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Class warfare

Mercedes-Benz takes the fight to high-end pick-up rivals with X-Class workhorse

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VXR-rated

Imported Commodore range topped by 235kW/381Nm VXR



By RON HAMMERTON

HOLDEN'S next-generation Commodore flagship, the V6-powered, all-wheel-drive (AWD), liftback VXR, has been revealed in images distributed by General Motors' Australian arm about six months out from the imported 2018 range's showroom debut.

Riding on a chassis honed by Holden engineers over 100,000km of test driving in

Australia, the German-sourced Commodore VXR gets a pumped-up sports body treatment that sets it apart from standard Commodore variants unveiled up to eight months ago.

Bolder front and rear bumpers, big-bore twin exhaust pipes, rear lip spoiler, unique side skirts and bigger 20-inch alloy wheels are among the VXR exterior highlights.

The front is dominated by two large metallic-look "vents" on each side at the front, along

with slimline LED headlights that Holden says boast anti-glare matrix technology.

As expected, the Holden VXR gets a 235kW/381Nm version of GM's ubiquitous normally aspirated 3.6-litre V6, hooked up to a new nine-speed automatic transmission and advanced all-wheel-drive system with torque vectoring and twin-clutch differential.

While the raw power and torque of the Commodore VXR falls well short of the figures

produced by the current Commodore sports flagship, the 304kW/570Nm 6.2-litre V8 SS, Holden is counting on the sophistication of the new package to win a new legion of fans.

Holden lead dynamics engineer Rob Trubiani said the next-generation Commodore VXR offered a different execution of performance to the outgoing SS, "but make no mistake, this is more than a worthy successor".

"We've been involved in the development of



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this car from the beginning and I personally have spent significant time behind the wheel overseas and at Holden's Lang Lang proving ground," he said.

"The V6 engine with the adaptive AWD and nine-speed transmission make the VXR a quick and smooth car to drive, even in wet conditions. Importantly we also have Brembo front brakes and Continuous Damping Control (CDC) and drivers are able to switch between three driving modes for distinctly different drive experiences."

In Europe, the Insignia will get only four-cylinder power, including an up-coming high-performance turbo four-cylinder for the OPC, although American reports suggest the Buick Regal version for North America will also get the option of V6 power.

The V6 VRX will sit atop a powertrain range that includes a pair of 2.0-litre four-cylinder

turbocharged engines – a petrol and a diesel – driving the front wheels.

Apart from its bigger engine and all-wheel-drive powertrain, the VXR will get Brembo brakes and three-mode driving control system that adjusts CDC suspension, as well as the steering, transmission shifts and adaptive AWD system.

The VXR will get leather-upholstered, heated and ventilated front sports seats along with a long list of advanced safety technologies, including autonomous emergency braking, adaptive cruise control, lane departure warning, lane keep assist, blind-spot alert, rear cross-traffic alert and 360-degree cameras.

At launch, the VXR will be offered only in the five-door liftback body style that replaces the familiar Commodore four-door sedan, with the Sportwagon variation getting only four-cylinder power. **MM**

X marks the spot

Benz's Navara-based X-Class to hit worksites from early 2018



By TIM NICHOLSON

MERCEDES-BENZ has finally ripped the covers off the production-ready version of its highly anticipated X-Class, with the German auto giant proclaiming it has “big ambitions” for its inaugural ute in the high-volume but increasingly competitive segment – despite

being a premium alternative to its major rivals.

The X-Class, which was shown in production guise nine months after the reveal of two distinct concepts last October, will start to roll out in Australia in early 2018, shortly after the European market.

For Australia, New Zealand, Europe and South Africa, the X-Class will be built at a

Nissan production facility in Barcelona, Spain, while the Latin American market will source the ute from Cordoba, Argentina, from 2019.

Speaking with GoAuto at the unveiling in Cape Town, South Africa, Mercedes-Benz Vans Australia and New Zealand managing director Diane Tarr was coy on sales targets for the X-Class, but confident the company would be

successful in the dual-cab pick-up market.

“We have big ambitions for the X-Class,” she said. “As you can understand we can’t give you specific numbers, but it is our intention to be a decent player in that space. For us, we are also setting a ... new category, by introducing a real premium ute into that segment and let’s see how that stimulates interest and demand



for all of us in that space.”

The X-Class will be offered in three specification grades – base Pure, mid-spec Progressive and highly specified Power – and a mix of two four-cylinder turbo-diesel engines and a flagship V6 oil-burner.

According to Mercedes, Pure variants are designed more for rugged, professional use as a traditional workhorse, and Progressive adds extra styling flourishes and comfort features while retaining its “rugged” characteristics.

The flagship Power variant adds more

stylistic and comfort features and has the highest level of standard equipment.

The exterior design of the X-Class is based on what Mercedes calls its “Sensual Purity” design philosophy, and while the pick-up is clearly based on last year’s Concept X-Class, the overall look has been toned down for production.

As reported following the reveal of the concept last October, the X-Class follows the design of Benz’s SUVs rather than its commercial vehicle lines, with a clear relationship in the front-end styling – notably, the twin-louvre grille – with

the GLS large SUV and the smaller GLC.

The headlights are reminiscent of the Ford Ranger’s, while its Navara origins are clear, with the middle of the X-Class from the A-pillar back virtually identical to the Nissan upon which it is based.

To differentiate the model grades, the Pure has an unpainted front apron and rear bumper, the Progressive has a body-coloured apron and bumper, while the Power also has a body-coloured rear bumper and front apron but with the addition of chrome flourishes, including a

chrome underbody guard.

Mercedes says the X-Class can take a Euro pallet in the tub, straight between the big wheelarches. The cargo area also has a dedicated third LED ‘brake light’ which illuminates the entire bed (operated via a switch in the centre console), while a 12-volt socket is also provided in this area.

Mercedes has ensured that the cabin has a distinctly Benz flavour, with a concave trim feature on the instrument panel reminiscent of other models, as well as the circular,



aviation-themed air vents and familiar steering wheel – wrapped in leather in the case of the Progressive and Power.

From Progressive spec onwards, the X-Class is fitted with a free-standing central display with an 8.4-inch screen – claimed to be the biggest in the segment – incorporating the Comand Online multimedia system and digital radio, while a

360-degree rearview camera and Garmin Map Pilot satellite navigation is standard on Power.

From launch in Australia, X-Class will be offered with the same 2.3-litre four-cylinder common-rail turbo-diesel engine from its Navara donor, but in two states of tune.

The X220d matches the Navara's output of 120kW/403Nm and has a single turbocharger,

while the X250d punches out 140kW/450Nm and is a biturbo unit.

A six-speed manual is the only transmission available on the X220d, while the X250d is offered with the manual or a seven-speed automatic transmission. Both variants are offered as rear-wheel drive or with Benz's 4Matic four-wheel-drive system. All 4x4

versions come with a diff lock as standard.

By mid-2018, Mercedes will launch the flagship X350d in Australia, powered by a V6 diesel engine delivering 190kW and 550Nm – enough to make it the most powerful one-tonne pick-up on offer Down Under, beating VW's punchy 165kW Amarok V6 for power, while matching its torque output.

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The V6 will be offered as standard with 4Matic permanent all-wheel drive, a 7G-Tronic seven-speed automatic transmission (with paddle shifters), automatic engine idle-stop and Mercedes' Dynamic Select drive mode select system with Comfort, Eco, Sport, Manual and Offroad modes that alter the engine characteristics and transmission switch points as well as the idle-stop function.

Mercedes is prioritising ride comfort and dynamic ability for the ladder-frame X-Class, with a double wishbone front axle and a rear multi-link solid axle with coil springs all round, matching the set-up of the Navara.

The X-Class has a 1632mm/1625mm front/rear track as well as a 3150mm wheelbase, which the company says reduces vibration and

makes for smooth straight-line stability.

The wheelbase length naturally matches the Navara's, but it is 55mm longer than the Amarok and slightly off the Ranger (3220mm).

The four-cylinder versions have a payload of 998-1092kg, while the the V6's payload is 918-977kg.

In four-cylinder guise, the X-Class has a maximum braked towing capacity of 3200kg for the 4x2 and 3500kg for the 4x4, while the V6 can also tow up to 3500kg. This is lineball with the 4x4 Navara and Ranger and 500kg more than Amarok.

The X-Class has a 600mm fording depth, ground clearance of 202mm at the front and 221mm at the rear and it is being offered with a 20mm-higher suspension as an option. **MM**

Heart N Seoul

202kW/353Nm engine underpins
Hyundai's first i30 N hot hatch



By RON HAMMERTON

HYUNDAI has chosen hot-hatch heartland, Germany, to finally reveal the production version of its all-new i30 N – the first of a flock of high-performance cars from its new N skunkworks.

A rival for front-wheel-drive hatches such

as the Volkswagen Golf GTI and Ford Focus ST, the i30 N was shown at a global launch in Dusseldorf after a long and very public gestation, much of it at Germany's famed Nurburgring.

Official images reveal a subtle but stylish sports body treatment, complete with obligatory red highlights on items such as the

front splitter, rear diffuser and brake callipers.

Air openings at the front include brake cooling ducts, while a rear roof-mounted spoiler – complete with a race-style triangular brake light – helps to keep the car planted on its fat wheels.

The new N logo – named after Hyundai's Namyang research and development centre in

South Korea and said to symbolise the shape of a chicane – is emblazoned on the grille and brake callipers.

Hyundai says the main focus of the i30 N's development has been on the fun factor, with its handling character described as “corner rascal”.

Unveiling the new car, Hyundai's executive



vice-president of performance development Albert Biermann said the company's new high-performance N models would cater to the needs of people "who love to have a smile on their face".

"That's why we measure high-performance in BPM, heart beats per minute, instead of only RPM," he said.

Set to arrive in Australia before the end of this year with pricing potentially starting below \$40,000, the five-door i30 N hatch will be joined next year by a similarly enhanced N-version of the upcoming five-door liftback i30 and – at a date to be fixed – and an even hotter all-wheel-drive hatchback based on the raunchy RN30 concept to go up against the cream of Euro hot

hatches such as the VW Golf R, Renault Megane RS, Honda Civic Type R and Ford Focus RS.

As expected, the i30 N will be offered with a 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder petrol engine in two states of tune – 184kW/353Nm for the standard i30 N and 202kW/353Nm for the i30 N Performance – that propel the 1450kg hatch from zero to 100km/h in a claimed 6.4

and 6.2 seconds respectively.

This puts it ahead of the Golf GTI's 162kW/350Nm and 169kW/350Nm variants that cover the standing start sprint in 6.5 and 6.4 seconds.

Unlike the GTI, the i30 N will only be available with a six-speed manual gearbox at launch, with an alternative eight-speed dual-



clutch automatic transmission not expected to come on stream until 2019.

Hyundai Motor Company Australia (HMCA) has yet to set pricing, but logic suggests the i30N will be priced below the \$41,490 plus on-road costs Golf GTI and its \$47,990 Performance Edition.

When it comes, the i30N will be the only variant in the i30 range to come to Australia from Hyundai's Czech Republic factory, at least until other N cars such as the liftback "coupe" go into production.

Among the sporting features that set the N apart from its i30 brethren are launch control,

rev-matching gearbox shift, electronically controlled adjustable suspension and a driving control system with five modes – Eco, Normal, Sport, N and N Custom.

These modes control functions such as engine response, suspension settings, steering assistance, electronic stability control (ESC)

and even the rev-matching gear-change system.

The N setting ramps everything up to a Sports+ level that, apart from tightening all the settings, adds a crackling exhaust after-fire on turbo overrun. If you want more noise, the i30 N even comes with an electronic sound generator that produces "a sporty engine sound" from a

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gadget at the base of the windscreen.

For thrill-seekers, the ESC can be switched off.

Apart from extra power, the Performance version gets larger brakes, bigger 19-inch alloy wheels with Pirelli P-Zero tyres (the standard car has 18-inch alloys with Michelin rubber), as well as an electronically controlled limited-slip differential and variable exhaust valve system.

The latter turns the racket from the twin exhausts “from normal to decidedly powerful”.

To bolster body rigidity for high performance driving, an extra bar has been fitted across the body behind the rear seats.

Sitting several millimetres lower than the standard i30, the N-version’s variable suspension can be adjusted for everyday commuting, sports driving or track days.

If Hyundai’s Performance Blue exterior colour is not your preference, you can select from six others.

Inside, the sports seats are available in a choice of two trims – leather/suede or cloth.

The N logo is emblazoned on numerous items, including the steering wheel, gear knob and seats. A blue theme is carried through the cabin via stitching and markings on the gear knob and instruments. **MM**

Project manager

Jag's tarmac-tearing 441kW/700Nm
XE SV Project 8 not for Australia



By TUNG NGUYEN

AUSTRALIANS will miss out on Jaguar's most powerful road-going production model, as all 300 units of the 441kW/700Nm 5.0-litre supercharged V8 XE SV Project 8 will be built in left-hand drive.

To claim the title, Jaguar's Special Vehicles

Operations (SVO) team retuned the engine calibration software and upgraded intake and exhaust flow to liberate an additional 18kW from the engine that powers the F-Type SVR and limited-run Project 7.

The new-look front bumper is designed to feed cold air into the powerplant. The exhaust

system is replaced by a lightweight titanium unit with quad tailpipes, while the vented bonnet draws hot air from the engine bay.

With power being sent to all four wheels via an eight-speed Quickshift automatic transmission, acceleration from zero to 100km/h is said to be completed in 3.7 seconds

– just as quick as the aforementioned two-door F-Type SVR. Top speed is 322km/h.

The XE SV Project 8 easily out-muscles the current XE flagship, the S, which makes do with 250kW/450Nm from a supercharged 3.0-litre V6 for a 0-100km/h sprint time of 5.1s.

Jaguar fans hope the Project 8 might open



the door to an unlimited production version to compete against other high-performing mid-size European sedans including the BMW M3, Alfa Romeo Giulia QV, Mercedes-AMG C63 and yet-to-be-revealed new-generation Audi RS4.

Revealed at last month's Goodwood Festival of Speed, the XE SV Project 8 is easily distinguished from its standard siblings by its heavily reworked body and aerodynamic-improving accessories, with Jaguar claiming the only untouched body panels are the roof and front doors.

The front and rear wheel arches are flared 19mm and 55mm respectively to accommodate wider tyres, a new boot floor is installed to improve airflow through the rear diffuser and a manually adjustable boot-mounted rear spoiler is added for more downforce.

Light-weight carbon-fibre is used on the front and rear bumpers,

bonnet, diffuser and bodykit, cutting the vehicle weight to 1745kg, making Project 8 the lightest Jaguar V8-powered sedan.

A recalibrated automatic transmission can shift gears non-sequentially at 200 milliseconds.

An Electronic Active Differential (EAD) on the rear axle better manages torque split between wheels, while new race-derived suspension components aid both grip and height adjustmen.

Retuned electric power assisted steering (EPAS) delivers ease-of-operation and precision.

Jaguar breaks new ground with carbon ceramic brakes. Tucked behind the front 20x9.5 wheels are 400mm two-piece discs with six-piston aluminium callipers, while the monster 20x11 rear wheels hide 296mm discs with single-piston sliding callipers.

The XE SV Project 8 will be offered in two trims – the standard

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four-seat configuration and the optional Track Pack which deletes the rear pews – starting from £149,995 (\$A252,635) before on-roads in the UK.

In standard form, the latest Jaguar receives magnesium-framed front sports seats with Project 8 stitched into the headrests, while the two rear seats have been redesigned with increased lateral support and bolstering.

The dashboard is finished in black Alcantara to reduce sun glare, while the door trims and steering wheel are finished in

the same soft-touch material.

The Project 8 also features an all-digital 12.3-inch instrumentation display, 10.2-inch central infotainment unit with stopwatch and g-meter readings, an 11-speaker Meridan sound system, USB inputs, digital radio and Bluetooth connectivity. A CD/DVD player can be added as a no-cost option.

Customers opting for the Track Pack will receive carbon-fibre racing seats up front, saving 12.2kg over the standard pews, as well as four-point harnesses and a fire extinguisher. **MM**