

START

TIGUAN GROWS TEETH

VW's small crossover gets refined looks, better fuel economy



□ DESPITE MORE THAN 700,000 sales worldwide since 2007, the Volkswagen Tiguan has had little impact on the crowded American sport-utility-vehicle market, moving fewer than 21,000 units—or a tenth of the volume of the Honda CR-V—in 2010. But the 2012 edition of the Tiguan could change things for VW.

For starters, the five-seat ute should achieve 15 percent better fuel economy, thanks largely to improvements in performance of the six-speed automatic transmission. The Tiguan will also get lower-rolling-resistance tires and more efficient daytime



running lights. EPA fuel-economy numbers are not yet available. Tiguan product manager John Ryan says it should be more competitive, and he admits that at 20 mpg city and 26 mpg highway, the Tiguan's relatively poor

fuel economy is a strike against the current model. The CR-V, for instance, has ratings of 21 city and 28 highway.

Styling updates include fresh grille and taillights and some additional chrome accent pieces on select models. Another trim level, S-plus, splits the difference between S and SE models. The 2.0-liter, 200-hp turbocharged four-cylinder continues as the sole engine, paired with either a six-speed manual (front-drive only) or a six-speed automatic transmission (front- or all-wheel drive). Pricing has not yet been set, but we expect it to start at about \$25,000. —NATALIE NEFF

Even Odds

AUDI BETS ON A SPORTY LINE OF FUTURE CROSSOVERS

■ AUDI HAS HATCHED a plan to launch several athletic crossovers within the next five years to meet demand for premium utes in key world markets, including North America, China, Europe and Russia.

The move would double the number of dedicated SUVs offered by Audi and see today's Q3, Q5 and Q7 models joined by more sporting Q2, Q4 and Q6 derivatives by 2016.

Chairman Rupert Stadler has approved plans for the lineup. The even-numbered utes would be distinguished by more athletic lines and angles, surface treatments and sportier styling cues.

"It's clear that demand for SUVs... is still in an upswing phase and will remain so for some years to come," an insider revealed to *AutoWeek*. "We want to make sure we have the necessary coverage to satisfy it."

An entry-level Q2 would be based on an all-wheel-drive version of the platform that underpins the A1 small car. That same structure is also planned to support a future Volkswagen SUV



Audi is considering a range of sporty crossovers to complement its existing lineup, which is anchored by the Q5 (shown).

positioned beneath the Tiguan. The Q2 would be similar in size to the Nissan Juke—which Audi designers admit to having in the design studio as a reference point. It would fight the Mini

Cooper Countryman on price.

The larger and more expensive Q4 would compete against the Land Rover Range Rover Evoque. Already at advanced stages of develop-

ment, it would sit on underpinnings similar to those of the Q5 and the upcoming Porsche Cajun. A Q6 model is also likely for around 2016, based on Q7 underpinnings.

—GREG KABLE

COOL BREEZE

Singer 911 channels Porsche's air-cooled past

■ THERE'S A SEGMENT OF PORSCHE-philies for whom the last real 911s were the Type 993 cars sold until 1998. That's when the historic air-cooled flat six-cylinder engine was dropped in favor of the water-cooled flat-six of the 996.

That was progress for sure, but the air-cooled powerplant retains a significant and devoted following. And one of those fans is doing his best to put more of the throwbacks on the road.

Enter Rob Dickinson, the man behind the striking Singer 911, which celebrates Porsche's air-cooled icon with a mix of vintage and modern styling and technology, fanatically rendered in a high-quality and high-priced package.

"The modern 911 is incredible," Dickinson acknowledges. "It's a technological masterpiece of engineering over physics. Our car is a line in the sand for the analog approach to the Porsche 911."

English-born Dickinson can talk for hours about that approach in aesthetic, philosophical and technical terms. His self-professed obsession with Porsche stretches back to a childhood vacation in the south of France, where he spied a 911 on the autoroute. It was his inspiration for studying industrial design, and that propelled him to a six-

month stint working in a studio for Lotus. We might know Dickinson as an automotive designer today if the arc of his career hadn't been interrupted by music.

In 1990, Dickinson became lead singer and guitarist for the newly formed band Catherine Wheel. Named for a popular English firework (and inadvertently for a more sinister medieval device), the quartet scored some success on the charts in the 1990s, particularly in Europe.

By 2003, Dickinson was living in Los Angeles and had joined the R Group, a West Coast car club started by noted designer Freeman Thomas (Volkswagen Beetle, Audi TT) for guys who liked modifying their early 911s. Upon seeing older chassis paired with later engines, Dickinson recognized an opportunity to "put the ultimate set of components together within this car."

That's the mantra behind his Los Angeles-based company, called Singer. It sources 964-era (1989-94) 911s, disassembles them, refabricates the chassis and sends them to California concept-car builder Aria for carbon-fiber bodywork and painting. Upon return, Singer pairs the chassis and body with a variety of premium components and one of three optional engines from Cosworth.

The Singer name is an allusion to the evocative air-cooled 911 sound and Dickinson's musical background. Buyers can opt for a 3.6-liter, 300-hp or a 3.9-liter, 380-hp engine. A track-focused Cup model pushes out 425 hp and offers a higher revs limit, individual throttle bodies and titanium connecting



rods. A five-speed manual Getrag transmission is standard, and a six-speed is available.

The Singer 911 has a decidedly 1970s look, with detailed touches such as nickel-plated fuel- and oil-filler caps and a 964-vintage gauge cluster dominated by an orange "Singer" revs counter.

The most notable exterior cues are 17-inch forged lightweight wheels on Michelin PS2s inside carbon-fiber bodywork and bixenon headlights.

Customers select the color, leather, brakes and a laundry list of other specs. Singer says he expects to be able to deliver a turnkey car within four to five months, complete with a warranty. The Touring model starts at \$190,000, and a Singer can be optioned up to north of \$300,000.

Singer is building its fourth customer car (destined for Mexico), and Dickinson says that production plans call for 10 to 12 cars a year.

—ERIC TEGLER

