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MOTORMONTHLY

FEBRUARY 2017

ISSUE 93



Whipped Pony

Fresh face and safety boost for updated Ford Mustang

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Automotive Lighting



MOTORMONTHLY

93 FEB 2017

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Long game

Lexus packs its flagship LS with the latest tech



By HAITHAM RAZAGUI

LEXUS is aiming to re-establish itself as disruptor of the luxury limousine market with the clean-sheet, fifth-generation LS flagship revealed at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit last month – just as it did with the original's Motown debut back in 1989.

Due to arrive in Australian showrooms early next year, the new LS will be produced in long-wheelbase form only, featuring a lower coupe-like silhouette with six flush-fitting side windows – the first time this has been seen on a Lexus – and an intricate new take on the brand's bold 'spindle' grille design.

Significantly, the new LS500 drops the

outgoing LS460 model's 4.6-litre V8 engine in favour of a 3.5-litre twin-turbo V6 producing 310kW of power and 600Nm of torque, making it much more potent than the 285kW/493Nm bent-eight it replaces.

The rear wheels are driven through the world's first 10-speed automatic transmission in a luxury sedan, the two additional ratios of

which are expected to compliment the fuel efficiency benefits from the downsized engine, but Lexus does not say by how much.

Neither is there mention of a hybrid drivetrain option. The LS was previewed at the Tokyo show in late 2015 by the LF-FC concept that used hydrogen fuel-cell power and, despite the limited number of countries where this



drivetrain makes sense, Lexus representatives at the time insisted it will become reality sooner than people are expecting.

Borrowing the LC500h coupe's drivetrain is more likely for most markets, combining a 3.5-litre V6 with an electric motor fed by lithium-ion batteries. In the LC, this drivetrain

produces less power than the new twin-turbo V6 of the LS, so a performance hybrid using the force-fed engine could also be offered to replace the outgoing LS600h.

As expected, the LS is brimming with new comfort features but Lexus has apparently not moved the technological game forward in the

same way as rivals such as the BMW 7 Series or adopted autonomous driving features as enthusiastically as Mercedes-Benz.

Instead, its media materials focus on how the Japanese Omotenashi philosophy of hospitality has been applied to "instill the new LS cabin with luxury that welcomes and

envelops the occupants while treating the driver like a partner".

Front seats with up to 28-way electric adjustment and the availability of Shiatsu massage, heating and cooling functions front and back, plus ottoman leg-rests and up to 48 degrees of rear-seat recline promise lavish



levels of comfort.

The rear seats can also be raised by up to 24 degrees to help rear passengers exit the vehicle, while the entire car can be raised using the key fob to help entry and egress by overcoming its new, lower-slung stance – if optional air suspension is fitted.

Ambient interior lighting is inspired by

Japanese lanterns and a combination of Shimamoku wood patterns, precise slicing and laser cutting methods go into the timber trim.

Back in the land of technology, the 12.3-inch multimedia screen interface is supplemented by a large head-up display and the whole system has been designed to work in a similar way to a smartphone, controlled through a

touchpad in the centre console that provides handwriting recognition for navigation address and phone contact or number input.

The two-tier dashboard is coated in contrast-stitched leather with a handful of shortcut buttons and, like the LC coupe, the instrument panel is flanked by two stalk-style controls.

Lexus has worked on its hallmark cabin

quietness for the new LS, with new noise suppression methods and an acoustically designed interior supplemented by noise cancellation technology through the audio system to eliminate certain frequencies generated by the engine. That said, Lexus has ensured the new turbo V6 emits a sporty bark when appropriate.

The Abarth name is steeped in Italian automotive performance history and with the Abarth 500 EsseEsse and Abarth 500C EsseEsse the legend continues to grow.



Abarth.com.au



Even the wheels – all of which will be 20-inch items for the Australian market – have been designed with a hollow rim structure claimed to reduce tyre noise, which should enhance enjoyment of the optional 3D surround Mark Levinson audio system and its array of ceiling-mounted speakers.

The LS has grown 85mm in length to 5235mm, while its 3125mm wheelbase is 33mm longer than the previous long-wheelbase bodystyle and it is also 25mm wider at 1900mm.

At 1450mm, the new LS is 15mm lower than its predecessor, but headroom is said to have been maintained by using an externally sliding sunroof mechanism. Its bonnet and boot are also around 30mm and 40mm lower than before.

Despite all the growth and focus on comfort,

Lexus claims to have improved the large barge's dynamics, firstly by adopting the ultra-stiff GA-L platform that debuted on the LC coupe and helped achieve a 90kg weigh reduction over the outgoing LS along with a number of suspension system refinements.

Second is a suite of technologies called Vehicle Dynamics Integrated Management (VDIM) that networks braking, steering, drivetrain and suspension to control body movement, which also has the side effect of improving comfort.

With around 12 months to go before the new LS arrives on Australian shores, it is too early for pricing to be announced, but the switch to long-wheelbase – an option offered only as special order in Australia since 2012 – could result in significant hikes. **MM**

Fury road

Ford's safety-boosted Mustang rolls out wearing stunning Orange Fury



By ROBBIE WALLIS

FORD has revealed a mid-life updated version of its hot-selling Mustang coupe and convertible, which features styling updates, new technology and engine tweaks ahead of its Australian arrival in 2018.

The revised model, revealed last month in

California, gets an updated exterior with new-look all-LED headlights, lower bonnet and grille design, blacked out rear diffuser, revised LED tail-lights, optional performance spoiler and quad-tip exhaust for V8 GT models.

With the mild aesthetic revisions, Ford is offering a dozen different alloy wheel designs,

as well as a new exterior paint colour – Orange Fury.

Powertrains have also been updated, increasing torque for the 2.3-litre four-cylinder EcoBoost engine, while the 5.0-litre V8 has been “thoroughly reworked”, according to Ford, although the new output figures have not

been revealed at this stage.

The V8 has received more power and it revs higher, thanks to new dual-fuel, high-pressure direct injection and low-pressure port fuel injection, which also improves low-end torque and fuel efficiency, says the car-maker.

Power and torque for pre-facelift GTs stands



at 303kW/525Nm, while the current EcoBoost four-pot turbo churns out 233kW/432Nm.

Automatic variants drop the current six-speed box for a new 10-speed unit that Ford says delivers higher average power for faster acceleration, has quicker shift times, reduced frictional losses and includes unique programs for different drive modes.

Manual transmissions have also been updated for both engines, with the V8 version scoring a twin-disc clutch and dual-mass flywheel to improve clutch modulation and torque capability.

Suspension has been included in the makeover with all models given new shock absorbers, a new cross-axis joint in the rear suspension and updated stabiliser (anti-roll) bars.

Ford's MagneRide magnetic damper system is on offer as an option, as is an active valve exhaust system for the GT which allows owners to control the exhaust note and volume of their vehicle.

When it arrives Down Under, the Mustang will be the first Ford to be fitted with the all-LED digital instrument cluster recently detailed in the Ford GT, with the 12-inch screen letting owners customise their instruments and choose between normal, sport and track mode displays.

Other tweaks include padded knee bolsters, a hand-stitched wrap with contrast stitching for the centre console, aluminium finish for the door handles, rings and bezels, new seat upholstery patterns and colours, and optional heated steering wheel. New models come equipped with Ford's Sync3 infotainment system.

Mustang MyMode with memory function allows drivers to save their favourite drive settings including suspension and steering preferences, while the 2018 model has a suite of new driver assistance systems, including pre-collision assist with pedestrian detection, distance alert, lane-departure warning, lane-keeping assist and driver alerts.

The range Australian range will remain the same with EcoBoost and V8 engines being offered in coupe and convertible bodystyles, however it is likely that a

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hybrid EcoBoost-derived variant will appear sometime in the model's life cycle.

In the US, the Mustang range kicks off with a V6 version, which has been included in the mid-life update, but the six-pot variant will not be coming to Australia with the update next year.


Sales of the current-generation Mustang have been heavily skewed towards the GT, with around three quarters of Australians opting for the V8 version, resulting in a waiting list that currently stands at around six months for the 5.0-litre and around three to four months for an EcoBoost.

Ford Australia product communications manager Damion Smy said that he didn't expect any customers on the current waiting list to postpone their order to wait for the

next-gen Pony car.

"The inherent design and style of the Mustang is still there," he said. "I think the people who have been waiting for the chance to have their Mustang experience will still absolutely want to have that experience, especially with these waiting lists – they'll be keen to get their Mustang and put it in their driveway as soon as they can."

Ford sold 6208 Mustangs in its first full year on sale in 2016, making it far and away the best-selling sportscar under \$80,000, followed by the Hyundai Veloster with 2232 and BMW 2 Series with 2159.

Last year it was also the fourth-best seller in the Ford stable, behind the Ranger ute (36,934), Territory (6928) and Focus (6783). 

Tail wagon

Benz Australia passes on blistering E63 Estate



By TUNG NGUYEN

MERCEDES-AMG has proven you can have your cake and eat it too with the reveal of its E63 S Estate, packing a supercar-scaring 450kW/850Nm turbocharged V8, torque vectoring all-wheel-drive system and a load-loving rear end.

Despite its potent performance, the Audi RS6 Avant-rivalling AMG wagon has already

been ruled out for the Australian market due to the slow uptake of the previous E63 Estate, as confirmed by Mercedes-Benz Australia/Pacific senior manager of public relations, product and corporate communications David McCarthy.

“We haven’t been able to get reasonable sales from an E63 Estate – it can barely crack double digits annually, versus the current C63 Estate, which this year (2016) will hit 150

units,” he said late last year.

“They do really well in Europe, including the UK, but the market for a quarter of a million dollar wagon is clearly fairly limited.”

In overseas markets, Mercedes will offer the E63 Estate in two variants, an entry-level version that makes do with 420kW/750Nm and the aforementioned top-spec S – both powered by AMG’s 4.0-litre biturbo bent eight

with cylinder deactivation technology.

Power is fed to all four corners via a wet clutch nine-speed automatic transmission, allowing the zero to 100km/h acceleration times of 3.6 and 3.5 seconds respectively for the E63 and E63 S Estates.

Top speed is electronically limited to 249km/h, but buyers can opt for the AMG Driver’s package which will raise that figure to 290km/h.

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By comparison, Audi's flagship RS6 Avant Performance is powered by a 4.4-litre V8 which produces 445kW/750Nm and can accomplish the 0-100km/h sprint in 3.7s, as well as hitting a limited top speed of 250km/h.

Best of all, Mercedes-AMG has not sacrificed any practicality for performance, with the E63 boasting a capacious 640 litres of boot space with the rear seats up, and an expansive 1820L with the 40:20:40 electric fold seats down – trumping the Audi RS6 Avant's 565/1680L capacity.

Exterior changes will see the E63 Estate stretched 27mm at the front for wider wheel arches, larger 20-inch wheels and increased track width, while sharing the same front fascia as its sedan sibling.

A prominent rear diffuser flanked by quad chrome exhaust outlets sits at the elongated rear end, while 360mm brake rotors are featured at

all four corners.

Suspension is handled by a bespoke variable damping, three-chamber air system, with three selectable modes – Comfort, Sport and Sport Plus – and AMG has fettled the engine mounts to allow for hard and soft settings.

Mercedes-AMG CEO Tobias Moers said the E63 Estate represents a blend of sporting performance and real-world utility.

“The new AMG E63 Estate combines our brand's hallmark driving dynamics with high everyday practicality,” he said.

“It is not for nothing that the model has been a permanent fixture in the AMG portfolio for 40 years. The powerful engine and the intelligent all-wheel drive underpin our claim to always be at the forefront of development when it comes to performance.” **MM**



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Superhero

Ferrari's new 812 Superfast flagship gallops in with 588kW



By TUNG NGUYEN

TO CELEBRATE its 70th birthday, Ferrari has developed an unbelievably quick new model, the 812 Superfast, which features an 588kW/718Nm front-mid-mounted naturally aspirated V12 engine.

Acceleration from zero to 100km/h takes just 2.9 seconds in the F12 Berlinetta-replacing flagship, while top speed is said to

be in excess of 340km/h, ensuring the 812 is a case of Superfast by name and super-fast by nature.

Unlike its 488, California T and GTC4Lusso T stablemates, the 812 – which will make its public debut at the Geneva motor show next month – eschews a turbocharged powerplant in favour of a larger-displacement 6.5-litre V12 engine, up from 6.3 litres in the F12.

Ferrari has fitted a reworked direct injection system and new Formula One-derived variable geometry intake tracts to increase maximum power to 588kW at 8500rpm and peak torque of 718Nm at 7000rpm, with 80 per cent of the latter available from 3500rpm.

The increase in performance hands the 812 Superfast the title of Ferrari's most powerful naturally aspirated production

V12, outmuscling the F12 Berlinetta by 43kW/28Nm and the special-edition F12 tdf by 14kW/13Nm.

However, the electronically enhanced hybrid powertrain found in the high-performing LaFerrari hypercar develops a combined total of 708kW/900Nm, thanks to 590kW/700Nm from the 6.3-litre V12 paired with a 120kW electric motor.

Compared with other exotic V12 supercar fare, the 812 Superfast's output trumps the hardcore 552kW/690Nm all-wheel-drive Lamborghini Aventador LP750-4 Superveloce – although the rear-drive Ferrari is 0.1s 'slower' to triple digits – and Aston Martin's 444kW/630Nm Vanquish S, which takes 3.5s to hit the benchmark speed.

Acceleration times are likely to vary based on driver reaction, though, with the 812 driver able to shift gears via steering wheel-mounted paddles to control the dual-clutch automatic transmission with reworked rear ratios and improved shifting times.

A dedicated launch-control function will help achieve consistent times as power is fed exclusively to the rear axle before being transferred to the road via 315/35 Michelin Pilot Sport 4 S tyres.

The front axle features the same-spec tyres in 275/35 sizing, with the 812 sitting on 20-inch wheels all-round. In a Ferrari first, the Superfast will employ an electric power steering system, tuned specifically to work in unison with the suite of electronic vehicle controls including the brand's bespoke Side Slip Control.

The 812 Superfast will also sport a new version of Ferrari's rear-wheel steering system that debuted on the F12 tdf – dubbed Virtual Short Wheelbase 2.0 – that increases turn-in sharpness and high-speed stability.

A reworked aerodynamic package will also help keep the 812 steady at high speeds, with active aero flaps incorporated in the front grille and bonnet scoops to help evacuate heat and

turbulent air, and sculpted bodywork to direct airflow and increase downforce.

Bonnet intakes are also designed in conjunction with new full-LED headlights, which are incorporated into the bodywork for a sleeker look and better aerodynamics, and flow directly into the beefy wheelarches.

At the rear, the size of the quad exhaust pipes almost matches the smoked round tail-lights, while a body-coloured rear diffuser is fitted to improve aerodynamics and increase downforce.



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In fact, the entire rear section has been tweaked to optimise airflow, evidenced by its heavily sculpted visage and rear vents to eliminate turbulent flowing air and promote smoother air bypass.

From the profile, the 812 Superfast exudes style with a fastback silhouette, long bonnet, heavily sloped roofline, and short front and rear overhangs.

In its pursuit of pure performance, Ferrari has not forgone modern conveniences, with both front and rear parking sensors, and an updated information and entertainment system with Bluetooth connectivity and voice command operations fitted.

New sports seats designed for more comfort

and better body-holding capabilities are fitted, while a new instrument cluster sits behind a new-look steering wheel with incorporated turn indicators, headlight, suspension setting and driving mode adjustability controls.

According to Ferrari, the 812 Superfast will deliver “an uncompromising sportscar that will deliver exhilarating driving both on road and track yet also be comfortable enough to allow its owners to enjoy it as an all-round experience”.

Australian timing and pricing is yet to be announced. The F12 Berlinetta currently commands an asking price of \$690,745 (plus on-road costs), and the 812 is expected to retail for a similar figure when it arrives, possibly in the next 12 months. **MM**