

Holden Vectra CDXi

Vectra a hard sell

By MARTON PETTENDY

HOLDEN has dismissed concerns that the new larger and more expensive Vectra medium car will compete for sales against the locally built Commodore when it goes on sale in April.

The all-new ZC Vectra's pricing actually starts above the VY Commodore, while its interior dimensions are close to the first series Commodore.

Full pricing and spec is detailed on page 2, but with the absence of an entry level GL model, the 2003 Vectra range will start just \$700 below the most expensive variant in the previous model line-up.

The range starts at \$34,990 for the CD sedan 2.2 manual and tops out at \$49,990 for the CDXi five-door hatchback V6 auto.

By comparison, Commodore pricing starts at \$30,880 for the Executive manual without air-conditioning, climbing to \$52,840 for the top-of-the-range V8 Calais automatic.

Commodore is Australia's top selling car and its performance is vital to Holden's chances of retaining number one vehicle seller status in the Australian market.

But after two months of 2003, Holden has dropped to number two in the sales race behind Toyota, at least in part because the BA Ford Falcon

Holden ups the pricing and downgrades sales forecast for new Vectra

is claiming a bigger share of large car sales than its AU predecessor.

Holden marketing executive John Elsworth dismissed claims that Vectra's price positioning above its larger Commodore volume seller could confuse buyers.

"Vectra buyers don't shop Commodore and Commodore buyers don't shop Vectra," he said.

"Most buyers know it's a European product – Vectra is a car positioned in its own right – a unique model with unique buyers.

"And you have to remember the base Vectra is now a CD, which is fantastically specced and represents great value."

Holden will also be keen for buyers to choose Commodore rather than the Euro-built Vectra because there is more profit margin in the local car.

Sales forecasts are extremely conservative for the new Vectra, with Holden predicting just 4000 for the rest of the year – less than half the number the old model achieved in its 1999 record year,

9500. That was worth 20 per cent of the medium category.

To complicate the issue further, Vectra's wide pricing spread means sales records will be split between two VFACTS categories. The CD sedan and hatch will stay in medium and be worth 2000 sales, while the CDX and CDXi hatches will be recorded as prestige cars.

That means while Vectra CD would continue to compete against the likes of Mazda6, Toyota Camry and Subaru Liberty, the upper-spec cars will be shopped against heavy-hitters like the BMW 3 Series, VW Passat and Audi A4.

Holden chairman and managing director Peter Hanenberger dismissed suggestions Holden would have preferred a lower priced, lower specified Vectra to better fit into its range and maintain sales.

He said he was confident Vectra's sales downturn would be more than compensated by the arrival of a rash of new models like the WK Statesman, turbo Astra hatch and convertible, Cross8, One Tonner, 4WD wagon and continued strong demand for Commodore.

■ Mr Hanenberger said the impending Iraqi war would not impact on Holden's sales performance. He said that if cars were not shipped to the Middle East, Australian and New Zealand demand would account for them.





Vectra ups the ante

SPEC & TECH

Vectra CD sedan

By BRUCE NEWTON

THE new generation ZC Holden Vectra range is being offered as three models, two body styles, four transmissions and two engine sizes.

The range starts with the CD sedan and hatch, powered by a 2.2-litre four-cylinder engine offered with the choice of five-speed manual or optional five-speed auto.

It then kicks up to the 3.2-litre V6 CDX hatch as an auto-only, followed by the manual and auto choice of top-spec CDXi hatchback.

While ZC is all-new and there's a massive uprating of specification across the range, there is also a huge ramp up in the admission price.

The cheapest Vectra is now the \$34,990 CD sedan, a massive \$9500 above the old GL sedan.

At the other end of the scale is the CDXi hatch, which has no equivalent in the old range. In auto trim it is just \$10 below \$50,000, placing it in Holden's view up against competition like the entry level BMW 3 Series, Audi A4 and Volkswagen Passat.

Standard Vectra specification across the range now includes anti-lock brakes, traction control, electronic brakeforce distribution, cornering brake control and emergency brakeforce distribution.

CD spec includes dual front and side passenger airbags, eight-way adjustable driver's seat, nine-speaker CD sound system, remote audio controls on the height and reach adjustable steering wheel, cruise control, remote central locking, power windows, alloy wheels and air-conditioning.

Neither air-conditioning, power windows or a

passenger airbag were standard on the old GL.

The new CDX adds front foglights, different 16-inch alloys, six-stack CD player, velour seat trim, woodgrain accents, trip computer, leather steering wheel and dual eight-way adjustable seats up front.

The CDXi tops off the list with a sports bodykit that includes unique front and rear sports bumpers, rear spoiler, twin branch sports exhaust, black bezel headlights and dark lens tail-lights.

The sports theme continues with a unique suspension tune, 17-inch alloy wheels and the ESP Plus stability system.

Inside there's black leather sports front seats with heating, dual zone climate control and a unique three-spoke leather steering wheel.


Vectra interior

Good as new

"ALL-NEW" is an over-used phrase in the car business, but it is certainly apt for the Opel-designed Vectra.

A staple of the European fleet market, the latest Vectra is underpinned by GM's new Epsilon front-wheel drive architecture, which is also being employed by the Saab 9-3.

Over the top of that are two angular and arched body shapes – a four-door sedan and five-door hatchback, which measure up 60mm longer in the wheelbase and 101mm longer overall than the old car.

The new bodies are also rated to be 74 per cent above the old model in terms of torsional rigidity and 62 per cent better in terms of bending stiffness.

But extensive use of aluminium and other light-

weight materials has kept weight growth to a minimum.

Engine power is provided by the current 2.2-litre aluminium engine, producing 108kW at 5600rpm and 203Nm at 4000rpm in this spec, up 4kW and 3Nm on the old car.

The bigger news under the bonnet is the new 3.2-litre V6 engine, which is about 600cc bigger than the old V6. It produces 155kW at 6200rpm and 300Nm at 4000rpm, up a substantial 30kW and 50Nm.

Each engine gets its own five-speed manual and optional auto transmission, the latter up one ratio on the old unit and also fitted with a semi-manual mode called "Active Select".

Mechanical spec is completed by MacPherson

strut front suspension, new design multi-link independent rear suspension, four-wheel disc brakes and electro-hydraulic power steering.

Extensive use of electronics is made possible by the now accepted CANBUS technology.

There's four channel ABS, Cornering Brake Control, Electronic Brakeforce Distribution, electro-hydraulic power steering and ESP Plus, which in contrast to conventional electronic stability programs that brake the inside rear wheel to prevent understeer, acts on as many as three wheels for more stable performance.

For first drive impressions of the Vectra, go to www.goauto.com.au from this Thursday

VECTRA PRICING:

	Manual	Auto
New Vectra CD sedan 2.2	\$34,990	\$36,990
Old Vectra GL sedan 2.2	\$25,490	\$27,190
New Vectra CD hatch 2.2	\$35,990	\$37,990
Old Vectra GL hatch 2.2	\$25,490	\$27,190
New Vectra CDX hatch V6	n/a	\$43,990
Old Vectra CD hatch V6	\$33,990	\$35,690
New Vectra CDXi hatch V6 (No old model equivalent)	\$47,990	\$49,990



Is the sun setting on HADA?

Local distributor says it is only a matter of time before Hyundai moves in



By BRUCE NEWTON

HYUNDAI Motor Company could take partial or full control of local sales and distribution operations within three years.

That's the forecast of CK Liew, the man who heads the independent Hyundai Automotive Distributors Australia, which has owned the franchise here for 12 years.

Mr Liew's forecast is not an entire surprise as Hyundai Motor Company president and chief executive officer Kim Dong-jin told GoAuto at the Seoul motor show last November that the move was on the agenda.

HADA is a subsidiary of Cycle and Carriage Australia, whose parent Cycle and Carriage Limited is based in Singapore. It is one of the last independent distributors of a volume brand left in the Australian market.

Cycle and Carriage is already involved in a 50:50 joint-venture with Audi AG to distribute the German brand in Australia. It lost the Chrysler-Jeep franchise back to the factory in 1999.

"HMC involvement is simply a matter of time," Mr Liew said.

"If you look at most of the manufacturers worldwide, eventually they want to be involved directly so they can have a very strong influence on the distribution side.

"So we are being quite realistic, it's a matter of time. I don't really know when, but it could be within three years."

Mr Liew confirmed discussions about an HMC buy-in were on-going.

"I think it is always a subject that is being discussed," he said.

"But if you were sitting at HMC in Seoul, your priority must be the USA where they are doing well. China is a large market that they must be involved in. So I think their priority must be in those areas rather than Australia."

Under HADA's stewardship, Hyundai rose to almost 60,000 sales per annum in 1998, largely on the back of the budget priced Excel, which prospered thanks to \$13,990 driveaway pricing.

Back then Hyundai had just four model lines – Excel, Lantra, Coupe and Sonata.

But as the range has dramatically expanded with the addition of the Grandeur large car, Trajet people-mover, Accent small car, Santa Fe and Terracan 4WDs, Elantra LaVita mini people-mover and Getz mini car, so the sales have dwindled away.

Last year Hyundai finished with 34,176 sales, down from 40,056 in 2001. It has started 2003 in similarly poor form and is now at the bottom of the top 10 sales companies in the nation, whereas it was the top importer in the late 1990s.

"We have learned that while the expansion of the range was good in theory, it also distracted us from focusing on certain products," Mr Liew said.

"Instead we tried to spread a limited (marketing) budget over 10 products.

"And also the dealers had problems coping with that range because they were so used to selling at \$20,000 and below. Then suddenly they are having to sell a \$40,000 car and that sort of customer is very different to the sub-\$20,000 buyer.

"So there is a reconsideration in the company. Perhaps we should concentrate on a certain two products and then use one or two other products to lift the brand image."

Santa Fe and Tiburon are believed to be the star cars picked out for brand image promotion.

That strategy will flesh out more after HADA finishes working through an advertising agency selection process.

It has also restructured internally to separate more fully the sales and after-sales operations of the company.

HADA is also considering a tidy-up of its range. While the Accent has returned recently as a 1.6-litre three-door to bolster its slipping grasp on the small car market – a drop Mr Liew blames on pitching the Getz at too youthful a market – the company also looks likely to drop the LaVita.

The 3.5-litre Grandeur model may also be delayed until a full model change due in about 18 months time, leaving only an Elantra facelift as the company's remaining new model action for the year.

From feast to famine then?

"No, I think it's from feast to reasonable diet," joked Mr Liew.

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SSANGYONG'S RETURN ...

The good old way

By JOHN MELLOR

THE winner of the right to re-introduce Ssangyong into Australia, New Zealander Russell Burling, is treading an old and well worn distribution road to build his dealer network.

But his conservative method, he says, was attractive to Ssangyong head office because they wanted to take a cautious and measured approach to the re-introduction of the brand after so many false starts.

Mr Burling, chairman and 100 per cent owner of Rapson Australia, is part-owner of the New Zealand Ssangyong distributor, Rapson New Zealand.

He was the importer of Daewoo in New Zealand and now owns a GM Daewoo dealership.

Mr Burling says he won the right to distribute Ssangyong Down Under in a battle with MG Rover Australia because he was giving the franchise 100 per cent attention rather than hanging it off the back of Rover and MG car sales.

His Ssangyong operation in Australia, which begins selling vehicles on April 28, is being built around state distributors – mostly well-resourced dealers – rather than state offices staffed by the importer.

This business model was used to establish most of the top brands in Australia and is still used by Holden in Tasmania and Toyota in Western Australia and Northern Territory.

But it faded out as more and more car-makers wanted more control of their representation and found it difficult to deal through independent businesses in each state who were then, in turn, deal-



Russell Burling and the Ssangyong Rexton.

ing with independent dealers.

"We have gone back to that system because we studied the Australian market and the most successful brands all started that way," Mr Burling said.

He said Queensland would be run out of Brisbane; NSW from Sydney; Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Northern Territory out of Melbourne and Western Australia out of Perth.

The distributors have been appointed but their names have yet to be announced.

Mr Burling said Rapson was also looking for local knowledge.

"Western Australia is so different to the Sydney market and Queensland is different again. That's why we went that way," he said.

"What we looked for in a distributor was youth – in their 40s – and the financial clout to do it but

also to have the enthusiasm, to be hungry enough to want to win.

"We took special care with that. That was a requirement from Ssangyong."

Mr Burling said Ssangyong was taking a long-term view "that we gently build the brand into something good".

"We are not coming in like other Koreans chasing huge volume straight up. We are not looking to have the massive growth that Kia and Daewoo or Hyundai had when they came in and then see them go off the boil," he said.

"Ours is a different scenario. Ssangyong just want to build this gently and very profitably. They can sell all the cars they make in the home market. It is not as though they are in a situation where they want to build millions of cars.

Continued next page



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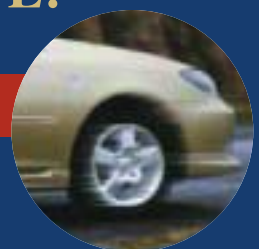
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It's the good old way

From previous page

"Our goal is to do 450 Rextons this year starting from April 28. We think that is a conservative goal. We think we will do more but we will be happy with 450.

"Our model range will be niche.

"Ssangyong is the premium brand in Korea, the Lexus, if you like. Their quality levels are high and they have Mercedes-Benz DNA. Their technology is purchased from Mercedes-Benz and you will see more of that coming over the next year or two. There will be a lot of technology out of Europe."

Mr Burling said that following on from the Rexton, Rapson was looking at bringing the Korando back as a soft-top. It will have the Musso-based dual-cab ute from September this year.

"This will be the first dual cab in Australia sold off an SUV platform. So it has independent rear suspension and four-wheel disc brakes. It will be diesel only with the five-speed automatic."

Mr Burling said the Rexton was also the only large SUV with Australian content. It uses the Falcon automatic gearbox made by Ion in Albury.

Ion sold more than 103,000 gearboxes to Ssangyong last year – more than they sold to Ford Australia.

The product line-up will be in four areas.



Australian-made: The Rexton has a similar automatic transmission to that used in the Falcon.

"Rexton will be our large SUV up against Prado and Pajero," Mr Burling said.

"Our medium SUV will be Musso 2 which will be out at the end of 2004. This is based on the Hemos concept car that was shown at the Melbourne motor show.

"We will be in the large MPV market against Tarago and Chrysler Voyager. This will be launched in Korea in October. That will be off the same platform and will be rear drive and four-wheel drive. Then there is the dual cab."

Australia may also get the Chairman.

Mr Burling said the facelifted Chairman – to be released in South Korea in October – was a Statesman and Fairlane competitor.

"With the currency where it is now, we will study the viability of Chairman here in the new model. We would do that on limited compliance," Mr Burling said.

He said all Ssangyong models except the

Chairman were to come from the one rear-drive or four-wheel drive platform.

"We are not going to be doing a lot of volume.

"Our problem will be supply. The Rexton has a three to four-month waiting list in Korea and dual-cab is a five-month wait in Korean right now."

Rapson is planning 51 dealers by the end of this year.

There will be four main dealers in Sydney and three to four dealers in Melbourne.

"But we are going to need coverage in places like Dubbo and that's where you build the numbers up," Mr Burling said. "With dual cab coming the rural guys will be impressed with it. It has good towing capacity and is very comfortable because there are no leaf springs.

"We are also looking at a service network further out than that (Dubbo).

"In 2005 we would like to build volume to 2500 vehicles. At 2500 vehicles it is a nice business."

A VX mystery... unveiled at...



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Monroe's Reflex action

By MARTON PETTENDY

IT'S not every day that the world's largest shock absorber manufacturer replaces its core aftermarket product.

Such is Monroe's confidence in its exclusive new Reflex technology, now fitted as standard to its top-selling GT Gas shocks, that the company took the unusual step of inviting motoring journalists to sample it at an unprecedented national launch.

Of course, aftermarket product launches are not exactly GoAuto's thing. In fact, this is the first product release we've attended that has not involved a new or updated car.

But when Monroe, Australia's only shock absorber manufacturer and supplier of about 97 per cent of the shock aftermarket here, asks you to test its replacement for the popular GT Gas shock – Monroe's number one aftermarket product, having sold 11 million units since 1986 – there's a good chance the story will be newsworthy.

And it is. The result of 20,000 man hours of development by its Belgian research and development centre, Monroe's new Reflex technology works by adding a second teflon-coated disc, which limits oil flow at high speed, to both the rebound and compression (bump) strokes of the proven nitrogen-pressurised GT Gas shock absorber.

Monroe says this revolutionary twin-disc technology negates the traditional shock absorber's compromise between ride comfort and handling response.

Similar in concept to the complex, multi-shim valve stacks found in highly-tuned race cars and bikes, the twin-disc Reflex technology aims to maintain ride comfort at low shock absorber piston speeds, while maintaining suspension control at high piston speeds.

The technology has been on sale in Europe and the US for some time, but has only now been adapted to Australian conditions by Monroe's local operation at Clovelly Park in South Australia.

Expected to be sold through aftermarket outlets at around a three per cent premium over the GT Gas shock it replaces, "GT Gas with Exclusive Reflex Technology" comes with a three-year, 60,000km warranty.

Monroe says the GT Gas Reflex shock, which is specifically tuned to suit individual models, should also be cheaper than the original equipment replacement cost quoted by more dealerships.



Back to back: Standard VX Commodore versus VX with Monroe GT Gas Reflex technology.

Given around half of its Australian business is in replacement shocks, the importance of GT Gas Reflex as Monroe's primary aftermarket product cannot be understated.

Monroe's launch involved back-to-back testing over a number of exercises at Eastern Creek Raceway in Sydney using both a standard VX Commodore Executive and a Monroe GT Gas Reflex shock-equipped example of the same car. Both were identical in all other respects.

Following the initial surprise that shock absorbers alone can make such a difference to ride, handling and general chassis composure, first impressions were that the Reflex-equipped car felt like it has shorter, firmer springs.

Revealing an uncanny ability to iron out bodyroll, the Monroe car stayed flat while the standard car wallowed through the same slalom course, requiring more work at the wheel for the same result.

A hot lap session backed this up, with the Reflex car feeling more neutral and less resistant to changes of direction, with less steering input required to maintain the same line.

In a collision avoidance test drivers were asked to travel at speeds that rose progressively to 80km/h, before braking and swerving to avoid an offset row of cones just 15 metres away.

While the standard Commodore nose-dived markedly, required more steering lock, rolled over more in both directions, continued to bounce on its suspension after stopping and noticeably depleted its braking ability throughout the day, the Reflex Commodore completed the exercise with ease every time.

Not only did it feel tighter, with more grip and control – especially during hard braking – but the Reflex car ended the day as fresh as it started.

Of course, aside from reducing wear in other areas such as brakes, tyres, bushes and the like, the Reflex shock's ability to improve the overall vehicle dynamics of an entry level Commodore – by separating the (increased) low-speed damping function from the (reduced) high-speed damping function – was not totally unexpected.

But what was surprising was that the increased suspension control came without detrimental effect to ride comfort. A chance to drive both cars over some of the Eastern Creek infield's irregular concrete joins showed quality had improved.

While it is not surprising Monroe has improved its core aftermarket product after 17 years on the market, it is quite remarkable just how much it has been improved.

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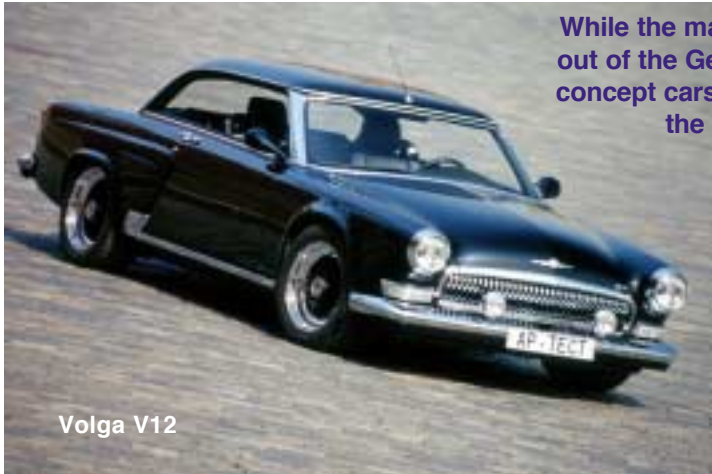
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From Volga to Enjoy ...

Wacky concepts revealed



Volga V12

While the mainstream manufacturers claim the big headlines out of the Geneva show, there's a whole wacky sub-culture of concept cars that emerges at what is traditionally regarded as the "designers' show". Here's a few of them.

Volga V12

RUSSIAN company A:Level displayed the Volga V12, a lowered and stretched interpretation of the Volga GAZ 21 of the 1960s complete with the BMW engine straight out of the 850 CSI coupe.

Next up from A:Level will be a beast called "The Big", which will also be powered by a BMW V12 engine.

A:Level's press release assured us that "THE BIG's design seems to convey the message: 'This car is designed to fly over the highway like an iron slug'."

Can't wait for that one.

Rinspeed Bedouin

THE Swiss firm is renowned for its strange ideas, not least the adjustable length Presto that has just been on display in Melbourne.

At Geneva this year it went back to its Porsche roots with the Bedouin, a 911-based device that converts from four-seat wagon to two-seat utility automatically at the push of a button.

It does this by folding the roof over the rear compartment and splitting it in two. The forward part forms the rear of the two-seat cab and the rear part becomes the utility bed.

Power comes from a twin-turbo 270kW engine running on gas, so it is environmentally friendly as well as strange.



Rinspeed Bedouin

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Wacky concepts

Bertone Birusa

BERTONE'S contribution was the Birusa, an aluminium spaceframe GT with doors that open like butterfly wings and can be operated by voice control, as can the sunroof.

The engine and chassis components come from the BMW Z8, but there's also a Segway transporter in the boot so the owner can easily navigate the inner city crush.

Giugiaro Moray

THIS was Italdesign's homage to the Chevrolet Corvette, with styling signatures from across the car's 50-year history which included split rear screen, bubble canopy roof, turbine wheels, cut off rear tail and diving nose. The Moray, named after the eel, is based on the current generation Corvette's mechanicals, including a 300kW V8 engine.



Pininfarina Enjoy

ALL the major Italian styling houses got into the act at Geneva with Pininfarina revealing a compact roadster called Enjoy, which is based on the Lotus Elise.

With power coming from the same 1.8-litre engine as the Elise mounted behind the cockpit and a double wishbone suspension, it was the Enjoy's pure open-top styling that was the big difference.

A unique feature of the Enjoy are the wings that can be removed to reduce weight when on race circuits where open wheels are permitted.



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WAR BRAKES

BOTH General Motors and Ford will slow production in the US as sales slump in the face of war with Iraq.

Ford has cut production 17 per cent, which means it will build 980,000 cars and trucks from April to June, compared with 1.18 million in the same period last year.

GM announced earlier this month it will cut its second-quarter car and truck production by 10.5 per cent.

GM plans to build 1.39 million cars and trucks from April to June, compared to 1.553 million in the same period last year.

SCHEELE HITS BACK

FORD president Nick Scheele has sent out a memo urging top executives to stay focused on the company's turn-around plan and ignore rumours of management discord, *The Detroit News* reports.

The memo came a day after Ford reversed Mr Scheele's controversial decision to consolidate the car-maker's worldwide advertising and marketing business with London-based WPP Group. The decision culminated from a review by Ford of whether Mr Scheele's directive violated company procedures.

In the memo, Mr Scheele took issue with news reports that suggested a rift had developed between him and David Thursfield, Ford's executive vice-president who oversees global purchasing and international operations.



Nick Scheele

KIA ONE IN A MILLION

KIA has become the fastest company to sell one million cars in the US, hitting the mark in just nine years, beating previous record holder Toyota by four years.

Kia expects to record its second million in the US in half the time it took to sell its first million cars.

Meanwhile, production of the current generation Mercedes-Benz C-class has topped one million after less than three years.

A more significant milestone has been achieved by Peugeot, which has just produced its 40 millionth vehicle.



There was strong demand for Mini.

STRONG BMW RESULT

LUXURY car-maker BMW recorded a strong profit in 2002, earning 2.02 billion euros (\$US2.2 billion), up from 1.87 billion euros in 2001 – its previous record. Revenue advanced 9.9 per cent to 42.3 billion euros (\$US46 billion) from 38.5 billion euros. Strong demand for the 3 Series and Mini in the US and Germany helped the Munich firm go against the worldwide trend for sliding car company profits.

MAZDA'S KIWI COUP

THE Mazda6 has been named New Zealand Car of the Year, heading off rivals such as the Honda Jazz, Ford's BA Falcon, the Holden Monaro, Mercedes-Benz's E-class, BMW's Mini and the Saab 9-3.

BOXSTER S ON TOP

THE Porsche Boxster S has won *Motor* magazine's Performance Car Of The Year award, edging out the Mercedes-Benz SL55 and Ford Falcon BA XR6 Turbo.

It is the fifth Porsche to win the award in its eight-year existence. "While it wasn't the fastest car in a straight line, the Boxster S's ability to give more than the sum of its parts astonished everybody." *Motor* editor Michael Taylor said.

"It's a glorious sensory overload that just invites you to drive it hard and fast, and rewards you whenever you do.

"It's also surprisingly practical for a convertible and it's been built by people who understand how to make fast cars without compromise."

UP CLOSE on PERSONNEL

FINANCE CHIEF

VINCENT Kerkhof, 42, is Holden's new executive director – finance, replacing Bernhard Lothschuetz, 60, who becomes chief financial officer of Adam Opel AG from April 1. Mr Lothschuetz succeeds Walter G. Borst, who was appointed treasurer of GM Corporation earlier this year. Mr Kerkhof, who will also become a member of the Holden board, comes across from Opel's International Technical Development Centre, where he has been finance director since 2001.

RETIREMENT

FORD Motor Company has announced John Rintamaki is retiring from his position as chief of staff after 30 years with the company. Until his retirement on August 1, Mr Rintamaki will be on a "special assignment" to chairman and CEO William Clay Ford Jr. Allan Gilmour, vice-chairman and chief financial officer, will assume Mr Rintamaki's responsibilities for human resources, Washington and governmental affairs, environmental and safety engineering, and the Ford Fund.

VW RESEARCH

MATTHIAS Rabe is succeeding Dr Ulrich Eichhorn as head of Volkswagen Research in Germany. Mr Rabe has headed the vehicle safety department at Volkswagen since



Matthias Rabe

1998. Dr Eichhorn became a member of the board of management for technical development at Bentley Motors Limited in the UK on March 1.

■ If you have any news to report on personnel movements in the industry, call Connie Scheibert on (03) 9598 6477 or send via e-mail to: cscheibert@mellor.net

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GoAuto's latest road test



Mercedes-Benz CLK500 Avantgarde coupe

THE Mercedes-Benz CLK's main objective is to draw back some buyers from a market segment owned by the BMW 3 Series coupe.

The CLK certainly has the ingredients to do that, even if its image is one of elegance and refinement rather than sporty BMW style – although the latter can be made available via an options list that includes plenty of AMG gear. And, in 225kW CLK500 form, don't discount it as a formidable highway express.

Though a fair bit larger, it might not look hugely different to the previous CLK coupe, but some important improvements have been made to increase interior space and develop aerodynamics that are among the best in class. The latest CLK is also more refined, meaning its road manners are a step ahead of the first generation model that came here in 1997.

FULL REPORT: [CLICK HERE](#)

LAUNCH PAD

MARCH:

- BMW X5 3.0-litre
- Chrysler/Jeep:
 - Grand Cherokee Laredo diesel auto and Grand Cherokee limited diesel auto
 - Cherokee Renegade diesel auto
 - Cherokee Sport diesel auto
- Holden Vectra
- Honda MDX
- Rover 75 Classic
- Saab 9-3 limited edition convertible turbo

SHOW RECORD

THE 2003 Melbourne International Motor Show has broken the attendance record set last year with 256,907 car lovers and buyers making it to the exhibition centre this year.

"We are absolutely delighted with the attendance, even more so because this year we were open for one less day than last year," said show director Russ Tyrie.

TATA SAYS HELLO

MG ROVER owner Phoenix Holdings has signed a distribution agreement with budget Indian manufacturer Tata.

The British car-maker will sell Tata's cheap and cheerful Safari off-roader and Loadbeta pick-up trucks in the UK and Irish markets.

The deal follows on from the agreement for MG-Rover to sell the Tata Indica mini car in the UK as a Rover.



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NO AGENCIES

