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Stinger missile

Kia loads its turbocharged rear-drive Stinger sports sedan

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3 Form a Q
Audi's Q8 concept heralds competitor for popular SUV coupe market



7 Kia bares Seoul
Korean car-maker launches most powerful production car to date



11 In favour, say A.I.
Toyota offers virtual A.I. companion for passengers of Concept-i

14 Creating a Buzz
Volkswagen builds a futuristic Kombi homage with Buzz ID



Form a Q

Audi's Q8 concept heralds competitor for popular SUV coupe market



By DANIEL GARDNER

AUDI has revealed its Q8 concept at the North American International Auto Show, heralding a production version that will take the four rings into the large coupe SUV segment against established

rival BMW and its X6 as well as the Mercedes-Benz GLE Coupe newcomer.

The concept follows a number of teaser images and concept vehicles that carry the common recurring theme of Audi's e-tron electrified powertrains including the e-tron

Quattro concept at Frankfurt in 2015.

While the most recent vehicle has usurped the e-tron name in favour of a simple Q8 moniker, the vehicle is clearly part of the family with a plug-in powertrain that combines a 3.0-litre TFSI engine with an electric motor,

and is the most likely drivetrain candidate for a production version.

Quite how much of the concept will carry over to the production Q8 in 2018 remains to be seen but the model will be "based" on the showcar and its vital statistics appear to be



more production plausible than flight of fancy.

A TFSI petrol engine output of 245kW and 500Nm is combined with the single electric motor for a total system output of 330kW and 700Nm. Zero to 100km/h acceleration takes 5.4 seconds and a top speed of 250km/h is most likely limited.

Audi reports that the concept can travel up to 60km on pure electric power thanks to a 17.9kWh lithium-ion battery located in the rear of the car, and when under hybrid power, can return fuel economy of 2.3 litres per 100km.

With petrol engine and electric motor working in unison, the Q8 has a total range of about 1000km and its battery can be charged in about 2.5 hours, although Audi does not state whether that rate requires specialised charging equipment or a household socket.

Final drive is handled by the company's Quattro four-wheel-drive system but with permanent engagement it is clear that the Q8 is not the model that will herald Audi's first e-tron Quattro Ultra application.

Its electric motor is combined into the eight-speed automatic transmission which communicates with the 'predictive efficiency assistant' to provide the most efficient use of electric and combustion power. The system is one feature that Audi has confirmed will be making into the production Q8.

Information from the car's surroundings including gradient, weather conditions and a selected navigation route are fed through the hybrid management system for maximum efficiency or driver involvement depending which driving mode out of EV, hybrid or battery hold is selected.

The EV setting prioritises pure-electric power, hybrid mode balances the best combination of electric and petrol power, while the battery hold function runs on combustion-only power to reserve battery power for later in a journey such as heavy traffic where electric drive is more useful.

The concept also premieres the latest version



of Audi's game-changing 12.3-inch virtual cockpit instrument cluster, which has been given a resolution boost to 1920 by 720 pixels and has more updated functions including 3D effect gauges when in Performance mode and more detailed display.

In addition to the improved instrument display, Q8 drivers are also treated to an evolution of the company's head-up display, which makes the first steps into augmented reality.

Instead of a basic arrow graphic for navigation, the augmented system can project the pointer as

if it is actually part of the road markings, for example, for a more immersive experience.

All other displays in the Q8 cabin are touchscreen including the central MMI monitor mounted in the dashboard as well as the climate control panel, which only

displays the zoned temperature settings for the passenger if the car senses one aboard. A third screen controls lighting settings.

The interior is an expanse of clean lines and simple interconnected displays contrasted by 'silver' Nappa leather and Nubuck.

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It is not known how much of the Q8 concept's Bombay Blue body will transition through to the road car, but a more sporty aesthetic compared with the Q7 is expected in the same manner that BMW and Mercedes differentiate their equivalent offerings.

Conspicuous 23-inch wheels may be scaled down for a road-going version and some artistic licence may be wound back before the production car is seen, but the Q8's sporty styling appears to be ready to hit the shelves.

Carbon-fibre use is rife including interior, exterior and even carbon-ceramic brakes but such exotic items are expected to be relegated to

the options list if they make it into showrooms.

Despite the rearward falling roofline, Audi says the Q8 offers generous room for four passengers with a boot area that can swallow 630 litres of luggage. A view of the second-row seating is not offered so it is not yet clear if the Q8 will accommodate two rear passengers in comfort or a more practical two-plus-one arrangement.

On the outside, the Q8 concept is unlikely to change dramatically in dimensions when it rolls out as an on-sale Q8, with a sizable 5020mm length, 2040mm width and 1700mm height in concept form. **MM**

Kia bares Seoul

Korean car-maker launches most powerful production car to date



By HAITHAM RAZAGUI

KIA'S coupe-styled Stinger sports sedan, revealed at this year's Detroit motor show, is due to hit Australian showrooms in September of this year with an expected price range in the \$40,000 bracket.

The turbo-V6-powered, rear-drive Stinger is pitched as a perception-transforming halo

model for the South Korean brand globally, joining the ranks of car-makers that have made striking concept cars into production reality.

It also promises to provide Australians with an affordable rear-drive family four-door in the absence of locally made Falcons and Commodores.

For example, at 4831mm in length and

1869mm wide with a 2906mm wheelbase, the five-seat Stinger is only slightly smaller than a VF Holden Commodore.

Meanwhile, the 3.3-litre twin-turbo V6 petrol engine confirmed for Australian-delivered Stingers is on track to churn out 272kW of power at 6000rpm and 510Nm of torque from 1300-4500rpm in production form

– similar figures to the dearly departed Falcon XR6 Turbo.

With an eight-speed automatic channelling drive to the rear wheels through a limited-slip differential, Kia expects zero to 100km/h to come up in 5.1 seconds.

Understandably, tyres will not be covered under Kia's seven-year aftercare plan



including factory warranty, capped-price servicing and roadside assist.

A less powerful 2.0-litre turbo-petrol will also be offered overseas, with an as-yet unconfirmed diesel likely for the European market and all-wheel-drive variants with torque vectoring to be available in snow-belt regions.

Like the Genesis sub-brand of Korean compatriot Hyundai, Kia's Stinger will take it up to European luxury sedans from Audi, BMW, Jaguar and Mercedes-Benz. Its interior styling certainly appears to pay homage to the latter.

Kia's German outpost spawned the GT concept that made waves upon its debut at the 2011 Frankfurt show, and was picked to carry the project through to production.

With dynamics tuned under former head of BMW's M division Albert Biermann, the Stinger is claimed to deliver a driving experience that lives up to its striking looks under the mantra: "Designed in Frankfurt, developed on the Nurburgring".

An Australian tuning program to tailor the GT's ride and handling for local conditions and tastes will also enter the mix before the Stinger arrives Down Under.

Stinger will be the first Kia to feature adaptive dampers, forming part of a five-mode dynamic customisation system that also alters steering and drivetrain characteristics. It rides on MacPherson front struts and a multi-link rear suspension setup, bolted to an ultra-stiff body with a 55 per cent



high-strength steel content.

Kia Motors Australia chief operating officer Damien Meredith described Stinger as “a car you cannot help but be excited by”.

“It has all the attributes to appeal to the Australian enthusiast – exciting design, a high-tech performance engine and gearbox

combination and rear-wheel drive.

“The Stinger is the right car to take Kia, and the brand’s perception, to the next level in Australia. It is the type of car to add desire and excitement to Kia’s core values of style, reliability and value.”

Like its GT concept progenitor – and

the imported 2018 Holden Commodore – the Stinger features a fastback silhouette with liftback-style boot opening promising generous cargo capacity.

Although the concept’s rear-opening ‘suicide’ doors and skinny windscreen frame have been dropped and the aggressive intakes

at the edges of its front bumper have been tamed down, little about the Stinger’s overall shape and style has been sacrificed in the five-year transition from outlandish design study to production reality.

A long, vented bonnet with short front overhang and muscular rear haunches leave

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no doubt in the observer's mind that this is a performance-oriented, rear-drive vehicle.

From the rear three-quarter view the production Stinger is arguably even more striking than the concept, with four purposeful tailpipes emerging from the diffuser and a hunkered-down stance.

The interior has changed significantly over the GT concept's minimalist design taking on a more Mercedes-Benz-inspired style with triple central air-conditioning vents between a tablet-style multimedia touchscreen above and metallic button cluster below.

A T-bar style gear selector is reminiscent of an Audi A8, with the instrument cluster also Audi-esque. Most interior surfaces appear to be

upholstered in leather or leather-like materials, with high-gloss black and chrome highlights.

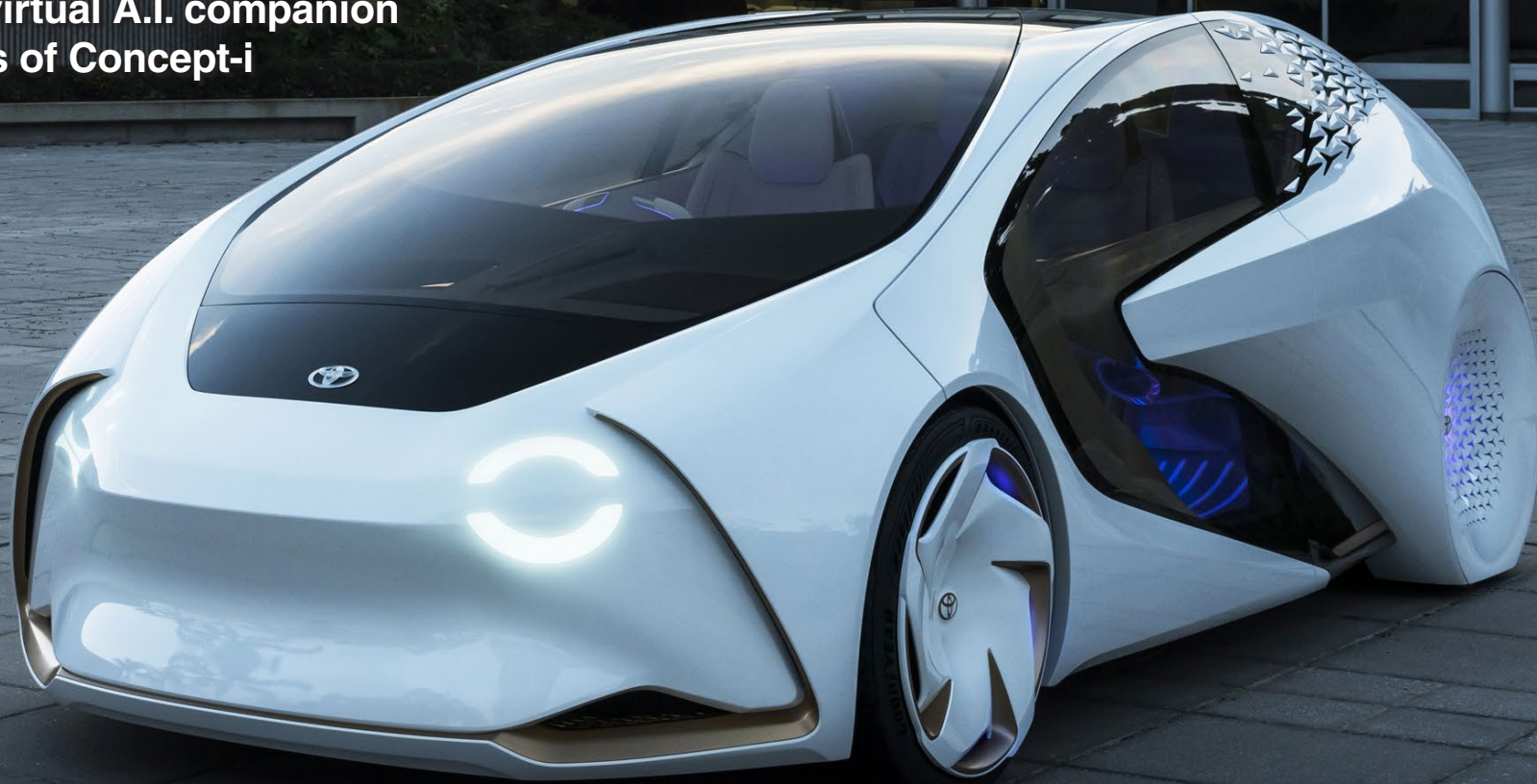
The design brief was to produce an authentic grand tourer, to be nimble and fast but also luxurious and quiet, with room for five and their luggage.

Kia Motors Europe chief designer Gregory Guillaume said the Stinger "has nothing to do with being the first to arrive at the destination – this car is all about the journey. It's about passion".

"A true gran turismo, a car for spirited long-distance driving, is not about outright power, hard-edged dynamics and brutal styling, all at the expense of luxury, comfort and grace," he said. **MM**

In favour, say A.I.

Toyota offers virtual A.I. companion for passengers of Concept-i



By TUNG NGUYEN

TOYOTA has unveiled its Concept-i artificial intelligence-powered, autonomous showcar at the 2017 Consumer Electronics Show (CES), which is aimed at revolutionising the interaction between driver and vehicle.

Though the concept will likely never make it to production, Toyota is expected to use the Concept-i as a testbed for its future technologies and, at its core, includes an artificial intelligence (AI) system that can learn and adapt to suit individual drivers.

Built by Toyota's in-house Calty Design

Research team – the same group responsible for the 2014 Toyota FT-1 concept and 2003 FJ Cruiser concept – in conjunction with the Toyota Innovation Hub, the Concept-i places an emphasis on user interface (UI) and has dubbed its AI “Yui” (the phonetic spelling of UI).

Looking less like a car and more like a

sensory deprivation tank, the Concept-i features invisible rear wheels, LED headlights installed underneath the front bumper and a rear-end reminiscent of a Tron light cycle.

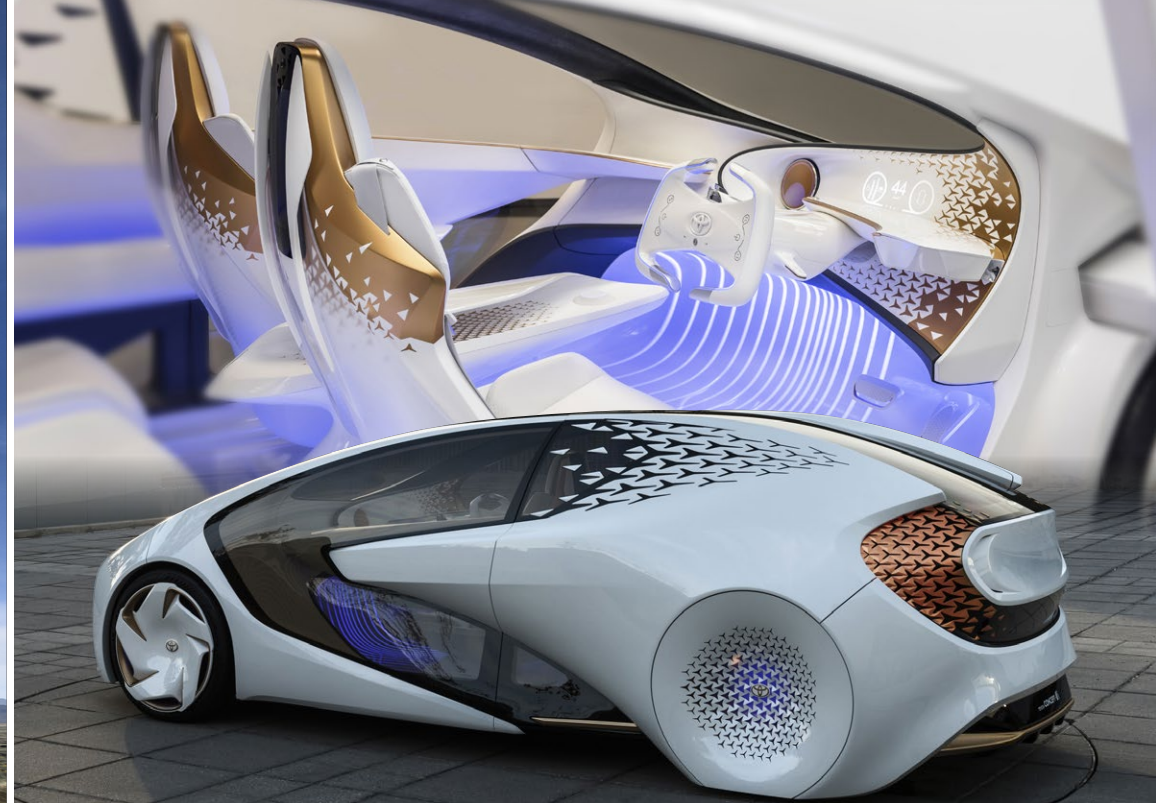
Ingress involves navigating the forward opening scissor doors – upon which Yui can display a welcome message – where users will

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be greeted by a futuristic interior swathed in sleek white surfaces with gold highlights and blue lighting throughout.

Through the dashboard, drivers will be able to interact with Yui - which has been designed to work across various cultures and languages - where it can communicate driving information using light, sound and touch capacities.

According to Toyota, the technology can "measure emotion" giving the Concept-i the "ability to use mobility to improve quality of life".

The AI system can take control of the vehicle and operate under self-driving mode, or else Yui will monitor the driver's attention and read road conditions to help supplement safety in the manual driving mode.

AI-driven safety features will include images being broadcast on the interior C-pillars (essentially eliminating blind spots for drivers),

as well as a next-generation head-up display designed to keep attention on the road.

According to Toyota, the AI will also be able to build upon interactions and learn over time to develop a better interface for individual drivers.

Toyota senior vice president of automotive operations Bob Carter said the Japanese car-making giant envisioned a future where vehicles would not only be able to assist drivers, but also to give them feedback.

"At Toyota, we recognise that the important question isn't whether future vehicles will be equipped with automated or connected technologies," he said.

"It is the experience of the people who engage with those vehicles. Thanks to Concept-i and the power of artificial intelligence, we think the future is a vehicle that can engage with people in return." **MM**

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Creating a Buzz

Volkswagen builds a futuristic Kombi homage with Buzz ID



By TUNG NGUYEN

VOLKSWAGEN has premiered its self-driving capable ID Buzz passenger van concept at the 2017 North American International Auto Show (NAIAS) with a transforming six-seat cabin and all-electric powertrain.

The ID Buzz foreshadows the German

brand's vision of a future van to complement last year's ID hatchback concept at the Paris motor show, as Volkswagen prepares an onslaught of electric vehicles from 2020.

Looking like a cross between the aforementioned ID concept and a Transporter van, the Detroit motor show debutant is unmistakably Volkswagen thanks to its two-tone

colour scheme and boxy exterior reminiscent of the cult Kombi vans of yesteryear.

Its fascia alludes to the all-electric powertrain with a completely smooth bumper, while a unique lighting signature is projected thanks to integrated, backlit LED headlights and fog lights, along with an ambient lighting strip around the entire vehicle beltline.

The rear features thin, wraparound tail-lights, a short overhang and large rear-hatch opening, while stylised air vents found on the D-pillar pay homage to the first-generation Transporter.

Measuring in at 4943mm in length, 1976mm wide and 1963mm tall with a wheelbase of 3299mm, the ID Buzz has slightly less of a road presence than its Multivan sibling, which



measures 5304mm in length, 1904mm in width, 1990mm in height and features a 3400mm wheelbase.

Built on the same Modular Electric Drive (MEB) platform as its ID hatchback forebear, albeit with an elongated wheelbase, the ID Buzz makes the most of its two electric motors (each mounted on the front and rear axle) for a combined output of 275kW.

Volkswagen claim the showcar can sprint from zero to 97km/h in five seconds, almost as quick as its DSG-equipped Golf R stablemate which can hit 100km/h in the same time.

With an 111kWh battery, the ID Buzz can be recharged to 80 per cent in 30 minutes from a 150kW Combined Charging System, or longer from a conventional home outlet, and has an electric driving range of about 600km.

However, Volkswagen says "it would be just as easy to equip the ID Buzz with a rear-wheel-drive setup producing up to 268hp (200kW) and a smaller 83kWh battery, depending on the region and purpose of use".

The ID Buzz will make extensive use of

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automated driving technologies including roof-mounted, extendable laser sensors, as well as ultrasonic and radar instruments, and side and front-facing cameras when in self-driving mode.

Driver's will be able to access an ID Pilot mode at the press of a button, wherein the steering wheel will "retract and merge into the instrument panel" and "ambient lighting switches from white light to mood lighting that is warm and relaxed", according to VW.

When the ID Buzz is in autonomous mode, passengers will be able to rearrange the six seats into a myriad of different positions, including transforming the second row seats into tables, turning the front seats to face the rear and sliding the tablet-controlled centre console towards the middle of the vehicle.

On longer journeys, the third row seats are even able to convert into beds for night stop-overs.

Pressing the steering wheel-mounted button again will revert control of the ID Buzz back to the driver, as will depressing the brake or accelerator pedals.

The ID Buzz also features a unique driver convenience technologies, including an augmented reality head-up display which can project satellite navigation and communications information onto the road ahead, a User-ID system that stores preferred information including seating position, sound system settings and type of ambient lighting to a unique individual profile, and the implementation of a smartphone-integrated Digital Key. **MM**

