HOT-HATCHES ARE MORE THRILLING THAN HYPERCARS

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VOLVO XC40 T5 R-DESIGN vs MINI COOPER S COUNTRYMAN

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CONTENTS

ON THE COVER
28 HOT HATCHES ARE MORE THRILLING THAN HYPERCARS
36 HYUNDAI KONA vs MAZDA CX-3 vs TOYOTA C-HR
46 VOLVO XC40 T5 R-DESIGN vs MINI COOPER S COUNTRYMAN
56 MERCEDES-BENZ CLS
66 AUDI A7 SPORTBACK

DRIVES
36 HYUNDAI KONA 1.6 vs MAZDA CX-3 2.0 vs TOYOTA C-HR 1.2
46 VOLVO XC40 T5 R-DESIGN vs MINI COOPER S COUNTRYMAN
56 MERCEDES-BENZ CLS
66 AUDI A7 SPORTBACK
74 PORSCHE 911 TURBO S EXCLUSIVE SERIES

HUE REFLECTIONS
KONA vs CX-3 vs C-HR
PG 36

TALL AND TALLER
XC40 T5 R-DESIGN vs COOPER S COUNTRYMAN
PG 74

$1.1M 911
911 TURBO S EXCLUSIVE SERIES
PG 46

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FEATURES
76 ROAD TRIP: SINGAPOREAN “MARTIAN”
It was a journey of Discovery for this journalistic explorer who landed on what appeared to be Mars – somewhere in Utah, USA.

84 TECH: TORQUE SHOP #4
This issue’s Q&A article is about automotive air-conditioning.

PLAY
88 TIME: STEEL LIFE
Put the pedal (and your wrist) to the metal with these steely timepieces.

92 THINGS
93 FARE

CONTENTS

REGULARS
6 EDITORQUE
10 POSTBOX
14 NEWS
18 FACES
22 ANALYSE THIS
28 ED LIB
30 HER WORLD OF MOTORING
32 BEHIND THE WHEEL
94 BUY
96 REAR VIEW
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WORK-LIFE BALANCE SHAFT

According to Audi’s technology portal, a pair of balance shafts can eliminate the free second-order inertial forces that detract from the mechanical smoothness of an inline 4-cylinder reciprocating engine.

The balance shaft is located in the crankcase, carries counterweights and counter-rotates at twice the speed of the crankshaft. The balance shaft brings balance to the force of internal combustion, so to speak.

I could use one now to rebalance my editorial-engine career and my everything else. Because the oscillating motion of the pistons in my head gives me a lane-splitting headache, the connecting rods in my petrol-pumping heart feel rather disconnected and my creative-thinking crankpins seem cranky.

At some point on the long, winding and interesting road that took me from avid writer to angsty editor, my occupation became my main preoccupation. Hopefully, you’ll be similarly engrossed when reading this well-balanced issue.
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If he can no longer review cars, our senior writer would welcome a second career as a road quality inspector (pg 32).

When it comes to cars, the more the merrier for this petrolhead, but when it comes to kids, she is happy to have just one (pg 30).

It was a journey of Discovery for this journalistic explorer who landed on what appeared to be Mars – somewhere in Utah, USA (pg 76).

He finds himself more thrilled by a Hyundai hot hatch than an 800hp McLaren (pg 28).
We connect you with the rapidly evolving digital world via our suite of multi-language and multi-platform media products, including the online and mobile editions of our newspapers. Find out more about how SPH engages minds and enriches lives on sph.com.sg
I have been reading Torque for a long time, but this is my first time writing to your Postbox.

In the February issue, I found that all the articles by Christopher Tan, Edric Pan, Lynn Tan and Jeremy Chua just gel together to promote the autonomous car.

The desire to own an autonomous car in Singapore will be strong, especially if one can have more screen time (increasing productivity) or better use of travelling time (such as putting on makeup or providing last-minute updates before a meeting).

You don’t have to face the frustration of weather-affected roads or try to pass folks who are driving at a leisurely pace on a single lane. You just key in your destination like a plane’s autopilot and let the computer do the rest.

Better still if the autonomous car can find a parking lot on its own, because we can do away with labour-intensive valet parking.

With autonomous cars, we also don’t have to worry about traffic accidents caused by intoxicated drivers.

We may have to wait a while before driverless cars take drivers out of the road traffic equation in Singapore, because of the legislative, infrastructural and technical hurdles involved.

But our country already has a Centre of Excellence for Testing and Research of Autonomous Vehicles, jointly set up by LTA, JTC and NTU, so it’s probably a matter of time before driverless cars hit the streets of Singapore in significant numbers.
UNDERPAID DESIGNERS?

JAY NG ✪ Is Mercedes-Benz not paying their designers enough?
[Torque Facebook post: We’re in Barcelona for the launch of the all-new Mercedes-Benz CLS, here’s a quick look at the third-generation “four-door coupe” model].

Torque Read our review (pg 56) of the latest CLS and decide whether the Mercedes-Benz design team was paid enough to take the coupe-ish saloon from sketch to sheet-metal.

RED AND YELLOW

DAVID GALT ✪ You failed to mention that “Redhead” has nothing to do with the colour of the car. It refers to the colour of the cylinder heads.
[Torque website story: This yellow Ferrari is actually a “redhead”].

Torque The storywriter, Sarjeet Singh, changed colour when we told him about this omission, but he was cool about it and didn’t see red.

ON AIR-CON

ALLAN CARPENTER ✪ I’ve lived in the tropics, both in Australia and the Philippines, for the past 35 years, and I’ve never reached for the switch to turn the air-con off! [Torque website story: Is it harmful to immediately turn on the air-con in a hot car?]

Of course, the models I’ve owned with climate control, they take care of vent openings and high fan speeds to clear the heat quickly. I’m still alive after all this time breathing the inside of my automobiles!

Torque Please turn to pg 84 for this issue’s Torque Shop Q&A, where we share more revelations about automotive air-conditioning.

I SAW RED

BOBBY CHAI ✪ Please, kindly tell the author and editor to clear their desks because of their terrible post about “Date Cars” and “Bengmobiles” [Torque website story: 10 worst cars for a first date]. If they absolutely cannot appreciate simply tuned cars, including those which are super lowered/stanced, sport terrible choices in spoilers or have odd rims, they should not be authoring posts for the #1 Monthly Car Magazine in Singapore.

It’s like telling a guy that he cannot paint a portrait because you don’t like it or many people might dislike it. If my girlfriend picks me up in a tricked-out FC3S or any tuned Mazda RX-7 model, I would get in and be giddy like an 8-year-old going to Disneyland.

To the article’s author, please, never write again.

Torque The online story in question, uploaded on Valentine’s Day, was meant to be a light-hearted read, but we apologise if anyone was offended by it.
MINI SPECIAL

DISCERNING DRIVER

THE MINI CLUBMAN IS THE MODERN ESTATE FOR TODAY’S GENTLEMAN DRIVER.
A GENTLEMAN’S ACTIONS MUST ALWAYS BE EFFORTLESS, AND THAT’S EXACTLY WHAT THE MINI CLUBMAN IS.
Two of the world’s biggest automakers – Volkswagen and Toyota – are experimenting with boxy cars in the increasingly busy sandbox of autonomous vehicles. Their most recent boxes of driverless tricks are the Sedric School Bus (below) and the e-Palette.

The newest version of the VW Sedric (short for Self Driving Car) is a design exercise that makes the school run more fun for children and less tedious for their parents.

With the Sedric’s OneButton mobility app, which “hails” the self-driving electric shuttle to provide a door-to-door transfer anytime within its radius of operation, even primary-school kids can hitch a little bus ride home easily and safely.

They will like the ride, too, thanks to the Sedric cabin’s stylised graffiti, stickered multi-purpose boxes and large OLED screen to provide onboard entertainment – maybe The Magic School Bus.

The e-Palette (right) is Toyota’s “blank box” concept, which provides a flexible platform for partner companies to create and deploy purpose-built autonomous vehicles that help their businesses and serve their customers.

E-commerce giant Amazon, restaurant chain Pizza Hut and ride-sharing tech firms Uber and Didi, along with automaker Mazda, are collaborating with Toyota on the e-Palette programme.

The vehicle is fully automated, battery-powered and readily customisable, and it comes with an open-source control interface, a set of software tools and the necessary road safety systems. The low-floor, cube-shaped interior with a choice of three sizes has the “empty” versatility to be outfitted according to business or vocational needs.
Lego has added two more Fords to its Speed Champions lineup – a 1968 Mustang fastback racecar and a 2017 M-Sport Fiesta WRC rocket. Each comes with a driver minifigure in racing overalls and wearing a helmet, and he can be parked inside the cockpit, ready to race, thanks to the removable windshield.

The 183-piece Mustang model features green bodywork with gold go-faster stripes, gold wheels and motorsport stickers. Not so obvious are the little brick-size ponies believed to be under the bonnet of this plastic pony car. A quarter-mile timing board completes the kit.

The 203-piece Fiesta World Rally Championship car model has been specified with a choice of wheel trims, dramatic spoilers, authentic race graphics and two interchangeable bonnets, one of which has “spotlights” for fast driving at the speed of night.

Other Fords which were turned into Lego Speed Champions include the historic GT40, modern GT, 2015 Mustang and the F-150 Raptor high-performance truck.

The Italian marque with the trident logo has tied up with Swedish firm Playsam Design to produce premium wooden toy cars based on the Levante SUV, Alfieri coupe and 4CLT, a historical Grand Prix machine. Crafted from walnut under high Scandinavian production standards, the collectibles showcase Playsam’s clean-and-streamlined design philosophy with a touch of the playful.

Prior to the collaboration with Maserati, Playsam had worked with Volvo, Saab, Fiat and Toyota to create a variety of interesting car-themed products.
ONE DYNAMIC FAMILY

With the launch of the Eclipse Cross, Mitsubishi’s SUV lineup in Singapore is now even more complete and ready to meet the needs of various lifestyles.
If one type of car could suit every driver’s needs, then our motoring landscape would be very boring indeed.

But since every car owner’s requirements are different, manufacturers must create various models to meet them. This is precisely why Mitsubishi offers a wide variety of SUV and crossover models.

FOR THE ADVENTUROUS
Aimed at adventurous drivers is the Mitsubishi ASX or Active Sports Crossover. Its unmistakable dynamic shield grille and sporty stance lend it an air of driving confidence. And with a 2-litre engine pumping out 150hp, you’ll be tempted to push it, too.

The Mitsubishi ASX can definitely handle some light off-roading, too, thanks to its suspension layout, which consists of MacPherson struts in front and a multi-link setup at the rear. So you can head to that grassy knoll for a picnic without worrying about getting stuck.

FOR THE LOVE OF POWER
Drivers who seek a performance-oriented crossover will definitely be keen on the Mitsubishi Eclipse Cross, which offers plenty of athleticism and a coupe-like design.

Beneath the Eclipse Cross’ bonnet is a turbocharged 1.5-litre motor that delivers 163hp and 250Nm of torque, which the driver can exploit using the INVECS-III CVT and its 8-speed manual override.

Other goodies on-board include a standard head-up display, electric parking brake, speed limiter and Forward Collision Mitigation (FCM) system. The Eclipse Cross also has seven airbags and a 5-star ASEAN NCAP rating to keep you and your loved ones safe.

FOR THE FAMILY
The Mitsubishi Outlander is the ideal SUV for families who love going on outings. This seven-seater SUV has a large cabin and equally spacious boot that’s perfect for stowing either prams or purchases from those weekend shopping trips. When the third-row seats are not in use, they can be folded flat to further expand the cargo hold.

The Mitsubishi Outlander is ideal for road trips across the border, too. Its 150hp 2-litre engine delivers plenty of oomph for safer overtaking, while offering better fuel efficiency with its Auto Stop & Go (ASG) system.

FOR TECHIES
Drivers who love advanced technology will definitely be drawn to the Mitsubishi Outlander’s eco-friendlier and more high-tech sibling, the Outlander PHEV.

The Outlander PHEV (Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle) is the world’s first plug-in hybrid SUV. Its powertrain consists of a 2-litre petrol engine and two electric motors, which draw power from a lithium-ion battery pack. As its name suggests, this battery pack can also be recharged independently by plugging it into a wall socket.

The Outlander PHEV has three driving modes: EV, Series Hybrid and Parallel Hybrid. In pure electric or EV mode, the Outlander can travel up to 53km, which is enough for an average motorist’s daily commute. In Series Hybrid mode, the petrol engine assists the electric motors when extra power is needed. When operating in Parallel Hybrid, the electric motors complement the petrol motor as required by the driver.
ICHIRO HIROSE

FOR enthusiasts, the engine or “heart” of a car is just as important as its design, if not more important. After all, a car’s powertrain exerts enormous influence on the car’s overall character and performance.

Powertrains are something that Ichiro Hirose knows well. The 57-year-old, who marked his 34th year with Mazda last month, has spent most of his career working in the carmaker’s engine-related divisions.

Although Hirose-san joined Mazda in 1984, his first significant appointment only came in 2009, when he was made general manager of the Engine Design Engineering Department. In 2011, he became the deputy general manager of the Powertrain Development Division.

The following year, he was sent to Germany where he assumed the post of vice-president at Mazda Motor Europe. After a two-year stint, he returned to Powertrain Development, a division he has stayed in for the past four years.

Hirose-san’s division is certainly making waves for Mazda. At the 2017 Tokyo Motor Show, the manufacturer announced Skyactiv-X, a new petrol engine that promises huge gains in performance and efficiency through the use of very high compression ratios.

Torque had a quick chat with the veteran engineer, who not only explained the technology to us, but also mentioned the return of rotary engines to future models.

How does Skyactiv-X work?

It is the first commercial petrol engine that primarily utilises high compression to ignite the fuel-air mixture (like a diesel engine) in the cylinders. In effect, it combines the benefits of a petrol...
engine and a diesel motor. Petrol engines have smoother delivery and greater horsepower, whereas diesel units offer higher efficiency and more low-end torque. Mazda’s current Skyactiv-G petrol engines have a compression ratio of 13:1. The new Skyactiv-X engine will exceed this ratio. Unfortunately, due to confidentiality issues, I cannot provide the figures.

What sort of efficiency gains can Skyactiv-X offer?
Compared to a current Skyactiv-G engine of similar displacement, a Skyactiv-X engine will improve fuel economy by 20 to 30 percent, while producing 10 to 30 percent more torque, too.

How long has Skyactiv-X been in development?
It has been three years since we started. But we will only launch it in 2019, so the total development time is four years.

Since Skyactiv-X uses higher compression ratios compared to Skyactiv-G, will the engine need high-octane petrol? Is there a minimum RON requirement?
Usually, high-compression engines require higher octane to prevent premature detonation, which is known as “knock”. However, we designed Skyactiv-X to take advantage of this “knock”. Therefore, lower RON means better fuel economy. That said, we engineered Skyactiv-X to use a minimum of 91 RON. The advantage is that this grade of fuel is more widely available not just in the ASEAN region, but globally, too.

After 2025, all new Mazda models will either be petrol-electric hybrids or fully electric. Will the latter models have range-extenders?
Our first full electric vehicle will be introduced in 2019, and it will have a range-extender, which will be a rotary engine.

How big will this rotary engine be?
[Laughs] Right now it is a secret. But it will be a rotary engine.

What’s the minimum expected range from Mazda’s pure electric vehicle?
We’re still considering this. The range will also depend on how advanced battery technology will be then.

Having driven various electric cars, you must have found that no matter the brand, the power delivery is similar. How will Mazda differentiate its models?
We will ensure that our electric car follows the Jinba Ittai (“horse and rider are one”) handling philosophy, so that it stands out.
Being able to depend on your car, knowing that it comes from a trustworthy source and having reliable, skilled and knowledgeable aftersales support is paramount to any ownership experience. Thankfully, these privileges are also enjoyed by buyers of pre-owned cars.

Since 2014, Das WeltAuto, Volkswagen Group Singapore’s pre-owned car dealership, has been curating, testing, certifying and delivering only the most robust pre-owned cars to customers.

The journey of every Das WeltAuto candidate from application to acceptance into the Approved Used Car Programme is a rigorous one. Take a pristine pre-owned 2017 Volkswagen Jetta Sportline now awaiting purchase at Das WeltAuto’s MacPherson Road showroom, for example. It has taken pride of place under the lights, a proud graduand of the Das WeltAuto certification process.

Das WeltAuto also accepts vehicles that have been sold by parallel importers, so long as each vehicle’s ownership, repair, maintenance and servicing histories can be verified.

For potential customers, this means that when you buy from Das WeltAuto, you will have peace of mind that the car you have acquired has been properly cared for. Buyers will also be informed if the car they’re checking out has been repaired after being in a fender-bender.

**COMPREHENSIVE INSPECTIONS**

Before Das WeltAuto sells a car, it undergoes a 115-point inspection to ensure that it meets the
highest standards. During said inspection, any worn components will be replaced by genuine Volkswagen parts.

This inspection process includes an exhaustive visual inspection, where paintwork is finely inspected for damage and the bodywork is carefully scrutinised. On top of that, headlights, hazard lights, high and low beams are tested to ensure these essential parts are in good functioning order. Moving on to the finer bits of the car, the wiper blades, antenna and even the fuel door and cap are examined.

Under the bonnet, technicians pore over the oily bits to ensure they are all in excellent condition. From the car battery to its cables and clamps to the overall engine condition and air filters, every Das WeltAuto candidate is guaranteed to keep chugging along happily and healthily with its new owner.

After this, the car is examined for structural integrity and operability of all technological and safety equipment. Then, the suspension, brakes, tyres and wheels are tested and evaluated.

Finally, a comprehensive road test by an experienced Volkswagen technician completes the entire process. Having passed the final exam, the accomplished candidate is finally qualified to enter the Approved Used Car Programme, where it will one day be “adopted” by its “new” owner.

**PEACE OF MIND, GUARANTEED**

Das WeltAuto’s commitment to quality does not end when a car is sold, though. A minimum 12-month warranty for every Volkswagen vehicle is applied upon purchase, so you can always rely on the integrity of your car.

A variety of good deals await, and Das WeltAuto provides attractive financial offers with no hidden costs, administrative or additional fees, with everything explained clearly and transparently by the dealership’s experienced sales representatives.

With this assurance, you’ll be able to buy a car from Das WeltAuto and drive it home, secure in the knowledge that your latest pride and joy is going to be an excellent addition to your family.
ELECTRIC AVENUE

Battery-powered cars are finally on the way, but some will inexplicably have a warmer reception than others.

THE second phase of the Vehicular Emissions Scheme (VES) – which takes effect from July 1 – will include fine particulate matter (PM) as a pollutant. PM will, along with four other pollutants, determine how much tax rebate or surcharge a car attracts. Like now, cars will be judged according to their worst-performing pollutant level. Specifically, for PM, the VES as of now stipulates an emission level of zero. In other words, for a car to qualify for the top-tier rebate of $20,000, it cannot produce any particulate matter at all from its tailpipe.

Currently, only pure electric cars can do that. Which explains why motor companies are starting to bring in a slew of battery-powered models. These include the Hyundai Ioniq Electric, Renault Zoe Long
VW and BMW will be selling their latest electric models here.

Range and Volkswagen e-Golf. Jaguar and Tesla are also expected to join the fray. BMW, the first to sell electric cars here, will also bring in the revamped i3.

But how well these cars perform in the showroom will depend on a few things. Certainly, like all cars, the appeal of an electric car will hinge on its attractiveness – from its styling, pricing, practicality, to its performance. Performance, in this case, will include range. That is, how far an electric car can go on a single full charge.

In most other markets, cars from Tesla and BMW will rank quite high on the attractiveness scale. They look good, are as practical as conventional-fuel cars, and are packed with high performance.

As for how far they can go on a charge, Tesla boasts of models which can cover 400 kilometres, while the latest i3 can do more than 180 kilometres.

In many other markets, a car such as the Tesla Model S will appeal to many who are looking for a premium vehicle. A Model S costs less than an equivalent Porsche Panamera in the US. Both cars are of a similar size, and provide similar performance. Which explains why the Model S is a common sight on the streets of Los Angeles and San Francisco.

But will it do as well here, assuming the brand makes a comeback? Probably not. In Singapore, even with a $20,000 VES rebate, a Model S is likely to cost more than an equivalent Panamera.

Not only that, a variant like the P85D will attract an annual road tax of over $11,000 – nearly thrice the annual amount for a Panamera.

So, in three years’ time, the Model S owner would have expended his VES savings on road tax.

Not so for a model like the Hyundai Ioniq Electric. The battery-powered Hyundai would probably have the same level of attractiveness as a mass-market 1.6-litre family sedan as far as styling, pricing, practicality and performance go.

But its road tax will only be a little over $1000 – in the same ballpark as a conventional 1.6-litre.

This is because the road tax calculation for electric cars is based on the vehicle’s power output, as well as a factor that takes into account the carbon footprint associated with the distribution of electricity to charge it up.

Hence a car like the Tesla Model S P85D, with a declared power output of over 500kW,
draws a prohibitively high road tax. The Hyundai Ioniq Electric, with 88kW, is taxed lightly.

Both cars are pretty much at the extreme ends of a wide spectrum. So, the commercial viability of a particular electric model in Singapore will depend much on which end it leans towards. And not just how attractive it is as a car, or how efficient it is.

The other reason why lower-powered choices are more likely to take off lies in the VES rebate and its relative value to the price of a car. Clearly, $20,000 will be a pretty big deal to a buyer of an Ioniq Electric, which is expected to cost below $140,000. But $20,000 is rather insignificant to a buyer of the Model S, which starts from around $400,000.

There is no wrong or right in the way road tax is levied on such cars. The power rating is a proxy for engine displacement in a fossil-fuel car. But there has to be a way to also factor in the indirect carbon emissions of battery-powered cars. The Government has chosen a rather inelegant way – through road tax.

By the same token, it is the same way the special tax is levied on diesel taxis – to reflect the higher mileage clocked by cabs. The more kilometres a vehicle chalks, the more pollutants it emits.

Unfortunately, this means lesser cars – as far as performance is concerned – will proliferate here. This is similar to how the COE power banding is paving the way for cars with less advanced engines to populate the roads here. Anything with more than 97kW or 130hp is placed in Category B – no matter how tiny the engine is. Cat B is a smaller COE quota, and its premiums are usually higher than Cat A, where the bulk of certificates reside.

Still, going by how the verdict is still out on how clean or efficient electric cars actually are, Singapore’s cautious treatment is not totally unwarranted.

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SILENCE IS GOLDEN

DRIVERS SEEKING A SMOOTHER AND MORE SILENT RIDE SHOULD CONSIDER THE ADVAN dB V552, YOKOHAMA’S QUIetest TYRE EVER.

If there’s one thing that luxury cars are known for, it would be delivering a quiet and refined ride. This enables its occupants to enjoy their favourite tunes, or carry on a conversation without raising their voices.

But even the most luxurious automobile cannot just rely on acoustic glass, thicker windows and increased sound-deadening materials to insulate its occupants.

That’s where the Yokohama Advan dB V552, the Japanese firm’s quietest tyre ever, comes in. As a successor to the renowned Yokohama Advan dB V551, the Advan dB V552 had to be better in every way.

So, the engineers went back to the drawing board to create the Yokohama Advan dB V552. Every aspect of the tyre, which included its tread pattern, internal structure and profile, has been meticulously scrutinised.

Most motorists won’t notice, but the Advan dB V552’s tread pattern has key design elements such as precise groove arrangements and twist edge chamfering, which help dissipate tyre noise and reduce any chances of uneven wear. Meanwhile, the staggered arrangement of the grooves and sipes optimises block rigidity while improving steering stability, too.

Apart from its tread pattern, the Yokohama Advan dB V552 is also constructed from a new dB compound, which enhances both fuel efficiency and wet grip. The tyre’s new base compound suppresses vibrations, which helps to reduce tyre noise.

To really ensure the quietest performance, the Yokohama Advan dB V552 also utilises a wider belt edge cover to enhance rigidity and control the vibrations from the tyre’s shoulder. This is complemented by the side-reinforcement belt, which improves ride quality on heavier cars.

You may not be driving a luxury car just yet, but with the Yokohama Advan dB V552, your ride could certainly be as quiet as one.
THE YOKOHAMA ADVAN dB V552’s new dB compound enhances both fuel efficiency and wet grip.
HIT HATCH

Edric finds himself more thrilled by a Hyundai than a McLaren.
Neither the McLaren Senna nor the Aston Valkyrie excites Edric like a good hot-hatch can.

SETTLING into my seat on a flight last month, I pulled out an automotive magazine (of course) for a leisurely read. But was I drawn to the piece on the brutal new McLaren Senna, or the spectacular thousand-horsepower, Adrian Newey-conceived Aston Martin Valkyrie?

No, my interest was piqued instead by the review of Hyundai’s new hot-hatch, the i30 N.

Truth be told, my eyes glaze over when I encounter a gushing article about yet another whizz-bang hypercar. Bugatti Chiron, AMG Project One, the aforementioned Aston Valkyrie – I’ve barely glanced at their breathless press releases and magazine previews, and certainly couldn’t recite their technical or performance specs.

Incredible engineering feats they may be, but they leave me cold, so alien are they in concept, ability and sheer price to anything you or I are likely to encounter in real life.

And even were I to somehow blag my way into the driver’s seat of the Valkyrie or another of these exotic devices, I’d probably end up only tickling a quarter or so of its potential because, not being Max Verstappen, that would be all the speed, grip and explosive ferocity that my awestruck mind and limited hand-eye coordination could process. Conduct a meaningful review of the car? Forget it.

The Hyundai, on the other hand – now that’s a car I can identify with. Compact, well-built, quick (275hp, in its more powerful guise), comfortable and an absolute hoot to drive, from what I’ve read.

A Korean Golf GTI, in other words, only cheaper and faster, and with a manual gearbox as standard. It’s a car which would easily shrug off my traffic-clogged daily work commute, yet prove a thrilling partner for a weekend B-road blast up the Malaysian east coast.

And it’s not just the Korean hot-hatch that’s caught my eye. I’ve always been partial to affordable, everyday performance cars (my daily drive is a four-door Civic Type R), so Renault’s newly minted Megane RS, with its 280hp 1.8-litre turbo engine and rear-wheel-steer (a first for this segment), looks tasty too.

And I’ve also been a long-time fan of the grand-daddy of this genre, the VW Golf GTI, having sung its praises in my previous Torque column.

In these everyday heroes, you can enjoy yourself behind the wheel while flying under the radar; in a hypercar, you’ll end up on Stomp even if you’re just pottering to the shops for some pet food. And when you get to the mall, there’ll be nowhere to park because your front splitter probably can’t clear the carpark hump. And you’re not about to try either, with a hundred pairs of eyes just waiting to see you scrape that exotic carbon fibre.

A hypercar seriously cramps your style, while a hot hatch liberates you. And that’s why I find myself more captivated by a Hyundai than a McLaren.

HOT HATCHES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN EDRIC’S THING. HIS FAVOURITE CAR OF ALL TIME? THE PEUGEOT 205 GTI.
STOP AT ONE, OR NOT

When it comes to cars, the more the merrier for this petrolhead, but when it comes to kids, she is happy to have just one.
DIFFERENT types of cars have different personalities. For folks who can afford it, they can have different cars for different occasions and moods. When you have more than one child, you can bet your last dollar that each of them will be as different as a convertible is from an SUV.

This means that there is no one-size-fits-all parenting. You will have to adopt a different approach with each of your kids, while maintaining a baseline fairness. Try justifying to one child why his or her sibling gets to buy a new pair of shoes, while he or she doesn’t because his or hers still fit and are in good condition.

Cars will not complain when you drive one of them more often than another, but a child is unlikely to understand why you need to spend more time with, or give more attention to, a sibling simply because he or she needs it more.

It is all right for the car with the highest horsepower or the quickest zero-to-hundred sprint to not be your favourite, for whatever reason, but good luck reassuring the child with the best performance in terms of results and behaviour who somehow feels that he or she is not the apple of your eye.

As parents, we are pleased when the straight-A child who always does well does it yet again, but when we are ecstatic over that single A which his or her less academically inclined sibling scores, you cannot blame the former for feeling just that little bit of resentment.

It is understandable when you love a car because it lives up to expectations and performs excellently every time. It is also normal to appreciate an old vehicle for its antics and quirks.

Every mother tries to love the child who is always up to mischief as much as another who can do no wrong.

I believe that all parents love all their children, but never equally. And that is perfectly fine because parents are human too, and humans are susceptible to favouritism. Just as long as you are truthful enough to admit it to yourself and do everything within your means to prevent any bias from manifesting itself, so as not to hurt your children’s feelings.

Maybe it is due to some of these reasons that my husband and I decided to have just one child.

I am in no way advocating a one-child policy, for that would make me an enemy of the state in the face of declining birth rates and a rapidly ageing population.

Neither am I advocating not having kids at all in order to reduce our carbon footprint and save the planet.

All I am saying is, let the parents decide on their number of offspring.

As for cars, it is a matter of financial prudence. There is no right or wrong when it comes to how many cars or kids you have. Have as many cars as you can or need, and have as many children as you can or want.

LYNN WOULD LIKE TO OFFER A PIECE OF ADVICE: NEVER LET ANYONE TELL YOU HOW MANY CARS OR KIDS YOU SHOULD HAVE, WHETHER CARS OR KIDS.
THE ROAD TO QUALITY

If he can no longer review cars, our senior writer would welcome a second career as a road quality inspector.

THE best career advice I ever received was from an engineer I interviewed about six months ago. He told me that if I ever wanted a job for life, I should work for a company that’s trying to make the world a better place.

Of course, I also believe in doing a job that I’m passionate about. But lately, my job has seen fewer ups and more downs. So, I have been thinking about possible alternative careers that still involve cars and motoring.

I imagined defecting to the “dark side” by joining a carmaker, as other ex-journo friends have. Perhaps being an automotive product specialist is in my future.

A corporate job with a car company sounds nice. It would bring me even closer to the cars I love, and my salary might even be double what I’m earning now. However, I’m not sure I can be as well-versed as an engineer.
when it comes to the technical nitty-gritty.

Then again, I might be more of a natural as a product expert rather than a public relations executive. Because I’m shy by nature, socialising with strangers sounds like a recipe for an anxiety attack.

I pondered my interviewee’s advice further and realised that if I cannot review cars anymore, I should get a job as a road quality inspector. That occupation would definitely contribute to the good of the nation, since everyone is a road user.

Like many motorists, I am also tired of Singapore’s seemingly endless roadworks and poorly resurfaced roads.

So how would I ensure that the quality of our roads will improve? First, I would do away with the practice of going with the contractor who submits the lowest bid for a project. I believe that this results in companies sacrificing quality in order to make their bids more attractive.

Instead, with the help of LTA scholars, I would compile a list of the most competent construction firms ever given contracts by the Government. Firms which have a great track record of completing projects successfully should be the only ones bidding for big Government contracts.

Perhaps I should also invite Japanese companies to participate, since most of the roads in Japan seem to be tofu-smooth.

I’m aware that tweaking the bidding process and weeding out blacklisted firms won’t be enough to guarantee an improvement in the overall quality of our roads. Therefore, I will need to employ the tried-and-tested Singaporean method of ensuring that firms do the job right: hefty fines.

It will be up to the contractor to set a reasonable/realistic project completion date, which the LTA scholars will adjust/approve based on similar past projects.

Once the deadline has been set and approved, not meeting it will result in serious consequences – for every hour, not day, that a project is overdue, the firm will be fined $250,000!

Thereafter, the penalty per hour will double for each day that the project remains incomplete. This will drive home the point that roadworks not only cost money, but also lead to a loss in productivity due to increased traffic congestion.

And under my watch, a project will be deemed incomplete until it passes muster with the other road quality inspectors from my unit. That means several of us have to drive over the resurfaced area to ensure it is as smooth as possible.

Doing things this way may very well cost more. But as a road user, I would rather pay more for excellent results, instead of economising and suffering the consequences of shoddy workmanship.

AFTER ENSURING THAT ALL ROADS IN SINGAPORE ARE AS SMOOTH AS THOSE IN THE MCE, JEREMY WOULD FOCUS ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF CURVIER ROADS FOR NICER DRIVING ROUTES.
NO.1 AGAIN!
Singapore’s No.1 Monthly Car Magazine
Nielsen Media Index 2017

Torque continues to be the authority on all things automotive in Singapore and remains the preferred read for people who love cars as much as us - on the road, online, in print and digital.
C FOR CUTE
The last Volvo model to qualify as cute was the C30, a snazzy hatchback based on the unsexy S40 saloon.

The C30 was the smallest car in the Volvo showroom but had the biggest personality, thanks to its interesting styling (that glass tailgate was inspired by the historical 1800ES and 480ES), chic interior touches, funky colour combos and artistic attention to detail that included a stylised demister array for the rear side windows.

The Swedish “safe sex” alternative to the German Volkswagen Scirocco was retired five years ago. Today, there is another cute Volvo driving hipsters to distraction in Singapore – the XC40, which we compare against the MINI Countryman (pg 46).

AND ALSO
- TOYOTA C-HR vs HYUNDAI KONA vs MAZDA CX-3
- MERCEDES-BENZ CLS
- AUDI A7 SPORTBACK
- PORSCHE 911 TURBO S EXCLUSIVE SERIES
HUE REFLECTIONS

Which of these brightly coloured crossovers has a character that’s true to its funky hue?
The passionate and sporty-looking competitor in this story is the Mazda CX-3, which comes in a shade called Soul Red. It’s the only non-turbo model in this shootout, but it’ll be banking on its 2-litre engine and well-tuned chassis to outshine its competitors.

Throwing its hat into the ring is the otherworldly Toyota C-HR. Its coupe-like design and sunny yellow paintwork give it the most striking presence, but it’ll also be eager to demonstrate the capabilities of its turbocharged powertrain.

Which of these colourful crossovers will prove to be the most characterful? Keep reading to find out!
KONA

ENGINE & GEARBOX
Hyundai’s turbocharged 1.6-litre 4-cylinder with 174hp and 265Nm is the most powerful of the trio, offering the strongest low-end torque and quickest century sprint time.

Kona’s 7-speed dual-clutch transmission performs the fastest gear changes, but its low-speed response could be faster.

CX-3

ENGINE & GEARBOX
Mazda’s 2-litre 4-cylinder with 156hp and 204Nm is the only non-turbo motor here. But it’s the most responsive and surprisingly the most efficient, too.

CX-3’s 6-speed automatic is the keenest gear-changer, and petrolheads will enjoy playing with the manual override function, which has the -/+ points in the “correct” orientation. The updated model even comes with paddle shifters.

C-HR

ENGINE & GEARBOX
Toyota’s turbocharged 1.2-litre 4-cylinder with 114hp and 185Nm has the lowest output, but its smooth-revving nature is second to none.

C-HR’s CVT is the most impressive transmission, as it goes about its business in such a creamy and unobtrusive manner that you’d swear it was a regular torque-converter.
RIDE & HANDLING
CX-3’s ride quality is the most balanced, because it manages to retain a degree of pliancy while still delivering the agile handling expected by Mazda drivers.

RIDE & HANDLING
Kona feels the most surefooted thanks to its all-wheel-drive system, which includes an on-demand 4x4 lock function for very slippery surfaces. The Hyundai’s overall ride, though not uncomfortable, is on the firm side.

RIDE & HANDLING
C-HR has the quietest and most comfortable ride in this contest, and soaks up anything from speed strips to speed bumps with aplomb.
COCKPIT
Feels the most upmarket with its generous leather trimmings, knurled air-con knobs and soft plastics. The infotainment system has the most intuitive menu layout.

COCKPIT
Most driver-focused cockpit features the sportiest front seats and a dashboard that’s angled towards the driver. The relatively tighter confines and steeply raked windscreens add to the coupe-like feel behind the wheel.

COCKPIT
Roomiest and most functional, thanks to the user-friendly controls, numerous connectivity options and wireless smartphone charger. The seat piping, which matches the exterior paintwork, is a nice touch.
BACKSEAT
Comparatively narrow CX-3 is better for two adults instead of three. The short backrests aren’t ideal for occupants taller than 1.75m, but the well-padded bench ensures that their bums will be seated quite comfortably.

METERS
CX-3’s racecar-like instrument cluster is dominated by a tachometer and is the only unit with an additional head-up display that helps keep the driver’s attention on the road.

BACKSEAT
Most spacious backseat is also the most supportive. Kona has the only rear cabin with a centre armrest, and the big doorbins make this space the most practical, too.

METERS
Kona’s instrument panel is the most conventional in this company, although few drivers will complain about the big digits, which make the gauges the easiest to read at a glance.

BACKSEAT
C-HR’s low roofline makes ingress/egress the trickiest, especially for seniors. However, the bench itself is great for tall folks with large feet, as it has the tallest backrests and the most generous footwell space.

METERS
Deep-set meters of the C-HR cockpit look sporty, but the nicest component in here is the secondary display, which has the sharpest and brightest graphics. The G Monitor, however, is superfluous in a car like this.
HYUNDAI KONA 1.6 vs MAZDA CX-3 2.0 vs TOYOTA C-HR 1.2

THE C-HR IS THE QUIETEST AND MOST COMFORTABLE, THE CX-3 IS THE MOST FUN TO DRIVE, WHILE THE KONA IS THE MOST SUREFOOTED AND MOST USEFUL.

BOOT
C-HR’s 316-litre cargo hold is the most useful as it has the most tethering points. Owners with outdoorsy lifestyles will like the underfloor compartment, which is handy for keeping loose items out of sight.
Kona’s 361-litre boot capacity is the most ideal for heavier cargo as it has the lowest loading point. Smaller things can be easily secured thanks to a standard elastic net.

CX-3’s 240-litre boot is the smallest and has the highest loading point, so it prefers small and light items to big and heavy items. The tiny boot light makes loading/unloading in the dark a bit hard.
The Hyundai Kona 1.6 is the most stylish of the three entries in this comparison, with a bolder exterior and a driver-oriented cockpit. Its turbocharged 1.6-litre engine is the most refined among the three, and its CVT is the best we’ve tested so far. The Kona’s only real drawbacks are its plasticky interior and slightly firm ride, and the $20,000 VES surcharge levied on the Hyundai adversely affects its value-for-money proposition. But these are small penalties to pay for a colourful crossover that out-funks and outruns the competition in this shootout. 😎

If you’re passionate about driving, then the Mazda CX-3 is your ride. Its engine revs keenly and its gearbox is always eager to drop a cog or two. We also love the CX-3’s head-up display and excellent infotainment.

While we love the CX-3’s soul-stirring character and can even live with the higher road tax its 2-litre motor attracts, it’s hard to look past the narrow backseat and small boot, which reduce the car’s overall practicality.

The most irresistible crossover in this story is the dynamic Hyundai Kona. Toyota may have dared to produce something as shocking as the C-HR, but Hyundai has gone a step further, for the Kona’s character actually matches its exterior hue and design.

The Kona’s dynamism is backed up by its on-demand all-wheel-drive and wonderful turbocharged 1.6-litre motor, which lets it zip about town with ease. The Kona’s other strengths are its commodious cabin, roomy boot and great onboard connectivity. The Kona’s only missteps are its plasticky interior and slightly firm ride, and the $20,000 VES surcharge levied on the Hyundai adversely affects its value-for-money proposition. But these are small penalties to pay for a colourful crossover that out-funks and outruns the competition in this shootout. 😎

HYUNDAI KONA 1.6 (A) DRIVETRAIN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>Inline-4, 16-valves, turbocharged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAPACITY</td>
<td>1591cc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BORE X STROKE</td>
<td>71mm x 85.4mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPRESSION RATIO</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAX POWER</td>
<td>174hp at 5500rpm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAX TORQUE</td>
<td>265Nm at 1500-4500rpm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POWER TO WEIGHT</td>
<td>124.2hp per tonne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEARBOX</td>
<td>7-speed dual-clutch with manual select</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRIVEN WHEELS</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PERFORMANCE

| 0-100KM/H | 7.9 seconds |
| TOP SPEED  | 205km/h     |
| CONSUMPTION | 14.9km/L    |
| CO2 EMISSION | 153g/km    |

SUSPENSION

| FRONT         | MacPherson struts, coil springs     |
| REAR          | Multi-link, coil springs            |

BRAKES

| FRONT / REAR | Ventilated discs / Discs          |

TYRES

| TYPE            | Nexen Nfера SU1                 |
| SIZE            | 215/55 R17                     |

SAFETY

| AIRBAGS | 6                               |
| TRACTION AIDS | ABS, ESP                      |

MEASUREMENTS

| LENGTH  | 4165mm                         |
| WIDTH   | 1800mm                         |
| HEIGHT  | 1550mm                         |
| WHEELBASE | 2600mm                     |
| KERB WEIGHT | 1401kg                    |
| TURNING CIRCLE | 10.6m                     |

BUYING IT

| PRICE INCL. COE | $126,999 (after $20k VES surcharge) |
| WARRANTY        | 5 years/unlimited km             |
### Toyota C-HR Luxury 1.2 (A) Drivetrain

- **Type**: Inline-4, 16-valves, turbocharged
- **Capacity**: 1197cc
- **Bore x stroke**: 71.5mm x 74.5mm
- **Compression ratio**: 10:1
- **Max power**: 116hp at 5200-5600rpm
- **Max torque**: 185Nm at 1500-4000rpm
- **Power to weight**: 86.4hp per tonne
- **Gearbox**: CVT with 7-speed override
- **Driven wheels**: Front
- **Performance**:
  - 0-100km/h: 11.1 seconds
  - Top speed: 185km/h
  - Consumption: 15.6km/L (combined)
  - CO2 emission: 144g/km
- **Suspension**:
  - Front: MacPherson struts, coil springs
  - Rear: Double wishbones, coil springs
- **Brakes**:
  - Front / Rear: Ventilated discs / Discs
- **Tyres**:
  - Type: Dunlop Enasave EC300+
  - Size: 215/50 R17
- **Safety**:
  - Airbags: 7
  - Traction aids: ABS, VSC
- **Measurements**:
  - Length: 4360mm
  - Width: 1795mm
  - Height: 1565mm
  - Wheelbase: 2640mm
  - Kerb weight: 1320kg
  - Turning circle: 10.4m
- **Buying it**:
  - Price incl. COE: $140,988 (no VES rebate/surcharge)
  - Warranty: 3 years/100,000km

### Mazda CX-3 Deluxe 2.0 (A) Drivetrain

- **Type**: Inline-4, 16-valves
- **Capacity**: 1998cc
- **Bore x stroke**: 83.5mm x 91.2mm
- **Compression ratio**: 14:1
- **Max power**: 156hp at 5600rpm
- **Max torque**: 204Nm at 2800rpm
- **Power to weight**: 86.4hp per tonne
- **Gearbox**: 6-speed automatic with manual select
- **Driven wheels**: Front
- **Performance**:
  - 0-100km/h: 9.5 seconds
  - Top speed: 192km/h
  - Consumption: 16.4km/L (combined)
  - CO2 emission: 146g/km
- **Suspension**:
  - Front: MacPherson struts, coil springs
  - Rear: Torsion beam, coil springs
- **Brakes**:
  - Front / Rear: Ventilated discs / Discs
- **Tyres**:
  - Type: Toyo Proxes R40
  - Size: 215/50 R18
- **Safety**:
  - Airbags: 6
  - Traction aids: ABS, DSC
- **Measurements**:
  - Length: 4275mm
  - Width: 1765mm
  - Height: 1535mm
  - Wheelbase: 2570mm
  - Kerb weight: 1297kg
  - Turning circle: 10.6m
- **Buying it**:
  - Price incl. COE: $131,188 (no VES rebate/surcharge)
  - Warranty: 5 years/100,000km

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**Most responsive powertrain, neatest handling, coolest infotainment**

**Most driver-oriented cockpit, comfiest ride, smoothest drivetrain**

**Tightest backseat, smallest boot, biggest road tax bill**

**Highest price, trickiest backseat access, least exciting performance**

**Best in build quality**

**Best in comfort**
GROUP TEST

VOLVO XC40 T5 versus MINI COOPER S COUNTRYMAN

STORY DR KONG YONGYAO PHOTOS YANG

TALL AND TALLER

Things are looking up for upwardly mobile urbanites in Singapore, thanks to this pair of premium compact SUVs with personality.
The name that changed the world of crossovers. Who would have thunk it?
Nissan jacked up a hatchback, gave it the thinnest of pretences to ruggedness and started a 21st century automotive gold rush.
Kadjar, HR-V, C-HR, Eclipse Cross, Renegade, Ateca, Karoq, Tiguan... The names are as numerous as they are funky.
Yet, for a few years now, the industry only had the eternally weird MINI Countryman as a bulwark against the tide of unrelenting blandness in the segment.
Happily, the compact crossover has matured somewhat since the niche was first flooded with faceless penalty-boxes, and we are beginning to see some semblance of distinctiveness and flair in the movement's second decade.
Suddenly, the challenge to MINI's idea of a premium compact SUV is thus now very intense, not least in the form of Volvo's unabashedly tall and angular XC40.
Flush with Chinese cash and undergoing a company-wide renaissance, Volvo has fleshed out its model range downward after the more expensive 90 series and the astoundingly good XC60.
The new XC40 is a car from a car company clearly surging with confidence and clarity of direction.
Volvo affectionately declares its entrant a "tough little robot", which, looking at the two-tone colour, angular lines and robobulldog stance, strikes me as a stroke of genius.
The description seems to be an epiphany for the identity of the compact SUV niche, a segment borne from focus groups and corporate meetings, and hence struggling badly for definition.

The butch, modern, and techno connotations which “tough little robot” have are as appropriate for the type as ‘sultry seductress’ would be for an Italian supercar.

It also helps that the XC40 is usefully differentiated in visual character from its bigger brothers, eschewing the Russian-doll sameness afflicting the German competition’s lineups.

Finally, the compact SUV can mean something beyond a white good.

Eternally spunky MINI, for its part, has been forging its own path by making cars as fun, pretty playthings.

However, as is the case with my young colleagues and my wife, many people soon outgrow their Coopers, both in taste and in practical requirements.

MINI hopes that they, along with their families, will then fall into the larger embrace of its cute ute.

Despite the swollen proportions, cute the Countryman still remains, particularly when dressed up in the “ALL4” exterior package standard on Cooper S variants.

All stripes, attitude and growly intent, the Countryman’s pugnaciously cartoonish appearance never fails to provoke a chuckle.

Both crossovers are immensely likeable to look at, though my suspicion lingers that the XC40 has more universal appeal.

Get yourself over the preconceived notion that Minis are but toys and you will find a perfectly useable family car losing nothing to its peers.

Underneath the colourfully distinctive sheet-metal of the Countryman are the bones
of BMW’s UKL platform that sees duty in the X1 and 2 Series bread van.

With a length of 4.3 metres and a boot size of 450 litres, this “mini” will do family-hauling duty perfectly satisfactorily for all 10 lunar new years of its COE.

It will do that with your family in considerable comfort, too, for the interior provides an undeniable aura of richness and vivacity with much success.

Lush and chunky compared to the Volvo’s light and airy, the Countryman’s cabin bear-hugs you with soft, luxuriant leather and abundant but tasteful smatterings of chrome.

BMW’s iDrive, in a cleverly playful and very attractive skin, lives in the ring of shooting, pulsating neon light that will either amuse or irritate the living daylights out of you.

Volvo’s critical acclaim since the XC90 is contributed to hugely by the brand’s fresh, bright and very Scandinavian take on luxury interiors.

Inside the XC40, modern dashboard inserts with ambient lighting that bleeds bewitchingly through in the night are subtly laid around a gigantic, vertically oriented central touchscreen through which most of the car’s functions are controlled, including the air-con.

Brightly coloured felt-surfacing fills in spaces which are more expansively lined with metal and mouldings in bigger models, yet adds youthful energy without detracting from an impression of high quality.

A digital instrument display, absent in the Countryman, puts a big map between two virtual dials and offers yet more control redundancy via the steering-wheel buttons.

Uniquely beautiful and becalming, the cockpit of the XC40 is like a cool breeze and radiant sunshine that whisk away the emotional clouds and mental exhaustion.
of a hard day’s work.
You could find some hard plastics if you deliberately go hunting, but they harm the ambience not one bit.
It is, however, possible to be initially quite annoyed at certain choices made by Volvo concerning the XC40’s ergonomics, some of which were no doubt made in the spirit of form over function.
These include requiring two separate pulls of the gearlever to move between Reverse and Drive, having no audio controls on the steering wheel, and needing to prod at a touchscreen to control the air-conditioning.
Climb into the Volvo, and you do actually climb a bit because it is about 10cm taller than the MINI, you will find your knees more bent and your body sat more upright, looking out at the world’s vastness through more glass than the cossetting Countryman has.
The Volvo’s driving position is not less comfortable, only less recumbent, and is another indication that the XC40 embraces its SUV remit more emphatically. Just like that, expectations are set for the drive in the two vehicles.
Lornie Road is relatively narrow, but has three lanes and a good flowing speed. In other words, within the limits of the law and good sense, it is a safe challenge.
A jaunt down Lornie always sees my mind lock on the car ahead like a homing missile, and that Lornie flows into the serpentine Old Upper Thomson Road is a delightful bonus.
It is the Countryman that takes to the game with far more relish, even peppering your ears with joyful snorts and childish burbles.
SUVs, tall of height and short of wheelbase, are always going to sway and amplify deflections more than sedans and hatchbacks.
Quite nakedly the XC40 demonstrates dive, squat, and roll, and it is possible to feel quite alarmed at the Volvo’s tippy disposition if you had jumped straight into it from a Mazda MX-5 (like I did).
Ease back on the uncouth violence, however, and the Volvo settles into a tranquil rhythm, and will go securely where you point it as long as you drive it with a sensible attitude.
In contrast, the 1.55m-tall Countryman is almost a hot hatch thinly disguised with some cladding. It is nicely balanced and eager to turn in, doing the brand’s fun-to-drive reputation no disfavour, even if it is quite some way from going like a “go-kart”.
Is the 2-litre T5 XC40 faster than the 2-litre Cooper S Countryman on paper and tarmac alike? With 251 Swedish horses versus 192 British ponies, of course.
But the XC40 is not the kind of car that goads you to deploy its full complement of firepower, nor is there a commensurate increase in pleasure from going that bit faster. Also, its engine, when extended, sounds like a leaf blower having an asthma attack. Which is just fine here, however, given that it is a very muted leaf blower.
Don’t drive the XC like a GTI and you will enjoy it very much. Actually, as much as I hate to find myself advocating less power, this car would likely not lose any of its charms if it is equipped with the company’s 180hp T4 engine at a lower price.
THE XC40 LOOKS LIKE A TOUGH LITTLE ROBOT, WHILE THE COUNTRYMAN IS DESIGNED AS A CUTE UTE.

**MINI COOPER S COUNTRYMAN 2.0 (A)**

**DRIVETRAIN**

- **TYPE**: Inline-4, 16-valves, turbocharged
- **CAPACITY**: 1998cc
- **BORE X STROKE**: 82mm x 94.6mm
- **COMPRESSION RATIO**: 11.0
- **MAX POWER**: 192hp at 5000-6000rpm
- **MAX TORQUE**: 280Nm at 1350-4600rpm
- **POWER TO WEIGHT**: 131.5hp per tonne
- **GEARBOX**: 8-speed automatic with manual select
- **DRIVEN WHEELS**: Front

**PERFORMANCE**

- **0-100KM/H**: 7.4 seconds
- **TOP SPEED**: 225km/h
- **CONSUMPTION**: 15.4km/L (combined)
- **CO2 EMISSION**: 149g/km

**SUSPENSION**

- **FRONT**: MacPherson struts, coil springs
- **REAR**: Multi-link, coil springs

**BRAKES**

- **FRONT / REAR**: Ventilated discs / Discs

**TYRES**

- **TYPE**: Bridgestone Turanza T001
- **SIZE**: 225/50 R18

**SAFETY**

- **AIRBAGS**: 6
- **TRACTION AIDS**: ABS, DSC

**MEASUREMENTS**

- **LENGTH**: 4459mm
- **WIDTH**: 1822mm
- **HEIGHT**: 1557mm
- **WHEELBASE**: 2670mm
- **KERB WEIGHT**: 1460kg
- **TURNING CIRCLE**: 11.4m

**BUYING IT**

- **PRICE INCL. COE**: $184,088 (after $10k VES surcharge)
- **WARRANTY**: 3 years/200,000km

MORE PUGNACIOUS, MORE NIMBLE AND MORE PLAYFUL THAN XC40

---

CARTOONISH APPEARANCE, LACKS ALL-WHEEL-DRIVE DESPITE “ALL4” PACKAGE
Now, a word on the XC40’s autonomous functions. This technology has seen major leaps in recent years and Volvo’s adaptive cruise control with lane-keeping system is one of the best I have sampled so far, locking on to lane markings and firmly assisting in steering the car most of the time.

The key word being “most”, as this is the kind of technology you must trust completely or not at all.

It guided me faultlessly... until it didn’t. I found myself pogoing between an SBS bus and a cement mixer, quickly losing my bladder control in terror. I never turned the system on again. It was inconceivable a few short years ago, but here we have two compact SUVs brimming with unique personalities and, more incredibly, suffused with the identities of their parent brands.

Perhaps I am thinking far too much in straight lines, but if terrier-like dynamic behaviour is my objective, I would not be poking around crossovers. Which is the MINI Cooper S Countryman’s problem here, because an overtly fun compact SUV is like spicy milk – not really the point.

Midway into your test drive of the XC40 while having the experience of the Countryman fresh in your mind, you could either be deeply underwhelmed by the Volvo’s clumsier disposition, or comfortably impressed by its loping, easygoing gait that in no way disgraces itself, all things considered.

I enjoyed tossing the MINI about more, but chances are SUV buyers will conclude on the latter. Then they will remember the wonderful airiness and delightful design of the XC40 that bathe them in elegant modernity, and sign gleefully on the dotted line of the Volvo order form.
VOLVO XC40 T5 R-DESIGN 2.0 (A)

**DRIVETRAIN**
- **TYPE**
  - Inline-4, 16-valves, turbocharged
- **CAPACITY**
  - 1969cc
- **BORE X STROKE**
  - 82mm x 93.2mm
- **COMPRESSION RATIO**
  - 10.8:1
- **MAX POWER**
  - 251hp at 5500rpm
- **MAX TORQUE**
  - 350Nm at 1800–4800rpm
- **POWER TO WEIGHT**
  - 148.3hp per tonne
- **GEARBOX**
  - 8-speed automatic with manual select
- **DRIVEN WHEELS**
  - All

**PERFORMANCE**
- **0-100KM/H**
  - 6.4 seconds
- **TOP SPEED**
  - 230km/h
- **CONSUMPTION**
  - 13km/L (combined)
- **CO2 EMISSION**
  - 176g/km

**SUSPENSION**
- **FRONT**
  - MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar
- **REAR**
  - Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar

**BRAKES**
- **FRONT / REAR**
  - Ventilated discs / Discs

**TYRES**
- **TYPE**
  - Pirelli P Zero
- **SIZE**
  - 245/45 R20

**SAFETY**
- **AIRBAGS**
  - 6
- **TRACTION AIDS**
  - ABS, DSTC

**MEASUREMENTS**
- **LENGTH**
  - 4425mm
- **WIDTH**
  - 1863mm
- **HEIGHT**
  - 1652mm
- **WHEELBASE**
  - 2702mm
- **KERB WEIGHT**
  - 1692kg
- **TURNING CIRCLE**
  - 11.4m

**BUYING IT**
- **PRICE INCL. COE**
  - $200,000 (after $10k VES surcharge)
- **WARRANTY**
  - 3 years/100,000km

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• NEW MODEL VERSUS OLD MODEL
The third-generation Mercedes CLS is armed with a sharper design, cooler features and a sportier character, in a bid to re-assert its position as the pre-eminent four-door coupe.
No matter how many times a manufacturer’s marketing or PR manager tries to convince him, our senior writer remains convinced that four-door coupes do not exist.
MARKETING is a very powerful tool. It can make or break a product, and convince consumers to buy into products that may sometimes not make any sense.

Take the Mercedes-Benz CLS, for example. When the German carmaker launched the first-generation model back in 2003, it was marketed as a “four-door coupe”. At that time, I liked the car’s swoopy lines. But I was never taken in by Mercedes’ advertising or marketing-speak.

To me, there is no such thing as a four-door coupe. The CLS has four doors and a notchback bodystyle, so it is a saloon – period. Even till today, the CLS continues to be based on the E-Class saloon.

But whatever you might call the CLS, it became a success and spawned an entirely new segment. In 2010, the CLS’s first rival arrived in the form of a fastback – the Audi A7 Sportback. BMW followed in 2012 with the 6 Series Gran Coupe. And with Audi having recently introduced the second-generation A7 Sportback, the release of the third-generation CLS couldn’t have been timelier.

Compared to its chunkier-looking predecessor, the latest CLS has a cleaner and more chiselled design. With its shark nose-inspired front end, it’s the most aggressive-looking CLS to date, too.

The new leaner design disguises the car’s increased dimensions over the older model. At 4988mm, the overall

Undoubtedly high-tech and swanky, but the cockpit’s similarity to the E-Class makes it feel less special.
length has grown by 48mm, while the 2939mm wheelbase is 69mm longer than before.

The longer wheelbase definitely improves interior space, but more significantly, the CLS is now a practical five-seater because, for the first time, it can accommodate three adults on the backseat.

In another nod to practicality, the CLS also has 40:20:40 split-folding rear seats, which increases its flexibility as a load-hauler.

Even more impressive is the fully digitised cockpit. As seen in the E-Class and S-Class, the instrument panel and infotainment system are now displayed using two 12.3-inch screens with attractive and colourful graphics.

Speaking of colour, the CLS is the first Mercedes with illuminated air-con vents. There are 64 selectable colours, and the vents momentarily glow red/blue if you raise/lower the air temperature.

All of this technology makes the cabin feel spaceship-like. But there’s no stopping the march towards digitisation. If you like your cars analogue, look elsewhere.

More familiar to Mercedes

MERC’S FASTER FASTBACK

If you think the CLS53 is too tame and can’t wait for the CLS63, you might want to consider the Mercedes-AMG GT 4-Door Coupe instead. Its moniker is going to befuddle buyers, though, because it’s not a coupe or a notchback saloon. It’s actually a fastback like the Porsche Panamera.

The AMG GT 4-Door Coupe can be specified with unique features not found in the CLS, such as active aerodynamics, rear-wheel-steering and a “Race” driving programme that includes a Drift Mode.

The AMG GT 4-Door Coupe is available in three variants – the spicy AMG GT53 with 435hp, the hotter AMG GT63 with 585hp and the torrid AMG GT63 S, which kicks out 639hp and is capable of crushing the century sprint in 3.2 seconds.

MERCEDES-AMG CLS53 4MATIC+ 3.0 (A)

| ENGINE | 2999cc, 24-valves, inline-6, turbocharged |
| MAX POWER | 435hp at 6100rpm |
| MAX TORQUE | 520Nm at 1800-5800rpm |
| GEARBOX | 9-speed automatic with manual select |
| 0-100KM/H | 4.5 seconds |
| TOP SPEED | 250km/h (governed) |
| CONSUMPTION | 11.5km/L (combined) |
| CO2 EMISSION | 200g/km |
| PRICE INCL. COE | To be announced |
**DRIVETRAIN**

**TYPE**  
Inline-6, 24-valves, turbocharged

**CAPACITY**  
2999cc

**BORE X STROKE**  
83mm x 92.4mm

**COMPRESSION RATIO**  
10.5:1

**MAX POWER**  
367hp at 5500-6100rpm

**MAX TORQUE**  
500Nm at 1600-4000rpm

**POWER TO WEIGHT**  
196.8hp per tonne

**GEARBOX**  
9-speed automatic with manual select

**DRIVEN WHEELS**  
All

**PERFORMANCE**

**0-100KM/H**  
4.8 seconds

**TOP SPEED**  
250km/h (governed)

**CONSUMPTION**  
12.8km/L (combined)

**CO2 EMISSION**  
178g/km

**SUSPENSION**

**FRONT**  
Four-link, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar

**REAR**  
Five-link, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar

**BRAKES**

**FRONT / REAR**  
Ventilated discs

**TYRES**

**TYPE**  
Dunlop Sport Maxx RT2

**SIZE**  
245/45 R19 (front), 275/35 R19 (rear)

**SAFETY**

**AIRBAGS**  
9

**TRACTION AIDS**  
ABS, ESP

**MEASUREMENTS**

**LENGTH**  
4988mm

**WIDTH**  
1890mm

**HEIGHT**  
1435mm

**WHEELBASE**  
2939mm

**KERB WEIGHT**  
1865kg

**TURNING CIRCLE**  
11.6m

**BUYING IT**

**PRICE INCL. COE**  
To be announced

**WARRANTY**  
3 years/100,000km

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**CLEANER DESIGN, GREATER REFINEMENT, CREAMY AND CAPABLE TURBOCHARGED INLINE-6**

**NOT AS AGILE AS EXPECTED, NEEDS A SPORTIER-SOUNDING EXHAUST, INTERIOR TOO SIMILAR TO AN E-CLASS**
owners is the refinement delivered by the tristar brand. Past CLS models have never been short on refinement, but the latest model takes this up by another notch, with more sound-insulating materials and optimised aerodynamics to reduce wind noise. There’s also an optional Acoustic Comfort package, which gives you laminated glass windows.

The CLS cabin is pretty darn quiet on the go. For a car with frameless windows, there is very little road noise and wind noise is non-existent until you’ve reached 170km/h. Even then, I could carry on a conversation with a fellow journalist, without either of us having to raise our voices. For even greater comfort, the CLS is available with Active Distance Control and Active Steering Assist. The former is Mercedes’ adaptive cruise control, which automatically adjusts the car’s speed and maintains a safe distance from the vehicle in front, while the latter helps keep the car within its lane by applying steering corrections.

However, I found Active Distance Control to be inconsistent. When I was stuck in evening rush-hour traffic, the system didn’t always react quickly enough the moment the vehicle in front began moving. This left a gap between my car and the one ahead of mine. For the Singapore-bound CLS, perhaps Active Distance Control should have a “SG” setting that maintains a 30cm distance to the car in front, so as to prevent other vehicles from cutting into your lane. And since there are PMD owners who insist on riding on the roads, a more aggressive “PMD” mode to reduce the gap to 10cm might also be needed.

With the CLS having ticked the boxes for refinement and convenience, I was curious to see how it would perform on the winding mountain roads outside Barcelona. Key to the CLS450’s performance is its new mild-hybrid powertrain. It consists of a turbocharged 3-litre inline-6 producing 367hp and 500Nm, paired to an electric motor and a 48-volt power supply.

The electric motor is responsible for key components such as the start-stop functions and air-conditioning. And apart from recuperating energy to recharge the 48-volt battery, it also contributes an additional 22hp and 250Nm for brief periods, or what Mercedes calls EQ Boost.

Driven in anger, the CLS450 goes from rest to 100km/h in 4.8 seconds. The scenery whooshes by in a blur, but as you come to the first bend, you’ll immediately...
realise that tearing up mountain roads is not this car’s forte.

The nose feels vague as you turn into a corner. Push harder and understeer begins to set in, with the 19-inch tyres squealing as they attempt to latch onto the road.

Far more eager to display its dynamic abilities is the AMG CLS53 4Matic+. Packing 435hp and 520Nm (there is also an additional 22hp and 250Nm available from its EQ Boost system), the CLS53 completes the century sprint faster (4.5 seconds versus 4.8 for the CLS450) and does it with a throatier and more forthcoming exhaust soundtrack, too.

With its firmer suspension setup and a front end with more bite, I could corner faster in the CLS53 than in the CLS450. The former’s fully variable torque distribution, as opposed to the latter’s fixed 45/55 percent split between the front and rear axles, also contributed to the car’s enhanced nimbleness.

But if you ask me, the most agile CLS model is probably going to be the one powered by a turbocharged 2-litre 4-cylinder engine, which Mercedes says is capable of “up to 220kW” or 299hp. The pre-production unit I drove did not have a model designation, although I suspect it will either be CLS300 or CLS350. I only had 10 minutes with this rear-wheel-drive 2-litre model, but it proved to be a refreshing drive, for unlike its two more powerful siblings, it actually enjoyed being flogged.

If Mercedes-AMG can imbue the next range-topping CLS63 model with such verve and nimbleness, it’ll definitely be a “four-door coupe” that’s worth driving. It might even give its more potent fastback sibling, the AMG GT 4-Door Coupe (see box story: Merc’s Faster Fastback) a run for its money.

But no matter how it turns out, the CLS will still be a saloon to me. And no marketing or PR manager is going to convince me otherwise.
THE CLS HAS NEVER BEEN SHORT ON REFINEMENT, BUT THE LATEST MODEL TAKES THIS UP ANOTHER NOTCH WITH MORE SOUND INSULATION AND IMPROVED AERODYNAMICS.
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GUESS THE CAR!

CAPTION THE PHOTO!

CAPTION THE VIDEO!
Audi’s new flagship fastback isn’t just pretty – it’s packed with lots of brilliant technology, too.
These days, more than half of the new models being unveiled by carmakers are either SUVs or crossovers. That’s why the launch of a stylish fastback, such as the all-new Audi A7 Sportback, is something to celebrate.

The design of the second-generation A7 is an evolution of the original model’s. The grille is now much wider, sits lower and has a hexagonal outline that is accentuated by sharp corners. Many of the lines around the front, such as the sharp bonnet creases and the slim headlights, seem to extend out from the grille. And the optional Matrix LED headlamps are the coolest you will find anywhere.

Audi’s obsession with LED lights extends to the interior. The driver can tweak the lighting intensity, colour and contours around the passenger cabin.

This ambience complements the high-tech dashboard, which consists of three high-definition electronic displays which have replaced the instrument panel, infotainment and climate controls.

The A7’s two touchscreens with haptic feedback make up the latest version of Audi MMI. The only element from the older generation of Audi’s MMI is the volume control knob for the audio system. Such a knob works far more effectively than a touch-sensitive scale on a screen, no matter how beautiful it looks.

Audi’s virtual cockpit is the main instrument cluster for the driver. It is a high-definition graphical display of the speedometer, refines the punchiness of its acceleration, but its poise and grip are nothing to be scoffed at.
tachometer and navigation map in the centre. While virtual cockpit works perfectly, the touchscreen version of the MMI is somewhat debatable.

Those who grew up in the smartphone era will have no issue with the controls, but having to look at either the upper or lower screen in the centre of the dashboard to alter settings is not intuitive.

Thankfully, there is a voice command function, but it doesn’t work for every setting. Perhaps the smartphone generation is sufficiently astute and able to make adjustments after just a split-second glance.

Even backseat passengers have a small touchscreen displaying a bar graph where temperature settings for the left and right halves of the rear can be individually adjusted to within 0.5 degrees C.

There is actually room for a fifth occupant since the centre console isn’t overly intrusive. On the topic of space, opening the huge tailgate reveals a massive boot, which simply adds to the practicality of this car.

The A7 is marginally shorter and narrower than before, but its wheelbase is 12mm longer. At the same time, the designers have re-profiled the roofline to liberate a tad more headroom, although in fairness, it was never really a serious problem in the previous car.

The higher roofline is complemented by the A7’s rear end, which looks perkier than the older model’s. If you recall, the previous A7’s rear was a throwback to the 1970 Audi 100S Coupe, so its long sloping profile caused its rear end to droop. Now, with the rear end a bit higher, the A7’s backside no longer has a “sad look”.

Less exciting are the fake
exhaust outlets, which are embellished with chrome surrounds. You never really see the actual tailpipes, as they curve downwards and end before reaching the rear valance. Perhaps the display of real pipes is reserved for the sportier S7 and RS7 versions, both of which we await very eagerly.

Not that this “base” model is a slouch. It is powered by a 3-litre V6, the same unit used by the Audi S4, S5 and the latest Porsche Cayenne. With a single turbocharger nestled in the valley of its 90-degree V-block, this engine produces 340hp and 500Nm.

Audi’s valvelift system (AVS) varies timing and lift for both efficiency and power. In part-load conditions, mostly in urban driving, the engine operates in B-cycle mode. It is essentially a Miller-cycle operation where fuel economy is optimised at the expense of outright power by reducing piston pumping losses.

AVS manages this by keeping the intake valve open a little longer than normal even after the compression phase has begun, allowing the piston to ascend the cylinder with less resistance.

In addition, the powertrain comes with Audi’s new Mild Hybrid (MHEV) system. The technology uses a front-mounted, belt-driven alternator that also functions as the starter motor. When coasting, the engine is shut down for as long as the accelerator is not activated, and starts up immediately when power is demanded by the driver.

The starter-alternator runs on a 48-volt DC circuit with electrical energy storage provided by a sealed lithium-ion battery. However, the fuel savings are not huge, with Audi claiming that the MHEV saves up to 0.7 litres of petrol every 100km.

The A7’s performance is of greater interest. This is a large fastback with a kerb weight of 1815kg, yet it comfortably
DRIVETRAIN

TYPE
V6, 24-valves, turbocharged
CAPACITY
2995cc
BORE X STROKE
84.5mm x 89mm
COMPRESSION RATIO
11.2:1
MAX POWER
340hp at 5000-6400rpm
MAX TORQUE
500Nm at 1370-4500rpm
POWER TO WEIGHT
187.3hp per tonne
GEARBOX
7-speed dual-clutch with manual select
DRIVEN WHEELS
All

PERFORMANCE

0-100KM/H
5.3 seconds
TOP SPEED
250km/h (governed)
CONSUMPTION
14.1km/L (combined)
CO2 EMISSION
161g/l

SUSPENSION

FRONT
Five-link, coil springs, adaptive dampers
REAR
Five-link, coil springs, adaptive dampers

BRAKES
FRONT / REAR
Ventilated discs

TYRES

TYPE
Michelin Pilot Sport 4
SIZE
255/40 R20

SAFETY

AIRBAGS
8
TRACTION AIDS
ABS, ESC

MEASUREMENTS

LENGTH
4969mm
WIDTH
1908mm
HEIGHT
1422mm
WHEELBASE
2926mm
KERB WEIGHT
1815kg
TURNING CIRCLE
11.1m

BUYING IT

PRICE INCL. COE
To be announced
WARRANTY
5 years/unlimited km

STYLISH DESIGN,
COMFORTABLE CABIN,
SUREFOOTED IN
ANY WEATHER

SWITCHGEAR LACKS
TACTILITY, MATRIX LED
HEADLIGHTS ARE OPTIONAL,
FAUX EXHAUST OUTLETS
THE A7 IS NO COMPACT SPORTS CAR, BUT ITS PUNCHY MOTOR, RESPONSIVE STEERING AND ALL-WHEEL-DRIVE MAKE IT AN EASY CAR TO DRIVE QUICKLY, EVEN ON TIGHT ROADS.
Accelerates from rest to 100km/h in 5.3 seconds. That is pretty quick. The 7-speed dual-clutch gearbox does a splendid job delivering seamless gear changes, and manual selection is available using either the gearshift lever or the steering-mounted paddle shifters.

Audi’s quattro (all-wheel-drive) drivetrain and dynamic steering are standard on all 3-litre A7s. The test car was additionally equipped with air suspension and dynamic four-wheel-steering.

The four-wheel-steering’s variable ratio system consists of an external drive that not only adjusts steering response depending on speed and driver input, but also intervenes to make corrections when the sensors detect that the car is straying from its lane. The latter feature, however, requires the road to have clear lane markings.

Four-wheel-steering is an option worth considering. While its action is not noticeable at speed, it is designed to enhance the car’s agility by giving the rear wheels a small degree of steer in the same direction as the front wheels. Below 60km/h, the rear wheels’ steer angle is up to five degrees in the opposite direction, which reduces the standard car’s turning radius by 1.1m.

On the mountain roads around Cape Town, the A7 proves itself to be a clean and smooth performer. Its refinement somewhat masks its acceleration but its pose and grip are nothing to be scoffed at.

With an overall length of nearly 5m, the A7 is no compact sports car. Still, its responsive steering and all-wheel-drive make it an easy car to drive quickly, even on tight roads.

The A7 is in a niche segment where it competes with BMW’s 6 Series Gran Coupe and Mercedes-Benz’s CLS. Like its rivals, the Audi oozes style and has plenty of passenger amenities.

But because its competitors are notchbacks, the A7’s fastback bodystyle makes it a unique and far more practical proposition.
$1.1M 911
Porsche gives its 911 Turbo S a Midas touch and a million-dollar price tag in Singapore.

Over the years, the Porsche Exclusive department has created limited-edition models like the 1993 911 Turbo slant-nose, the 2009 911 Sport Classic and the 2011 911 Speedster, among many others. Most of these “exclusive” Porsches did not end up as mainstream models, but one did – the 911 Turbo S in 2003.

The department has now been rebranded as Porsche Exclusive Manufaktur and the first model to be introduced under the new name is the 911 Turbo S Exclusive Series.

Compared to the standard 911 Turbo S, the Exclusive Series gets an extra 27hp lift from 580hp to 607hp and its torque rises from 700Nm to 750Nm. Higher boost pressure and model-specific engine control are responsible for the increased output.

Like the 911 Turbo S, it clocks a 2.9-second century sprint. But it is 0.3 of a second quicker to 200km/h, accomplishing the dash in 9.6 seconds. Top speed remains at 330km/h.

The car’s bonnet, fenders, wing mirrors, air-intake scoop, rear wing and roof, along with the front and rear spoilers, are made of carbon fibre.

As tested here, it wears a signature Golden Yellow Metallic paint job with stripes of exposed carbon fibre woven in a glossy finish.

Then, there are the “Porsche Exclusive Manufaktur” plaques on the front wings as well as on the side skirts.

Inside the cabin, there is the usual choice of leather or Alcantara, with decorative stitching. Hard surfaces such as the dashboard cappings and surrounds can be in metallic, piano black or carbon fibre finish.

And as if there isn’t enough bling, Porsche has applied
This Porsche 911 is an official limited-edition model with a production run of just 500 units.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spec</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENGINE</strong></td>
<td>3800cc, 24-valves, flat-6, turbocharged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MAX POWER</strong></td>
<td>607hp at 6750rpm</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MAX TORQUE</strong></td>
<td>750Nm at 2250–4000rpm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POWER TO WEIGHT</strong></td>
<td>379.4hp per tonne</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GEARBOX</strong></td>
<td>7-speed dual-clutch with manual select</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>0–100KM/H</strong></td>
<td>2.9 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOP SPEED</strong></td>
<td>330km/h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONSUMPTION</strong></td>
<td>11km/L</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CO2 EMISSION</strong></td>
<td>212g/km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRICE EXCL. COE</strong></td>
<td>$1,088,888 (after $10k VES surcharge)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bespoke decoration and great German attention to detail distinguish this cockpit from that of other 911 Turbos.

Gold-coloured metallic thread, which is woven into all the carbon elements.

There are many other ways to customise the interior, including having special graphics within the instrument cluster. There is even a personalised chronograph watch by Porsche Design to go with the car.

As the chassis is taken wholesale from the 911 Turbo S, the drive experience is as expected – fabulous.

The rock-steady way in which the 911 Turbo S Exclusive Series swallows huge distances is unrivalled. It readily cruises at 200km/h as if it were travelling at half that speed.

Its all-wheel-drive system is a real boon in inclement weather, making the Porsche a true everyday supercar and not just a fair-weather toy.

All the carbon fibre bits probably lower the car’s weight, but Porsche’s main goal is not to set a new record at Nurburgring with this number. Rather, the exercise is to create a unique 911.

At well over $1 million in Singapore, this car might make you wonder if you could customise a 911 Turbo S yourself. Of course you could, but you might end up spending even more.

Also, you would not belong to an exclusive “club”, since the 911 Turbo S Exclusive Series is an official limited-edition model with a production run of just 500 units, each complete with its own serial number and certification.
SINGAPOREAN “MARTIAN”

It was a journey of Discovery for this journalistic explorer who landed on what appeared to be Mars – somewhere in Utah, USA.
ROAD TRIP

Thanks to Navajo Bridge, the Discovery didn’t get its Goodyears wet “crossing” the Colorado River.

HOW do you fly to Mars?
On a jet plane, that’s how!

Journalists from all four corners of the world were flown to southern Utah last year for Land Rover’s Discovery World Media Test Drive. The 45th state of America offers some of the most breathtaking views – from pink sand dunes to snowy pine forests to canyons and flatlands, all in a day’s drive. Our hosts chose a venue that was second to none for journos to test-drive their latest Land Rover Discovery, an all-terrain seven-seater that is a highly practical sports utility vehicle.

We stopped at Canyon Point for afternoon coffee. This was in the middle of nowhere, with a surreal Martian landscape of rusty-hued badlands and layered cliffs peppered with green shrubs. The vegetation reminded me that I wasn’t really on the Red Planet.

The four of us Singaporean scribes had flown 14,688 kilometres from Changi Airport to St. George Regional Airport in Utah to commence our drive in the new fifth-generation Disco.

By the time we sat in the luxurious 4x4s powered by either a 3-litre 340hp supercharged petrol V6 or a 3-litre 248hp turbo-diesel V6, we were not weary international travellers you would expect, having spent the previous afternoon and evening in Los Angeles.

Flying business class from Singapore to LA for the first leg, and then in a chartered Boeing 777 the next morning to Utah, helped a little, too!

An array of Discos in various liveries greeted us when we disembarked on the tarmac in St. George Airport.

The drive from there took us along typical American
highways – mostly straight and long. Then suddenly, like Disney magic, we were 4000 feet (1219 metres) up in Zion National Park, in a picture-perfect scene of winding mountain roads flanked by snow-topped pine trees. That soon changed to scenes of the Night Watch’s perspective from the Wall.

The Landie Discos, in both petrol and diesel guises, were in their element, offering sure-footed handling in slippery conditions and munchin’ up the miles and elevation in superlative comfort.

Our lunch stop was the quaint Buffalo Grill restaurant about 12 miles (19 kilometres) after the wintery conditions of the national park.

The farm setting was reminiscent of Little House On The Prairie – a rusty old western horse carriage laid against a backdrop of a prairie, accompanied by the neighing of a couple of ponies and the bleating from some brown goats.

After our country lunch, having hitherto been a pampered front seat passenger, I took over the helm of our Farallon Black petrol Discovery, sporting 21-inch Goodyear F1s.

Two hours later, we arrived on “Mars” for our coffee break at Canyon Point. The good
CANYON POINT’S GREEN SHRUBS REMINDED ME THAT I WASN’T REALLY ON THE RED PLANET.
people at Land Rover had set up a tent to serve various brews and cookies. We had time to explore the wilderness on foot, by which period the temperature had dipped to 12 degrees Celsius in the late February afternoon.

Two other journos from Singapore decided to scale a two-storey-high rock. I reminded them that it was Navajo land and they could expect floating midnight guests with feather headdresses in their room should they continue. They beat a hasty retreat.

No Land Rover driving event would be complete without a demonstration of its legendary off-road capabilities.

We scaled boulders like mountain goats and crawled up steep inclines at angles that astronauts launching from the Nasa Kennedy Space Centre are familiar with. All the stunts were performed on street tyres!

There was one particularly harrowing exercise in which I thought I was going to barrel-roll down a cliff, due to a very tight turn at the edge of the cliff into the entry point.

For all the lump-in-the-throat moments orchestrated by Land Rover’s off-roading experts, we were rewarded with a night’s stay at the exclusive single-storey Amangiri Suites, frequented by the biggest names in Hollywood and the music world.

That night, as I wallowed in my white linen-draped bed, I wondered which superstar had slept on it.

The next morning, we
WE CRAWLED UP STEEP INCLINES AT ANGLES THAT ASTRONAUTS LAUNCHING FROM THE NASA KENNEDY SPACE CENTRE ARE FAMILIAR WITH.
splendid experience. From rustic canyon terrain, we descended 2000 feet (609 metres) within 20 minutes to flatlands bathed in sunshine skirted by mountainous range in the distance. We then drew closer and closer to a foggy forest as the elevation increased again. And before we knew it, we were driving amidst snowfall in Smokey Bear country in the Grand Canyon National Park and Kaibab National Forest.

The Kaibab Plateau Visitor Centre, which is a gateway to these two national parks, is closed for winter between mid-October and mid-May, but was specially opened to receive us media folks (that was impressive, Land Rover!).

When we resumed our journey, the snow had stopped and the sun was out. From white-carpeted forest, we arrived at the Coral Pink Sand Dunes desert a couple of hours later. It was an opportunity for our test vehicles to show off their soft-sand climbing ability. The tyres were deflated a little to enhance their grip on the ground and it was extraordinary to see these almost 2200kg luxury 4x4s overcome the slippery pink sand dunes on street tyres. The terrain was more for dune buggies than middle-class SUVs such as the Disco.

After a quick lunch served in a specially erected large tepee, we made our way back to St. George Airport for our return flight to Los Angeles. It was American highway driving again and the Disco dispatched us explorers with consummate ease.

If there was to be a vote for the complete all-rounder in a Martian landscape, the Land Rover Discovery would certainly be one of the few contenders in the list.
Several car workshops offer air-conditioner gas top-up service. Is it necessary to top up air-con gas? I thought the system is a closed loop and the gas level will not fall unless there is a leak?

You are right about refrigerant in the car’s air-conditioner being in a closed-loop system. This, incidentally, applies to any air-conditioner, even the ones in your homes.

So the air-con gas top-up service is a load of hogwash and a waste of your money. If the car’s air-con is no longer blowing cool air or has begun to perform inadequately in very warm weather, a refrigerant top-up is unlikely to solve the problem.

A low refrigerant level means there is a leak in the air-conditioning system and this needs to be fixed first.

Of course, a top-up will give you some relief, but the fresh refrigerant will soon leak.

While on this topic, it is important to bear in mind that periodic servicing of the air-con system in your car (as in your home, for that matter) is necessary to maintain performance.

This includes flushing and evacuating the system of the existing refrigerant, cleaning or replacing the filters and then recharging with fresh refrigerant. For the car, such a service is not required annually, but do consider doing this for every 60,000 kilometres.

Just stay away from the air-con gas top-up providers.

I was told by a friend, who is an airline pilot, that switching off my car’s air-conditioner is part of the correct shutdown procedure. Is this true?

Certain specific steps are necessary when shutting down an aircraft. As you can imagine, a car is a very different machine.

Apart from parking the vehicle in a proper place, shifting the gear lever to P (in the case of an automatic transmission) or first gear (in the case of a manual transmission) and pulling up the parking brake, there is really no other procedure to perform.

While on this topic, it is important to bear in mind that periodic servicing of the air-conditioning system,
Your car’s air-con system requires periodic servicing to maintain its cooling performance, like the air-conditioners in your home.

even if its switch is in the “on” position, will be activated only when the engine has started and is at least at idling speed. Not turning off the car’s air-con when shutting down the engine will not cause any electrical or mechanical damage.

Only with old cars – mainly those more than 20 years in age – is the compressor activated the moment the ignition is switched on. This causes additional load to be placed on the starter-motor, which is why it is advisable to keep the air-conditioning off when starting the old car in question.

I have heard that you should switch off the car air-conditioner before turning off the ignition. Is this a myth or is there a sound technical reason for doing so?

During the 1970s, when most automotive air-conditioners were retro-fitted accessories, the average family car suffered 10 to 15 percent loss in power. With these units, it was helpful to have the air-conditioner turned off when the engine was shut down, so that the starter-motor had less of a strain the next time the car was started.

So if you run a classic car, do remember to ensure that the air-conditioner is switched off before starting up the engine. Otherwise, the air-conditioner compressor load puts a strain on the starter-motor and battery.

With all modern cars that are fuel-injected and fitted with electronic engine management, this routine is not necessary. This is because the compressor is not engaged – and thus does not impose a load – until the engine has reached its normal idling speed.

Also, the higher efficiency of the air-conditioning system and the engine of modern cars means that performance and fuel economy losses are not as drastic as they used to be.
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The LG V30S ThinQ may be svelte and lightweight, but don’t be fooled into thinking that it’s just a pretty device, for this smartphone is actually loaded with artificial intelligence-backed features. Said features include QLens, which supposedly recognises items using the camera and helps you find them online, and Voice AI, which enables users to run apps or change settings using voice commands. And having passed 14 Military-Standard 810G tests, the V30S ThinQ is pretty tough, too.
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Dynamic driving and vigorous workouts might cause most wireless earphones to fall out, but Bose claims that their SoundSport Free wireless ear buds will stay in place thanks to the brand’s StayHear+ ear tips. When paired with your phone, they’ll conveniently store their last known location when you remove them, so they’ll be easier to find. $319

If you’re still reaching for your charging cable each time your smartphone runs out of juice, perhaps it’s time to consider something like the Belkin Boost Up Wireless Charging pad. It’s compatible with the iPhone 8, iPhone 8 Plus and iPhone X, and is claimed to work through cases up to 3mm thick. $99

If you like your cars fast and tough, then you’ll want to be typing on a keyboard like the Cooler Master MasterKeys MK750. This keyboard has a 32-bit ARM Cortex processor and 512KB of onboard memory, a response time of 1ms, and German-made Cherry MX mechanical switches that can withstand up to 50 million keystrokes. $239

Formula 1 fans who are also serious shutterbugs can consider adding the Nikon 180-400mm f/4E lens to their kit. Getting even closer to the action is made easier with the built-in 1.4x teleconverter, which increases the focal length to 560mm. And to help ensure sharper images, the lens has a useful Vibration Reduction feature, too. $17,000

Supercar lovers who’ve always wanted a laptop that reminds them of their dream machine should check out Lenovo’s sixth-generation X1 Carbon. Thanks to the carbon fibre used in its construction, this laptop weighs just 1.13kg. It can be specified with Intel’s newest Coffee Lake processors and equipped with a 1TB solid-state drive. With up to 15 hours of battery life, it can go the distance, too. $3,159
Diners looking for a blend of eastern and western cuisines could check out Beast & Butterflies, which serves dishes such as Teochew-style Lobster Porridge (right), and Crispy Pork Knuckle with sesame oil scented sauerkraut accompanied by nam kim and hoisin sauces. The restaurant is located at Robertson Quay.

Families searching for a place to celebrate Easter can consider heading to Opus Restaurant, which is offering an Easter Sunday brunch that starts at $108++ for adults and $55++ for children between 5 and 12 years of age. You’ll be spoilt for choice with the eight different stations, which include a seafood bar, charcoal grille and 6m-long dessert showcase. The establishment is located at Hilton Singapore.

Diners looking for modern European fare at a reasonable price should check out the menu at Porta Fine Food & Import Company. Their Wild Mushroom Orecchiette (left), for instance, costs $22, while their Porta Burger, which is made with Angus beef, is priced at $26. The restaurant is located at Park Hotel Clark Quay.
Dynamic drivers who want both space and pace will be tempted by the all-new Porsche Cayenne, which offers higher performance and greater practicality than the old model. Key features include compound-coated brake discs that are stronger than conventional ones, an optional active rear spoiler (that also works as an air brake) and a rear-wheel-steering system. Currently, the lineup is comprised of the Cayenne, Cayenne S and Cayenne Turbo models, but an eco-friendlier hybrid and even hotter Turbo S variant should follow shortly.

**RIVAL: MASERATI LEVANTE**

TOYOTA VIOS
$84,988 ON THE ROAD

Toyota’s entry-level saloon is now more upmarket than its predecessor. Apart from its fresher design, the Vios is also better equipped and more economical. Both the less expensive E and range-topping G variants have seven airbags (up from two previously) and Vehicle Stability Control as standard. The Vios continues to be powered by a naturally aspirated 1.5-litre 4-cylinder, but this motor is now paired to a CVT (Continuously Variable Transmission) instead of a 4-speed automatic for improved fuel efficiency.

**RIVAL: HONDA CITY**

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JAGUAR E-PACE

Jaguar’s new baby SUV is out to attract sporty suburbanites with its design, which is clearly inspired by the F-Type Coupe/Roadster. The E-Pace isn’t just about style, though. It’s also surefooted thanks to its all-wheel-drive system and adaptive dampers. The E-Pace is expected to be available in 249hp and 300hp variants, which are both powered by turbocharged 2-litre petrol engines.

RIVAL: VOLVO XC40

JEEP CHEROKEE

The new Cherokee may not look too different from its predecessor, but it actually has a host of improvements that enhance its usefulness and performance. Inside, the infotainment system has been updated, while storage space has increased thanks to the redesigned centre console and cargo hold. The Cherokee’s naturally aspirated 2.4-litre Tigershark motor is now more efficient than the older unit, but the engine to look forward to is the new turbocharged 2-litre that delivers 270hp.

RIVAL: BMW X3
One of the three original vehicles that launched the 4x4 legend of Land Rover at the 1948 Amsterdam Motor Show has been found and is undergoing (a lot of) restoration.

MISSING FOR OVER SIX DECADES, THE HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT PROTOTYPE DIDN'T ROVE THE COUNTRYSIDE MUCH - IT SPENT 20 YEARS IN A WELSH FIELD AND THEN LANGUISHED IN SOMEONE'S GARDEN.
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