

GEAR & GADGETS

CODE SWITCH Taking its DNA from Volvo Cars, the Polestar self-identifies as a Scandinavian brand.



POLESTAR

RUMBLE SEAT / DAN NEIL



Progress, But Not Perfection, For an Elegant Tesla Rival

OUR GUEST THIS WEEK is the facelifted Polestar 2, a chic if somewhat cramped premium compact crossover built in China and brought to you by Volvo Cars in Gothenburg, Sweden. In 2010, the China-based conglomerate Geely bought Volvo Cars and now owns a 24% stake in the Polestar brand. Not that it matters. Last week AutoPacific market research released survey results gauging Americans’ openness to Chinese imported vehicles. Of the 800 people surveyed, 35% said they would be open to buying a car from a China-based brand. Among the under-40, that number hits 76%, despite widespread concerns about personal privacy. Polestar—a premium EV brand engineered to sell in Western markets—self-identifies as Scandinavian, but the truth is out there. In any event, younger consumers seem to consider the issue irrelevant. Perhaps they feel they have more to fear from climate change than an unfavorable balance of trade. AutoPacific’s survey did show that consumers would be more inclined to buy a Chinese vehicle if it were assembled in North America. Management is only too happy to oblige. Volvo Cars’ mothership in South Carolina is currently tooling up to produce the Polestar 3, a slightly larger electric SUV. The company has announced that U.S.-market Polestars will be built in South Carolina by the end of 2024.

2024 POLESTAR 2 (PERFORMANCE PACK)

Price, as tested \$56,900
Propulsion Electric all-wheel drive, with front-mounted permanent magnet AC asynchronous motor and rear-mounted AC synchronous motor; silicon-carbide rear inverter; 400V NMC battery pack (82 kWh capacity, 79 kWh usable).
Power/torque 476 hp/546 lb ft
Length/wheelbase/width/height 181.3/107.6/78.1/58.0 inches
Curb weight 4,641 pounds
0-62 mph 4.2 seconds (Polestar)
Range 247 miles
Charging 205 kW, 10-80% in 28 mins
Cargo capacity 15.8 cubic feet



The company is also establishing a supply chain for domestically produced batteries in order for the cars to be eligible for the full federal \$7,500 tax credit available to EV buyers. In the meantime, U.S. retail operations are showing agreeable flexibility on price. The company recently lowered the list price of the dual-motor Polestar 2 to \$47,800, matching the single-motor version. The former goes quicker (4.1 seconds to 60 mph); the latter goes longer (320 miles of nominal range). While first-gen Polestar cars lacked the range, performance and hand-in-glove integration of Tesla products, the cars were lovely and

cool-looking, inside and out. The revised P2 retains all the good while addressing some key deficits—chief among them price, which we’ll get to. Among the positives, the future-friendly exterior styling, something of a genial replicant of Volvo’s XC40. The P2 doesn’t have a grille; it has a SmartZone, a polygonal body-colored panel on the nose that hosts the radar and camera sensors, thus denoting the shift between breathing cars and seeing cars, the company says. While still using the same vehicle platform, revised P2 moves the single motor from the front to the rear, making the car rear-wheel

drive in standard configuration. AWD drive versions use two motors, one up front, but retain a sporty rear bias. The P2 also now has a silicon carbide inverter, which can handle more juice from the battery. Nominal horsepower in the rear-drive version is up by 68 hp; torque increases by 118 lb-ft; and range rises to 320 miles with the rear-drive version. Performance has also gained a step, with 0-60 mph acceleration marked at 5.9 seconds, shaving 1.1 seconds off the previous model’s pace. Many of these gains leverage the P2’s revised battery pack (82 kWh capacity) using cells sourced from CATL, the world’s largest

battery company. The new packs, says Polestar, have a carbon footprint 1.1 tons smaller than before. The downsides: The P2 is another disruption baby, that is, an EV based on a powertrain-agnostic vehicle platform to reduce development and manufacturing costs. This arcane engineering detail has obvious consequences for the P2. The elegantly dressed cabin is small, tight-feeling and the center armrest crowds my right elbow like a drunken bar patron. Apparently, there’s a platform landmark under there that can’t be changed. Teslas, built on a dedicated EV platform, offer about 50% more cargo capacity as well as a more spacious cabin. Charging: The P2’s 400V system tops out at a205 kW charging rate, sufficient to raise battery charge from 10% to 80% in 28 minutes, ac-

First-gen Polestars lacked the range and performance of a Tesla.

cording to the company. Current model-year P2’s have the combi receptacle. Future products will adopt the North American Charging Standard that is compatible with Tesla’s Superchargers. An NACS adapter should be available soon for the 2024 cars. The overhaul brings a welcome update to Polestar’s Android-based infotainment system, with Google built-in also cohabitating with Apple CarPlay (but still not a wireless connection to iPhone devices). Polestars all grok over-the-air updates. In keeping with brand values, the P2 has a full suite of advanced-driver-assist systems (ADAS), as well as structural reinforcements that help it earn a five-star safety rating in Europe’s New Car Assessment Program (NCAP). Our car had been endowed with the Performance Pack (\$5,500), bundling in hotter software (421 vs. 476 hp), the 20-inch wheels and summer tires, the gilded Brembo brake calipers and the Ohlins dampers. The Performance Pack includes the Plus Pack (Harman Kardon audio system, panoramic sunroof) and Pilot Pack (high-functioning Level 2 driver-assist systems such as adaptive cruise control). And that is how a car with 276 miles of estimated range (base dual motor) turns into one with 247 miles. I’d note here that most of the cars that manufacturers send around to journalists have performance upgrades that come at cost of range and efficiency. I love the sharper edge the Performance Pack brings, but in my advisory capacity, I’d recommend skipping it. If we bake in the recent price cut and forego the Performance Pack’s meringue, the dual-motor P2 costs around \$47,800 in South Carolina money. I’d add back \$4,200 for the generous Pilot and Plus packs. For \$52,000, the P2 is pretty delicious, no matter where it’s made.

‘It’s the Projectors That Got Small’

Mini models—portable and user-friendly—show big movies more easily

IF I COULD, I’d watch every film in a cinema. My next best option: Replicate the experience in my living room, with surround-sound and a projector that turns my wall into a de facto screen. But until recently, projectors were bulky and tricky to pair with streaming services; they often required a ceiling mount, too. A new breed of mini models promises sharp picture quality, plus more seamless tech setup and easy portability. I tried three to see which can light up a room.

LG CineBeam Q 4K, \$1,300
No bigger than a shoebox, this device projects 120 inches of picture, making the most of blockbusters like Richard Linklater’s “Hit Man.” While its picture quality is sharp and vibrant at night, it does take a hit in the daytime. Watching “Dune” during lunch (don’t tell my boss), I struggled to follow the darker scenes. A 360-degree kickstand lets you tweak the projection angle and doubles as a carrying handle when spun backward. In the back, a full-size HDMI port accommodates gaming consoles, but the lack of built-in



HOME MOVIES Mini projectors like Samsung’s Freestyle (shown) promise fewer hassles than older, bulkier models.

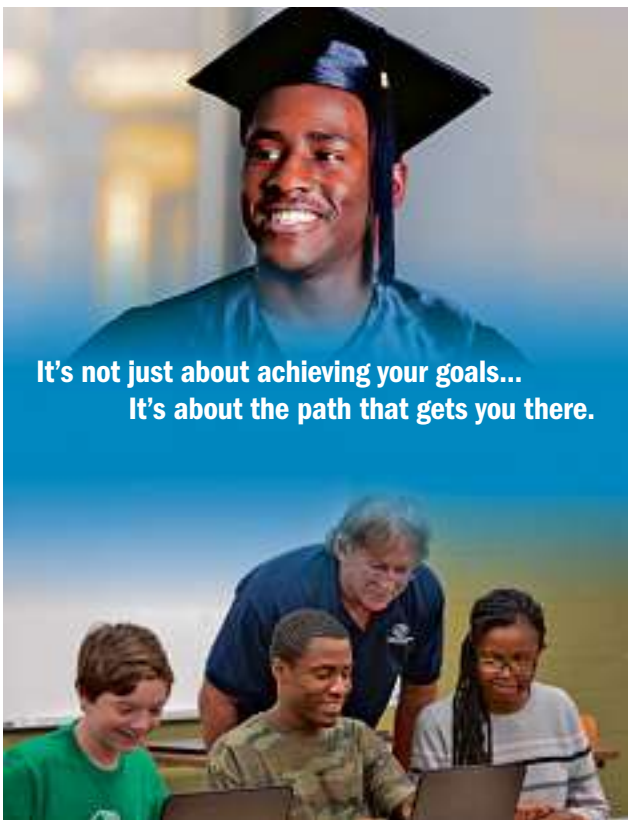
battery precludes a cord-free experience. The tiny speakers were a letdown, too—although you can pair the device with up to two speakers, or even

headphones, to better your audio experience.

Samsung Freestyle, \$800
This projector resembles the

Pixar lamp—a fun detail for movie lovers. It delivers an 80-inch screen, but those with a Samsung smartphone can opt to combine two of these projectors through the brand’s app, doubling the screen size. The picture quality is good enough, and it has built-in surround sound, wireless speaker pairing and three hours of battery life. Plus, the Freestyle has a pre-installed catalog of gamer services, such as Xbox Cloud Gaming, letting you play with Wi-Fi and a controller.

BenQ GV31, \$599
You can easily mistake the GV31 for a Bluetooth speaker, and that’s on purpose: Besides projecting a 100-inch picture at a clear 1080p resolution, the device lets you stream music from your phone. Its circular body swivels fully on a magnetic tray, so you can choose your preferred wall, or even project a starry night sky onto your ceiling without awkward maneuvering. Like the Freestyle, the GV31 has a 3-hour battery life, which will get you through “Oppenheimer,” “Barbie” or about 3.5 reruns of “Suits.” But while the speakers are fine for day-to-day media, you’ll need a much stronger option for surround sound. —*Shubham Agarwal*



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