

Under the Hood, October 2018

Last month we discussed the ultra-expensive Bugatti Chiron, with its 1500 hp powerplant. The Chiron is a baby compared to a top fuel dragster. The latest dragsters have a 500 ci (8.2 liter) engine putting out a supercharged 11,000 hp, and 16,000 lb-ft of torque. Yes, you read that right. I recently read a step by step description of the race procedure. From the time they fire the engine, do the burn out to heat the tires (and entertain the fans), stage at the starting lights and make the run, less than 100 seconds have elapsed from start to finish. At the starting line, the driver experiences 5 g's acceleration, which can cause a momentary blackout. The driver is still seeing 4 g's at half track and the dragster is already doing almost 300 mph. Of course, at that speed it doesn't take very long to travel the last 500 feet of the race. A normal race will take about 3 seconds with a final top speed of about 330 mph. Even before the driver has reached the finish line, he/she hits the parachute button as the vehicle will have crossed the finish line before the chutes can deploy. When the two parachutes are open, the driver sees as much as 5.5 g's deceleration. The engine is now cooling off after about 1.5 minutes of total running time, while the dragster is towed back to the pits, where the mechanics begin a complete engine rebuild before the next race. No wonder racing can be so expensive. Following a fatal accident in 2008, NHRA changed the race distance for Top Fuel and Funny Cars from the traditional 1,320 feet (1/4 mile) to 1,000 feet in the interest of keeping speeds lower and providing an extra 320 feet after the finish line to slow the car. All the other NHRA classes still race the full quarter mile.

Ferrari has introduced the Portofino for you. The Portofino is claimed to be the starter Ferrari, and the manufacturer anticipates that for most buyers, this will be their first Ferrari. Naturally the pricing is for the masses as well, with a starting price of only \$214,533. Did you ever wonder how the manufacturers come up with these prices? At this price point, why not \$214,000, \$214,500, or even \$214,530. But \$214,533; what does that extra \$3 get me? Even with that extra \$3, I suspect that no Portofino will leave the local dealership at less than \$250,000. Porsche isn't the only manufacturer with a reputation of super-expensive "mandatory options". The Portofino has a heavily turbocharged 3.9 liter V8 with a ratings of 591 hp, and 561 ft-lb of torque with a 7 speed dual clutch automatic. Since this is a stripper model and it does not have all wheel drive, Ferrari has limited torque in the first 6 gears which means only 7<sup>th</sup> gear will get the full 561 ft-lb of torque. Does that make any sense to you? Why not just drop the boost a little bit? The computer is basically doing that for us in all but the top gear anyway, so the claimed top torque is only listed for bragging rights.

At a different price point from Ferrari, Ford has announced that it is going to discontinue almost all sedans from the product offering. Ford will stop selling the Fusion, Taurus, CMax hybrid and Fiesta, even most of the Focus line. Mustang is expected to survive as well as the compact Focus crossover. Under this plan in a very short time, all Fords will be crossovers, SUV's or trucks. Ford says it is simply responding to customer demand as fewer and fewer people buy sedans. We have once again been spoiled by the relatively lower fuel costs and as a result demand for more fuel-efficient vehicles has all but disappeared. It doesn't seem that many years ago that we were paying close to \$5/gallon for premium fuel. Yes, much has changed in the intervening years, with fracking adding greatly to our domestic fuel production. Yet somehow, I still expect that some international crisis will once again bring us much higher fuel costs and many buyers will be lamenting their vehicle choice. But I cannot worry about those buyers. I need to worry about my family's financial future. That is why I am working with George Foreman's InventHelp group to patent my new three row pickup with a 3 foot long bed. I predict my invention will dominate the market. Now if I could only get Ford or GM to return my phone calls. Elon, would you and Tesla be interested?