

# LA AUTO SHOW DEBUTANTS AND AN SUV CRAZY WORLD

*It's no secret that the worldwide automotive industry has found a nearly indestructible foothold in the form of the Sport Utility Vehicle and the various crossover platforms these hulking beasts have somehow spawned. Whether it's a good thing or not is seemingly not up for debate – SUVs are terrible for the environment, they're too large to be considered daily modes of transportation in packed urban environments and they sip fuel at a higher rate than anything else on the road. Or are they? Not surprisingly, the huge demand for SUVs has pushed manufacturers to sink increasing sums of money into making them more agile, more efficient and softer to the Earth and baby seals. It's a trend reflected on the auto show floors, as evidenced at the 2017 Los Angeles Auto Show. Here's our roundup of the SUVs and crossovers to keep an eye on.*

## Toyota FT-AC Concept

The latest in Toyota's FT series of concepts is this active urban and off-road tourer, with dollops of mobility and practicality. Toyota thinks the FT-AC can be quite popular in LA, provided the retro FJ Cruiser has done quite well there.



## Hyundai Kona

No, Hyundai has not decided to name their latest crossover after a fading pop singer from Bangladesh. The Kona takes the supposed youthful energy of potential buyers to the extreme with a zany design that is too messy to be cool and too ugly to be funky. But Hyundai's doing well, and bold designs like these show it.

## JEEP Wrangler

Nothing screams Muricaa like a proper Jeep crawling over rocks and wading into streams. JEEP renews the Wrangler flagship with new off-road assistance tech, much more efficient drivetrain and traditional Wrangler design. You can also personalize it with the best of Jeep's optional extras, which is yuuuuuge.



## Nissan Kicks

...kicks what? Footballs? Buttocks? Whatever it kicks, this small crossover looks to settle in cozily beneath the X-trail and Qashqai and alongside the Juke, offering more practicality and less controversial looks. We say that, but look at how hideously tall its roofline seems. It's like a small terrier with an abnormally large head.



## Infiniti QX50

The QX50 takes the rulebook for blocky, bulky SUV design and throws it out the window, rather working with smooth creases and cutsto deliver a sleek crossover that actually looks like something young people would want to buy. It'll also be loaded with traditional Infiniti tech, so that's another plus point for young'uns.

## Subaru Ascent

We know its descending in the picture, but bear with it. The Ascent takes Subaru's expertise with All Wheel Drive and applies it to a proper SUV after nearly a decade since the Forester registered on anyone's radar. The Forester was amazing, we hope the Ascent can go above and beyond it. Heh.



## Volvo XC40

Can Volvo's lineup get any better now? With the help of a small, urban-friendly crossover that takes after its bigger XC90 brother, it can. The XC40 brings a touch of class to the often garish crossover-SUV segment, with a focus on finely crafted materials and elegant Swedish design to deliver an astounding ownership experience.



## Volkswagen Tiguan

The Tiguan has been a moderate sales success beside the larger Touareg, and the new one takes sharp design cues and efficient drivetrain to the US market. Will it be able to counter the effect of the Dieselgate scandal? Turns out people don't really care – Volkswagen Group is still going fairly strong in North America.

## Lincoln Nautilus

Named after Captain Nemo's famed submarine from Journey to the Centre of the Earth and the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, the Lincoln Nautilus joins the smaller MKC crossover as part of Lincoln's renewed efforts at making the American SUV cool again, like the heyday of the Navigator.



## TEST DRIVE

# TOYOTA SAI

Toyota has gone crazy with hybrids. There's a hybrid version of pretty much every car they make, from the bare bones Axio to the Mercedes rivalling Crown. On the luxury front, they've peddled the Camry hybrid globally, while hybrid cars made by the Lexus sub-brand are becoming increasingly popular. That leaves room for obscure models like this, the Toyota Sai.

Never heard of it? Neither did I, until I actually drove it. The Sai is a Japan only model that slots in between the Camry and the Lexus ES, with a sister car badged the Lexus HS. Produced for only a few years from 2010 to 16, the Sai is, at best, an odd blend of entry-level equipment and high-end finish and materials. It doesn't come with a lot of goodies, but you'll get stitched leather, comfortable padded seats and a futuristic interior with uncharacteristic-of-Toyota ergonomics. If you don't know what that entails, here's a taste – it took me about half a minute to figure out where the electronic parking brake button is, and about ten seconds to decipher what direction to push the tiny gear lever to get it into Drive. However, drive it does, and well. With a



2.4 litre four cylinder motor and the supplementary electric motors, the hybrid drivetrain pushes the Sai forward with surprising urgency. In Sport mode, the throttle is nearly a hair trigger – launching forward the sleek and futuristic nose of the obscure

mid-size sedan. With a combined power output of 187 HP and about 108 lb-ft torque, the Sai isn't particularly powerful but it makes up for it in responsiveness. The only downsides happen to be the whiny drone of the CVT gearbox and the weight of the vehi-

cle, a fact that makes itself known quite clearly through the heavy but heavily assisted steering. Visibility over the massive dashboard and the steeply raked front end is a minor annoyance what maneuvering in Dhaka traffic.



Practicality is decent. The rear legroom is not as generous as that of the Camry, but it's a definite step up from the Allions and Premios. Boot space gets eaten up by the battery pack nestled between the trunk and the rear seats. Cubbyholes, cup-holders and pockets are aplenty, but the high and wide floating center console takes up a huge amount of space. It's not that it looks great either, and the weirdly placed buttons make me ask questions of why Toyota thought this would be an effective design.

It's quiet, especially in EV mode. The regenerative brakes make a fair amount of noise when pressed, but other than that, the hybrid powertrain and the well-insulated interior make the Sai a nice place to be in. For the price you pay you could get a lot more, but in the Sai you'd be one of the very few people who can truly claim to be an exclusive Toyota owner.

Nippon Auto Trading provided this particular unit to us for a test drive.