



# Dream drive event delivers much data

By Joe Sage Photos: Doug Berger and Bailey O'Bar for NWAPA

We cover 455 mountain, river and high plains miles in Washington State and Oregon over three days in 24 top trim performance vehicles worth a total of \$1.96 million and bearing 8870 horsepower



**R**un to the Sun is an annual event of NWAPA (the Northwest Automotive Press Association), a professional media organization in the Pacific Northwest, of which we are an outlier member. This was our sixth year participating. Routes comprise two-lanes through canyons, mountains, lava fields and historic Western towns, much like the Arizona high country (though there is more water up there, not least the mighty Columbia River). The vehicles are also very much in line with tastes in our state, making this event a solid bellwether for Arizona buyers.

The event is a statistician's dream, with many ways to total and compare prices, horsepower, fuel mileage and other key attributes for 24 vehicles in four categories.

There are also 24 drivers, a key distinguishing element of this event. Whereas most media comparos happen at a fixed location (track, off-road course and/or driving loop), most have wildly mismatched numbers of cars and drivers, more vehicles than it's mathematically possible to drive in a given period of time, bottlenecks around some vehicles and neglect around others, NWAPA Run to the Sun has a predetermined rotation of vehicles and drivers along a rally-style route of around 500 miles. Each driver is guaranteed to drive each vehicle—for a fulfilling period of time on a challenging route demonstrating real world performance. The driving and analytical opportunities this provides are unmatched.

Manufacturers enter vehicles they feel offer core appeal in Performance Coupe, Performance SUV, Convertible and Performance Sedan categories. Each is generally a high-powered model, an enhanced body style, a special edition or all of the above.

### Time-Distance-Speed stats

The 24 segments of our route varied in length from eight miles (for which we had the Volvo XC90) to 39, the first leg from the airport to the hotel (for us, in the Hyundai Veloster N). The longest regular legs were two 26-milers (for us, in the Polaris Slingshot SLR and the Ford Explorer ST).

The route book's estimated times for the 24 legs ran from 14 minutes to 35 minutes (or 50 for that airport-to-hotel leg). Some legs have more highway, some more twisties, so time and distance do not run hand-in-glove. The shortest estimated time leg was for us 11 miles in the Kia Stinger, while the longest estimated time legs (not count-

ing the Day 1 hotel run) were for us in the Explorer ST and the Slingshot (the only one that matched its rankings for both distance and estimated time).

From that information, it's simple to calculate average speed, though a little misleading, with slow motion in and out of staging areas. But we can still compare. An eight-mile run up a twisty 689-foot climb from Antelope to Shaniko, Oregon averaged just 32.0 mph based on route book distance and estimated time (we ran this in the 400-hp Volvo XC90). The fastest segment, calculated at 57.6 mph per route book time and distance, was a 24-mile run from Mill Creek Bridge to the Madras Airport—beautiful open two-lanes (also reportedly populated by purpose-built state troopers), quick even with the last few miles local and slow. For this, we had the 505-hp Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio.

### Horsepower-Price stats overall

Although every vehicle in this event is performance- and/or fun-oriented, there is plenty of variety in power. Only three little convertibles had under 200 hp. Sixteen vehicles ranged through the 200s to 400s. Five vehicles were above 500 hp, including two SUVs, two coupes and one sedan.

And although each is a top trim of some sort, there is plenty of variety in price. By base price, four were under \$30 grand and four were in six digits (topped by a \$327,000 base Rolls-Royce, the other three each 100-and-something). Price-attested range mostly runs in parallel, with exceptions—such as the least expensive base price of all (\$21,290 for the Fiat) jumping up into the \$40s (and eighth overall) when outfitted. Only two remained in the \$20s at this point, though the Slingshot nudged over \$30k by a hair only when its destination charge was included. Add-ons pushed the Lexus above a \$100,000 total price, while Rolls-Royce options added over \$100k to its price.

The core mission is an immersive experience with each vehicle. But at the end, each driver also votes for a "Most Fun" vehicle in each category, as well as one overall (the voting aspect was added just a couple of years ago).

Each driver's insertion point into their first car is different, but the overall sequence is the same for all, carefully choreographed for meaningful relativity within each category by event organizers.

Our narrative blends the universal sequence with how it fell for us individually—thus starting with our last two coupes from Day 3, then moving to the first coupe we drove on Day 1, continuing into Day 2 and keeping that category together.

MPG is highway (with one MPGe-combined, as noted). Prices are for base and ours as driven. Models are 2019 or 2020 as noted for each.

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## PERFORMANCE COUPES

**HP RANGE:** 275-755 (avg 468.3)  
**BASE PRICE RANGE:** \$26,900-\$327,000  
 (avg \$100,145 or \$62,336 without Rolls-Royce)  
**AS DRIVEN \$ RANGE:** \$29,920-\$427,875  
 (avg \$122,698 or \$71,835 without Rolls-Royce)

*Note: Each driver arrives at the Portland Airport and dives into their first car at a predetermined point in the overall sequence. (Only four out of 24 people would happen to start with the first vehicle in any given category.) For us, the event began with car number three in the Performance Coupes category, Hyundai Veloster N, and ended, at the end of Day Three, with the first two in the coupe group as our last two driven. (It all makes sense if you visualize the two ends knit together on kind of a Mobius strip.) We're inserting those "first two" here, to give you the complete set all in a row.*

*("First two" coupes, driven at end of Day 3)*

**Dodge Challenger R/T Scat Pack WB (2019)**  
**485 hp / 24 mpg hwy**.....\$39,245 / \$56,600

The diverse Dodge Challenger lineup ranges from a \$27,295 rear-drive SXT up to the staggering 797-hp SRT Hellcat Redye at \$69,650, with GT and R/T trims and a couple of all-wheel-drive models along the way—a major achievement of which is keeping the prices usefully stair-stepped through them all. Most are in the upper \$20s to upper \$30s, followed by a \$20-30k jump into the SRT Hellcats—which puts the R/T Scat Pack at a very sweet spot, top dog just shy of the Hellcat price jump. It is accordingly popular. Ours adds \$15k or so in options, notably the Widebody treatment (\$6000 to mimic the much pricier Hellcat), as well as a wide range of creature comforts and tech/entertainment features. "Sublime" paint is literally the icing on the cake. Our next-to-last car

on Day 3, this 485-hp Challenger gave us a solid run on I-84 along the Columbia River back toward Portland.

**Toyota GR Supra (2020)**  
**335 hp / 31 mpg hwy**.....\$55,250 / \$57,375

One of the most anticipated cars of the new model year, you can read about the GR Supra in depth, including the history of the Supra lineup and its rebirth, from its reveal at Barrett-Jackson in Arizona in January, in our March-April issue. With Supra's base price carefully kept below \$50k, our sample at Run to the Sun was one of just 1500 Launch Edition models at \$55,250, which brings you details from 19-inch forged matte black alloy wheels and red mirror caps, to your choice of black, white or in our case Renaissance Red paint. Dramatic styling, sophisticated suspension and above-30-mpg fuel mileage aside, Supra's defining attribute is its adherence to the badge's inline-6 engine heritage. As our last vehicle in the event—a nice finish—we didn't get to put Supra's suspension and handling to much of a test on the last stretch of I-84 to Gresham, but we enjoyed its 335 horses.

## Day 1...

*Upon our arrival in Portland, our particular rotation saw us start the event in what is officially the third of seven Performance Coupes—a category ranging overall from 275 to 755 horsepower and from \$29,920 to \$427,875, price as tested. A one-vehicle day, Day 1 comprised an afternoon drive segment from the airport to our overnight spot along the Columbia River on the Washington State side.*

*(The third coupe, our first car on Day 1)*

**Hyundai Veloster N (2019)**  
**275 hp / 28 mpg hwy**.....\$26,900 / \$29,920

We first drove the Veloster N at its launch event, held at Thunderhill Raceway, north of Sacramento, and through-

out that region. It's the first of a new N performance series from Hyundai, building on an extensive, successful rally heritage. We think of it first in the signature Performance Blue paint used on their World Rally Championship cars, though red, black and white are also available. And the Ultra Black paint with strategic red highlights on our event car was a knockout—a Batmobile for under \$30 grand. The extra long first leg has everything from Interstates to a Columbia River bridge to a twisty two-lane up to our hotel—and the Veloster N's 275 hp were quite potent for its 3100-or-so pounds (25 more horses than the standard Veloster, a ten percent boost, enough to move the car fully four spots higher among the 24 vehicles in this event). One of many engineering triumphs is a total absence of front-drive torque steer.

## Day 2...

*For our longest drive day, with fifteen segments, we resumed with the other four Performance Coupes, then moved on to all the Convertibles, all the Performance SUVs, then just the first of the Performance Sedans, before the day was done.*

*(Day 2: Performance Coupes cont'd)*

**Rolls-Royce Wraith Black Badge (2019)**  
**624 hp / 18 mpg hwy**.....\$327,000 / \$427,875

While Rolls-Royce stands apart by virtue of its price, their regular participation really sets the tone for the whole overall event in many ways. Wraith is a standout in their lineup—a sleek beauty with just two doors (hinged at the rear, opening like a flower or a voracious beast, depending upon your point of view), priced more than \$100,000 lower than the Phantom. We've felt a bit

### PERFORMANCE COUPES SORTED LOWEST TO HIGHEST BY PRICE AND POWER

	\$ BASE	\$ AS TESTED	HP
<b>Veloster</b> ..... <b>Veloster</b> ..... <b>Veloster</b>	\$26,900	\$29,920	275 hp
<b>370Z</b> ..... <b>370Z</b> ..... <b>370Z</b>	\$35,070	\$38,855	332 hp
<b>Challenger</b> ..... <b>Challenger</b> ..... <b>Supra</b>	\$39,245	\$56,600	335 hp
<b>Supra</b> ..... <b>Supra</b> ..... <b>Lexus</b>	\$55,250	\$57,375	472 hp
<b>Lexus</b> ..... <b>Lexus</b> ..... <b>Challenger</b>	\$96,650	\$106,185	485 hp
<b>Corvette</b> ..... <b>Corvette</b> ..... <b>Rolls-Royce</b>	\$120,900	\$142,075	624 hp
<b>Rolls-Royce</b> ..... <b>Rolls-Royce</b> ..... <b>Corvette</b>	\$327,000	\$427,875	755 hp

**WINNER: "MOST FUN COUPE"**  
**2020 Toyota GR Supra**

## PERFORMANCE COUPES

*Category drive sequence (at right, top to bottom):*

**2019 Dodge Challenger R/T Scat Pack Widebody**

**2020 Toyota GR Supra**

**2019 Hyundai Veloster N**

**2019 Rolls-Royce Wraith Black Badge**

**2020 Lexus RC F Track Edition**

**2020 Nissan 370Z Sport A/T Special 50th Anniv Ed**

**2019 Chevrolet Corvette ZR1 Coupe**



ostentatious driving big Phantom sedans around metro Phoenix, but on open desert two-lanes, that all quickly faded away, as it also does in the inland Northwest, in what EPA calls a midsize car. Black Badge is described as being for the "darkly obsessed," for the "creature of the night." In Arctic White, ours didn't seem sinister, and it still benefits from Black Badge 21-inch alloy wheels, aerospace-grade carbon fiber composite surfacing and Mugello Red leather highlights in its black interior. The Black Badge also pushes the 624-hp engine's torque from 590 up to 642 lb-ft. The car is both blissful and potent.

**Lexus RC F Track Edition (2020)**  
**472 hp / 24 mpg hwy**.....\$96,650 / \$106,185

Weeklong drives we've had in the LFA-supercar-inspired rear-drive Lexus RC in Arizona include the discontinued turbo-4 RC 200t with horsepower in the 200s (and highway mileage in the 30s), V6 models up to the 350 F Sport with power in the 300s, and the naturally aspirated V8 RC F with power in the 400s. Prices for V6 models run from the low to high \$40s for most, with F Sport models slightly topping \$50k. Some V6 models also offer all-wheel drive. The V8 RC F is a \$64,900 luxury animal—lightweight and enhanced for 2020, with more carbon fiber, aluminum, chassis stiffness, throttle response and V8 engine acoustics. Our car here sits above even that—the RC F Track Edition shaves more weight and adds launch control, bringing its zero-to-60 time from 4.2 seconds down to just 3.96. Recognizable by its carbon fiber hood and big rear wing, inside by Circuit Red leather seats with Alcantara accents, red carbon fiber trim and red carpets, Track Edition comes in Ultra White or Matte Nebula Gray (our example) and sits around \$100,000.

**Nissan 370Z Sport A/T 50th Anniv Ed (2020)**  
**332 hp / 26 mpg hwy**.....\$35,070 / \$38,855

A move straight from the second-most-expensive to the second-least-expensive car in this group does not leave us wanting when it's the Z-car, which has maintained its personality and position through many decades of evolution, arguably currently bearing the highest degree of its original spirit since the original. What more appropriate than a 50th Anniversary Edition honoring exactly that—adding personality, pizzazz and collectibility, while keeping the price close to traditional Z-car altitude. The special package, with either a 6-speed manual or pricier 7-speed automatic transmission (ours had the automatic) adds two-color exterior (white with red, like ours, or silver with black), color-keyed wheels, 50th badging on front, rear and sides, upgraded leather power seats, Alcantara steering wheel, and 50th badging on the tach, carpeting and kickplates—all for \$2600.

**Chevrolet Corvette ZR1 Coupe (2019)**  
**755 hp / 20 mpg hwy**.....\$120,900 / \$142,075

We spent a swan song week with a C7 Corvette Grand Sport in Arizona just prior to the July reveal of the new mid-engine C8 (see our July/August issue) and were excited to hear Corvette was entered in the event. Would this be the C8? Despite our high hopes, the swan would sing again, but what a song—a ZR1. The 2019 Stingray

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**CHALLENGER:** 485 hp / 24 mpg hwy  
 \$39,245 base / as tested \$56,600



**SUPRA:** 335 hp / 31 mpg hwy  
 \$55,250 base / as tested \$57,375



**VELOSTER N:** 275 hp / 28 mpg hwy  
 \$26,900 base / as tested \$29,920



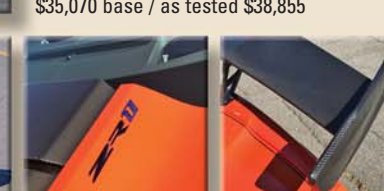
**ROLLS-ROYCE WRAITH:** 624 hp / 18 mpg hwy  
 \$327,000 base / as tested \$427,875



**LEXUS RC F:** 472 hp / 24 mpg hwy  
 \$96,650 base / as tested \$106,185



**NISSAN 370Z:** 332 hp / 26 mpg hwy  
 \$35,070 base / as tested \$38,855



**CORVETTE ZR1 (C7):** 755 hp / 20 mpg hwy  
 \$120,900 base / as tested \$142,075

starts at just \$55,900 (the C8 will also beat \$60k), with trims up to the low \$70s, then jumps to \$80,900 for the Z06, then to \$123k for the supercharged ZR1—or topping \$142 with our sample's creature comfort, tech and track performance packages. Its removable top could have put it with Convertibles, but it ran with the Coupes. Its Sebring Orange paint and carbon fiber highlights including its rear wing turned heads wherever it went.

#### GROUP ANALYSIS: PERFORMANCE COUPES

Our Coupe-splitting rotation meant we managed to both launch and wrap the whole event within this lustworthy group. Veloster is lowest in both power and price (both base and as-tested), a leader in the "buck" quotient of the bang-for-the-buck formula. Two others start in the \$30s (370Z and Challenger) add some more "bang" to those relatively modest bucks, at 335 and a whopping 485 hp, respectively, even if you don't build your Challenger up into the \$50s as our example did (none of which added to its power). Supra holds its \$50s turf, as promised at launch, though with power about the same as the Z-car's. For power approaching Challenger's, you're around \$100k in the Lexus RC F. Corvette of course starts out with far more affordable models, so the high-hp (755), high-dollar (the price of a decent condo) ZR1 halo car is appropriately here mostly to show off. The Rolls has fewer horses than the Corvette, but it's still massively powerful, and its price (that of a decent house) is only a topic of conversation for those who aren't buying.

#### AWARD: "MOST FUN COUPE"

2020 Toyota GR Supra

## PERFORMANCE SUVs

**HP RANGE:** 228-577 (avg 397.0)  
**BASE PRICE RANGE:** \$37,900-\$147,500 (avg \$122,029)  
**AS DRIVEN \$ RANGE:** \$46,795-\$172,195 (avg \$85,124)

#### Mercedes-AMG G63 (2019)

**577 hp / 15 mpg hwy**.....\$147,500 / \$172,195  
 This was our third direct encounter so far this year with the Mercedes G Class. We drove the Mercedes-Benz G550 at NWAPA's off-road-centric Mudfest event this

spring, had the Mercedes-AMG G63 for a week in Arizona this summer (featured in our Sept/Oct issue)—and now this. This is a very popular vehicle in Arizona, and an AMG version is always going to be the most popular of all. Its form factor may make it look clunky to the uninitiated, but it hugs the road like any AMG performer. And with 577 hp, it quickly leaves the road behind. (Surprisingly, the AMG's off-road specs are almost the same as the G550's, which is to say exceptional.) Built for the military, perfect for the country club, brawny, capable, showy and elegant—the G dominates its turf.

#### Ford Explorer ST 4WD (2020)

**400 hp / 24 mpg hwy**.....\$54,740 / \$59,915  
 Ford Explorer is all new for 2020 (see the reveal feature in our Feb/March issue). The most notable in a litany of notables could be its return to a rear-drive platform for the first time in a decade—fundamentally better for stopping, better for going, better for cornering, in our opinion. As such, Ford has introduced a performance version, the Explorer ST—unexpectedly, perhaps, to the mainstream SUV buyer, but perfect for Run to the Sun (and in line with the other performance SUVs here, proof of a market hungry for such beasts). This hot Explorer, ours in Rapid Red (one of its few options, \$395) gets its 400 hp from a 3.0L EcoBoost V6, a variant of the powerplants that have quickly (and initially surprisingly) become top sellers in the F-150 pickup line.

#### Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio AWD (2019)

**505 hp / 23 mpg hwy**.....\$80,245 / \$94,340  
 The second most powerful SUV in this group (by just 12.5 percent) and second most expensive (by about 45 percent both base and total), the Alfa SUV delivers, on paper, a notable bang for the buck at the upper end of the seven vehicles in this set. Add to that its sexy Italian sheet metal, here lathered in Alfa Rosso red paint, then cap it off with high-performance, high-luxe Quadrifoglio trim, and it's a head-turner that you'd best turn your head quickly to catch. Despite its pedigree, several options are required to bring it up to our test vehicle's spec—upgraded Brembo brakes leading the pack (\$8000), AWD (\$1200) and a few others. We've driven this a number of

times, and its sports car DNA runs deep—it hasn't met a twisty road it doesn't want to dive right into.

#### MINI JCW Countryman ALL4 (2019)

**228 hp / 30 mpg hwy**.....\$37,900 / \$50,610  
 Since Arizona has plenty of backcountry and off-road opportunities, we've always had a sweet spot for the Countryman ALL4 among the many MINIs in the market. And with plenty of smooth freeways, Interstates and mountain two-lanes, we also have a sweet spot for John Cooper Works (JCW) builds of any MINI model. This entry—resplendent in logos and badging from a special cross-country tour—has it all in one package. Its base price is the lowest in the group, though as outfitted it bumps up to second place, while its highway fuel mileage is the highest apart from Volvo with its complex hybrid powertrain. MINI's horsepower is the lowest here, but you won't notice this behind the wheel—it delivers the oft-noted "go-kart" thrills of all MINIs, with AWD to mitigate torque steer we've noted in their front-drivers.

#### Acura RDX SH-AWD A-Spec (2020)

**272 hp / 26 mpg hwy**.....\$45,800 / \$46,795  
 Acura brought the smaller of their two SUVs, the two-row RDX, which starts at \$37,600 for the base trim with rear-wheel drive—but in SH-AWD (Super Handling All-Wheel-Drive, for four-wheel grip plus cornering and handling control) and with their A-Spec Package (\$3000), which automatically also adds a Tech Package (\$3200). A-Spec is mostly about tech, style and comfort, though 20-inch wheels, sport pedals, gloss black spoiler and A-Spec exhaust outlets all speak to a performance look and feel. (An available Advance Package, not on ours, includes the above and adds an additional array of tech, style and comfort features at \$4900, but this includes A-Spec, so is really just a \$1900 differential from our sample—and worth a look). All have the same powertrain.

PERFORMANCE SUVs SORTED LOWEST TO HIGHEST BY PRICE AND POWER			
	\$ BASE	\$ AS TESTED	HP
MINI	.....Acura	.....MINI	
\$37,900	.....\$46,795	.....228 hp	
Acura	.....MINI	.....Acura	
\$45,800	.....\$50,610	.....272 hp	
Ford	.....Ford	.....Ford	
\$54,740	.....\$59,915	.....400 hp	
Volvo	.....Volvo	.....Volvo	
\$67,500	.....\$86,890	.....400 hp	
Alfa	.....Alfa	.....Alfa	
\$80,245	.....\$94,340	.....505 hp	
AMG	.....AMG	.....AMG	
\$147,500	.....\$172,195	.....577 hp	

**WINNER: "MOST FUN SUV"**  
 2019 Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio AWD



## PERFORMANCE SUVs

Category drive sequence (at right, top to bottom):

#### 2019 Mercedes-AMG G63

#### 2020 Ford Explorer ST 4WD

#### 2019 Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio AWD

#### 2019 MINI John Cooper Works Countryman ALL4

#### 2020 Acura RDX SH-AWD A-Spec

#### 2020 Volvo XC90 T8 E-AWD Inscription



#### Volvo XC90 T8 E-AWD Inscription (2020)

**400 comb hp / 55 mpg comb**.....\$67,500 / \$86,890  
 The Volvo XC90 has won awards wherever it goes, from day one. Beautiful and useful in its own right, it goes a big step further with the T8 Twin Engine Drive-E powertrain, combining a 2.0L turbocharged and supercharged four-cylinder engine (313 hp) with an electric motor (87 hp) for a combined 400 hp and 472 lb-ft of torque. Our sample also sports top-level Inscription trim (including AWD, which is an option on lower trims). This XC90 T8 approaches double the cost of the lowest-priced vehicle in this group, but it also approaches double the horsepower, double the seating and almost four times the fuel economy at the low end in the various ranges. The T8 version also approaches double the horsepower of a standard-powertrain XC90 (400 vs 250) and more than double (approaching triple) its fuel mileage. The vehicle includes an extensive suite of IntelliSafe safety technology features, enough to fill its own 22-page brochure.

#### GROUP ANALYSIS: PERFORMANCE SUVs

Some of these are fairly mainstream SUVs, while some are fairly rare exotics, while even the more mainstream brands are all higher-badged performance models—as is typical for this event. The killer AMG version of the durable-duty Mercedes G-Wagen is the only one over \$100 grand, though the Alfa Quadrifoglio nudges that mark as driven. This group is one example of base and as-built prices crisscrossing, with the MINI jumping from its only-one-under-\$30k base position to second place by price as driven. Acura's price is, as usual, complete at base except for destination charge. Ford's sporty Explorer also keeps option prices under control. Above those are three whose buyers probably don't particularly flinch at the tally as options are added.

#### AWARD: "MOST FUN SUV"

2019 Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio AWD

## CONVERTIBLES

**HP RANGE:** 164-270 (avg 197.0)  
**BASE PRICE RANGE:** \$21,290-\$38,395 (avg \$30,507)  
**AS DRIVEN \$ RANGE:** \$30,994-\$52,015 (avg \$40,915)

*One of our favorite stops at Run to the Sun the past few years is the tiny high plains town of Shaniko (where we also have an ice cream break). Last year, we blasted out of there in the highest-horsepower vehicle of the event, the Hellcat Redeye, heading to the next leg, at 26 miles tied as the longest of the event, not counting the atypical first segment from airport to hotel. This is a top-of-the-world route, all to ourselves with an open throttle through long straightaways, surprise corners and twisty canyon stretches—also one of our favorites. This year, it was our first leg of the four-vehicle Convertibles category.*

#### Polaris Slingshot SLR (2019)

**173 hp / 20-28 est mpg hwy** .....\$29,999 / \$30,994  
 First in the Convertibles category was a genre-bending entry, the Polaris Slingshot SLR, the upper of two primary models (and for \$1000 more, there's a third one

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AMG G63: 577 hp / 15 mpg hwy  
 \$147,500 base / as tested \$172,195



EXPLORER ST: 400 hp / 24 mpg hwy  
 \$54,740 base / as tested \$59,915



MINI JCW: 228 hp / 30 mpg hwy  
 \$37,900 base / as tested \$50,610



ACURA RDX: 272 hp / 26 mpg hwy  
 \$45,800 base / as tested \$46,795



VOLVO XC90: 400 comb hp / 55 mpg comb  
 \$67,500 base / as tested \$86,890



that adds a taller windshield and a sunshade canopy). Part three-wheel car, part motorcycle, part drag racer, part corner carver, this vehicle's striking appearance always turns heads, and it's a flat-out blast to pilot. Whether a convertible by definition or not, it is most definitely an open vehicle. Set among others in a comparo, it may or may not help with the typical decision on a convertible purchase of your own, but however you categorize it, it is sure to inspire you. If your whole purpose in an open car is to be one with the road, wind and sky, this gets you closer to the original classic convertible formula than even the original classic formula itself.

**Mazda MX-5 Miata Club RF (2019)**  
181 hp / 34 mpg hwy.....\$32,345 / \$38,955

To generalize hardly at all, nobody doesn't like the Mazda MX-5 Miata. Born in the late 1980s as a rebirth of the original classic affordable roadster formula, in an era short on ragtops, it has stayed close to its roots for three decades and counting. Mazda offered a fully retractable hardtop a few years back (basically indistinguishable from the soft-top and occupying virtually no trunk space when down). The fourth-generation Miata, now finishing its fourth year, has instead offered this Retractable Fastback (RF) model, for about \$6600 (or 25.7 percent) more. It still delivers solid roof security, but somewhat forgoes the wind-in-your-hair, bugs-in-your-teeth roadster experience, becoming more like a T-top (or the Corvette in this event, which was entered as a coupe). You can still choose a wide-open soft-top roadster (\$25,730), but you can't get both experiences from one car. Beyond that, the RF delivers near perfect front/rear weight distribution with a mix of cocoon and open air abandon.

**Fiat 124 Spider Abarth (2019)**  
164 hp / 36 mpg hwy.....\$29,290 / \$41,695

The lowest-base-priced, highest-mpg entry in this whole event is also really the only conventional convertible in the category—a raise-it-up-lower-it-down ragtop covered open car, a two-seater in classic roadster format, to boot. That base price climbs noticeably in our example,

though not as dramatically as it seems at first glance (\$20s to \$40s is actually just \$10,910 before destination charge). Brembo brakes (\$2195) are the only directly driving-related add-on; the rest are comfort, convenience, tech and entertainment—and those could be skipped by a sports car purist, who may view the car as its own best entertainment. In fact, the Fiat 124 Spider starts at \$25,440, but the extra \$3850 for an Abarth brings you more than your money's worth of sporty upgrades.

**Jeep Wrangler Unlimited Sahara 4x4 (2019)**  
270 hp / 24 mpg hwy.....\$38,395 / \$52,015

Some people would not think of a Jeep Wrangler first when shopping for convertibles. Then again, some would. Nonetheless, it seems an innovative entry, till you realize it offers more open air for more people than any other in the category. It also offers the most horsepower by far, via its new 2.0L direct injection eTorque turbo four-cylinder engine, which also offers decent fuel mileage for its higher size, weight and capacity among the group. Wrangler also offers more ways to vary your open or closed cockpit than any of the others—or than any others you can think of, really. And of course it's the only one with dead serious off-road chops. Top that off with the vastly upgraded suspension and handling of the new-in-2018 Wrangler JL, and you'll find it's also a champ on the paved open road, as we utilized it at this event.

**GROUP ANALYSIS: CONVERTIBLES**

This group of just four is evidence that Run to the Sun—originally an all-convertibles event—has evolved over time, as has the marketplace. There are convertibles available with far more power and far higher prices than the set entered at this event (think AMG, for example, and compare with their sedan entry below). Jeep is the only one in this group above 200 hp, considerably above, approaching 300, and this from its fuel-frugal new 4-cylinder turbocharged engine. But while even the Performance categories end up voting for “Most Fun” winners, and the Convertibles category is simply voted for “Most Fun in the Sun,” all convertible entries turned out to be

on the very affordable side (the base price average is \$30k, as built about \$40k). A couple definitely bent the envelope a bit on the conventional definition of a convertible. This set may not be quite what is expected by the buyer who is seeking relatively for their “what convertible should I buy?” question. But it definitely helps them think outside the box. Voting could have gone any which way on this group, depending upon people's interpretations of “convertible” and “fun in the sun,” but it went, perhaps somewhat ironically, to the only one that doesn't open up to the outdoors completely.

**AWARD: “MOST FUN IN THE SUN”**

**2019 Mazda MX-5 Miata Club RF**

**PERFORMANCE SEDANS**

**HP RANGE:** 228-630 (avg 346.0)  
**BASE PRICE RANGE:** \$27,795-\$159,000 (avg \$56,300)  
**AS DRIVEN \$ RANGE:** \$28,985-\$184,285 (avg \$61,629)

*This group of seven specially outfitted sedans includes just two front-drivers. The rest are AWD, whether built off a front- or rear-drive basis.*

**Honda Civic Type R Touring (2019)**  
306 hp / 28 mpg hwy.....\$35,700 / \$36,620

There's Honda Civic—the now aggressively styled but generally modest and efficient sedan or coupe—and then there's Honda Civic Type R sedan, a tour de force of power and handling built upon that same unassuming package. Unassuming it's not, with air dams, rear wing, huge brakes, red highlights and other details—and this suits its driving personality perfectly. We were among the first to drive this model, at Run to the Sun a couple of years ago, and we spent a week with it at home in Arizona last year (see “Built from the Inside Out,” in our March/April 2018 issue). Power is mid-pack (or toward the upper end if you exclude the over-the-top AMG GT sedan), and its price is second-to-lowest—and as a Honda, the whole deal is baked in at base price. A front-driver, it demonstrates virtually no torque steer feel.

CONVERTIBLES SORTED LOWEST TO HIGHEST BY PRICE AND POWER		
\$ BASE	\$ AS TESTED	HP
Fiat.....Mazda.....Fiat	\$21,290.....\$38,955.....	164 hp
Slingshot.....Slingshot.....Slingshot	\$29,999.....\$30,994.....	173 hp
Mazda.....Fiat.....Mazda	\$32,345.....\$41,695.....	181 hp
Jeep.....Jeep.....Jeep	\$38,395.....\$52,015.....	270 hp

**WINNER: “MOST FUN IN THE SUN”**  
**2019 Mazda MX-5 Miata Club RF**



**CONVERTIBLES**

*Category drive sequence (at right, top to bottom):*

**2019 Polaris Slingshot SLR**

**2019 Mazda MX-5 Miata Club RF**

**2019 Fiat 124 Spider Abarth**

**2019 Jeep Wrangler Unlimited Sahara 4x4**



**Day 3...**

*The final day had eight legs, versus 14 the day before, but this is a half day, wrapping up at lunch in Gresham, Oregon (with a final drive or ride to the airport accomplished different ways by different people). After one sedan at the end of Day 2, Day 3 brought us the other six, then two Performance Coupes (sliced from the top of the official sequence and placed at the end in our rotation).*

*(Day 3: Performance Sedans cont'd)*

**Volkswagen Arteon 2.0T SEL R-Line w/ 4MOTION (2019)**  
268 hp / 27 mpg hwy.....\$43,560 / \$44,555

A new vehicle this year, though also an evolution of the prior Volkswagen CC, the VW Arteon has a longer wheelbase, shorter overhangs and complete repackaging of shapes and spaces inside and out. Its premium look and feel make an immediate impression—the grille has the precision finish of a wristwatch at the same cost. Pricing for the model grids out as 15 versions, but simplified, there are an SE or SEL (or SEL Premium), with or without 4MOTION all-wheel drive, with two available R-Line upgrades (with 19- or 20-inch wheels), all with the same engine. Ours was next-to-top—SEL, R-Line, 20s, AWD, everything but Premium (which is just \$3150 more). Mid-priced and mid-powered in the category, it's a stunner inside and out and an outstanding autobahn cruiser.

**Volkswagen Jetta GLI 2.0T 35th Anniversary Edition (2019)**  
228 hp / 32 mpg hwy.....\$27,795 / \$28,985

Is it tough to follow the showpiece Arteon with a Jetta? Not really—when it's a Jetta GLI (which is treated as a separate model in the lineup, along the lines of GTI in the Golf lineup), has almost as many horses as Arteon (in a bit smaller and lighter package), fuel mileage in the 30s, and a price in the \$20s, and which was complete as-is (as with the Arteon) with no further options needed. Besides being a GLI, ours was the 35th Anniversary Edition, which for just \$2000 adds grey-with-red-stripe wheels, DCC adaptive damping and a fifth drive mode, Comfort. (There is also an Autobahn model, which adds power seats, remote start, upgraded infotainment and such, at just \$2200 above this model.) Jetta GLI is so compelling by comparison, VW has (surely purposely, to maintain positioning?) created it as a front-driver only.

**Mercedes-AMG GT 63 S (2019)**  
630 hp / 20 mpg hwy.....\$159,000 / \$184,285

The Mercedes-Benz AMG lineup (now called Mercedes-AMG) has been growing by leaps and bounds. Within it, AMG GT models have been doing the same, from five models of GT roadster and coupe, to eight more cars (including CLA, C, E, CLS and S models, CLS being their original “four-door coupe,” the car that launched that trend and that term). Now they bring us their first four-door GT, introduced with a special presentation just before dinner on our first hotel night. As with the CLS, this was called a four-door coupe at the presentation, and it's listed with coupes on the AMG website, but it was entered in this event as a sedan, so—go figure. This has often been a good place in the automotive space for some flexibility



**SLINGSHOT:** 173 hp / 20-28 est mpg hwy  
\$29,999 base / as tested \$30,994



**MX-5 MIATA RF:** 181 hp / 34 mpg hwy  
\$32,345 base / as tested \$38,955



**FIAT 124 SPIDER:** 164 hp / 36 mpg hwy  
\$21,290 base / as tested \$41,695



**JEEP WRANGLER:** 270 hp / 24 mpg hwy  
\$38,395 base / as tested \$52,015



and interpretation. The priciest car in this category and second only to the Rolls-Royce in the event overall, as soon as they opened the hood, it was apparent you get your money's worth right there. You get it again inside, again in the underpinnings and again when you drive.

**Subaru Legacy Touring XT (2020)**

**260 hp / 32 mpg hwy**.....\$35,895 / \$36,795  
Quickly reminding us you don't necessarily have to spend almost two hundred grand for your new sedan—even this top-trim model costs almost precisely just 20 percent of the prior car—we next moved to Subaru, a brand famous for its customer loyalty based on a formula of value, capability and reliability. All Subarus (with the rare exception of their Toyota-shared BRZ sports car) are all-wheel-drive only. Legacy is their largest of three sedans, though not the priciest at base level (that would be WRX). Its price is lower than Subaru's crossover lineup, with the fairly close exception of Crosstrek. Of six Legacy trims starting at \$22,745, this one—Touring XT—is tops, one of two with a 260-hp 2.4L turbo rather than the 182-hp 2.5L found in the four lower models. It includes every available feature, with nothing but destination charge added to its bottom line.

**Kia Stinger GTS AWD V6 (2019)**

**365 hp / 25 mpg hwy**.....\$46,400 / \$47,670  
As Kia continually refines and expands its brand definition, it has gone in two new directions over the past year or two—most recently a big SUV (Telluride) and before that, performance (Stinger). You can find coverage of Stinger's full-line launch drive, as well as local drives in its smaller-engine-rear-drive and larger-engine-AWD versions, in our online archives. The bigger engine brags its horsepower and acceleration competitively against well known and far pricier Europeans and is at the core of our event sample, in GTS trim—a mid-level trim uniquely only in Federation Orange paint, only with 19-inch GT alloy wheels, outfitted with functional carbon fiber side vents, carbon fiber grille and carbon fiber mirrors, along with a number of additional features also found on prici-

er GT1 and GT2 trims—adding up to its very own sweet spot in the Stinger lineup. Ours included optional AWD

**Genesis G70 AWD 3.3T Sport (2019)**

**365 hp / 25 mpg hwy**.....\$45,750 / \$52,495  
Genesis—split off a few years ago from Hyundai as a separate high-end companion brand—has a current lineup of three luxury sedans. G80 and G90 evolved from prior Hyundai Genesis and Hyundai Equus models, while G70 was all new two years ago (sharing some of its deep bones with cousin Kia Stinger). We've had the G70 in our Arizona fleet a couple of times, both RWD Sport trim and AWD Prestige. There are two engines for G70 (2.0T and 3.3T), rear-drive and AWD options, and even a manual transmission (on 2.0T RWD only). Our event G70 was 3.3T and AWD (thus automatic) and in Sport trim, matching our "value-priced autobahn scorcher" impression from our earlier Sport drive (powerful, notably premium, but economically priced—in this combination delivering both 25 mpg highway and 4.5-second zero-to-60 times). Note that the Genesis lineup is about to expand considerably, with a performance coupe and a couple of SUVs expected within the next year or two.

**GROUP ANALYSIS: PERFORMANCE SEDANS:**

Buyers have had a love affair with SUVs and crossovers for several years now, to the point that some manufacturers are even planning to discontinue many of their sedans (we suspect they may have a change of heart as winds may always shift again). You wouldn't know it by this highly desirable, highly developed group of car-cars. With most powered in the sensible-but-quick 2- and 300-something-horsepower range (and one 630-horsepower stunner) and most priced from the upper \$20s to upper \$40s (plus that stunner in the upper \$100s), all with practical four-door utility and most boasting multiple industry and consumer awards, this category (tied for largest in the event, with seven entries) is proof that the concept still has legs—fast, sturdy and durable legs.

**AWARD: "MOST FUN SPORTS SEDAN"**  
**2019 Mercedes-AMG GT 63 S**

*Note: Here are the last two in our particular rotation again—which were the first two in the overall sequence for this category (and for which we included the writeups in that section). See above for the complete seven-car Performance Coupe category presented together all in a row.*

**(Coupes described above, but driven here)**

**Dodge Challenger R/T Scat Pack WB (2019)**  
**485 hp / 24 mpg hwy**.....\$39,245 / \$56,600

**Toyota GR Supra (2020)**  
**335 hp / 31 mpg hwy**.....\$55,250 / \$57,375

**(Coupe award info above, with full group)**

**About the awards...**

This has not always been an awards event—that aspect was added two years ago. Also of note, the awards, though done by the same categories as those driven, are not titled (and therefore presumably not judged) quite the same, nor are they voted as "Best," as is typical for most such events.

The Convertibles category is voted for a "Most Fun in the Sun" winner; three Performance vehicle groups produce three "Most Fun" awards; and an overall winner is also based on a "Most Fun" vote. You may be seeking to wrap your mind around a "best" judgment in each group, but with performance the nominal basis for entry and fun the stat-

PERFORMANCE SEDANS SORTED LOWEST TO HIGHEST BY PRICE AND POWER			
	\$ BASE	\$ AS TESTED	HP
Jetta	\$27,795	\$28,985	228 hp
Honda	\$35,700	\$36,620	260 hp
Subaru	\$35,895	\$36,795	268 hp
Arteon	\$43,560	\$44,555	306 hp
Genesis	\$45,750	\$47,670	365 hp
Stinger	\$46,400	\$52,495	365 hp
AMG	\$159,000	\$184,285	630 hp

**WINNER: "MOST FUN SPORTS SEDAN"**  
**and OVERALL "MOST FUN TO DRIVE"**  
**2019 Mercedes-AMG GT 63 S**



**PERFORMANCE SEDANS**

Category drive sequence (at right, top to bottom):

- 2019 Honda Civic Type R Touring
- 2019 Volkswagen Arteon 2.0T SEL R-Line /4Motion
- 2019 Volkswagen Jetta GLI 2.0T 35th Anniv Edition
- 2019 Mercedes-AMG GT 63 S
- 2020 Subaru Legacy Touring XT
- 2019 Kia Stinger GTS AWD V6
- 2019 Genesis G70 AWD 3.3T Sport



ed basis for winning, take 'em for what they are.

Also, those assessing these vehicles and granting their scores are not writing a check for purchase, nor feeding their ongoing appetites for fuel, service or parts, so some of the priciest vehicles often win, even if they're a less likely buy.

Every vehicle entered is the cream of the crop, a special model with a big dose of performance, styling, features and other panache.

The addition of awards to this event has been welcomed by some, quietly lamented by others, considered by some to be of benefit to the manufacturers, to the writers by others and to you, the audience, by others still.

Be all that as it may, voting in an event with so few vehicles is statistically interesting. Six cars in one category, for example, could get four votes each from the 24 judging drivers, a six-way tie. Yet a shift of just one vote in this example—now one car with five votes, one with three and four with four each—would give the winner a 25 percent higher tally than most of the rest, 67 percent higher than the lowest, but it's still just one vote that brings home the gold. However, it's also possible one vehicle receives 19 votes and the other five receive just one vote each—a significant and clear win—but we don't see this information.

For the overall winner, this effect is even more dramatic. Votes spread evenly would mean just one vote for each of 24 vehicles, and one vehicle with two votes could determine the winner.

We tend to contemplate such things a lot at all comparos. Then when final announcements are made, they generally make reasonable sense. But we feel for all who entered—a sizable and costly endeavor—moreso when the numbers could be so exceptionally close and the results can seem unusually subjective in the final analysis.

We did find it interesting that a sedan won overall, as we've all been hearing that these are dead and as good as gone and that people are only interested in SUVs (after decades of peaceful coexistence). The winning Mercedes-AMG GT 63 S was indeed entered in the sedan category, though officially described as a four-door coupe (though that's still a "car"), so there seems to be some wiggle room in even this interpretation of things. ■



**CIVIC TYPE R:** 306 hp / 28 mpg hwy  
\$35,700 base / as tested \$36,620



**VW ARTEON:** 268 hp / 27 mpg hwy  
\$43,560 base / as tested \$44,555



**VW JETTA GLI:** 228 hp / 32 mpg hwy  
\$27,795 base / as tested \$28,985



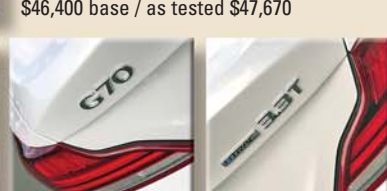
**AMG GT 63 S:** 630 hp / 20 mpg hwy  
\$159,000 base / as tested \$184,285



**SUBARU LEGACY:** 260 hp / 32 mpg hwy  
\$35,895 base / as tested \$36,795



**KIA STINGER:** 365 hp / 25 mpg hwy  
\$46,400 base / as tested \$47,670



**GENESIS G70:** 365 hp / 25 mpg hwy  
\$45,750 base / as tested \$52,495