



World first drive:



Toyota concept put to the test

EXCLUSIVE REPORTS
 by **MARTON PETTENDY**

CONCEPT cars are a protected species – so protected that even we motoring scribes seldom get more than a distant gawk under lights at a motor show. But not in the case of Toyota Australia's first concept car, the X-Runner utility, which was revealed to the world for the first time at the Melbourne motor show in late February.

GoAuto is the first outsider in the world to drive the bright green two-door that Toyota hopes will spring from a home-grown recreational vehicle manufacturing base Down Under.

A product of the Australianised Toyota Modular Platform, X-Runner is a show of design, development and engineering strength that could become reality within two years.

If approved by Toyota Motor Corporation, the project could also herald a brave new era in research and development for TMCA, which may in turn lead to local and export production of more locally designed and built TMP-based derivatives.

We've done more than just drive X-Runner. In this special feature you'll also read about the engineering that underpins the car, the styling concept and the significance of the project for Toyota Australia.



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Platform to future

IT WOULD be easy to dismiss X-Runner as a knee-jerk reaction by Toyota Australia to the all-wheel drive craze currently being embarked upon by its fellow local manufacturers.

While Mitsubishi led the way by releasing the first all-paw Australian car – the Magna AWD in January – Toyota has ambitions more closely related to Holden and Ford, which will both release all-wheel drive wagons within 12 months.

Although Ford has placed many of its eggs in the Territory wagon crossover, which was shown in near-production form in Melbourne this year and is projected to sell in numbers up to 32,000 by 2007, it is likely Toyota will tread more of a niche product path like Holden, which will release an AWD wagon and the Cross8 AWD ute later in 2003.

Toyota officials say production of an all-wheel drive vehicle like the X-Runner ute – or any other bodystyle, including coupe, wagon or convertible – could be as little as two years away if approved.

But the bigger picture is that Toyota wants the ability to design vehicles from the ground up, not just assemble them, in the same way that Holden produces various cost-effective derivatives from the same Commodore base for both local and export consumption.

"Holden are really quite incredible how they can milk so much out of what is effectively one platform," said the man responsible for creating X-Runner, Peter Eustace.

"What we're trying to simulate is what can we do with this modular platform and Holden has shown us that this is exactly what you can do relatively simply."

Integrally related to the X-Runner project is Toyota Australia's bid for a key role in a new Asia Pacific research and design facility that Toyota in



BEYOND THE MACHINE

Thailand is also chasing. Toyota Australia will get a share of the facility, but now the fight is on to decide which areas of responsibility will be allocated here and which go to Thailand.

Toyota says production of the TMP-based X-Runner is not dependent on the fight for the lion's share of roles within the R&D facility, which could include a virtual cave such as Holden used to fast-track development of the Monaro to just 19 months.

But it would make further TMP derivatives more likely.

If approved by TMC, X-Runner itself certainly bolsters the local arm's chances.

"We have the capability to put something like this together with the engineering ability we have now," said Mr Eustace.

"It's not totally dependent on what happens in the future, but it still needs a business case and approval from the parent company.

"Because it's a Toyota Australia project, we're looking at it as if it was going ahead as a search and seek activity. The current situation is we have local input, but Japan has control over our destiny. This is a situation where we've got control of our destiny."

"We'd like to think the R&D centre would give us greater control of our destiny.

"There's no denying it opens up other doors. I think the virtual reality studio that Holden has is

obviously the ultimate, but it's not everything.

"With this vehicle we're saying we've expressed ourselves and developed something that's generated a lot of interest.

"We have the ability to do it – give us the chance to make a fully Australianised version of a vehicle rather than a global vehicle that doesn't necessarily suit our unique market."

Launching X-Runner at the Melbourne show, Toyota Australia vice-president John Conomos said it was "a demonstration of the capability (Toyota) needs in this country in order to produce future models. It shows that we are ready and able to do this type of development for the next (Camry/Avalon).

"The X-Runner shows that we can build an all-wheel drive, we can go off road if we wish to, we can build an on-road AWD passenger car, or, from this platform, we can build an SUV as well."

The SUV should be the next generation Kluger, which is under consideration for local production at the Altona plant in Melbourne.

Mr Eustace said the development of a number of other TMP-based derivatives, possibly including an all-wheel drive Camry/Avalon, was already under way, while discussions with TMC – "delivering the message that we would like to have greater design flexibility and freedom" – had also taken place.

"We've got some other projects on the go as well which will complement what we've shown with this vehicle. Concept cars are basically designed to test the market. Reaction from Melbourne was quite remarkable. The interest that it's generated internally has sparked a lot of enthusiasm.

"We seem to have hit on a nerve here and our Japanese president is 200 per cent behind it. We didn't do this for nothing."





PRODUCT CONCEPT



ABOVE: Avalon-based interior features sat-nav, climate control and an internet browser.

LEFT: One of only five Toyota-tread tyres in the world.

Toyota's toast to Australia

TOYOTA admits the timing of X-Runner's appearance at the Melbourne motor show was designed to spoil Ford and Holden's all-wheel drive party, but is this bright green Toyota ute concept a little too far fetched?

TMCA associate director and divisional general manager product engineering Max Gillard does not think so, citing the monocoque utility's popularity Down Under.

"The Toyota Modular Platform used on Avalon was accepted as the starting point for X-Runner," he said.

"From there, the team reviewed the market, established a theoretical target customer and developed a vehicle concept and specification to suit.

"We can make a four-door sedan concept car or convertible or a coupe, but this concept is really exclusive to Australia. We wanted something that would identify with the local market.

"It's a very big step. From where we have been seen as just adopting TMC or Japanese design, X-Runner has really proven to ourselves and TMC ... that we are capable of matching it with anyone else."

Project leader Peter Eustace admits the time was ripe to go for maximum exposure.

"This was the perfect opportunity to move to the next step. We needed to make a statement and this was the ideal time. It's where we needed to move," he said.

"Four-wheel drive is also flavour of the month. Australians relate to utes. We're very successful in our sector in the ute market with LandCruiser and Hi-Lux – Toyota owns the workhorse ute



market – but they (Ford and Holden) enjoy a sector of the market that we don't play in. Getting into the sports or recreational-type of vehicle is something we haven't done.

"We've shown that we can extend the body quite easily and that we can put any external cladding on we like. But that's secondary to why the vehicle was done, which was to show what we can do with TMP – it really opens up the door for all sorts of things."

Designed by a team led by former Nissan Australia chief stylist Paul Beranger, X-Runner's only carryover externals are the Avalon headlights and bonnet.

Despite an uncharacteristically aggressive new grille, the body is conservative, featuring lower front and rear bumper inserts and blacked-out

wheel arches, but no chunky off-road bodywork.

Exterior mirrors incorporating indicators are courtesy of German supplier Schefenaker, while Bosch provided the parking sensors and a "pebble texture" modelled off the mountain bike's hand-grips and matched to the seat and door inserts is applied either side of the rear wheels.

There are dual exhaust outlets, Allen key wheel nuts and twin roof rails, while the tailgate (com-

plete with removable backpack) hinges from the right hand side to expose a flat load space with four wheel-holes for the two mountain bikes.

A row of lockable bins on either side of the tray provides lockable storage space, fridge and a global positioning system with 17-inch plasma screen.

Inside, there are two power sports seats from the Supra Turbo (re-trimmed by Autofab), a stitched leather Avalon dashboard and basic white-faced instrumentation.

A GPS-based internet monitor courtesy of Australian Arrow, touch-screen satellite-navigation, six-speaker Fujitsu sound system, climate/cruise control and power windows/mirrors complete the well appointed interior.





All the president's men

TOYOTA Australia's first ever concept car was conceived by its president Ken Asano in early 2002, not long after the successful adaptation of the US market Avalon's underpinnings for Australia and its further development for use underneath the new 380N Camry.

Work on the third application of the local car-maker's Toyota Modular Platform started in earnest during August last year, overseen by Toyota Australia engineering veteran Peter Eustace, who holds the title of project manager commercial vehicles product development division vehicle evaluation and engineering.

Based out of the technical centre skunkworks at Toyota's Port Melbourne HQ, X-Runner's development began by stretching the TMP's wheelbase ahead of the rear wheels by 150mm.

A Japan market RX300 off-roader donated its V6 powertrain, including constant all-wheel system with centre viscous coupling, three-piece tailshaft and four rubber mounts either side of the rear differential. A two-piece driveline was tested but found to transmit too much noise and vibration.

There is no traction control – although the new RX330, due here in April, employs a sophisticated stability control system – nor low-range gear ratios, which Toyota says was not required for a recreational application and would have added



TECH STORY

significantly to the project's cost and complexity.

While the supercharged V6 represents possibilities for Camry Sportivo, the adaptation of the all-wheel drive system similarly helps the case for building a cross-over as a third model line at the Altona plant in Melbourne, while the stretched wheelbase is being considered for the next Avalon to differentiate it further from Camry.

Avalon/Camry's MacPherson strut independent rear suspension was swapped for packaging reasons (to reduce rear wheelhouse encroachment in the utility's tray area) for the more compact live axle torsion beam from the Tarago all-wheel drive, which also donated its rear hubs.

Mounting the Avalon's front cross member in the RX300 subframe necessitated the re-alignment of the steering linkage, rear bank exhaust manifold and front stabiliser bar, which actually features fewer bends and therefore improved "value added value engineering".

"Dropping in RX300 powertrain and tuning

the driveshafts was easy," said Mr Eustace.

"Accommodating it into the envelope was a bit tricky, however, especially the lower area where there's a transfer case."

The tailshaft required exhaust system re-routing, while packaging issues saw power steering plumbing moved and brake master-cylinder relocated to accommodate the blower belts.

While Avalon parts outnumber by far 380N Camry components, the remaining one per cent of X-Runner that did not come from Toyota's global parts bin was fabricated locally, including the exhaust system, front anti-roll bar, (modified RX300) fuel tank and new handbrake cabling.

With a rear spaceframe extension to support the composite body's rear tray, massive PBR brake rotors and callipers, and a ride height that's increased by around 65mm (including the much bigger 19-inch wheels), X-Runner hits the scales at a substantial 1700kg.

Like heat shielding, however, weight has so far not been a priority in X-Runner's development.

"We've obviously got more things to consider for a production environment, like heat shielding the exhaust system around the transmission tunnel," said Mr Eustace.

"The basic architecture is there, it just needs massaging for the particular application."

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ENGINE

Super V6 could power Camry



TOYOTA describes it as a VVT-i-equipped and supercharged version of Avalon/Camry's 1MZ-FE 3.0-litre 24-valve DOHC alloy V6, but the X-Runner engine is more accurately identified as a supercharged version of the VVT-i V6 found in the RX300 donor vehicle and the Lexus ES300.

Either way, Toyota freely admits it is being considered for use in the Sportivo Camry, but the crucial item is the Eaton-type TRD supercharger, which is actually offered as a genuine Toyota accessory in New Zealand and has been considered for same by Toyota Australia's go-fast division T-CAM for more than four years.

T-CAM dyno tests indicate at least 185kW is reliably obtainable with the blower kit, with an undisclosed level of torque, but combined with X-Runner's freer flowing exhaust, chief engineer Peter Eustace says the figure is likely to be higher.

Of course, the new RX330, on sale here in April, employs a 3.3-litre VVT-i V6 producing 172kW in standard form, forming an even better basis for supercharging.

Mr Eustace could not reveal a torque rating for the all-wheel drivetrain, but when asked if a V8 was considered for application in X-Runner, he said: "Yes, but it may not have achieved what we were trying to achieve. It would have required major structural changes, such as moving the dashboard, but anything's possible."

SPECIFICATIONS:

Engine: Supercharged 3.0-litre DOHC 24-valve all-alloy VVT-i V6	
Transmission: Four-speed electronically controlled automatic	
Drivetrain: Four-wheel drive with viscous-coupled centre differential	
Front suspension: independent struts, coil springs, hydraulic dampers, ball-joint mounted anti-roll bar	
Rear suspension: Live torsion beam axle, coil springs, hydraulic dampers, anti-roll bar	
Steering: Power-assisted rack and pinion with variable gear ratio	
Front brakes: 355mm diameter ventilated discs, twin-piston callipers	
Rear brakes: 343mm diameter ventilated discs, twin-piston callipers	
ABS: Four-channel, four-sensor	
Wheels: 19 x 8.0-inch aluminium alloy	
Tyres: Unique Dunlop 245/45 R19	
Overall length: 4905mm	Front track: 1610mm
Overall width: 1910mm	Rear track: 1660mm
Overall height: 1520mm	Kerb weight: 1710kg
Wheelbase: 2870mm	Seating positions: 2



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By MARTON PETTENDY

WE'RE at Lindsay Fox's Anglesea proving ground near the Victorian coast south-west of Melbourne. This is also home to Toyota Australia's field engineers and the venue for our X-Runner drive.

Sitting behind the stitched leather dash in low-slung sports bucket seats and with two \$4500 mountain bikes filling the rear-view mirror, I twist the key. Under the watchful eye of the man who built X-Runner and another charged with transporting it and keeping it clean, a super-charged 3.0-litre V6 fires into a booming, lumpy idle that has only one thing on its mind – grunt.

I select D on the garden variety four-speed Avalon-style automatic shift gate and with a gentle brush of the right pedal there's an instant hit of monster truck-like torque. Beginning at idle and showing no sign of slacking off even beyond 5000rpm, the wall of V8-style urge available from the blown V6 is enough to stretch the friendship of four massive 245/45-section Dunlops.

Despite the impressive performance, the over-riding sensation is one of solidity and stability, with an enormous level of traction and road holding afforded by an RX300-sourced, viscous-coupled constant all-wheel drive system. While the big dose of typical Toyota ergonomics and build quality were expected, the impressive way the doors slammed closed with a dull thud was not.

Nor was the lack of refinement. Basking in the knowledge I was sampling the future in recreational all-wheel drive vehicles from Toyota Australia, my wry smile faded as the droning exhaust note overpowered my senses, the vibration of both internal and external plastics reaching a crescendo as I reached the Toyota-imposed speed limit of around 60km/h.

At least, I guessed it was about 60km/h. See, the same one-off X-Runner (pronounced "cross" runner) prototype was actually designed to be a static show car, not a driveable vehicle.

It represents a serious challenge to Ford and Holden's all-wheel drive ambitions

Hence, the speedo and tacho did not work, the external (tray-mounted) DVD/internet monitor and concealed 240-volt transformer were in danger of shorting out if they got wet and the heavy steering did not self-centre.

The unsorted, long-travel suspension felt soft as it compressed under only mild cornering speeds.

Oh, and I was under strict instructions not to scrub out the unique, laser-cut Toyota logo tread pattern on the four special 19-inch Dunlop tyres

because the car still needed to be shown at the forthcoming Adelaide motor show and, of course, in Sydney later this year. There is, apparently, a fifth example of the wacky Toyota tyre, but it's in a glass case at Dunlop's Melbourne headquarters.

Despite all this – and the fact our first drive in the world's only X-Runner was its only real-road outing apart from a photo shoot at the same venue – the car is probably roadworthy save for the loud exhaust and lack of rear licence plate lighting.

So it is a testament to its engineering prowess that Toyota Australia's first ever concept car drove anywhere at all, really.

Which is what X-Runner is all about.

Designed to demonstrate Toyota Australia's engineering might for the benefit of both parent company Toyota Motor Corporation and the buying public, X-Runner is just one example of the company's ability to spin-off cost-effective derivatives from its Toyota Modular Platform.

Even as an under-developed show car never designed to be driven, not least by a Toyota outsider, X-Runner's relevance Down Under is obvious.

As a rolling exhibition of Toyota Australia's local manufacturing potential, it represents a serious challenge to Ford and Holden's all-wheel drive ambitions.

X-RUNNER A FIRST FOR TOYOTA:
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BMW finally develops a ...

Thirst for turbo-diesel

By MARTON PETTENDY

IT'S BEEN a long time coming, but BMW Australia has finally joined the growing band of manufacturers to offer turbo-diesel power.

In fact, the spinning propeller brand's first ever diesel model sold Down Under, the X5 3.0d off-roader, could be the start of a revolution in turbo-diesel motivation for BMW passenger vehicles in the land of the V8.

BMW makes no bones about the fact X5 3.0d – first deliveries of which begin in April – represents an exercise in establishing turbo-diesel technology as part of the BMW range.

While next year's 3 Series-based X3 off-roader, the X5's little brother, is also eventually likely to comprise a turbo-diesel model, BMW plans to offer similar versions of future sedans – including the mainstream 3, 5 and 7 Series model lines – centre around the success of oil-burning X5 and X3 models. So expect BMW to put plenty of resources into pushing the turbo-diesel wheelbarrow.

The introduction here of the fourth BMW X5 model (joining X5 3.0i, X5 4.4i and the X5 4.6is range-topper) was delayed until the federal introduction of a new standard of diesel fuel quality, which came into effect on January 1 this year.

BMW says the changes, which reduce the sulphur content of Australian diesel fuel from 1700 parts per million to around just 550ppm, bring our fuel within the technical tolerances of the X5 3.0d's Euro III-compliant engine. Despite this, the same engine has been offered in the Range Rover SE and HSE since its launch in August 2002.

Either way, what BMW describes as "the world's most advanced diesel-engined Sports Activity Vehicle" is here, and the X5 3.0d makes a compelling statement in terms of driveability and economy, especially when compared to the previous entry level X5, the 3.0i six-cylinder petrol.

On sale Down Under at an introductory price of \$78,000 for the five-speed manual and \$80,000 for the five-speed auto (each undercutting the X5 3.0i by \$2700), the X5 3.0d carries an identical standard equipment list to the 3.0-litre petrol X5.

This includes traction and stability control, no fewer than 10 airbags, ABS, Hill Descent Control,



The good oil: Turbo-diesel X5 brings improved driveability and consumption for less money than X5 3.0i.

DataDot security, 17-inch alloys, roof rails, front foglights, remote central locking, "Dakota" leather upholstery, multi-function steering wheel, in-dash CD audio and luggage net.

Almost identical to X5 3.0i, X5 3.0d differs only in its use of a diesel (but still straight six) engine, different (but still 17-inch) alloy wheels and concealed exhaust outlets. Options prices are also as per X5 3.0i.



So X5 3.0d makes a persuasive argument on a price versus specification basis, but the story gets even better when it comes to mechanicals.

Featuring a slightly smaller capacity (2.926-litre) than the petrol six-cylinder engine with over-square (88 x 84mm) bore dimensions, 18:1 compression and four-valves per cylinder, the common-rail turbo-diesel engine produces 135kW at 4000rpm and 390Nm of torque at 2000rpm.

While the 3.0i produces more power at more revs (170kW at 5900rpm), the diesel blows it away for torque, with the petrol engine delivering only 300Nm at a much higher 3500rpm. Despite the extra torque, the taller-g geared X5 3.0d returns impressive fuel consumption figures.

In manual guise, the 3.0d achieves 9.3 litres per 100km (versus 13.9 for the 3.0i) in the city and 6.4L/100km (versus 8.9 for the 3.0i) on the highway. Overall, by BMW's own figures, the 3.0d

(8.0L/100km) uses 3.6 litres less fuel for every 100km than the 3.0i (11.6).

A 190km/h top speed falls short of the 3.0i's 202km/h flat-strap figure, as does 0-100km/h acceleration, which at 10.5 seconds in manual form is exactly two seconds slower than the 3.0i. The gap falls to less than a second in BMW's claimed 80-120km/h test, which the 3.0d completes in 8.5 seconds to the 3.0i's 7.6.

In a nutshell, for \$2700 less than the X5 3.0i, buyers of the X5 3.0d get the same equipment level, the same 25,000km service intervals, according to BMW similar servicing costs, better driveability and a greater, 1100km range from the same 93-litre fuel tank.

While these days there is no significant cost saving on the fuel itself, the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries is lobbying for greater price parity between petrol and diesel. And major petroleum distributors have undertaken to improve diesel fuel's other main negative, bowser cleanliness.

BMW has sold 4500 X5s since going on sale here in November 2000 and again expects to sell between 1700 and 2000 examples this year because it is limited in supplies from the Spartanburg factory in the US. Between 200 and 300 of these are expected to be diesels.

For first drive impressions of the BMW X5 3.0-litre turbo-diesel, go to www.goauto.com.au from this Thursday



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Holden looks to the big picture

HOLDEN boss Peter Hanenberger has declared retaining the number one sales spot in 2003 is not a priority for the company.

Following Holden's two consecutive years at the top, Toyota is applying enormous pressure in the VFACTS sales race, leading Holden by a narrow 206 sales after two months.

But Mr Hanenberger makes it clear that his eyes are focussed on a bigger prize than this year's sales results.

"This is for me not an issue," he said. "It is very nice if you are number one at the end of the year, but the issue for me is to sell the cars, get the right products in the market for the customers and achieve the profitability so we can invest in our future programs.

"We have a very clear plan which I have talked about for four years that we want to get a sustainable business for Holden for decades to come.

"We have a plan for this year for 184,000



The assembly plant at Elizabeth will soon introduce a third shift.

vehicles together with Isuzu and we are pretty much on target for that."

Holden's stalwart Commodore has been down in year-on-year sales terms compared with 2002, but Mr Hanenberger said that was a result of January work at the Elizabeth assembly plant in Adelaide to prepare for the mid-year introduction of a third shift.

Holden had up to 1000 contractors working at Elizabeth over three weeks in January making

the changes that affected 70 per cent of the site.

Since then Mr Hanenberger said assembly line workers had worked every Saturday and Sunday to make up the Commodore shortage – which initially stood at 1400 cars. The exception was last weekend, so staff could attend the Clipsal 500 V8 Supercar races.

"But next week it's Saturday-Sunday and that continues ... until we get the third shift going," he said.

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AMG accelerates

**More models,
more performance,
more sales
for Benz's
go-fast division**

By BRUCE NEWTON

MERCEDES-BENZ plans to continue accelerating its sports performance in Australia in 2003 with yet more AMG models heading to our shores.

In the past few months the supercharged V8 SL55, E55, S55 and CL55 AMGs have all landed here direct from Benz's go-fast division in Germany as either additions to the range or replacements for existing models.

And as of around now, the naturally-aspirated CLK 55 AMG has been added to the local fleet.

In the third quarter the CLK 55 AMG cabrio arrives to bring the range to nine models. It will cost around \$15,000 more than the \$190,900 coupe.

If you are not familiar with AMG then think of it as being to Mercedes-Benz

what HSV is to Holden, turning its mainstream cars into potent sports machines.

But in this case the once independent company is now owned 51 per cent by Benz. Also, like HSV does for Holden, AMG handles Benz's touring car racing program.

Spectacular performance is yielded by some pretty extensive engine modifications, while underpinning all that is some similarly intensive chassis reworking. But AMG does not design or build its own cars, purely adapting Mercedes-Benz product.

Mercedes-Benz Passenger Cars Australia boss Matthias Leuhrs is expecting to drive AMG sales from 2002's record of 291 to around 400. That's a climb of 37 per cent in a year where he predicts the sales of the mainstream range will stay static at about 13,300.



Matthias Leuhrs



AMG CLK cabrio

So why are the ultra expensive sports models going to be the big improvers for Benz?

"Australia is a market where there is a lot of sports enthusiasts and that goes well with our model range," Mr Leuhrs said.

"AMG plays a very important role for us because it extends the brand toward the more sporty end ... and it helps us a lot with our market perception."

Benz has also created an AMG owners club which is now conducting a Snowy Mountains drive program for about 100 members.

But plans to offer other attractions such as wine tastings and art viewings have been ditched. "They just want to drive the cars," said Mr Leuhrs.

Mr Leuhrs forecasts the sales break-up to be about 120 each for the SL and E; 60 for the C32; 35

PRICING:

ML 55 AMG:	\$139,900
C 32 AMG:	\$150,900
SLK 32 AMG:	\$154,074
CLK 55 AMG:	\$190,900
E 55 AMG:	\$221,900
S 55 AMG:	\$349,900
SL 55 AMG:	\$369,900
CL 55 AMG:	\$372,900

for the CLK coupe; 30 for the ML; 20 for the CL and 10 each for the CLK and SLK cabrios and S 55.

By the way, when we say ultra-expensive we mean it. The range is book-ended at the low end by the \$139,900 ML 55 AMG and by the \$372,900 CL 55 AMG at the high end.

But then we're talking ultra-performance as well.

The normally-aspirated ML is the least powerful in the local range with a mere 255kW from its 5.439-litre V8, climbing all the way to 368kW for the supercharged version of the same engine found in the SL and CL 55s.

The all-important torque story is just as impressive, with the supercharged 3.2-litre V6 in the C and SLK 32 kicking things off at 450Nm. The peak producers are the supercharged 55s, which all have a tyre-shredding 700Nm from 2650rpm.

Performance is obviously attention-grabbing too. They are all speed limited to 250km/h – except the 235km/h ML – thanks to a German manufacturers' gentlemen's agreement. But you can kick that into touch pretty quickly with help from the factory once you buy a car. While the ML is predictably the laggard from 0-100km/h at 6.8 seconds, the rest of the range is down either in the low 5s or high 4s.

They're all astonishing figures, not the least that as the performance and pricing continue to escalate so does the demand for AMG here and overseas. Worldwide sales were a record 18,300 in 2002, with that figure expected to push over 19,000 in 2003.

We don't see all the AMG line in Australia. The AMG modded A210, which does not actually carry the AMG badge, the C30 turbo-diesel Sports Coupe and the G 55 AMG based on the Gelandewagen are all non-starters. But we should get a hot A-class when the next generation of Benz's first front-wheel drive car goes on sale in 2005.

■ In 2004 the range will be boosted by AMG's most powerful range yet – the CL and S 65. Report – page 10



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Right turn on brute Benz

AMG's wildest Benz yet drives up performance and pricing

By BRUCE NEWTON

THE mad CL 65 AMG will be coming to Australia after all.

Launched at the Geneva motor show earlier this month, the brute coupe was originally intended to be only built in left-hand drive – with only 250 to be made.

But such was the overwhelming response at the show that Benz's hot-rod division has decided to build more – and make some right-hookers as well.

What has triggered the demand is AMG's biggest, most powerful and torquiest engine yet.

The V12 6.0-litre unit (so why call it 65?) is based on the 5.5-litre bi-turbo from the S-class and is uprated to produce 450kW and a truly astonishing 1000Nm.

Claimed performance includes a 0-100km/h sprint time of 4.5 seconds and a top speed electronically limited to 250km/h.

To put that in context, the current top of the heap is the supercharged SL 55 AMG with 368kW and 700Nm. It accelerates to 100km/h in 4.7 seconds and has the same governed top speed.

The CL 65 AMG will arrive in Australia near



CL 65 AMG

the end of 2004 and be accompanied by an S 65 AMG sedan. They will come in extremely limited numbers – maybe five or 10 per annum.

That's because along with the awesome performance will come an awesome price tag that will push well beyond the \$400,000 barrier and perhaps even threaten \$500,000.

Further down the track there is the possibility of an SL 65 AMG convertible.

The availability of right-hand drive was confirmed to Australian journalists during Benz's annual AMG media drive event by the company's worldwide boss, Domingos Piedade.

"I have just got off the phone 20 minutes ago to the factory and I can confirm the CL 65 will be built in right-hand drive from summer 2004," he announced to the media last Wednesday night.

Mr Piedade also revealed that the 65's V12 engine in its original development tune had produced a staggering 1200Nm of torque, but that

had to be toned down in the interests of drivetrain durability.

Engine modifications have increased the cylinder bore from 82 to 82.6mm, lengthened the stroke of the crankshaft by 6mm to 93mm and increased the charge pressure of the turbochargers to a maximum of 1.5 bar.

In addition, AMG engineers have used forged pistons, main and big-end bearings made from extremely high temperature and pressure-resistant materials, and enlarged the apertures in the injection nozzles to achieve a higher fuel flow.

Power is transferred by a five-speed automatic transmission with steering-wheel gearshift.

To cope with the prodigious torque, there have been modifications to various transmission components as well, including the rear axle differential, the drive shafts and the wheel carriers.

FIRST DRIVE IMPRESSIONS OF BENZ MIND BENDERS: [CLICK HERE](#)

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CONTINENTAL PRICING CONFIRMED



THE recommended retail price for the new Bentley Continental GT has been confirmed for Australia at \$379,995.

Bentley has also confirmed more than 250 deposits for the car have been taken by the company's network across Asia-Pacific nine months before the first deliveries will be made, with 115 from Australia alone.

Strong local demand is reflected worldwide, with 3200 deposits lodged for the new four-seat supercar.

The pricing lines up closely against the \$372,900 Mercedes-Benz CL 55 AMG, but is significantly more expensive than the \$308,990 Porsche 911 Turbo.

Bentley also recently confirmed perfor-

mance figures for the 6.0-litre twin-turbo W12-engined all-wheel drive, which pumps out 411kW and 650Nm.

That massive level of grunt pushes the GT from 0-100km/h in 4.8 seconds and on to a top speed in excess of 300km/h.

All-wheel drive is a first for a Bentley, as is the paddle operated, six-speed sequential automatic gearbox.

The GT is styled in-house at Bentley's design studios in Crewe with the intention of seating a family of four in comfort.

Styling cues include a pillarless cabin, minimal front overhang, pronounced haunches, a distinctive "face" featuring large inner headlights and a flush-mounted rear spoiler that rises at speed.

CAMRY FLEET OF FOOT

TOYOTA'S senior executive vice-president John Conomos has revealed the latest generation Camry is now selling more to fleets than to private buyers.

Mr Conomos was speaking at the Australasian Fleet Managers Association (AFMA) annual conference. "Toyota's new locally made Camry ... has attracted greater fleet attention than we had originally expected," he said.

He also predicted a record result for the Australian new vehicle market, surpassing last year's 824,309.

HONDA'S HELPING HAND

THE Honda Foundation is helping Canberra bushfire victims back on their feet with a donation of \$100,000.

The donation was made by Honda Australia director Lindsay Smalley at a gala fundraising dinner in the nation's capital last week, following a submission by Canberra's two Honda dealers, Patrick Van Den Bogaart of Rolfe Honda and John Stark from Capital Honda. The Honda Foundation was established in 1992 as a charitable organisation consisting of Honda dealers Australia-wide.

HYUNDAI IN NEW DEAL

HYUNDAI Motor Company, component supplier Hyundai Mobis and Mitsubishi Motors Corporation have announced the signing of a new co-operation agreement for projects involving the development, manufacture and sale of passenger cars and automotive components. Mobis is an affiliate of Hyundai and joins directly in the co-operation for the first time.

UP CLOSE on PERSONNEL

PRODUCT PLANNING

NISSAN Australia has announced the appointment of Ian Moreillon to the newly created position of manager product planning at the company's head office from April 1.

Mr Moreillon was previously regional sales manager for the southern regions.

GM FINANCE

GMAC Financial Services, the financial services subsidiary of General Motors, has announced Carlos Eduardo Modeli Ribeiro is succeeding Mark F. Bole as vice-president of Asia Pacific operations. Mr Bole was named group vice-president European operations. Mr Ribeiro, who will be based in Melbourne, will be responsible for GMAC's automotive financing business in Australia, New Zealand, India, Indonesia, Taiwan, Thailand and China.

NISSAN SUCCESSION

CARLO'S Ghosn's successor team at Nissan Motor is starting to take shape with the announcement last week that its chairman, Yoshikazu Hanawa, would retire in June.

At the same time, Mr Ghosn added the title of co-chairman to president and CEO of Nissan, titles he will hold until 2005, when he is expected to relocate to Paris as chairman and CEO of Renault. Two potential "successors" to Mr Ghosn in the top Nissan post – Toshiyuki Shiga and Itaru Koeda – were given new assignments.

Mr Shiga, 49, was named senior vice-president in charge of general overseas market operations and a member of Nissan's executive committee.

Mr Koeda, purchasing executive vice-president, was appointed co-chairman of the automaker along with Mr Ghosn. Also on the A-list as Mr Ghosn's potential replacement in Tokyo is former Nissan North America senior vice-president Yukie Kitahora, 56, who was transferred to take charge of Nissan's lagging homeland operation last year.

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GoAuto's latest road test

Honda Jazz VTi-S 5-dr hatch

CAST your mind back, just one automotive generation, to a time when most inexpensive small cars were cheap and nasty. No, it really wasn't that long ago cut-price light cars were flimsily built, dynamically comatose, poorly equipped and aesthetically challenged. How times have changed – with the likes of Honda's Jazz and the Mazda2 breaking the mould in all these areas while continuing to deliver exceptional value for money. Of course there remain exceptions to the rule, but Honda's first sub-compact competitor – the most inexpensive four-wheeled Honda ever – also proves respectable performance and intelligent packaging are no longer the exclusive domain of sports cars or people-movers respectively. In fact, in top-shelf VTi-S form (tested here), Jazz makes the most convincing argument yet that Japan can mix it with the established premium light car builders from Europe.



FULL REPORT: [CLICK HERE](#)



SAAB, OPEL LINK UP

SAAB'S fully owned national sales companies in Europe will be combined with those of Opel as part of a cost-cutting drive at General Motors' troubled Swedish subsidiary, *Automotive News* reports.

Citing a senior GM Europe manager, the trade newspaper said Saab sales and marketing organisations in Germany, Switzerland, the UK, France, Italy, Finland and Denmark would be merged with Opel's "as soon as possible." The newspaper said the move was part of Saab's Viggan turnaround plan launched last autumn. GM had previously confirmed that Saab's engineering operations would be integrated with those at Opel.

PRIMERA FACELIFT?

NISSAN is reported to be considering a facelift for the new Primera – just a year after it went on sale in Europe and Japan.

The revisions would include altering the car's steeply angled nose and rear end styling. Company president Carlos Ghosn has described Primera's reception onto the market as just "reasonable".

Sales in Japan and Europe have failed to live up to expectations and, crucially for Europe, no diesel version was available at launch.

MINI TO THE MAX

BMW told Reuters last week that the Mini was selling so well it plans to boost the capacity of its Oxford, UK, plant by 10 per cent.

The move will take a few years but BMW executives say it will enable them to build about 180,000 Minis each year, up from about 160,000 a year now.

The extra capacity will be necessary as Mini adds a diesel and a convertible model. But the next addition to the family will be the 150kW John Cooper Works version of the Mini, which has already been launched internationally and will go on sale here later this year.

FUEL TO THE FIRE

THE US army estimates it is paying close to \$US600 per gallon to fuel its war against Iraq, according to thecarconnection.com.

This staggering amount is caused by the

LAUNCH PAD

MARCH:

- BMW X5 3.0-litre turbo-diesel
- 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

logistical nightmare that includes getting the fuel from a refinery to and into storage facilities, transferring it to tanker trucks or freight cars, then transferring it to specially equipped cargo/tanker planes or ships, sailing or flying it to Kuwait and then off-loading and moving it to storage sites at assembly and service areas.

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