

The Hot List

These are the cars that will be roaring past you in 2005



Lotus Elise

PRICE \$41,000 ENGINE 190-hp, 1.8-liter inline-4

The bug-eyed Elise arguably delivers more bang for the buck than any other sports car. Its small engine is atoned for with a puny weight (less than 2,000 pounds) that, along with girde-tight suspension and steering, makes this British roadster feel more like a Formula One race car.

Chrysler 300C SRT8

PRICE \$49,000 ENGINE 425-hp, 6.1-liter V-8

Last May, Snoop Dogg begged Chrysler for one of its new fat-grilled Hemi-equipped sedans. This limited-edition version, due next spring, is even more pimped-out, thanks to custom headlamps and alloy rims, all courtesy of in-house tuners from the Street and Racing Technology team.



Mini Cooper Convertible

PRICE \$22,000 ENGINE 115-hp, 1.6-liter inline-4

Driving this impossibly cute (yet tremendously cool) car, early adopters of the Mini Cooper sensed they were riding around in a giant puppy. Now, Mini has cut off its head. Push a button, and the ragtop slides partially back to create a sunroof, or slides all the way back into a Z atop the trunk.

Mitsubishi Evolution Lancer MR

PRICE \$35,000 ENGINE 276-hp, 2.0-liter inline-4

Anyone who's driven Mitsubishi's Evo — built for the rally circuits of Europe and unleashed here in 2003 — is in on the secret: Inside this plain-Jane econobox lurks the heart of a supercharged beast. This year's model brings a larger turbocharger and — what the kids really want — even more power.

Forty years young, the Mustang gallops back.



Ford Mustang

PRICE \$25,000 ENGINE 300-hp, 4.6-liter V-8

Like the town bullies who often drove them, the last few versions of Ford's Mustang got uglier by the year. But under the design tutelage of J Mays (the brains behind the new Beetle and the Audi TT), the Mustang, now forty years old, has returned to its stylish muscle-car roots. The shark nose and ample rear recall the pony car's late-Sixties heyday, and the V-8 version is the most affordable 300-horsepower you can buy. **JOSH DEAN**



The Mustang's 300-hp heart

MOBILE AUDIO

Playing MP3s in the car used to mean big hassles and puny sound. Now you can play digital-music files with a hard drive in the trunk, an adapter to channel your iPod or a tuner to read MP3s off burned CDs

APPLE IPOD INTERFACE

An inexpensive addition to any Alpine AI-Net tuner, the adapter merges the iPod's controls with the stereo's, letting you search for songs via ID3 tags and assign playlists to the station-preset buttons. And it runs off the car's power, so the iPod charges while you drive. **\$100, alpine-usa.com**



PIONEER DEH-P8MP

As you may have discovered, most car stereos spit burned CD-Rs right out. The solution is a tuner like this one, which plays about ten hours of digital-music files on each CD-R disc and is nearly idiotproof, thanks to its bright-blue Organic EL display, rotary control knob and scrolling sixty-four-character ID3-tag display. **\$500, pioneer-electronics.com**

KENWOOD MUSIC KEG KHD-C710

Load more than 2,500 songs into this 10-gigabyte player simply by slipping it into the USB cradle. Pair it with a Kenwood system and you can pipe those songs through the car just as easily, with ID3 tags for choosing playlists, plus Voice Index on Tap software that reads the info out loud — so you can focus on more important things, like driving. **\$300, kenwoodusa.com**

STEVE MORGENSTERN



DRIFTING AWAY

A bizarro new motor sport called drifting slides into the U.S.



Cars skid around the track at a drifting rally.

On a racetrack in Joliet, Illinois, Ken Gushi sits in a neon-green Nissan 240SX, ready to show off his skills. The California teenager is here not to race but to drift, a nascent motor sport in which drivers whip smoke-churning race cars around with the delicacy of surgeons. Gushi pops open the passenger door and gestures at the empty seat.

"How old are you again?" I ask, cinching my harness.

"Seventeen. No, wait, I just turned eighteen."

"So you've had your license for, what, two years?"

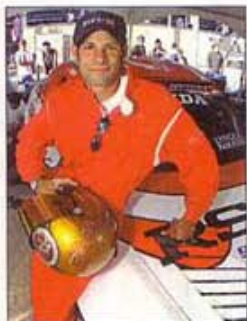
"I don't have a license," he says. "It got suspended."

And with that, he hits the gas. In simple terms, drifting is the art of controlling a car while it slides sideways through a series of turns. Gushi accelerates to 70 mph heading into the first turn and puts the car into a tire-squealing slide. Then, with a gentle flick of the wheel, he pulls out, starts a drift in the other direction and is gone in a cloud of atomized rubber. Yet drifting is more about style than speed: Like surfing, it's a judged sport, where points are awarded for the drift's angle and the car's proximity to the track's walls - the closer the better.

It also has what Alex Pfeiffer, a twenty-eight-year-old drifter from Hawaii, calls "a huge wow factor," as in, "Wow, I can't believe he fucking did that." In Japan, where the sport was born, drifting has evolved from a teen craze into a cultural phenomenon that supports its own professional league, video games and a hugely popular manga comic called "Initial D." Imported videos brought the sport to the U.S., where it quickly caught on in the tuner-car movement. "Where this sport is now is a lot like where snowboarding was ten years ago," says Chad Harp, a PR rep for sponsor Yokohama Tire. "It's just a bunch of young kids out raising hell."

Gushi and Pfeiffer are spreading the gospel through a new U.S. pro series called Formula Drift, but the sport's future here may depend on how drivers measure up to its past - namely, Manabu Orido, 35, a Japanese drift king. Orido hits the Joliet track with two teammates at 100 mph, performing cat-and-mouse drift chases, tandem donuts and powerful slides that eat inches from the wall.

"For drivers, it's way more fun than straight racing," says Pfeiffer. "Having crazy, high-horsepower cars going right next to other cars - it has an impact factor unlike any other motor sport."



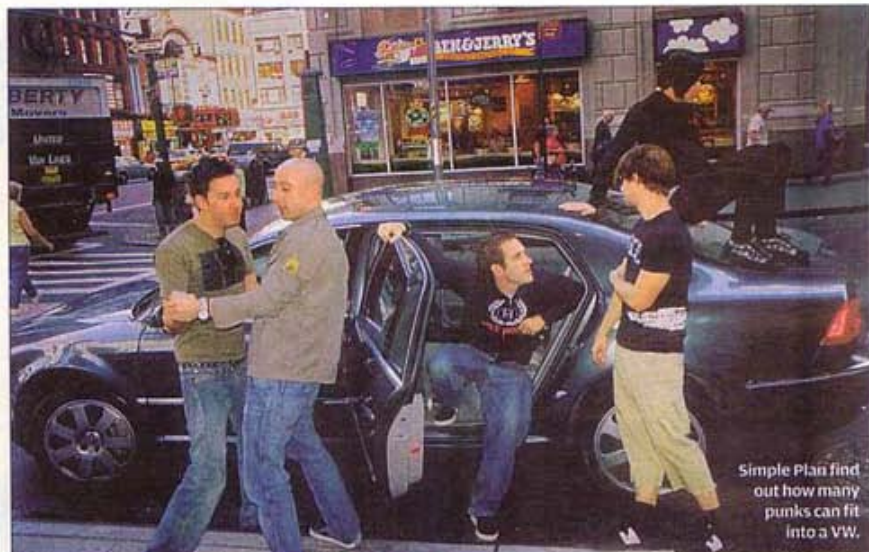
Alex Pfeiffer gets ready to wow.

MY FIRST CAR

RACHEL BILSON
OF "THE O.C."
1997 Jeep Cherokee



"I was in a car accident when I was fourteen, so when my Dad got me my first car, he said, 'I'm getting you an SUV!'"



Simple Plan find out how many punks can fit into a VW.

TEST-DRIVE SIMPLE PLAN

Volkswagen Phaeton



PRICE \$94,600 ENGINE 6.0-liter W-12 POWER 420 hp
TORQUE 406 lb-ft @ 3,250-4,250 rpm

LIKE ANY LUXURY CAR WORTH ITS BURNISHED-walnut dash panel, the Volkswagen Phaeton offers its drivers assistance in times of need. And right now, the members of Simple Plan are puzzled. Cruising down New York's Palisades Parkway, bassist David Desrosiers pushes the OnStar button and is greeted by a gruff-sounding guy called Gary. "Hi, Gary," Desrosiers says. "We're reviewing this Volkswagen for ROLLING STONE, and I have a question: I'd like to know how to pronounce this model."

This is a valid question. I have heard Fay-ten, Fay-tahn, Fay-a-ten and various other bastardizations of this very untidy nomenclature.

"I've been told it is Fay-tun," Gary says.

"You know, Gary, because I'm driving this car in America, I think it should be pronounced Fat-on."

That solved, Desrosiers cranks Green Day's American Idiot, which he has already told me twice is "the best album of the year." (He has also told me that he spent last night partying with his bandmates, which explains the black circles under his eyes that accessorize his black hair, black pants and black shoes.)

The five Montreal natives - Desrosiers, frontman Pierre Bouvier, guitarists Sebastian Lefebvre and Jeff Stinco, and drummer Chuck Comeau - do not drive often. Only two of them own cars: Bouvier has a year-old VW Jetta GLI that's been in the shop four times, and Stinco drives a very unrock-star-ish Hyundai Accent. "I just want a car to get groceries," he says. "We have a tour bus. That's where we live anyway."

After they relinquish the keys to the two VWs currently in their possession, the guys will hop a plane back to Montreal to rehearse for a two-year-long

world tour in service of their new album, Still Not Getting Any... but first, they want to drive fast.

Bouvier floors the gas pedal of the massive twelve-cylinder engine. It very politely clears its throat and accelerates calmly, as if we were riding on a velvet pillow carried by a team of speedy English butlers. "I was expecting more kick," Bouvier says. "This is an awesome car, but it's more like a businessman's car."

Which is pretty much the idea. The Phaeton is big and heavy and smooth and can be outfitted with the sorts of features that country-club members have come to demand from their offices-on-wheels: massaging seats, heated leather steering wheel, gigantic back seats at a safe remove from the driver. It's not hard to imagine Puffy owning one.

"It's like riding around on a La-Z-Boy," Comeau says from the back seat, where each passenger controls his own climate zone. "But for \$100,000, it should have screens back here with a DVD player."

Up ahead, Desrosiers and his Phaeton have gotten lost under Manhattan's West Side Highway. As we careen around a turn, Bouvier notices a cop in our rearview, and then - shit! - Desrosiers pulling an illegal U-turn.

"That's not good," Stinco says as we continue past, making a perfectly legal right turn. The cop passes without incident.

Bouvier picks up the two-way radio. "Yo, dude, did you see that cop?"

"Of course I did. These cars have a special paint job that makes them invisible during U-turns. They are chameleons." Desrosiers pronounces the last word in a mischievous French accent. When the members of Simple Plan want to talk shit about someone or argue among themselves, they switch to French. "We can have private band meetings anywhere," says Stinco.

As we near the group's hotel, the subject finally turns to Simple Plan's new record.

"It's a great driving record," Desrosiers says, reluctantly handing over the keys. "Unfortunately, I don't have a car to test-drive my record in."

He looks at the idling sedan: "I love this car. I think it's fucked that I'm not getting it for free." J.O.

TEST-DRIVE KELLY CLARKSON

Land Rover LR3 HSE



PRICE \$52,245 (as tested) ENGINE 4.4-liter V-8

POWER 300 hp TORQUE 315 lb-ft @ 4,000 rpm

KELLY CLARKSON DOES NOT LIKE SMALL CARS. SHE has been in seven accidents; the most spectacular one occurred on New Year's Eve, before she was named "American Idol." She was piloting a Ford Explorer and was hit by — this is not a lie, she swears — five different vehicles, and she walked away unscathed. So it's no wonder she appreciates a big truck.

Plus, she's from Texas, and Texas girls just dig trucks. So we're riding around New York in a Land Rover LR3 HSE, the A-plus redesign of a C-minus vehicle, the Land Rover Discovery. But to Clarkson, it's simply a truck with a cool navigation system, comfy leather seats and three sunroofs — one each over the front, middle and rear row of seats — and she likes it. She is also utterly unfazed by New York traffic.

"Bronx or Queens?" she asks as we exit the Triborough Bridge. Our destination is City Island, a seaside slice of Nantucket heated up and plated in the Bronx. Unfortunately, when I say "Bronx," Clarkson hears "Queens," so first we must swerve across a lane of traffic and merge onto the proper

ramp. Clarkson executes this maneuver as seamlessly as possible, which means without hitting any cars or rolling over. So far, so good.

"I don't know my way anywhere, even Texas," Clarkson says. "I have the worst sense of direction." I point out the navigation screen, the first one either of us has ever seen with perspective-based maps on which roads slant away from you. "Those don't always work," she says. "Sometimes they just take you in circles."

Currently, Clarkson is living in Los Angeles, recording the follow-up to her platinum debut with numerous songwriters, including her current boyfriend, David Hodges, formerly of Evanescence. L.A. affords her plenty of time to drive her silver Acura MDX, a luxury SUV that now faces competition.

"This is the first time I've driven a Land Rover," Clarkson says. "I really like it. Maybe I'll trade in my Acura! Jason, what do you think?" Jason is her brother, who doubles as assistant and confi-

dant. Jason likes the interior but thinks the exterior is a little boxy. Which it is.

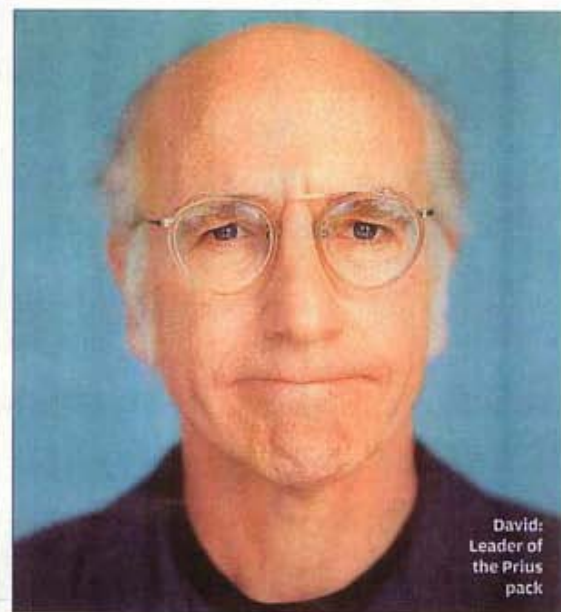
Aside from nearly running over a cop at a toll plaza ("He was in my blind spot!"), Clarkson handles herself well on several highways and bridges. "This isn't a place I really want to run a red light," she says. "Because you'll, like, kill people."

At her hotel, she takes one last look at the truck. "So this was my first time driving in New York," she says. "I think I did good, right?" J.D.

She nearly runs over a cop at a toll plaza. "He was in my blind spot!"



Bigger is better: Truck lover Kelly Clarkson.



David: Leader of the Prius pack

ME AND MY PRIUS



Larry David loves his hybrid. But the car can't stand his wife

When I was doing *Seinfeld*, I bought a Porsche, but I returned it two weeks later. I would actually park it a few blocks from where I was supposed to be, because I didn't want anyone to see me get out of it. I was so humiliated, finally I got rid of it.

Then, about four years ago, I bought my first Prius. I was looking for a car without a console, because when I drive, I like to stick my right knee all the way out so I'm touching the gas pedal with the side of my foot. It was all about the console for me. If the Prius had gotten ten miles to the gallon, I probably would have bought it. Also, it was kind of cute, it was maneuverable, it was small, and — OK — the forty miles per gallon didn't hurt. But that wasn't my

main objective. The main objective was the console.

I use the car on *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, and I give a lot of credit to the navigation system when we're filming. We could

be in some neighborhood I've never heard of at one o'clock in the morning, and I plug in my address and it takes me right

home. Unless my wife is in the car. The navigation girl, the voice, detests my wife and will never take us to the right place when she's with me. When I'm alone, it does the job perfectly.

I see a lot more Priuses on the road these days. When I first started driving it, I would get interesting looks, like, "What is that? I've never seen a car like that before." I don't proselytize. I lead by example.

The Prius was cute, maneuverable — and forty miles per gallon didn't hurt.

MY CURRENT RIDE

CARMELO ANTHONY, DENVER NUGGETS
1964 Lincoln Continental



"I took off the word *Continental* on the side and put my name there, so when I'm driving around everyone knows that's Carmelo's car."

CAR 2004 CULTURE

Whether horse- or hydro-, this year's models are all about power



Ludacris: "I write most of my songs in the car."

TEST-DRIVE LUDACRIS

Corvette C6



PRICE \$60,095 (as tested) ENGINE 6.0-liter V-8
POWER 400 hp TORQUE 400 lb-ft @ 4,400 rpm

LUDACRIS SITS BEHIND THE WHEEL OF THE NEW Chevrolet Corvette C6 and pulls a CD from his pocket. He pops the disc in, cranks the volume and introduces the good people of Chicago to his catchy new single, "Get Back."

Then he picks up a set of keys with a bewildered stare. "Yo," he says. "How the hell is this car running if the keys are sitting right here?"

Good question. As far as either of us can tell, there's no

ignition keyhole. Nor are there any interior door handles. We are two dogs trapped in a station wagon at the mall.

Through the window I motion for help to the Chevrolet rep outside. He laughs: "The car works on a keyless system. So long as the key is within a few feet of the dash, you just push this button"—he shows us a button next to the steering wheel—"to start the car."

There is also, we learn, no need to unlock the doors if the key is in your pocket when you approach. These bells and whistles are part of an all-new lighter design that's helped make the 2005 Corvette the most potent in the line's history. Its ferocious V-8 churns out 400 horsepower and accelerates from zero to sixty in a little more than four seconds, on its way to a top speed of 186 mph.

Ludacris tugs down his black do-rag and puts the car in gear. He gives it the subtlest bit of gas and... the car explodes out of the hotel carport. He cackles. "I like this shit already! I might have to get me one of these."

"I like this already!" says Ludacris. "I might have to get me one of these."

Like most hip-hop luminaries, Ludacris spends a lot of time—and money—on his wheels. His latest toy is a 2004 Bentley Continental GT, a lightning-fast sports touring car. "This isn't as fast as my Bentley," he says, "but, man, I love it." He punches it and shifts quickly through the gears. Our speed—projected onto the windshield so that drivers don't have to look down—passes ninety, and the

lanky rapper appears to have become one with the wraparound leather seat.

Since Ludacris is checking mixes of "Get Back" while he drives, we quickly run through seven different versions of the song. Finally, at a stoplight, he pops in "Put Your Money (Where Your Mouth Is)," a raucous track featuring DMX. The light changes, and Ludacris again floors it. "You know," he says, "I write most of my songs in the car. I jot stuff down as I'm driving."

That can't be safe.

"I'm a perfect knee driver," he says. "Just lower the wheel and drive with your knees."

JOSH DEAN



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Kelly Clarkson checks out Land Rover's LR3.



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Chingy takes a spin in the new Cadillac STS.



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Simple Plan pack into the VW Phaeton.