



AUTO SHOW BUZZ...

We were fortunate enough to attend both the Phoenix and Los Angeles International Auto Shows, for an up-front, close and personal look at what's coming your way. Detroit's North American International Auto Show ran at about the same time, and we bring you some of the latest from there, as well. Power was a consistent theme, as the number of vehicles presenting 400 to 500 hp—and more—was unprecedented.

← FORD & MERCURY PONY UP

FORD MUSTANG. Ford introduces the next generation Mustang in 2004 as a 2005 model. The platform evolves from the Lincoln LS, Jaguar S-Type and Thunderbird. Standard power will likely be a 215-hp V-6 and a 4.6-liter (280-hp) V8, with an SVT near 400 hp.

MERCURY MESSENGER. In the company of the new Mustang, above, we think this should instead be a new Cougar. If Ford wants to totally dominate the pony car segment in the wake of Camaro's and Firebird's retirement, it looks like they're on track.



CHRYSLER OPENS THE THROTTLE →

DODGE TOMAHAWK. This show-stopper pumps out 500hp. See page 27.

DODGE KAHUNA. Picking up a contemporary woody treatment reminiscent of the recent PT California Cruiser's brushed aluminum side trim, the Kahuna has an aggressive stance that shows a serious desire to head to the fun, and now.



← AUDI UPS POWER WITH RS & S

AUDI RS6. While Audi's evolution to quattro and S quattro has been awesome enough, the RS quattro series heads right toward the top of the charts. At 450 hp and 415 lb.ft. of torque, the middle-platform RS6 offers speed, stability, handling, safety and comfort unsurpassed. Wow. RS8, anyone?

AUDI S4. The S4, a rocket built on Audi's smallest US-imported platform (although there are the A2 and A3 in Europe), packs a big punch. Restyled for 2004 and available now, the S4 now delivers 340 hp and 302 lb.ft. of torque in Audi's perfected refined-but-kick-butt manner.



KEEP RIGHT >>



← POTENT HEMI CONCEPT

DODGE MAGNUM. The lights dimmed for a private screening of Hollywood-style promotions, culminating with a thrilling Dodge Magnum featurette, at which point none other than Chrysler Group President and CEO Dieter Zetsche burst forth below the screen in a floodlit Dodge Magnum. The Magnum, to arrive in 2004 as a 2005 model, is powered by a supercharged 5.7-liter Hemi V8 with power reaching almost 450 hp.



← CHEVY TOP-DOWN PICKUP

CHEVROLET SSR. This previous auto show concept vehicle enters production this year and was unveiled at the Phoenix Auto Show in January (and photographed nearby). Part early-'50s pickup and part sports roadster, the SSR is based on the mid-size TrailBlazer chassis, with rear-wheel drive.

← NEW FORD F-150 & SVT LIGHTNING

FORD F-150 PICKUP. Under strict embargo until Monday of the LA Auto Show, the F-150 has been the subject of much website speculation, for months. This all-new generation arrives just seven years after the previous F-150 redesign, with features galore (see page 9). What's more, the SVT Lightning (below, left) is ready, too.



← IF CADILLAC MADE A CORVETTE →

CADILLAC XLR ROADSTER. This 2004 production two-seat, retractable hardtop convertible roadster has evolved from the previous Evo1 concept car. The XLR includes heads-up instrumentation, Magnetic Ride Control, heated and cooled seats, keyless access with push-button start, and DVD entertainment. Power comes from the next-generation 4.6L Northstar V8 and is delivered to the rear wheels.

→ ZAGATO GOES TOPLESS

ASTON MARTIN DB AR1. Revealed at the LA Auto Show, Aston's DB American Roadster 1 is slated for US customers only. With body by Italy's famed Zagato coachworks, chassis based on the current DB7 Vantage Volante, and the engine enhanced to 435 hp, this is a full-time convertible, meant specifically for climates as favorable as Arizona's. Features and amenities include an AP twin plate racing clutch, 19" multispoke wheels, and racing-grooved 355mm (f)/330mm (r) Brembo brakes. A production go-ahead required positive customer response, and they got it! Expect 99 units in the US at about \$230,000.



→ PORSCHE BUILDS AN SUV

PORSCHE CAYENNE. Some people were startled when Porsche took on the SUV category, but the company has deemed its anticipated profitability as essential to survival as an independent maker in an era of conglomeration. What's more, they seem to have solidified a new category, the performance SUV, with the new Infiniti FX45 (see page 29) and the BMW X5.

→ ROTARY RETURNS, X-MEN CLIMB ABOARD

MAZDA RX-8. With two small rear-hinged backseat doors, the new rotary-powered RX-8 aspires to sports car stature, but is thought halfway to the sedan category by some. Picking up where the legendary RX-7 left off, sort of, the RX-8 packs enough performance to more than please most of the audience nonetheless. This model, displayed at the LA Auto Show, will be featured in the upcoming X-Men movie sequel.



→ GTO: NEW FROM AUSTRALIA

PONTIAC GTO. When Bob Lutz joined GM last year, he embarked on a tour of its world facilities. In Australia, he was enamored by the Holden Monaro, a high-powered rear-drive coupe exclusive to the land down under. With a corporate edict, some US-spec engineering, new styling that evokes the Pontiac of today (if not of the GTO era), the US now has a reborn muscle car era. Appropriately, Bob Lutz himself presented the first iteration to journalists at the LA Show.

