly what it sounds like: a double-wishbone linkage attaching the front forks to the all-new aluminum frame. In the middle of the links is the spring and shock. With it, front wheel travel becomes nearly vertical, instead of arcing rearward as it did on the previous Wing. The Pro-Link rear suspension is a single-sided swing arm. Brakes are two-wheel ABS on all models.



The new Wing's throttle-by-wire system allows all kinds of electronic controls. There are four riding modes: tour, sport, econ and rain, plus Honda Selectable Torque, Hill Start Assist and cruise control. The bike even comes with Apple CarPlay, and there's an audio system available. Everything is controlled through a 7-inch screen via a set of buttons and a mouse-like knob on top of the gas tank.

Yes, this is a motorcycle we're talking about. Can air conditioning be far behind?

It all works splendidly on the road. The double-wishbone front suspension eats up bumps that in any other motorcycle would transfer directly into the frame. Steering is downright sporty for a Gold Wing; despite what you might think is a heavier front end, it does not feel heavier. It helps that the curb weight of around 800 pounds (about twice your average motorcycle) of the 2018 is about 90 pounds lighter than the 2017 and feels it. Plus, the isolation offered by the double wishbones makes steering the iron giant easier. Back-to-back rides between 2018s with the wishbones and 2017s without make

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The DCT transmission shifts with almost-imperceptible smoothness. You can set it so that it'll shift for you or, at the flip of a switch, you can shift it your-

self via two pull tabs on the left handlebar. There's also a six-speed manual available. Both get a backup gear called a reverse walking mechanism for maneuvering in tight spots. The DCT adds a forward walking mode.

I start on a DCT bike in auto mode. One minor problem: Like many automatics, it upshifts too soon in three out of four modes. In sport, it downshifts too soon. Tour mode seems like a good default. I also try the six-speed manual transmission, and I like that, too. But all things being equal, I'd choose that DCT.

Prices range from (brace yourself) \$23,950 to \$31,500—steep, but more or less in line with the competition. Speaking of, there's also the BMW K 1600 GTL, Indian Roadmaster, Yamaha FJR1300, Harley-Davidson Electra Glide and so on. But for a luxury tourer with some newfound sportiness, the Gold Wing just might be the best of them all. ♦



## MARKET



### 1967 DATSUN 1600 ROADSTER

Gooding & Co.  
Amelia Island, Florida, sale  
March 9, 2018



Silver gray metallic with burgundy leather interior; deep red soft top. The original motor has been rebuilt and modified; displacement is now "around" 2,200cc. Upgraded five-speed manual transmission. All exterior and interior restoration has been well done; details down to the tools and jack are included. The engine compartment is fully detailed. Nice? Well, this car won both Junior and Senior Antique Automobile Club of America awards, as well as Best of Show two years running in Watkins Glen at Datsun Regional meets. Just 2,300 miles since the restoration; seller is including many photos and receipts detailing the work done.

**SOLD AT \$40,700**

Before there was a Nissan selling cars and trucks in North America, there was Datsun. The Datsun brand was generally well-received, with some great cars (240Z, anyone?) and even racing successes. It must have been a tough call to rebrand under the corporate name.

One of those well-loved Datsuns was the Roadster. It appeared badged as a 1600 or 2000; this particular car is what was known as a 1967.5—a very late 1600. In 1967, the base price for a 1600 was \$2,546, and the Roadster weighed in at just over 1 ton at 2,028 pounds. This car has some tasteful (and largely hidden) modifications, but the Gooding audience seemed to appreciate it for how well it presented and how nicely it showed.

Now, about the price. You can find a nice example at half this winning bid, but chances are it's going to not be as well finished, so the value here is in it being ready to go. And it's a proven show winner. This no-reserve sale had a presale estimate of \$45,000 to \$55,000, and frankly, at the bid sold, it was a good buy.

**DAVE KINNEY**



DRIVES

2019 RAM 1500

# THE FULL MONTY

The new Ram 1500  
hauls hay bales and  
humans with ease



DRIVEN BY  
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**W**E LIVE IN AN AGE of ludicrous vehicular capability. Whether we're talking sports cars, off-roaders or pickup trucks of all sizes and duty ratings, today's machines will do more than most of us will ever ask of them—not a bad place to be for you, the buyer.

But, and be honest here, if the 2019 Ram 1500 wasn't any more capable than the truck it was built to replace, would you notice? Would anyone but a Ford or Chevrolet partisan notice?

This isn't to say that the fifth-generation 1500 can't tow more (up to 12,750 pounds total when properly equipped) than its predecessor. And sure, a certain percentage of you reading this will push your new 5.7-liter eTorque Hemi V8-equipped Quad Cab 1500 4x2—which is what you'll have to order to get that figure—to that limit on a semi-regular basis.

It's that for the majority of us, it becomes academic after a certain point, a little like a Nürburgring time. We crunched the numbers, and there are simply not enough hobby farmers, horse fanciers or part-time brick transporters in America to soak up the surplus capability.

There's much more to the new 1500 than increased payloads and tow ratings, which is good for Ram because it can't quite compete with the F-150's 13,200-pound max. This is a truck that has been designed from the wheels (now beefier, with six lugs) and the frame (100 pounds lighter than its predecessor) on up to accommodate the truck-buying public's dual mandate: to haul stuff, yes, but also to haul the family in comfort and style.

Basically, we want super-butcht, civilian-grade big rigs complete with all the bragworthy tow/haul ratings. But we also want something that, when you get down to it, amounts to a crossover with a bed. Despite cries for stripped-down, rear-wheel-drive trucks with manuals and 8-foot beds—might as well slap a

carburetor on there, too—emanating from certain sectors of Truck Country, gussied-up luxotrucks with big cabs and short beds are selling like hotcakes.

Before Ford's foray into aluminum, Ram tended to be a bit more avant-garde than the Blue Oval or the Bowtie when it came to civilizing its offerings, from big things (air suspension, introduced as an option in 2013) to little things (keyless ignition, also made available that year). These changes were incremental; in the world of trucks, you dare not move too quickly. See: the unibody Honda Ridgeline. Capable though it may be, it's a little too crossover-like to win over typical buyers.

The new 1500 is something significantly different—perhaps the first of its breed. It reflects how people who buy pickups circa 2018 actually use them. It's still a predominantly steel body (the remote-droppable aluminum tailgate is one exception) on a predominantly steel frame. The V8 isn't going anywhere. But the niceties that have been creeping into pickup cabins over the past decade aren't tacked on here—they feel baked in from the start. The new

**“EVERYBODY NEEDS A TRUCK, WHETHER IT'S EVERY DAY, ONCE A MONTH, ONCE A YEAR...”**

**—JIM MORRISON, RAM BOSS**

1500 strives to be a fully realized, modern truck. Our initial impression is, with some caveats, the Ram pulls it off confidently.

You get the feeling that Ram would happily build and sell a pickup to every soul in America: Once the 2019 model fully rolls out, you'll be able to choose from two cabs, two beds and three engine options, plus various add-ons, options and 15 new wheel designs. There's a truck here for every task and taste, assuming you don't need a regular cab with an 8-foot bed (Ram isn't offering those, at least at the outset).

To keep things simple on the first drive, though, the Rebel, Big Horn, Laramie and Limited trucks we drive are all 5.7-liter Hemi-equipped (early availability trucks will all come equipped with that engine). Unfortunately, we'll have to wait to try the V6





and V8 eTorque variants. These will use a 48-volt mild-hybrid system to provide extra low-end grunt on takeoff (and recapture some energy while braking); that this system is on its way, and on a truck no less, speaks to how the pickup is changing to meet the expectations and regulatory demands of the 21st century.

Unless you're really striving for a bit more towing capacity and economy, the familiar 5.7-liter is more than sufficient. You still get 395 hp and 410 lb-ft of torque, and it still sounds nice and growly when you punch it. At one point, we drag around a trailer loaded to about 6,000 pounds—barely a challenge. It would only be news if the truck did break a sweat here; suffice it to say, the rig goes and stops just fine.

There are a number of things our first drive couldn't possibly reveal (though off-road time was limited, you can read more about that starting on page 16). Naturally, these are the things most important to truck buyers—we're talking reliability and durability here. You can take solace in the fact that Ram stuck to the steel frame/V8 equation, but what we keep coming back to is how well-integrated the entire package feels.

Take the interior, extra quiet thanks in part to frame-mounted, engine-vibration-canceling, active-tuned mass modules (all this on a pickup truck!). Add in the available air suspension, which seems to have proven itself since its introduction, and the smoothest ride in the class gets smoother, if only marginally.

The big eye-grabber inside is that 12-inch Uconnect touchscreen. It dominates the center stack on trucks so equipped (an 8.4-inch touchscreen or a puny 5-inch display are also available). It works intuitively and looks natural because it wasn't shoehorned in; the truck was designed to accommodate this piece of tech, which you'd expect to find in a Tesla or a Volvo.



## DRIVER NOTES

Smoothest-riding truck on the market, hands down

Nicest interior, too, with or without the 12-inch touchscreen

That the classic regular cab/long bed isn't available at outset is telling

Yet even the Big Horn, with its cloth seats, isn't a bad place to be. It feels like Ram started with the top trim-level trucks and worked down rather than wrapping a basic truck in leather until it had a Longhorn; the result is a more comfortable, better-considered truck no matter where in the range you jump in. That benefits the guy who earns his living in a Tradesman just as it does the family in a loaded-up Limited.

In the popular imagination, the pickup is a utilitarian thing, designed and built for those who do Truck Stuff on job sites and ranches over yonder in Truck Country. But the frontiers of Truck Country are expanding, and fast. Or maybe it's the suburbs that have been creeping into Truck Country?

However we ended up at this juncture, pickups are no longer specialists' tools: They're everyday transportation. Measuring a modern truck's utility purely in terms of towing and hauling feels myopic. They're the new universal vehicles, which helps justify their prices; a bare-bones Tradesman Quad Cab 4x2 V6 starts at \$33,340, and a loaded Limited can easily crest \$60K (Rebels and Big Horns actually get cheaper for 2019).

"Everybody needs a truck," Ram boss Jim Morrison is fond of saying, "whether it's every day, once a month, once a year ..." In the past, you had to endure a certain amount of crudeness to get that truck, however often you needed it. Not anymore. The new Ram is all the pickup you're likely to need when you need it to be and surprisingly refined transportation when you don't. Hop in for a test drive; once you're behind the wheel, you might be surprised to find Truck Country is a lot closer than you thought—and it's easier and more comfortable than ever to get there. ♦



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2019 RAM REBEL 1500

# HIT THE TRAIL



The new Ram is ready to rock when the pavement ends



DRIVEN BY

**BRADLEY IGER**

**IF YOU PLAN TO SPEND** a significant amount of time in the dirt, you have two ostensible options when it comes to outfitting a 2019 Ram 1500: Check the box for the 4x4 Off-road Package on the options sheet (available on all trim levels aside from Rebel) or simply opt for the Rebel model.

Now sporting a more rigid frame, retuned front suspension geometry and a third-generation five-link setup at the rear, the new 1500 focuses on bolstering strength while dropping some pounds, which pays dividends off-road. I had a chance to put both a 4x4 Off-road Package-equipped Longhorn crew cab and a Rebel crew cab through their paces where the road ends.

First, the Rebel. It's not a Ford F-150 Raptor-fighter, but neither is it an appearance package. Now offered in both quad-cab and crew-cab configurations, Rebel models are outfitted with a 1-inch suspension lift, off-road-biased rear suspension geometry,



redesigned Bilstein shocks that feature remote reservoirs at the rear for improved heat management, and 33-inch Goodyear Wrangler DuraTrac all-terrain tires that put the power to the ground through an electronic-locking rear differential. While the previous iteration of the Rebel came standard with air suspension, the more traditional coilover setup is now the default configuration, with air suspension an option.

Underbody skid plates provide protection for the transfer case, steering system, oil pan and gas tank, and hefty tow hooks with wide bumper openings are fitted as standard to improve ease of use. Along with 4WD Low and 4WD High modes, the Rebel also features hill-descent control to make the pickup easier to manage in steep, loosely packed downhill sections.

I test the Rebel's suspension articulation, hill-climbing prowess and desert running capability within the span of a looped course. After switching the transfer case into 4WD Low and dropping the hammer, I make short work of some demanding terrain without so much as an untoward groan. The sheer size and weight of the truck are evident at all times, but the 395-hp Hemi V8-equipped Rebel bounds effortlessly through rut-filled ravines and up inclines steep enough to be sketchy on foot.

Yet there are spots where the Rebel's limitations become evident. Heading through densely packed ruts with a bit too much gusto could quickly overwhelm the suspension, and while some of that can be chalked up to this journalist's leadfoot, it's worth noting that the Rebel is not outfitted with the sort of multistage damping technology seen on Ford's latest Raptor.

Second: There's no way to manually control the eight-speed transmission's behavior to hold it in a lower gear and power through, for example, deep sand. Lacking paddle shifters, the only way to do this is to preprogram the gear limit feature—which simply prevents the transmission from upshifting past a certain predetermined gear—before going into a particular section of a trail. Not a particularly elegant solution.

Ultimately, these are minor quibbles; the truth is that most folks who are buying this pickup won't miss the lack of multistage dampers or paddle shifters. Those who do will likely find an easy solution in the aftermarket or from FCA's own Mopar Performance division, at least where the suspension is concerned.

The coilover suspension-equipped Rebel isn't the only way to get off-road capability in the new 1500. The Longhorn I get to drive earlier is outfitted with the optional active air suspension system, which Ram says enhances fuel efficiency while improving ride quality and offering load leveling and ride height adjustability. The differences between the three selectable suspension heights in terms of ride quality seems negligible on-road, though dropping it to its lowest setting helps the new Ram 1500 achieve a claimed best-in-segment drag coefficient of 0.357.

Off-road excursions in the Longhorn are decidedly less demanding than trail sessions in the Rebel, but I can report that the former felt well-composed, with minimal body motion when trekking through densely packed and uneven dirt roads at high speeds. The Longhorn, with its retractable running boards, air ride and 32-inch Falken Wildcat all-terrain rubber, is slightly less sure-footed in the rough stuff than Rebel. But not by much.

When tasked with dispatching inhospitable driving routes and handling lengthy stints on unpaved roads (likely the most demanding off-roading that the majority these will ever see), both the Rebel and the Off-road Package-equipped Longhorn feel over-qualified for the job. Of course, if you need more than that, I'm sure FCA would be happy to sell you a Jeep Wrangler Rubicon. ♦





DRIVES



2019 MERCEDES-BENZ CLS-CLASS

# RIGHT

M-B revives its straight-six  
in the third-gen CLS-Class



DRIVEN BY

**J.P. VETTRINO**

# IN LINE



**F**OURTEEN YEARS have obscured the impact of the original CLS some, but that car remains a genuine landmark of the early second automotive century. The 2005 CLS-Class more or less created the oxymoronic phrase “four-door coupe,” because it sort of amounted to ... a four-door coupe: a car with the elegance and dynamic proportions of a conventional two-door coupe and most of the functionality of a four-door sedan. That first CLS was unique and beautiful, and Mercedes-Benz was widely praised. Competitors launched into hot pursuit. A host of imitators followed, starting with cars like the Audi A7, Volkswagen Passat CC and BMW Gran Coupe. The subsequent trend toward permutations has carried us to oddities like SUV “coupes” with four-doors.

Now comes the third-gen CLS, and though things have changed, plenty has stayed the same. Differences include advanced safety and semi-autonomous features Merc has deployed since the last CLS redo in 2011—and also the revival of the Mercedes straight-six. The sedan-as-coupe signature remains, with more bling.

This CLS is to the recently launched E-Class sedan as the old one was to the previous E-Class, and a bit larger. Its mostly steel unibody shares a 115.7-inch wheelbase with the new E-Class, but the CLS is 3 inches longer than the E, 2 inches wider and a fraction lower at the roof. Its 0.26 drag coefficient is impressively low for such a heavily styled car—down there

with the Tesla Model S and approaching the little Tesla Model 3. Drag reduction in the CLS is aided by a complicated louver system behind the front intakes that adjusts depending on cooling needs.

And the CLS is styled. If it isn't clear in the photos, its shark nose is emphasized with a grille that cants inward and widens toward that bottom. The familiar egg line along the hood, roof and deck and the frameless windows remain. Bling? Those big, sneering corner intakes below the front

**“THERE’S JUST  
SOMETHING ABOUT  
THE TURBINE FEEL,  
THE SMOOTHNESS OR  
THE AURAL CADENCE  
IN A STRAIGHT-SIX.”**

bumper, chrome bits that generate a diamond-stud effect in the grille, the vents in the corners of the rear bumper and copper-tone trim on the launch-only CLS Edition 1. The AMG-branded CLS53 adds more prominent side sills and a lip spoiler on the rear deck.

The next CLS marks the return of a Mercedes-Benz inline-six to the United States—the first since four years before the original CLS was launched. This 3.0-

liter straight-six arrives with plenty more firsts, including 48-volt electrics, a starter/generator motor packed in its bell housing and an electrically driven AC compressor and water pump. With a conventional, twin-scroll turbocharger in the base CLS450, the I6 generates 362 peak hp and 369 lb-ft of torque. That's just 40 hp fewer than the twin-turbo V8 in the 2018 CLS550, from 1.7 liters less displacement. The starter/generator can also add bursts up to 22 hp and 184 lb-ft to the CLS450's motive force, depending on the charge in its 1-kWh lithium battery.

The upgraded I6 in the CLS53 adds an electric compressor on its intake side, with a larger conventional turbo on the exhaust side. Engine output increases to 429 hp and 384 lb-ft, with the same power boost available from the starter/generator. The bigger turbo is responsible for most of the CLS53's extra power. The 48-volt electric compressor more or less fills the boost gaps, responding instantaneously regardless of exhaust flow, smoothing things out over the rev range and eliminating anything that can be called turbo lag.

The transmission is Mercedes' 9G-Tronic nine-speed, torque-converter automatic, tuned in the CLS53 with AMG's “Speedshift” control program for quicker full-throttle shifts, a double-declutching (rev-matching) function and multiple gear kick-downs. 4Matic all-wheel drive—with a power-takeoff clutch at the end of the transmission and shaft running to the front axle—is optional on the CLS450 and







standard on the AMG CLS53, where it's tuned with a default torque split of nearly 100 percent to the rear wheels.

This CLS has a multilink suspension front and rear, with three grades of finish. Steel springs and conventional shocks are standard. Next up is Dynamic Body Control, or the steel coils with rheostat adaptive shocks—now with two valves in each to separately control compression and rebound rates. Finally, there's Air Body Control, or full air suspension with a multichamber setup. The CLS53 comes standard with the air suspension, again controlled by software developed at AMG.

The big news inside might be the rear accommodations. Instead of the familiar two-place, console-split rear seat, the next CLS gets a three-place bench for the first time. There's more rear legroom thanks to the longer wheelbase and thinner front seatbacks, though headroom is still tight, as the roofline probably suggests. The rear seatbacks fold forward, and by appearances, the trunk is more spacious than before. Might be fair to say that this CLS is a bit more practical.

There's more bling inside, too. The wide range of options might count, from piano lacquer to carbon fiber, and maybe the copper-colored piping and appointments in Edition 1.

Yet Exhibit A is the CLS' standard ambient LED lighting. It's as expansive as any we've seen, adjustable in 64 colors and even fills the dash vents. It's sort of like Las Vegas inside.



## DRIVER NOTES

Engine stop/start is as seamless as we've tested

Every safety system and driver aid you've heard of is available

We like the idea of a rear bench more than the reality

Rain in Spain and the vagaries of air travel crimped Autoweek's introduction to the new CLS, but a wet, one-hour session in a CLS53 is sufficient for some observations. So is a chauffeured transfer in a standard CLS450. Gear changes are subtler in the standard grade. The CLS53 generates a deeper, throatier exhaust hum, with maybe a hair more jostle in its AMG-tuned air suspension on rougher roads.

The engine is easy to like, and the appreciation isn't simply nostalgia for the days when there were straight-sixes in everything from Jaguars to F-150s to Toyotas to Jeeps. There's just something about the turbine feel, the smoothness or the aural cadence in a straight-six that V6s could never quite replicate, no matter how much power they generate. Mercedes' under-square 3.0 makes revs in a fashion only straight-sixes can manage. Its torque flows deep and steady, thanks to a big, high-boost turbo and the electrically operated compressor filling the numb spots, and there's plenty of bottom end. The rain in Spain is enough to have the stability control dialing back the straight-six repeatedly, at moderate throttle, even as the AWD shifts some power north.

Back to the interior, the new CLS is familiar Mercedes: a single video screen spanning almost two-thirds of its dash, with a mouse pedestal on the console to rest your hand. It will do just about anything an S-Class will do, right up to driving itself. It will massage your cheeks and shoulders, vaporizing alleged mood-enhancing perfumes as you go, and it will switch its climate control to recirc when you enter a tunnel. It will even try to protect your eardrums from the wicked boom of a crash, triggering the natural stapedius reflex in your ear with a beep when it decides that crash is unavoidable (did not test this).

Admittedly, CLS sales in the United States slipped a bit as Gen II aged, settling behind the Audi A7/S7 on the luxury sedan-as-coupe charts. Yet Mercedes has averaged 27,000 CLS sales per year since the car's inception—a solidly profitable niche that explains money invested in this Gen III. That, and the host of imitators that followed, suggests the four-door coupe was a good idea to begin with.

The CLS450 and AMG CLS53 are expected in North American showrooms late this summer or early this fall as 2019 models. Base equipment includes full LED headlamps, 18-inch wheels, lane-keeping assist, speed-limit assist and a communication module with LTE data reception. Prices are a guess at this point, but a base around \$78,000 ranging to a peak over \$100,000 are probably good ones. The new straight-six will roll further across Mercedes' lineup going forward, appearing first in 53 guise in the '19 E-Class coupe and a cabriolet. ♦





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# 01 2019 BUICK ENVISION

**ON SALE:** Late April  
**BASE PRICE:** \$33,985  
**POWERTRAIN:** 2.5-liter, 197-hp, 192-lb-ft I4; FWD, six-speed automatic  
**CURB WEIGHT:** 3,755 lb

**THE INTENT** Roughly 70 percent of Buick Envision buyers stick with the standard 2.5-liter inline-four/six-speed automatic powertrain. However, those willing to step up to the optional 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder/nine-speed auto in their near-luxury mini-ute will be rewarded with an additional 55 hp and 103 lb-ft to 252 and 295. All-wheel drive remains optional.

The modifications to the outside of the 2019 Envision are subtle. The grille and front fascia have been redesigned, but the most noticeable changes are apparent at the rear of the vehicle, where Buick has fitted new taillights and sculpted fenders.

**THE EXECUTION** The Envision is known for its roomy rear seat thanks to the 108.3-inch wheelbase. And that helps the Buick carve out more rear-seat legroom and cargo space than its close competitor, the Lincoln MKC.

The upgraded turbo-four and new nine-speed are excellent, and acceleration is brisk. That stuff is important, but the average Envision owner wants a roomy interior, quietness and a comfortable ride. And the Envision certainly delivers all three.

**THE TAKEAWAY** The Envision has strong competitors in its size and price class from all over the globe. The case for the Envision is strongest in the lower, less expensive trim levels. This is a solid vehicle in that low-\$30,000 price class. **BEN STEWART**

# 02 2018 SUBARU BRZ TS

**ON SALE:** Now  
**BASE PRICE:** \$34,355  
**POWERTRAIN:** 2.0-liter, 205-hp, 156-lb-ft H4; RWD, six-speed manual  
**CURB WEIGHT:** 2,842 lb



**THE INTENT** Two common complaints about the Subaru BRZ sports coupe were that it needed more power and more tire. Subaru responded to one of those—tires—with the new BRZ tS. It gets a wing like its WRX STI Type RA stablemate, but the BRZ tS only received suspension tuning from Subaru Tecnica International. That means no STI-grade turbo.

**THE EXECUTION** This is the sharpest new BRZ you'll find on the dealer lot, period. The 18-inch Michelin Pilot Sport tires are the same width as what comes on the standard '18 BRZ, but there is more mechanical grip because of the softer tire compound. In addition to the extra rubber, Subaru's trunk-lid-mounted wing has two positions for variable downforce. Sachs dampers keep everything planted at speed.

**THE VERDICT** The extra grip, suspension tuning and aero Subaru added to the tS highlight its sharp bones and its nimble nature. If you plan on hitting track days or mountain roads, you'll feel at home with this BRZ. However, if you're still planning on screaming down the straight at Sebring, you might need more power. **WESLEY WREN**



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# FAST & LOOSE

The wheels come off  
American Haas F1 Team's  
effort in Australia

BY JOE SAWARD

**H**AAS F1 TEAM principal Guenter Steiner is rarely glum.

By nature, he's an ebullient individual, always willing to laugh and trade insults. He doesn't care what other teams think about how Haas has put together its F1 team. They call the car "the grey Ferrari," but Steiner says that if they have a problem with Haas' technical relationship with Ferrari, they should make a protest.

Haas F1, Steiner says, has played by the rules, and if the other teams want to challenge the legality of the car, they can do so. So far, the opposition hasn't lodged a formal complaint, and the FIA is satisfied that Haas is playing by the book.

Steiner says teams are just annoyed because they didn't think of doing the same thing themselves.

But on race night in Melbourne—following a day in which Sebastian Vettel, Lewis Hamilton and Kimi Räikkönen finished on the

podium—Steiner looked drained and weary. His drivers Kevin Magnussen and Romain Grosjean had been running fourth and fifth in the Australian Grand Prix, and they were keeping Max Verstappen's Red Bull in the rearview mirror.

Then the unthinkable happened. Magnussen pitted for a new set of red supersofts on lap 22, but as he headed down the pit lane and made his way back on the track, a frantic radio call came from the pits to Magnussen. "Stop the car! Stop the car immediately!"

The call was for a loose wheel. Just like that, Magnussen's day was over.

Grosjean also needed to exchange his ultrasofts for a new set of supersofts, so he pitted two laps later. Once back on the track, however, a loose wheel forced him to stop on the racetrack, too.

Suddenly, a chance at a podium turned into the latest disappointing day for Haas, a team that finished eighth in the F1 Constructors' Champi-



onship in each of its first two seasons. Grosjean finished 16th and Magnussen 17th.

"It's unbelievable," Steiner said, staring into space. "Two cross-threaded wheel nuts. Both cars had the same problem, but they were unrelated. The problems were on different wheels. Different teams of wheel changers. The design of the wheel nuts has not changed since last year. There was no reason to change it.

"Maybe, with the benefit of hindsight, we should have done more pit stop practice

in Australia, but we didn't have time. We had a lot of little problems in the course of the weekend. Fiddly stuff. Maybe that would have made a difference. But it's happened and that is it. There's nothing we do about it now, apart from making sure that it does not happen again. Last year we were pretty good with pit stops, so it's not about a lack of experience. I think it is just bad luck.

"The good thing is that we have shown that the cars are fast, and we have the pace to compete with our rivals and





LAT PHOTOGRAPHIC (2)

that is very positive. It means that we will be in a position to score points in other places as well. It will depend a little on the temperature and the nature of the circuit—because these things do change, but we are going to be there whenever we can. We have lost a lot of points that we should have had, but I am sure we will score more as the season progresses. Given that the team is still only in its third season in Formula 1, I think we can be very proud with what we have done.”

Magnussen qualified sixth and Grosjean seventh. The two

started fifth and sixth, respectively, after Red Bull’s Daniel Ricciardo was socked with a three-place grid penalty for a virtual safety car infraction in Friday practice.

“It’s a very tough one to swallow for the whole team,” Magnussen said. “To have both cars not finishing, having been in such good positions and with so much anticipation, it’s just heartbreaking to finish like that. We’ll get on top again. We’ll fight back.

“I’m beyond disappointed, but we’ll get over it.” ♦



LEWIS HAMILTON

## ‘SOFTWARE BUG’ SINKS HAMILTON



**AFTER THE SEASON-OPENING** F1 Australian Grand Prix in Albert Park, Lewis Hamilton was not the only one confused about how Sebastian Vettel had won the race. Was it Hamilton’s fault? The team didn’t know. What was clear was that Ferrari’s strategy was a desperate one because the team saw no way to beat Hamilton’s pole-sitting Mercedes on pure pace.

“Last year, we had more pace than Lewis,” Vettel said. “This year, he had the faster car.”

Vettel could have played up the Ferrari win, but he deliberately didn’t. He knew he had been fortunate.

“We got a bit lucky with the timing of the safety car and obviously that was the key to our win,” Vettel said. “We had other races last year where it went the other way. It worked for us this time.”

Vettel, who started second behind Hamilton, finished the race 5.036 seconds ahead. Ferrari’s Kimi Räikkönen finished third, 6.309 seconds back of the winner. Red Bull’s Daniel Ricciardo and McLaren’s Fernando Alonso rounded out the top five.

Räikkönen, who was second early on, had been called to the pits to force Mercedes to cover the move. Hamilton duly pitted, leaving Vettel in the lead, hoping for a safety car period that might get him ahead on the road. Overtaking is almost impossible in Albert Park, so track position is key. And it proved to be when the safety car happened, yet Vettel still came out ahead.

After the race, Mercedes officials said that its algorithms showed that Hamilton would need a gap of 12 seconds to cover a potential safety car intervention, but in reality, he needed 15 seconds. It was a miscalculation—Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff called it a software glitch—that eventually cost the team a win and gave Vettel career victory No. 48.

“Lewis did nothing wrong,” Wolff said. “It was down to a software bug or an algorithm that was simply wrong.” **JOE SAWARD**



COMPETITION PRESS



# LEARNING CURVE

Acura and Mazda Prototype teams are still working for their first IMSA podium



BY STEVEN COLE SMITH



**THE BUZZ AROUND** the 2018 season for the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship centered largely on two teams—the No. 6 and No. 7 Acura Team Penske Prototypes and the No. 55 and No. 77 Mazda Team Joest Prototypes. And the buzz is still strong around the two teams, but the focus has changed from how both were expected to be competitive, possibly even dominant, to: “What’s wrong with the Acuras and the Mazdas?”

Granted, we are just two races into the 12-race season, but the two in the books—the Rolex 24 at Daytona and the Mobil 1 Twelve Hours of Sebring—happen to be the most important IMSA races of the season and certainly the two with the highest international profile.

And while the two teams are essentially new, both the Acuras and the Mazdas tested so much in the preseason that expecting them to be fast and reliable out of the box was an understandable choice.

And while both outfits have been fast, reliability has been another issue.

Roger Penske’s team, in particular, surprised many of us last fall, when—with the Acuras not quite ready to debut—the team took a single off-the-shelf Oreca-Gibson and qualified it on the pole of the season-ending, 10-hour Petit Le Mans at Road Atlanta, finishing third.

So when they showed up at Daytona, both cars—with a superstar driver lineup of Juan Pablo Montoya, Dane Cameron and, for the longer races, Simon Pagnaud in No. 6; and Hélio Castroneves, Ricky Taylor and Graham Rahal in the No. 7—were impressive in qualifying, where they qualified 10th and second, respectively. But even in 10th, the No. 6 was only eight-tenths of a second off the pole time. But the cars finished ninth and 10th, both 15 laps down.

At Sebring, the team qualified third and sixth, with the cars first and fourth fastest in prerace warmups. But they finished 40th and 41st in the 43-car field.

Sebring was especially a disappointment because the team had from Jan. 27 to March 17 to further develop the cars post-Daytona. And while the Acuras were fast, both suffered the same engine problem, which had not revealed itself during thousands of miles of testing. Both 3.5-liter V6 engines were sent to Honda Performance Development Center in California for an autopsy.

For Mazda, Sebring was just one more in a long line of heartbreaking races. Having signed on in 2014 with an all-new, diesel-powered Prototype team, Mazda, which ditched the deadbeat diesel after two seasons in favor of a variation on its proven 2.0-liter turbocharged engine from the American Le Mans Series, halted its Prototype program midway through the 2017 season. It was then reassigned to Joest Racing, the German organization that had so much success with Audi Prototypes (11 total wins with Audi at Le Mans, four others with Porsche).

Daytona was a disaster for Mazda. The No. 55 qualified ninth, but the No. 77 had mechanical problems and wasn’t able to qualify at all, which meant it was listed 50th in the 50-car field. That was a bellwether for the race, in which the Mazdas finished 46th and 47th.

At Sebring, the team appeared ready to contend on every level. They qualified seventh and ninth but seemed especially fast at night, which theoretically put them in good stead for Sebring’s final few hours. Indeed, the No. 77 had the race’s



LAT PHOTOGRAPHIC (2)

## SEBRING RACE RESULTS



Class winners from the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship 66th Mobil 1 Twelve Hours of Sebring:

### PROTOTYPE

**Drivers:** Johannes van Overbeek, Pipo Derani, Nicolas Lapierre  
**Car:** No. 22 Tequila Patrón ESM, Nissan DPi

### GT LE MANS

**Drivers:** Patrick Pilet, Nick Tandy, Frédéric Makowiecki  
**Car:** No. 911 Porsche GT Team, Porsche 911 RSR

### GT DAYTONA

**Drivers:** Bryan Sellers, Madison Snow, Corey Lewis  
**Car:** No. 48 Paul Miller Racing, Lamborghini Huracán GT3

fastest lap, though it finished eighth, 10 laps back. But the No. 55 was contending for the win and was running second when driver Harry Tincknell brought it in for the final pit stop with 40 minutes left. He had been fighting clutch and electrical issues, and when he went to restart the car after the pit stop, the battery was dead.

By the time the team got it running, Tincknell was a lap down and finished sixth.

All that is bad news for Mazda and Acura. The good news: Two of the next three races are 1 hour, 40 minutes in length, and the third is 2 hours, 40 minutes. The emphasis will be more on speed, less on endurance. And given those parameters, the two brands should be solid contenders. ♦



IMSA

# PLENTY LEFT IN THE TANK

IMSA racer Hélio Castroneves  
still has his eyes on Indy 500

**HÉLIO CASTRONEVES** didn't want to leave the Verizon IndyCar Series at the end of 2017 to join Team Penske's sports car program with Acura. And it was clear when he was invited to IndyCar's season-opening race of 2018 at St. Petersburg, Florida.

"I have to say, being a grand marshal in St. Pete, it was great to see everyone, but it did kind of like sting a little bit," Castroneves said.

Castroneves felt uncomfortable. It was apparent in his body language. He was stiff. His smile not as wide and full as usual. "It was tough. But, you know what, life goes on," he said. "You gotta change."

The decision to switch from IndyCar to IMSA prototype racing was ultimately a mutual one, but it was born from team boss Roger Penske's desire for his longtime driver to make it. "When Roger mentioned it to me, he didn't mention like, 'Would you want to do it?' He said, 'I want you to do it for me.' (But) I still have a lot of fuel to burn at IndyCar," said Castroneves.

Once Penske assured Castroneves that he'd still race in the 500, Castroneves thought, "You know what, you've got to find a time in your life. So I accepted the challenge. Let's burn fuel here in IMSA, win races and be competitive. That's what drives me, so I was very happy with the way it was presented and I'm glad I'm here, too. And I still have the Indy 500."

And he's still fast. At a March test at Barber Motorsports Park in Alabama, Castroneves was back in a Penske Indy car, and he turned in the third-quickest time.

Why not change teams and stay full time in open-wheel racing? "I have to say, I did have phone calls from other teams, and I was flattered to see people still wanted me," Castroneves said.

But longtime Penske man and four-time Indy 500 winner Rick Mears put a move to sports cars in perspective.

"He was brutally honest: 'Stay here. In the long run, it's going to pay off.' And I was like, 'Thanks man, that's exactly what I want to hear.'"

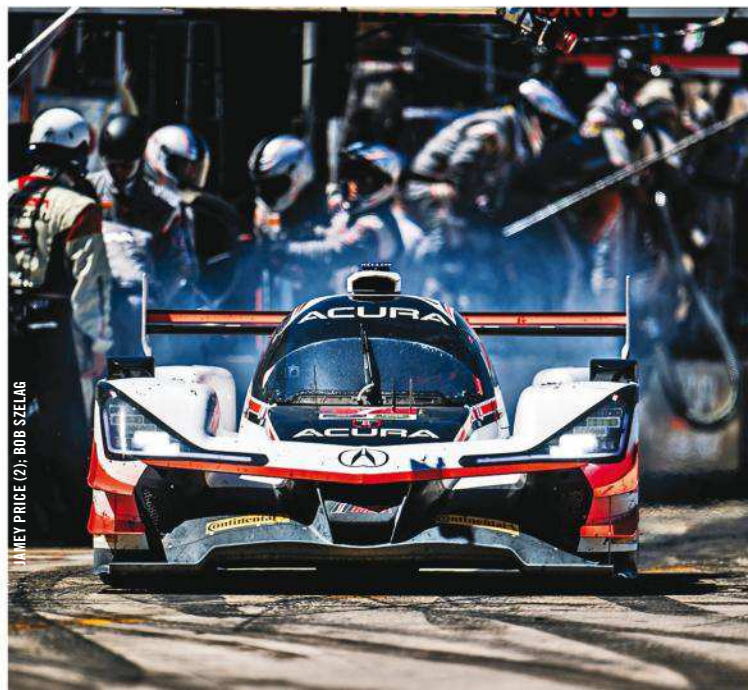
Castroneves, 42, is in his 19th season with Penske and despite a full-time IMSA schedule, a lot of his attention is on Indy. And one number sticks in his mind for the three-time 500 winner: "I'm going to get that No. 4, and I want it. I feel Roger wants it, the team wants it and a lot of people want it." But his IMSA season is off to a rough start; both Daytona and Sebring efforts ended a far cry from the podium. But like Mears said, Castroneves is looking for his commitment to pan out long term. "I want to (race into) my 50s. And hopefully more. So hopefully at least eight more years. My goal is, obviously, to keep going.

"Racing for me is the air that I breathe, no matter what kind of race. It keeps me sane. It keeps me active. I just love it."

**ROBIN WARNER**



Top: Hélio Castroneves at Sebring, ready to hop in the No. 7.  
Bottom: The Acura Team Penske race car leaves the pit box.







NHRA

## BOOM, BABY!

What's up with all these NHRA Funny Car explosions?

**IT MAKES FOR** great television, but it comes at a cost: Those NHRA Funny Car explosions, like the ones suffered almost simultaneously in second-round eliminations at the Gatornationals at Gainesville Raceway in Florida March 18, are almost guaranteed to make the highlight reel of Sunday night sportscasts nationwide.

John Force Racing's Robert Hight had an engine explode as he approached the 1,000-foot finish line, then Matt Hagan's engine exploded three-tenths of a second later (above). The splintered bodies went high in the air, and when the two drivers finally came to a stop, the smoldering cars were barely recognizable.

It was amazing on TV and for the near-capacity crowd, but for the teams, it's a nightmare.

Sixteen-time Funny Car champion John Force, 68, has seen his car blow up at each of the first three NHRA events this season. The Friday before the Sunday eliminations in Gainesville, his Chevrolet Camaro SS blew up in qualifying.

It was dramatic but far less spectacular than his blowup at Phoenix on Feb.

25, when he was well ahead of Jonnie Lindberg when Force's engine exploded, sending the car body flying and Force hard into Lindberg's lane. Force's car literally rode over the top of Lindberg, then the two cars were tangled in each other's parachute cords, which slingshot Lindberg head on into the wall, which knocked his body off. Then the two cars, tied together, ended up back to back against the opposite wall, Lindberg completely covered by Force's parachutes.

Force went to the hospital by ambulance, but he was treated, released and back to the track in time to see daughter Courtney win the Funny Car final.

There's no question these Funny Car explosions are dangerous, but they are also costly. They lose an engine, the bodies alone can cost \$70,000 to replace, and there's sometimes chassis damage. Hagan won the race where he and Hight both exploded, and Hagan's team pulled out a spare chassis and had it ready for the semifinals, which Hagan won. He lost in the finals to Don Schumacher Racing teammate Jack Beckman.

So what's causing these explosions? The most common reason is that the engine "drops" a cylinder or two during the race—meaning one or two of the eight cylinders stop firing—and the driver tries to nurse the car to the finish line in hopes of a win. Often they try to "pedal" the car to the end, meaning they are off and on the gas pedal, which confuses an 11,000-hp engine. All the nitromethane fuel that isn't being burned by the dead cylinders has to go somewhere, and it can cause an explosion that often separates the supercharger from the engine, which is why the supercharger is held down by heavy-duty straps.

In the case of the multiple explosions in John Force Racing cars, the team is working hard to find the cause. By the end of the racing at Gainesville, word came that they think they have found the problem: an oil pump issue.

Force and his banker hope that's true. No team can afford to lose the equipment JFR has these first three races for an entire season. **STEVEN COLE SMITH**



NASCAR

# WHAT'S WRONG WITH JIMMIE JOHNSON?

Seven-time NASCAR Cup champion  
refuses to lose sleep over slump

**THE DRIVER GENERALLY CONSIDERED** the best of his generation is mired in a bewildering, irritating, career-worst losing streak.

Heading into the Martinsville race weekend, seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson hadn't won since last June at Dover, an 0-for-28 slump that many around the Cup Series never expected to see.

"I'm reminded every week of a streak that you don't want to be reminded of," he said before snow postponed the STP 500 at Martinsville. "I kind of chuckle. Only 28 races?"

Almost as bad as the slump itself is its depth. Johnson has led only 45 of 7,287 laps since his most recent victory and has been shut out in 24 of his last 28 starts. His slump scorecard is bleak: zero poles, zero victories, one top-five and six top-10s ...

plus, he's crashed out six times. Granted, Hendrick Motorsports teammates Chase Elliott, William Byron and Alex Bowman haven't been much better, but they've never won a Cup race, never mind 83. That alone adds to the pressure Johnson faces every weekend.

"I hold myself to a high level of expectation, but there are some unfair expectations," Johnson said at Martinsville. "People often forget how difficult it is to compete at a pro level. I'm not losing sleep over it because I know I'm going to win and this team is going to win and we're going to compete for the championship. I understand where I am, where our team is and what we're doing as a company. I know the journey we're on (internally at Hendrick) and what's happening to build a better product. It's going to take time to work out the kinks."







Maybe so, and maybe a comeback is looming. But what about now? How has Johnson gone from averaging five victories a season to only three in '17 and none (entering Martinsville) in '18?

Eleven different drivers have won since he last did, including career first-timer Ryan Blaney. Some series-watchers feel the loss of car chief/quality control guru Ron Malec, who wanted off the road after 20 years, is a factor. Others cite learning how to maximize the new Chevrolet Camaro. (Fair enough, except it doesn't explain last year's 23-race swoon.)

Another theory is that unlike departed teammates Jeff Gordon, Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Kasey Kahne, Johnson's new teammates aren't experienced enough to help in weekend debriefs. And despite no public discord, some outsiders feel the Johnson-Chad Knaus magic has simply run its course.

Johnson says things began going sideways last fall. "At the end of last year, there was high frustration and some embarrassment that we couldn't get things in the right direction," he said. "We've improved every week this year and seen great strides. I'm optimistic that success is out there, around the corner."

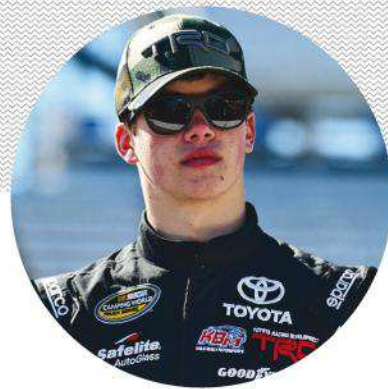
Not surprisingly, hardly anyone in the garage seems worried about the former champ.

"Everybody tries to ride on the age (Johnson is 42) and that's so not true," the 22-year-old Elliott said. "You don't forget how to drive or change your driving habits in the course of a couple of years. He's still one of the greatest, if not the greatest, to come through NASCAR. To make accusations that he's not as good as he once was is simply not true. If he has a car capable of running top-five and leading laps and dominating races, he's probably going to be doing that." (Notice "if" and "probably.")

Fellow former champion Brad Keselowski is sympathetic, up to a point. "It's hard to feel bad for a guy who's won 83 races," the Team Penske driver said. "I know how frustrating it can be to be on a stretch where not only are you not winning, but you're not as competitive as you want to be. I sympathize with the effort that I'm sure they're putting in."

"But I also understand that this sport has ebbs and flows. There are guys who get ahead and guys who fall behind. It's just that this is the first time that group has really fallen behind in their existence. I don't expect it to last. I wouldn't be too worried for them and I'm guessing they're probably not too worried themselves."

If they are, they're wearing it well. **AL PEARCE**



**HARRISON BURTON**

## COMING OF AGE



**ONE OF THE TOP** prospects in NASCAR finished eighth in the Camping World Truck Series race at Martinsville on March 26 but isn't eligible for the championship.

That's because Harrison Burton is just 17 years old and not allowed to compete on tracks larger than a mile until his birthday Oct. 9. Burton already seems ready to climb the ladder, capturing the 2017 K&N East championship in just his second full campaign.

So Burton, the son of NASCAR veteran and current TV analyst Jeff Burton, found himself facing a development predicament. Having already won the K&N crown, there was no reason to return for a third season, but he isn't old enough to race full time in ARCA or Trucks.

So instead, Burton is going to do a little bit of everything this season.

"We're just trying to win races and hopefully I'll learn as much as I can along the way," Harrison said of a schedule that includes Late Models, K&N, ARCA and nine Truck Series races. Once he cuts the cake on his birthday, three of those Truck Series races will come at Kansas, Texas and Homestead—tracks he is currently barred from entering, unlike Martinsville.

"Listen, he's still a kid, and I don't necessarily believe you have to have a full-time trucks deal when you're 18," Jeff Burton said. "When I think about how I came up, that's unusual to me. So from my eyes, I think it's important that he drives a bunch of different cars and learns to race up front with some of the best."

"When he gets in a Late Model and goes door to door with Jeff Choquette or Bubba Pollard, that's valuable. That's just as important as getting him seat time on some of these bigger tracks."

The younger Burton doesn't feel excluded.

"I want to move up, but there is still a lot that I need to learn here, too," Harrison said. "I got time and I'm learning what I need to." **MATT WEAVER**





COMPETITION PRESS

RACING NEWS

# CATCHING UP WITH NIGEL MANSELL

Racer held CART, F1 titles at same time

**IN 1993**, Nigel Mansell did the unthinkable. After winning the 1992 Formula 1 championship, Mansell flew to America and won the '93 CART Indy Car World Series championship for Newman-Haas Racing at the age of 40. With the wins, he became the only driver to hold both major open-wheel titles at the same time.

Autoweek recently sat down with the 64-year-old Mansell on his home turf in the U.K. to get his take on the state of F1.

**AUTOWEEK:** Modern Formula 1 drivers seem to focus on F1 and little else—and then along comes Fernando Alonso. Alonso raced in the Indy 500 last year, and this year it's the WEC and the Rolex 24 at Daytona. What do you make of Alonso's extracurricular activities?

**NIGEL MANSELL:** I'm absolutely staggered at the patience that Alonso demonstrated last year and the self-control. Being in a great team like McLaren and with a great manufacturer like Honda, for them not to get it right for so many years and for him to keep his motivation as high as it has been I think is a great testament to him as a person.

I think the distraction of him going to do Indy was fantastic. Very, very important for him to learn a new discipline, which is what you have to do because the Indy 500 is nothing like Formula 1, and if you get it wrong you pay a very high price.

You're averaging around about 230 mph, so, if you put a foot wrong, the barriers are there right next to you, unlike Formula 1 where you have got the run-offs. So, I think it was an education, and I know Fernando explained that in a lot of the (press) conferences he had. He had a lot of respect for the drivers there, but I think that overall it will make him a better driver than he is now.



**AW:** Nico Hülkenberg went to compete in the 2015 Le Mans 24 Hours—winning the race with Porsche. Is this something that you would like to see more of?

**NM:** Well, don't forget that the Formula 1 drivers years ago used to do that. They used to cross over an awful lot, and it's just time restraints and contractual restraints. If there's an opportunity, then I think yeah, it's wonderful. It's good for the sport.

**AW:** Is it a sign of the changing face of the sport from the Bernie Ecclestone era to the Liberty Media era that the drivers are able to do this?

**NM:** Possibly, but I think it's also dangerous for any driver to try and change their discipline because, of course, if they go over to a different discipline and don't do very well, it's not going to look too good for Formula 1. So everybody protects their own opportunities and careers. You have to be very careful in what you do and how you do it.

**AW:** You have firsthand experience driving with Honda power in your Williams between 1985 and 1987. Can you believe the difficulties that Honda and McLaren have had the last couple of years?

**NM:** No, but I think that it's grossly unfair, as well, to just blame one or the other, because it's a marriage. I know with all of the years that I spent with the late great Colin Chapman and Lotus and the Williams team—I remember all the success that we had with Honda with Williams—that the whole thing had to jell.

I think what we've seen is two mighty manufacturers, who are mighty in their own ways, but together as a package don't work, and something went terribly wrong somewhere.

I'm incredibly disappointed, as are all the sporting fans around the world, because McLaren-Honda should have been the most incredible competitive package, but it wasn't.



**AW:** Safety is a hot topic in Formula 1, and the halo has been introduced for the 2018 season. Do you sometimes look back at the cars that you drove and wonder what was going through your head when you stepped into the cockpit?

**NM:** For me, I shouldn't say it but I will: I'm not a fan of the halo. If you're a race car driver, you have to accept some part of that it's a little bit dangerous.

We drove cars that barely had seats in them years ago. We were just sitting on metal floors with a bit of foam. We had no runoffs, so invariably, if you went off the circuit, you had a big accident and that's why people were killed and injured so readily. The safety standards now and the FIA and the manufacturers have built the cars like they're almost bulletproof—it's fantastic.

The longevity of a race car driver now is twice what it was in the '80s. You've got many Grand Prix drivers now doing over 300 Grands Prix, and that's unheard of. I mean, if you had a career of 180-something Grands Prix, years ago you actually thought that you'd had a stellar career, and now it's very different.

**AW:** Finally, if you were running the sport, what changes would you propose to improve it and bring back the fans?

**NM:** The easiest thing to say to that and the hardest thing to achieve—and I'm not being critical of anybody—is, in the '80s, the most amazing thing that was in Formula 1 was that predominantly 20 or 22 of the cars on the grid had the same engine: the Cosworth DFV. Beautiful-sounding engine.

Then you had the Ferraris, you had the Alfas maybe and you had the Renaults. You can only have super competition if you have a level playing field. I understand technology has to move forward, but when you think that back in the '80s you had teams of 100 or more people and that was a major team. When I was with Ferrari, we just had 150 people—now there are thousands.

And the budgets that some teams have. If they admit it, you're talking about budgets of 500 million pounds (\$700 million) plus. There's a huge dysfunctional disparity. It's not a level playing field. **SAM HALL**







### PIRELLI WORLD CHALLENGE

**FERRARI SWEPT** all three Pirelli World Challenge GT SprintX classes March 25 at the Circuit of the Americas in the Grand Prix of Texas at Austin, led by Toni Vilander and Miguel Molina co-driving the No. 61 R. Ferri Motorsport Ferrari 488 GT3 (above) for the second-round GT SprintX race.

Vilander, a past Le Mans 24 winner from Finland, and Molina, a factory Ferrari driver from Spain, won the 60-minute, two-driver feature by defeating the No. 80 Lone Star Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3 pair of Mike Skeen and Scott Heckert by 2.521 seconds in the 28-lap round 2 race in the Pro-Pro category.

Another Ferrari victory came in the GT SprintX Pro-Am class with Jeff Segal of Miami and Wei Lu of Vancouver co-driving the No. 31 Ferrari of Vancouver/TR3 Racing Ferrari 488 GT3 over the No. 3 K-PAX Racing Bentley Continental GT3 duo of Rodrigo Baptista of Brazil and Maxime Soulet of Belgium.

The Am-Am class victory went to former GTA champion Martin Fuentes of Mexico City and Caesar Bacarella of Miami in the No.

07 Squadra Corse Garage Italia/Hublot Ferrari 488 GT3.

One day earlier, The R. Ferri Motorsport Ferrari 488 GT3, driven by Vilander and Molina, returned to victory lane in round 1, a 60-minute GT SprintX event. The last R. Ferri Motorsport win in Pirelli World Challenge was at Long Beach in 2015 with Olivier Beretta driving.

### NHRA

**RICHIE CRAMPTON** (Top Fuel), Jack Beckman (Funny Car) and 19-year-old Tanner Gray (Pro Stock) took top honors at the NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series Amalie Motor Oil NHRA Gatornationals in Gainesville, Florida, on March 18.

Crampton's victory was his first since Dallas in 2015 and eighth of his career. Beckman's win was his 27th career triumph.

Gray, meanwhile, was the first driver in the Pro Stock class to win from the 11th qualifying position since 2015.

Defending series champion Eddie Krawiec won in Pro Stock Motorcycle.

Points leaders through the first three of 18 regular-season events include Steve Torrence in

Top Fuel, Matt Hagan in Funny Car, defending champion Bo Butner in Pro Stock and defending champion Krawiec in Pro Stock Motorcycle.

### NASCAR CUP

**ONE OF THE** most successful sponsor-team racing marriages in NASCAR Cup history is coming to an end.

Lowe's, the No. 48 NASCAR team of seven-time champion Jimmie Johnson, is leaving Hendrick Motorsports at the end of the current season. The team made the announcement March 14. Lowe's Companies Inc. has been the No. 48 team's only primary sponsor since 2001.

The team did not announce a new primary sponsor for Johnson's 2019 ride in its press release.

Since the No. 48 team's debut in 2001, Lowe's has experienced an unrivaled level of success with Johnson, winning seven Cup championships, 83 points-paying races and 35 pole positions, along with 222 top-five finishes, 341 top-10s and more than 18,000 laps led.

Johnson, 42, is under contract with Hendrick Motorsports through 2020. He is the only driver to compete in NASCAR's postseason each year since the format's inception in 2004.

### NASCAR XFINITY

**MONSTER ENERGY** NASCAR Cup Series drivers continue to enjoy playing down in class, as Joey Logano became the fourth different Cup regular in five races to win a NASCAR Xfinity Series race when he led 139 of 150 laps in his No. 22 Penske Ford to win the Roseanne 300 at Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, California, on March 17.

Kevin Harvick, Kyle Larson and Brad Keselowski are the other Cup Series regulars with Xfinity wins in 2018.

Logano's win in California was his 29th career victory in the Xfinity Series to move him into a tie for

seventh with Matt Kenseth. NASCAR Hall-of-Famer Jack Ingram is next on the list with 31 wins. Kyle Busch holds the all-time wins record in the series with 90.

### FORMULA E

**ABB FIA** Formula E points leader Jean-Éric Vergne held off defending series champion Lucas di Grassi (Audi Sport Abt Schaeffler) by 0.447 second to win the Formula E 2018 CBMM Niobium Punta del Este E-Prix in Uruguay on March 17.

Virgin Racing's Sam Bird completed the podium as the series hit the halfway point of the 2017-18 season.

With six rounds remaining, including the season-ending double-header in New York on July 14-15, Techeeta's Vergne holds a healthy 30-point lead in the championship over Mahindra Racing's Felix Rosenqvist. Bird is third in the standings, 33 points back.

Each race win is worth 28 points, while second place pays 15 points.

### IMSA CONTINENTAL TIRE

**THE NO. 60** Roush/Kohr Motorsports Ford Mustang GT4 won the second IMSA Continental Tire Sports Car Challenge race of the season—the Alan Jay Automotive Network 120.

The "120" refers to the two-hour length of the race, which went 47 laps around the 3.74-mile Sebring International Raceway on March 16.

Drivers Kyle Marcelli and Nate Stacy finished 7.651 seconds ahead of the second-place car, the No. 26 Classic BMW/Vess BMW M4 GT4 of Toby Grahovec and Jason Hart. Just 0.2 second back from the BMW was the No. 28 RS1 Porsche Cayman GT4 MR of Spencer Pumpelly and Dillon Machavern. That team won the Grand Sport class at the opener at Daytona, but pit stops related to an ill-timed late caution flag kept them from repeating at Sebring.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36



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**NOW \$149.99**

**SAVE \$60**

**COMPARE TO POWERBUILT \$135.27**

MODEL: 647592

ITEM 69227/62116  
62584/68048 \$169.99



35379656



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**1 TON CAPACITY  
FOLDABLE SHOP CRANE**

- Boom extends from 36-1/4" to 50-1/4"
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ITEM 69512/61858/69445 shown

3-9-811-6-43

LIMIT 43 Foron valid through 8/31/17

**EARTHTOOLS XT BEATS Snap-on** ✂️ **SUPER COUPON**

Customer Rating  
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**20 VOLT LITHIUM CORDLESS  
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FT. LBS.  
NOV. RELEASE**

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63852  
63537 shown

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1/2" IMPACT WRENCH KIT

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**PREDATOR**  SUPER COUPON

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INVERTER GENERATOR**

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- 4.7 hours run-time

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**HONDA**

**SAVE \$549**  
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**\$499.99**

ITEM 6252

  
35405447

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**9 PIECE, 1/4", 3/8" AND  
1/2" DRIVE WOBBLE SOCKET  
EXTENSION SET**

**LIFETIME WARRANTY**

**Customer Rating**  
★★★★★

**SAVE 50%**

**COMPARE TO \$19.99**  
**KLUTZ** MODEL# 400633

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ITEM 61278/67971 shown



35426015

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WITH ANY PURCHASE



**3-1/2" SUPER BRIGHT ALUMINUM FLASHLIGHT**

- 9 LED
- Compact, Lightweight

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63875/63884/63886  
63888/69052 shown

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35359954

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**SAVE 54%** 63091 ship



35399015

**HaulMaster**  **SUPER COUPON**

Customer Rating  
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**STEP STOOL  
WORKING PLATFORM**

- 350 lb. capacity



ITEM 62515/66911 shown

COMPARE TO <b>\$57.55</b> GPL	<b>SAVE 65%</b>
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MODEL: H-21

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35410684

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**10 FT. x 10 FT. PORTABLE SHED**

**Customer Rating**  




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**COMPARE TO** **\$236<sup>89</sup>** **SAVE** **\$96**  
**SHELTER LOGIC** MODEL: 70323

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**PNEUMATIC ADJUSTABLE  
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**Customer Rating**







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**SAVE 69%**

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Customer Rating  **4-1/2" ANGLE GRINDER**



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MODEL:2011-1

ITEM 69645/60625 shows

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 • 1500 lb. capacity



**Customer Rating**  


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**NOW \$44.99**

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## INDYCAR

**PASS THE MILK.** The Indianapolis 500 is moving from ABC TV to NBC TV as part of a new television deal announced by the Verizon In-

dyCar Series on March 21. Beginning with the 2019 IndyCar season, every race in the series will be on either NBC and/or NBC Sports Network. The agreement runs through the 2021 IndyCar season.

The Indianapolis 500 has been televised by ABC since 1965. It was part of "Wide World of Sports" from 1965-70 before ABC began to show the Indy 500 with "same day, prime-time" coverage from 1971-85. ABC has broadcast the 500 live every year since 1986. So ABC will be ending its long association with Indy-car racing, one that dates back to the United States Auto Club days of the early 1960s, with this season's Chevrolet Dual

in Detroit doubleheader at Belle Isle June 2-3. The remainder of the 2018 IndyCar schedule after Belle Isle will be on NBCSN.

NBC plans to air the Indianapolis 500, plus seven other events for a total of eight races on the network television. The remainder of the schedule will be shown on NBCSN.

Also, Verizon IndyCar Series content will be provided through NBC Sports Gold, a direct-to-consumer product for subscribers. The service will provide feeds not available on any other platform, including practice and qualifying sessions not televised live. All 2019 IndyCar Series races will be streamed live on NBCSports.com and the NBC Sports app.

## NEVER MISS



## RACING ON TV

## ANOTHER RACE

## THURSDAY, APRIL 12

- **Pirelli World Challenge TCR/TC/TCA**, Austin, Texas; 8 p.m., CBS Sports Network (T)
- **NHRA Sportsman Series**, Las Vegas; 8 p.m., FS2 (T)
- **Formula 1 practice**, Shanghai; 10 p.m., ESPN3 (L)

## FRIDAY, APRIL 13

- **NASCAR K&N Series**, Thompson, Conn.; 12:30 a.m., NBCSN (T)
- **Formula 1 practice**, Shanghai; 2 a.m., ESPN3 (L)
- **Monster Energy NASCAR Cup practice**, Bristol, Tenn.; noon, FS1 (L)
- **NASCAR Xfinity practice**, Bristol, Tenn.; 1 p.m. and 3 p.m., FS1 (L)
- **Monster Energy NASCAR Cup qualifying**, Bristol, Tenn.; 4:30 p.m., FS1 (L)
- **Formula 1 practice**, Shanghai; 11 p.m., ESPNEWS (L)

## SATURDAY, APRIL 14

- **Formula 1 practice**, Shanghai; 2 a.m., ESPN2 (L)
- **Monster Energy NASCAR Cup practice**, Bristol, Tenn.; 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m., FS1 (L)

## ► = RACES WE'LL BE WATCHING

L = LIVE S = SAME DAY T = TAPE DELAY  
ALL TIMES EASTERN

- **NASCAR Xfinity qualifying**, Bristol, Tenn.; 9:30 a.m., FS1 (L)
- **NASCAR Xfinity Series Fitzgerald Glider Kits 300**, Bristol, Tenn.; 1 p.m., FS1 (L)
- **IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Bubba Burger Sports Car Grand Prix at Long Beach**, Long Beach, Calif.; 4 p.m., FOX (L)
- **Verizon IndyCar Series qualifying**, Long Beach, Calif.; 6:30 p.m., NBCSN (S)
- **Monster Energy Supercross**, Minneapolis; 10 p.m., FS1 (S)

## SUNDAY, APRIL 15

- **Formula 1 Heineken Chinese Grand Prix**, Shanghai; 2 a.m., ESPN2 (L)
- **ABB FIA Formula E qualifying**, Rome; 10:30 a.m., FS2 (T)
- **ABB FIA Formula E Rome ePrix**, Rome; 11:30 a.m., FS1 (T)
- **Monster Jam**, Las Vegas; 1:30 p.m., FS1 (T)
- **Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series Food City 500**, Bristol, Tenn.; 2 p.m., FOX (L)

- **Monster Jam**, Las Vegas; 2:30 p.m., FS1 (T)
- **AMSOIL Arenacross**, Wichita, Kan.; 3:30 p.m., FS1 (T)
- **Verizon IndyCar Series Long Beach Grand Prix**, Long Beach, Calif.; 4:30 p.m., NBCSN (L)

## WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18

- **NASCAR K&N Series**, Thompson, Conn.; 3 p.m., NBCSN (T)

## FRIDAY, APRIL 20

- **NASCAR K&N Series**, Bristol, Tenn.; 1 a.m., NBCSN (T)
- **NASCAR Xfinity practice**, Richmond, Va.; 9:30 a.m., FS1 (L)
- **Monster Energy NASCAR Cup practice**, Richmond, Va.; 11 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., FS1 (L)
- **NASCAR Xfinity qualifying**, Richmond, Va.; 4 p.m., FS1 (L)
- **Monster Energy NASCAR Cup qualifying**, Richmond, Va.; 5:30 p.m., FS1 (L)

- **NASCAR Xfinity Series ToyotaCare 250**, Richmond, Va.; 7 p.m., FS1 (L)
- **NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing qualifying**, Houston; 9:30 p.m., FS1 (S)

## SATURDAY, APRIL 21

- **Verizon IndyCar Series qualifying**, Birmingham, Ala.; 4 p.m., NBCSN (L)
- **Monster Energy Supercross**, Foxborough, Mass.; 3 p.m., FOX (L)
- **Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series Toyota Owners 400**, Richmond, Va.; 6:30 p.m., FOX (L)

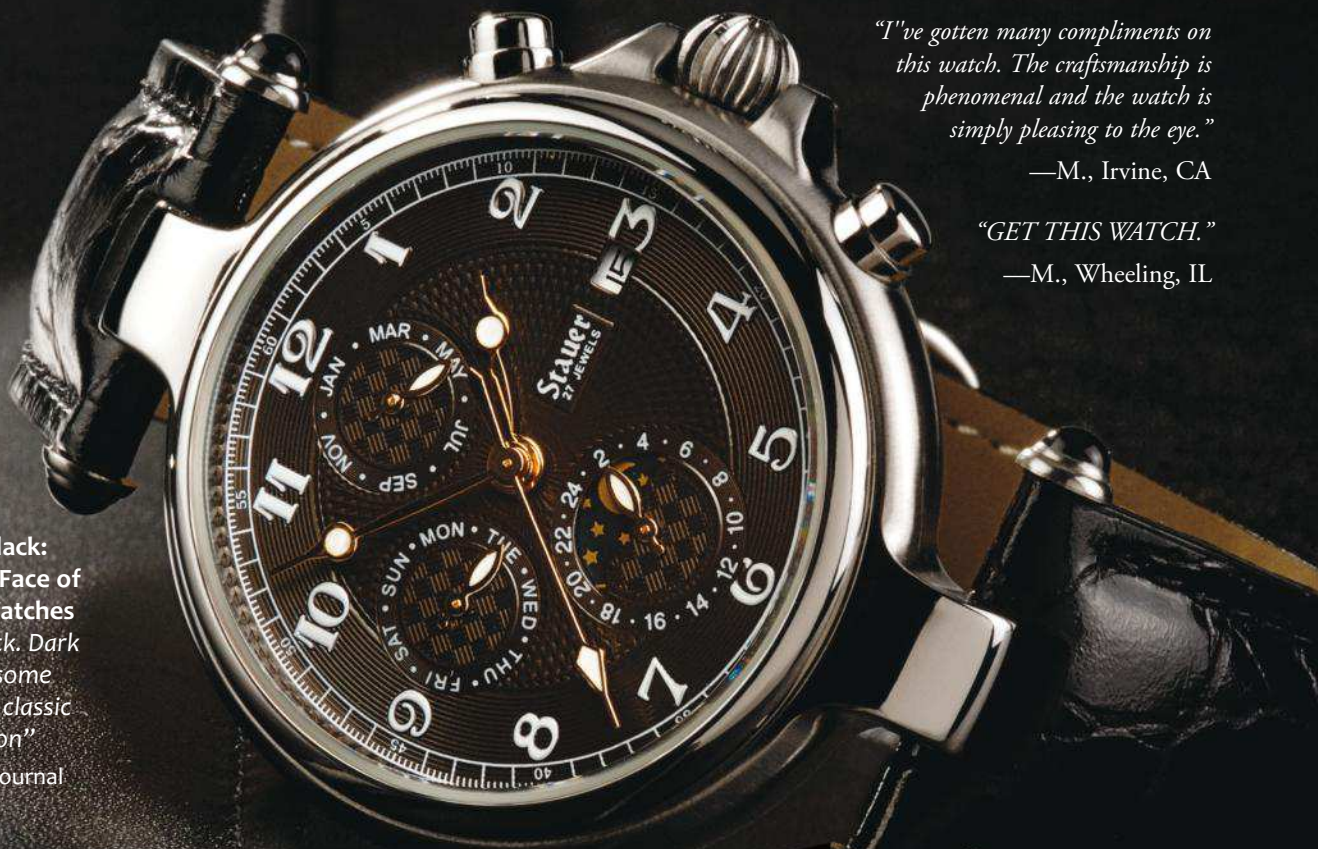
## SUNDAY, APRIL 22

- **NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing qualifying**, Houston; 1 p.m., FS1 (T)
- **NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Spring Nationals**, Houston; 2 p.m., FS1 (L)
- **ARCA Racing Series Kentuckiana Ford Dealers 200**, Salem, Ind.; 2:15 p.m., MAVTV (L)
- **Verizon IndyCar Series Grand Prix of Alabama**, Birmingham, Ala.; 3:30 p.m., NBCSN (L)



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✓Yes



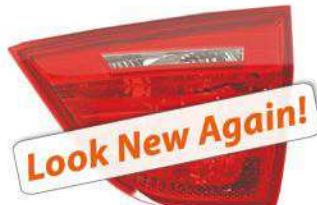
✓Yes



xNo



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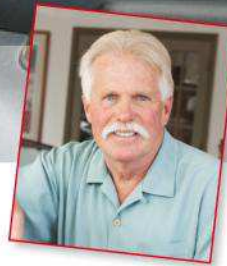
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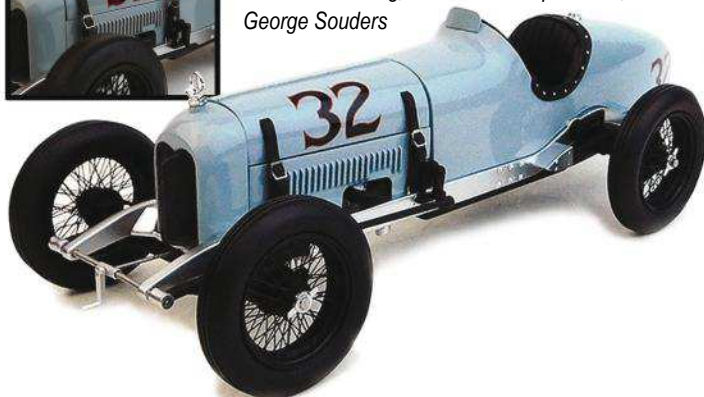
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**R18022... \$269.99**

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### MIGHT AS WELL RUN WITH IT

More than one of our readers has noted the new F1 car safety halo's unfortunate resemblance to a flip-flop. McLaren is the first team to fully embrace it: For the Australian Grand Prix, it teamed up with beachwear-maker Gandys, which plopped its logo right there on the center of the halo.

On the flip side, Gandys released a limited-edition line of footwear in blue and McLaren orange; 100 percent of the proceeds from the sale of the flops will benefit Gandys' Orphans for Orphans initiative, which benefits at-risk kids around the world and helps them out with education, medication and nutrition.

### STEP ASIDE, RAM 1500



Is there anything a station wagon can't do?  
Thanks to Sean Oversmith for the photo.

### MUST BE SOME KIND OF... WEIRD FRENCH TRANSMISSION?



Fortunately, this tattooed six-speed mix-up has since been corrected.

Got a BWTM submission? Mail it to [Autoweek](#), 1155 Gratiot Ave., Detroit, MI 48207, Attn: BWTM or email [bwtm@autoweek.com](mailto:bwtm@autoweek.com)





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