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2017 ON WHEELS OUR PREDICTIONS

Every year, auto manufacturers introduce a whole host of features that change the way cars work, and how owners interact with them. This usually follows trends that are built up over the previous year, while newer trends make their way into the fold at the same time. This week, we look into the automotive crystal ball and state our predictions for the year ahead. If none of these actually happen, don't hold it against us because we're still recuperating from one of the worst years in recent human history. 2016, you will not be missed.

SHAER REAZ

HYUNDAI WILL BE A RISING GIANT IN THE LUXURY CAR MARKET

The South Korean manufacturer has been making waves in the executive segment in North America and elsewhere, undercutting Japanese rivals on price and offering bargains that are too difficult to ignore. 2016 was a year shaped by millennials in more ways than one, and their lack of badge snobbery in the face of logic

means Hyundai has gained significant traction in the market. Which is why, late last year, they announced the official formation of the Genesis brand which will be supplying bargain luxury vehicles to young CEOs. Will it beat the well-rooted Germans? If they play their cards right, yeah.



China will see a torrent of new manufacturers with competing USPs.

So far, China has not had a single major hit in the international auto market – just a plethora of carbon copies meant for domestic use. All that seems set to change with Lynk&Co, a company launched by the people with stakes in Volvo. They showed off a concept recently

that they are adamant they will build, complete with smartphone levels of sophistication. The 01 concept has a play store and offers an incredible level of personalisation touches, which if marketed right, could make Lynk&Co a force to be reckoned with.

Supercars will drive the efforts into efficient motoring through small, turbocharged hybrid engines.

Ford's seminal supercar, the GT, was revived in 2014 as a twin turbo, small displacement 3.5 litre V6. All the major hypercar manufacturers like McLaren, Ferrari and Porsche have some sort of hybrid system in place that ups efficiency. If an American manufacturer with a history of V8 obsession can switch to greener, efficient powertrain, more manufacturers can be expected to follow suit.



Traditionally Rear-Wheel-Drive performance cars will adopt more efficient All-Wheel-Drive instead.

Mercedes landed a shock on the world's auto enthusiasts with the new E63 AMG S, which comes with a hooliganism-check: All Wheel Drive. Even traditional American muscle car enthusiasts got the AWD shock therapy as well, as Dodge revealed their plans of making the Challenger muscle car in AWD. It's likely that more manufacturers who've shunned the idea of all four wheels turning under power will embrace it in the coming year. Lotus Elise AWD, perhaps?

Hydrogen Fuel Cell cars will finally have their fates sealed, although no one knows what that fate might be yet.

While other manufacturers run after electric vehicles in the pursuit of finding viable alternative fuel transportation, Toyota and a few others are staunchly striding towards Hydrogen. Toyota's Mirai has been on sale for a good while year, and 2017 brings with it important questions that must be answered if Hydrogen is to be the future – questions of a refueling infrastructure, cost of R&D, government regulations, and scaling up while keeping costs down. It truly is the year of reckoning for any manufacturer involved in alternative fuels.



You will know at least one person directly who owns a crossover SUV.

In 2006, sales of crossover vehicles made up more than 50% of SUV sales in North America. A decade on, every manufacturer from Honda to BMW to KIA have introduced crossover SUVs into their lineup. Crossovers are one of the most popular types of vehicles sold new in North America, with other markets in other regions catching up fast to the notion of practical, funky, comfortable and an all-rounder of a vehicle like Toyota's recently launched CH-R. Expect more in 2017.

Autonomous cars will undergo significant developments, inching towards showroom floors.



Google, Tesla, Hyundai and others are investing billions into removing the driver from the equation, and with pretty much the same formula utilised, it's all about making a system that is better than your rival's. Tesla's autopilot feature is already on the market, but counting the number of negative reports about it, seems like they'll have to put in a bit more work. Google's adoption of sensors combined with machine learning looks promising, but how feasible it'll be is the question.



Electric cars will be cheaper and thus actual alternatives to cars aimed at the average consumer.

Right now, electric cars that are not the limited-range Nissan Leaf will cost you a fortune to buy. Tesla, quickly turning into the measuring stick by which all other electric car attempts are judged,

has brought the Model 3 into the electric car ring, and is knocking everyone else down with its \$35k price tag. That's still pretty high, but consider the effortless range, unbelievable level of

equipment and overall quality that Tesla is now known for, and it'll quickly be clear that the Model 3 might be as significant for EVs as Ford's Model T was for the gasoline powered car.

Electric motorbikes will start catching on as a viable alternative.

Much of the past couple of years has been spent on the electric car debate, while the issue of fossil-fuel-powered two wheelers has largely been left alone. We imagine it'll be an issue addressed in 2017, with more manufacturers like Zero Motorcycles coming up with fun, torquey and electric offerings like the S ZF6.5.



The dashboard of the average car will have exponentially fewer buttons.



Volvo and Tesla have already rid their interiors of unnecessary switchgear, opting instead for a large tablet-like screen that hosts all the menus and all the options for the air-con and multimedia. As manufacturers try and streamline the experience of driving and riding their cars, one possible issue that arises is long term usability. It'll be pretty difficult to sell your Volvo V90 in 4-5 years' time if the central control screen has dead pixels on it.

An aftermarket tuning industry will evolve around electric cars, mostly Teslas.

Unplugged Performance and Brabus already have "tuned" versions of the Tesla Model S, but they've mostly focused on making the car's stance wider and bodywork more aggressive. However, we feel 2017 will be the year when the billion dollar aftermarket industry that caters to gasoline cars will turn to making electric cars faster around corners and even more juice for the straights.



The traditional instrument cluster will be digitalised, and thus better utilised.

Modern motoring is all about information – how fast you're burning fuel, how much tyre pressure you have at any given wheel, how long you have to wait till it's finally okay for you to snap and refuse to listen to Rebecca Black's new song any longer just because your kid cousin loves it. While the center console is being replaced by screens, the instrument cluster is more or less still analog. That's slowly changing, with Benz, Volvo and Lexus opting for digital instrumentation instead.

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