



Active reaction

Story by Larry Edsall
Photos by Brenda Priddy & Company



Not quite a decade ago, three accomplished athletes who also were members of the news media were among the journalists going from press conference to press conference at the Los Angeles Auto Show.

At each press conference, it seemed, the trio heard automakers proclaiming how they were designing their newest vehicles for those who lived active lifestyles.

The trio listened, though in growing disbelief. The vehicles being unveiled seemed to have little to offer people who raced bicycles, paddled kayaks, or had to haul around other assorted sporting gear.

The trio decided the automakers could use some help and encouragement, and needed to be introduced to people who truly lived such lifestyles. Soon, they launched the Active Lifestyle Vehicle of the Year program to draw attention to vehicles that actually met the transportation needs of those who did, indeed, live active lifestyles.

The Active Lifestyle Vehicle of the Year program was the brainchild of a trio comprising Bob Babbitt, founder of the Competitor Group and an inductee into the Ironman Hall of Fame; Jim Woodman, founder of Active.com and an endurance cyclist; and Nina Russin, an automotive journalist and marathon runner.

Each year, the ALV of the Year committee, which is headed by Phoenix resident Russin, announces category parameters and seeks entries from the various automakers. Typically, around 50 vehicles are entered in the various categories.

Throughout the spring and summer, a national panel of automotive journalists evaluates the vehicles as part of their regular work. Early in the fall, those auto writers and broadcasters cast their votes for the vehicles they believe best meet the needs of those with active lifestyles.

The top cars in each category are then invited to participate in the ALV of the Year finals, where athletes are invited to drive and evaluate them throughout a day-long program. Those athletes—divided into teams based around each of the seven vehicle categories—vote on the vehicles which best meet their lifestyle needs.

The journalist votes count for half a vehicle's ALV

Some 70 athletes and over a dozen automotive journalists convened in Phoenix to evaluate some 50 vehicles with attributes favorable to the active lifestyle. Seven manufacturers went home with the coveted ALV trophy. The event was presented by OnStar, Local Motors, Mindfold, Inc. and Russo and Steele Auction. Below left, host Local Motors shows off its Rally Fighter in their shop; at bottom, the Rally Fighter gets some serious air.



total. The athlete votes also count for 50 percent.

At the end of the athletes ride-and-drive day, the winners in each category are announced.

Late this past fall, after several years in San Diego and one in South Bend, Indiana, the finals of the ALV of the Year competition were staged in Phoenix, where some 70 local and elite athletes drove and evaluated vehicles in seven categories. Going home with the honors in the seven categories were:

URBAN

(for small vehicles priced at \$20,000 or less)

★ Mazda5

BEST VALUE ON ROAD

(for vehicles priced at \$34,999 or less and designed primarily for driving on pavement)

★ Subaru Impreza

BEST VALUE OFF ROAD

(for vehicles priced at \$34,999 or less but designed for use on or off pavement)

★ Jeep Wrangler

LUXURY ON ROAD

(for vehicles priced at \$35,000 or more and designed primarily for driving on pavement)

★ Audi A7

LUXURY OFF ROAD

(for vehicles priced at \$35,000 or more and designed for use on or off pavement)

★ Jeep Grand Cherokee

GREEN

(for hybrids, clean diesels and electric vehicles)

★ Volkswagen Jetta Sportswagen TDI

FAMILY

(for vehicles with three rows of seating)

★ Audi Q7 TDI

For the eighth annual ALV of the Year program, the athletes' ride-and-drive was based at Local Motors, the auto-building micro factory that develops and produces the Rally Fighter vehicle in Chandler. ■

