

Wet March may be on tap for California

By Tim Hearden, Capital Press

SACRAMENTO – After a fierce mid-February storm system kept most areas near or above their normal seasonal rainfall totals, Northern California could be in for a wet March.

A weak system coming down from Canada this weekend could provide some mountain rain while helping to break down the high-pressure ridge over the region, setting up a possible barrage of storms from the Pacific, National Weather Service meteorologist Eric Kurth said.

“The ridge does seem to be breaking down to where we might be seeing some systems in early March,” Kurth said. “The very long-range models are showing a shift to a wetter pattern in early March. ... There do seem to be some hints in that directions.”

AccuWeather’s long-range forecast goes as far as to predict as many as 23 days of rain in Redding in March, punctuated by some thunderstorms, with high temperatures in the 50s and low 60s.

Read the whole story

Talk to focus on Tahoe’s

railroad history

Lake Tahoe's railroad history will come to life Feb. 19 with a presentation by Jerry Blackwill.

Blackwill is vice president of Strategic Planning for the Truckee Donner Railroad Society and board president of the Sierra State Parks Foundation

He will be telling the story of how Duane L. Bliss, William Seth Bliss, Walter D. Bliss, Duane L Bliss Jr, and Frank Titus built and ran this tourist system, laying the foundation for Lake Tahoe's present day tourist industry.

The talk is at 7pm at the Truckee Veterans' Memorial Building, 10214 High St., Truckee. Cost is \$10.

CalFire ramping up for early fire season

By Len Ramirez, KPIX

While the calendar says February, CalFire is getting an early start on making sure it has enough staff to battle this year's wildfires.

One by one, applicants walked in to CalFire headquarters in Morgan Hill for their job interviews wearing business suits. What they really want to wear are fire coats, helmets and goggles, battling wildfires up and down the state this summer.

About 1,200 applied to become firefighters. Three hundred are getting interviews, but only a very select few will get a job.

SLT to resume commercial fire inspections

South Lake Tahoe is getting back into the fire inspection business.

In 2011, the fire marshal position was eliminated. For a time Lake Valley Fire Protection District took on the responsibilities, but fire codes in the jurisdictions were not the same at the time so that was not a good fit.

“Inspections have not occurred as they should have,” Fire Chief Jeff Meston told the City Council on Feb. 17.

The staff report said, “Some businesses have neglected to maintain basic safety items such as working fire extinguishers, working smoke detectors, fire sprinkler maintenance and fire extinguisher systems over cooking appliances, creating unsafe conditions for the public.”

Because no one in the department is qualified to do this job the city will be looking to hire someone from the outside. But what will be unique is that the person will also be a building inspector and will work in that department. The person will have to have the necessary certifications to do both.

The theory is one person can do both inspections at the 960 commercial establishments. The goal is to have the fees pay for the position. Businesses with less than 10,000 square feet will be charged \$234 for the fire inspection.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

UFOs were not always a laughing matter

By Matthias Gafni, Bay Area News Group

It was 1964. Late at night. The Northern California man had lost his hunting buddies in the woods near Lake Tahoe and climbed a tree to sleep.

Awakened by a glowing object landing on a nearby ridge, the man was soon fighting for his life against two neckless creatures and a robot before the beings emitted a noxious gas and knocked him out.

A tall tale? Drunken binge? Drug-induced hallucination (it was the '60s, after all)? No matter. That Placer County UFO sighting and thousands more were studiously collected and meticulously researched as part of the Air Force's strange, long-shuttered Project BLUE BOOK, a government program on the hunt for little green men – or perhaps Soviet spies; no one is saying for sure.

For 22 years, the military seemed to spare little expense in chronicling humans' reported otherworldly encounters with glowing orbs, spinning spheres, flying ice cream cones, and more.

All of it had been hidden away in archive files until a UFO enthusiast posted 130,000 documents worth of BLUE BOOK material in a free online database for the first time last month. Dozens of Bay Area close encounters were included in

the trove.

Read the whole story

Judge: Claiming to cure homosexuality is consumer fraud

By Samantha Michaels, Mother Jones

In a blow to the controversial practice of gay conversion therapy, a New Jersey judge has ruled that therapists who claim that homosexuality is a curable mental disorder are committing consumer fraud.

The ruling, issued on Tuesday by Superior Court Judge Peter F. Bariso Jr., is part of an ongoing lawsuit filed on behalf of four men who say they were subjected to humiliating treatments by therapists affiliated with Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing (JONAH), a gay conversion therapy referral service based in Jersey City. Bariso said it violates the state's Consumer Fraud Act to advertise conversion therapy services by describing homosexuality as a mental illness, disease, or disorder.

"This ruling makes clear that when conversion therapists lie about the nature of homosexuality in order to lure these vulnerable clients into their services and their programs, they're committing fraud," says David Dinielli, deputy legal director of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which filed the lawsuit for the plaintiffs. According to the SPLC, this marks the first time a US court has found that homosexuality is not

a mental disease.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



- The Feb. 19 6pm Tahoe Resort Improvement District board meeting has been moved to the CCC building in Meyers.

- The Rubicon Trail has reopened.
 - Aerosmith returns to Harveys on July 3 at 7pm. Tickets go on sale Feb. 24 – \$89.50-\$235.50, plus fees.
 - Placer County is cracking down on people trespassing on the Foresthill Bridge. Ten people, mostly from the Sacramento area, were cited early Sunday and 24 more were encountered there later Sunday.
 - Sunnyside in Tahoe City is hosting a fundraiser for Tahoe XC Junior Nordic Competition and Development Team on Feb. 18 from 4-8pm.
-

Road beat: Mazda makes a true minivan



The Mazda5 is the last true minivan on the market.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

In this day and age, about every minivan in the U.S. market has a footprint the size of a full-size SUV. Length and width average about 202 inches and about 78 inches, respectively. They even stand about 68-inches tall or more. Who's kidding who, the age of the minivan is gone, except for one and that is the Mazda5.

Still with three reasonably roomy rows of seats, the Mazda5 is a true minivan with a length of just 180 inches, a width of 69 inches and a shorter height of 64 inches. That's about the

footprint of your average compact car. And even better is that the Mazda5 splits the wind with a co-efficient of drag of just 0.30.



Specifications

Price \$22,060 to about \$27,000

Engine 2.5L DOHC, 2.5L 16 valve inline four cylinder
157 hp @ 6,000

163 lb-ft of torque @ 4,000 rpm

Transmission

Five speed automatic

Configuration

Front engine/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 108.3 inches

Length 180.5 inches

Width 68.9 inches

Height 63.6 inches

Track (f/r) 60.2/59.8 inches

Ground clearance 5.5 inches

Weight 3,457 pounds

Weight distribution (f/r)
56/44 percent

GVWR 4,685 pounds

Fuel Capacity 15.9 gallons
Cargo capacity (third row folded flat) 44.4 cubic feet
Steering lock to lock 2.9 turns
Turning circle 36.7 feet
Wheels 17X6.5 inch alloys
Tires 205/50X17 All-season
Performance
0-60 mph 8.48 seconds
50-70 mph level highway 5.02 seconds
50-70 mph up six percent grade 8.96 seconds
Top speed Do they race Minivans yet? They already race lawn mowers
Fuel economy 21/28/24 mpg city/highway/combined.
Expect 25-26 mpg in rural driving and 31-32 mpg on the highway at legal speeds.

That remarkably low CD becomes evident in examining the Mazda5's slick profile. Watch how you drive it as you could get arrested for cheating, cheating the wind. Its shape and proportions are just right with the main standout detail being the Nagare flow waves created in its three subtle character lines along its flanks. Other impressive details can be seen in the headlights and front fenders. Remember when discussing looks, we are dealing with a minivan, not a Mazda6, which is perhaps the best looking midsize sedan currently on the market. No, I wasn't paid to say that, it's an empirical fact.

Lifting the rather long hood will expose a Mazda 2.5L inline, DOHC, 16 valve four cylinder engine that is used in the Mazda6 and some Mazda3s. However in the 5 it doesn't get the SkyActiv

treatment of direct injection and the ultra high, 13:1 compression. In the Mazda5 its has a rather low 9.7:1 compression with a port injection system so the production numbers are lower making a still respectable 157 hp at 6,000 rpm and 163 pounds of twist at 4,000 rpm. The SkyActiv engine cranks out 184 hp at 5,750 rpm and 185 pounds of torque at an even lower 3,500 rpm. That is a demonstration of the benefits of direct injection/higher compression; more hp and torque at a lower rpm.

Power is sent to the front wheels via a five speed auto cog swapper. It is not only smooth, but also intuitive. Drive it hard and you will find it downshifting as you power through a corner or drive it easy and you will find it upshifting sooner to maximize fuel economy and engine efficiency. Straight line performance is about what you would expect from a Mazda, better than expected as a standing start 0-60 mph run required just 8.48 seconds, not bad for a nearly 3,500 pound, 2.5L four cylinder true minivan. Passing times are adequate with a 50-70 mph simulated pass taking 5.02 seconds and the same run up a six percent grade extending that time by nearly 4 seconds to 8.96 seconds. Throttle response is sprightly. Fifteen years ago those numbers would be on par with a V-8 powered Lincoln Town Car.

Most big minivans average about 21 mpg overall and 27-28 mpg on the highway. Mazda5 does a lot better. With about a liter less motor and at least 500-1,000 pounds less weight, the Mazda5 is projected by the EPA to achieve 21/28/24 mpg city/highway/combined. Overall the Mazda5 averaged about 25 mpg while on a level highway at 70 mph it returned 31.6 mpg or about 4 mpg better than the full size minivan. Fuel capacity is a good size 15.9 gallons, giving a highway range of almost 500 miles. The engine spins 2,350 rpm at 70 mph.

Being a Mazda you can expect state of the art suspenders with MacPherson struts up front and a multilink system in the rear. Seventeen inch alloys are shod with 205/50 series rubber and

the steering rack is an electro-hydraulic unit that is quick for even a sporting sedan at 2.9 turns lock to lock. Even the turning circle is a tight 36.7 feet. Track front and rear is 60 inches. The result is one tight handling minivan. Pushed hard you could even get the Mazda5 to rotate a bit in the tighter corners. About the only complaint is some body roll. But steering is benign, turn in crisp, front to rear weight balance is good (56/44) as well as the grip. You would be surprised at what the Mazda5 can do when the road bends. It would stay glued to the butt of many sedans and do it easily. It is certainly more nimble than any full size minivan.

The highway ride is smooth. However, there is slightly more road noise than a sedan. Overall, the vehicle has a controlled, compliant ride over bumps big and small. Being a smaller four cylinder it runs at a little higher rpm, so expect a little more noise when pushing hard. However, in normal, easy driving the Mazda5 acquits itself well.

Four wheel discs of a foot in diameter with all the appropriate acronyms do the stopping chores. From 40 mph forward progress is arrested in a very good 41 feet. Of course it has all the safety features you would expect, a plethora of airbags and even back up sensors.

Another positive area is in the interior. First the leather adds a touch of class and comfort. Perhaps even more important are the extraordinarily, well bolstered, comfortable front seats and second row captain's chairs. More good stuff is in the simplified instrument panel. The binnacle has a big tach and speedo with the trip computer and radio and HVAC info contained in the center stack. No touch screen or distracting insidious mice, just wonderfully clear buttons and knobs to operate everything.



The mini van practically has room for a whole team.

Rear sliding doors offer easy access to the second and third row seating. Third row seats fold away to a flat floor and almost 45 cubic feet of cargo capacity. Total interior volume is a whopping 142 cubic feet, not bad for a vehicle the size of your average compact car. Perhaps because of its small size there is less of a minivan “stigma” connected to the Mazda5. It is just an extremely practical vehicle at an even better price.

Pricing starts at \$21,240 plus \$820 for the boat ride from Hiroshima, Japan (and no it doesn’t glow in the dark). My loaded (all standard equipment) Grand Touring model stickered for \$25,640 with destination. The only extra charge was \$75 for a rear bumper guard cover. Everything else including moon roof, full power (except seats) and xenon headlights were standard. The optional equipment list is short with the most expensive item being an overhead DVD system. In reality the Mazda5 rates about an 8.5 to a 9.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.

Vacation rental rules changing in South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Vacation rental owners are likely going to have to pay more money to get a permit in South Lake Tahoe as well as contend with other new regulations.

The South Lake Tahoe City Council on Feb. 17 spent the bulk of the meeting talking about how to revise the 2003 ordinance that was amended in 2011.

The council is going to have a public workshop soon to gather more input. After that, a revised ordinance is expected to come back to the council for adoption in April.

Noise is the No. 1 complaint about vacation renters. Some of the proposed ordinance changes are the result of those complaints.

Of the 1,574 permitted vacation rentals in the city, there were 158 calls to 911 complaining about a vacation rental. Not everyone who spoke Tuesday believes that is enough of a problem to warrant changes. But those also don't account for all of the complainers.

"The city routinely receives complaints. The number of calls about general complaints are not tracked, as they come into various offices within the city," City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

A major issue still to be resolved is what to do with Airbnb like rentals where people are in their residence renting a room, a bed or even a mattress. There was no consensus among the council members as to whether those types of rentals should be subject to paying the transient occupancy tax.

What the council did agree to is to change the code so only two people may stay in a room unless the occupants are 10 years old or younger.

When it comes to occupancy limits, the word “overnight” will be removed. This means groups that rent multiple houses on a street cannot legally visit one another. If the house sleeps eight – then only eight people are allowed in the house no matter the time of day.

It was pointed out, though, that all enforcement regarding vacation rentals is complaint driven. Police officers aren’t going to be peeking in windows to see how many people are gathered around the dinner table.

Outdoor hot tubs will be off limits after 10pm. This came about because people were complaining of loud talkers after that hour. Part of the problem is people tend to raise their voices when the jets are on.

But, again, cops aren’t going to be looking over fences to see if people are soaking after hours unless neighbors complain.

While some members of the public suggested requiring rentals have a kill switch for the bubbles at 10pm, the council went with the more restrictive “no hot tubing after 10pm” mandate. And for those who want to violate that policy, the penalty starts at \$250 and could escalate to the owner losing his or her vacation rental permit.

Amplified music after 10pm is going to be a no-no, too, with the same punishment for not following the rules.

The council opted to forego the staff recommendation to provide free parking permits to neighborhoods impacted by the vacation rentals.

Forcing renters to park immediately in front of the home will be removed from the code because it’s not enforceable.

Still to be decided is how many bear boxes a rental might need to install if and when there are trash violations.

The exact fee structure is also up in the air. Those who manage their own rentals will pay more than those that are locally managed. “Professionally managed” was changed to “locally managed” to accommodate owner-occupied Airbnb’ers as well as people who live in the area and have vacation rentals.

The issue is that out-of-town owners who don’t use a management firm tend to have more infractions. The higher fee is designed to be an incentive for them to turn control over to someone locally.

The city said increasing fees is necessary so more enforcement personnel may be hired. The part-time compliance auditor position is going to be full time, and a full-time enforcement officer will be hired. Those salaries will be paid with the fees.

While the council agreed to the above recommendations, the electeds can still change their minds before the vote. (Councilman Tom Davis recused himself from the discussion and direction to staff because of his affiliation with Tahoe Keys Resort.)

Opinion: Clutter is taking over our lives

By Pamela Druckerman, New York Times

I recently discovered the secret to livening up even the duller conversation: Introduce the topic of clutter. Everyone

I meet seems to be waging a passionate, private battle against their own stuff, and they perk up as soon as you mention it.

“I don’t buy anything – no clothes, no shoes,” a woman who works in the French fashion industry told me. A New Yorker on a de-cluttering bender explained: “There’s too much in my head, there’s too much stuff in my house, too.” Another friend said that when his girlfriend got angry, she called him the clutter of her life.

Clutter isn’t a new problem, of course. But suddenly, it’s not just irritating – it’s evil. If you’re not living up to your potential, clutter is probably the culprit. Marie Kondo’s “The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up,” the top-ranked book on The New York Times list of self-help books, promises that, once your house is orderly, you can “pour your time and passion into what brings you the most joy, your mission in life.”

Read the whole story