The 2018 Cars Technica cars and SUVs of the year

Enlarge / In addition to all the new stuff we got to drive (see below), 2018 was the year we dove into the delightful world of Japanese imports.
Aurich Lawson

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Just as I finally got used to writing the date as 2018, it’s time to learn a whole new number. As is now traditional, the end of the year is an opportunity to remember some of the four-wheeled friends we made on this most recent trip around the sun. It was a busy 12 months for the Cars Technica gang—and we are officially a gang now.

Tim Lee has been responsible for some great coverage of Waymo, Uber, Cruise, and that whole autonomous driving thing. When she wasn’t busy holding the EPA’s feet to the fire or covering the growth of zero-emissions mass transit, Megan Geuss got to ride in Audi’s new battery electric vehicle before anyone else. Cyrus Farivar has done the old-school thing with some shoe-leather reporting on Tesla’s factory troubles. Sean Gallagher wrote his first (but not last) truck review, and Ars managing editor Eric Bangeman has gamely tested every SUV, crossover, and minivan we could get to Chicago.

As for me? I discovered I’m at peace with the fact that I’m not a professional racing driver, for one thing. My plan to travel by air less often didn’t work out so well—people are

welcome to buy trees in my name—but I did get to see some interesting new concept cars and, more importantly, drive some good new BEVs.

With all that automotive authority, these are the vehicles that impressed us most in 2018.

Hybrids, BEVs, PHEVs, and even a FCEV

- The Kia Niro: they call it a crossover, but I think it's a hatchback.
- Behold, the 2018 BMW 530e xDrive iPerformance. That's quite a mouthful!
  Elle Cayabyab Gitlin
- The 2018 Honda Clarity Plug-In Hybrid.
- The 2018 Chrysler Pacifica Hybrid
  Eric Bangeman
- The Toyota Prius Prime Advanced plug-in hybrid EV.
  Jim Resnick
- The 2018 Volvo XC60 T8.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The hottest version of the Volvo S60 is T8 Polestar Engineered. It's based on the T8 hybrid but with a smidgen more power and some golden go-faster bits.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The 2018 Porsche Panamera 4 E-Hybrid Sport Turismo; try saying that out loud ten times or crafting a catchy headline that includes it all but is no more than 70 characters in total.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Tesla's Model X.
  Jordan Golson
- The Jaguar I-Pace, my favorite of the current crop of BEVs
  Jonathan Gitlin

- The Audi e-tron under desert skies.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The Kona EV is relaxing to drive but does not demand you take it by the scruff and carve some canyons.
- The Hyundai Nexo FCEV was actually extremely good. But I remain unconvinced that H2 has a future.

These are the vehicles that most interest us here at Ars—and many of you, too, judging by the (often unnecessarily rude) comments in some of the discussion threads.

2018 was a good year for hybrids and EVs. The Kia Niro hybrid was surprisingly good—a trait it shares with its plug-in hybrid EV sibling, although you'll have to wait until next year to read about that one. BMW did a clever thing and priced its new 530e PHEV the same as its entry-level 530i. Meanwhile, Honda might have gotten a bit too clever with the Clarity PHEV, and Chrysler made a hybrid minivan with few compromises with the Pacifica.

We thought the Toyota Prius Prime could do with a bigger battery, a complaint that also applied to the Volvo XC60 T8 and S60 T8. Neither of those PHEV Volvos feel like they're packing 400hp, and they're not really much more efficient than the cheaper, less powerful, non-hybrid T6 versions, which therefore (sadly) remain our recommendations if you're shopping for a mid-sized Volvo. On the other hand, we'd definitely opt for the Porsche Panamera 4 E-Hybrid Sport Turismo over the non-electrified version.

2018 was also a good year for BEVs. We kicked things off in January with a review of the Tesla Model X P100D, which swallowed up the miles on a road trip. We also got some seat time in three other new BEV SUVs, each of which has its own niche. Jaguar's I-Pace remains my pick of the bunch, because it's the most fun to drive and I love the styling. The Audi e-tron is the most conventional, and be glad that its clever side-view cameras aren't allowed here in the US. And the

Hyundai Kona EV is darn good affordable BEV, even if it won't be coming to these shores in massive numbers.

Finally, we also got to drive Hyundai's Nexo, a hydrogen fuel cell EV that feels like you're piloting a Starfleet shuttlecraft. It might actually be my pick of the bunch, if not for the facts that Hyundai won't offer it outside of California. (Even if it did, the nearest H2 filling station to me is 400 miles away in Connecticut.)

Putting the *tech* in Cars Technica

- Delphi has equipped this VW Passat with one of its 48V mild hybrid systems, as well as modifying the engine to use its new Dynamic Skip Fire cylinder deactivation system.
  John F. Martin for Delphi
- The new 2019 Chevrolet Silverado will be available with this technology, which GM is calling Dynamic Fuel Management.
- Skyactiv-X from another angle.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The Skyactiv-X engine.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- An illustration of the variable-compression ratio technology.
- Super Cruising.

We definitely want to see more EVs on the road, but at the same time, we have to be realistic about the fact that plenty of people still want (or need) an internal combustion engine-powered vehicle. In light of that reality, it was encouraging to drive some new advances in ICE technology that each offer a meaningful boost in fuel efficiency.

There was Delphi's Dynamic Skip Fire system, which General Motors is adopting for its big V8s. Mazda did the (almost)

unthinkable and got gasoline compression ignition to work with its Skyactiv-X engine, and we tried out Nissan’s clever variable-compression-ratio engine in the Infiniti QX50 (and more recently the Nissan Altima, review to come).

But the coolest new automotive technology we sampled all year was definitely Cadillac’s Super Cruise semi-autonomous system. If we ran GM, Super Cruise would be available on every MY2020 vehicle it offers. For now: we don’t, and it isn’t.

Listing image by Eric Bangeman

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