

## HOME &amp; DIGITAL



The 2013 Toyota Scion FR-S and the Subaru BRZ, at right, are automotive kissing cousins: Developed jointly by Toyota and Subaru, these affordable new sports coupes are nearly identical, but marketed to different drivers.

EYES ON THE ROAD

## The Return of Small, Impractical and Sexy

By JOSEPH B. WHITE

Two of the hottest-selling cars in America right now are a pair of impractical sporty coupes designed to make the daily commute feel like a day at the races.

Surprised? The Scion FR-S and the Subaru BRZ, launched at the beginning of summer, aren't packed to the gills with sexy tech features. They don't warm the high-mileage hearts of the eco-conscious set. And they're pretty much worthless when it comes to hauling kids or lugging a week's worth of groceries.

Not that these considerations matter to enthusiasts like Darren Seeman, who put down a deposit on his FR-S in February—more than three months before the official launch—and watched the shipping docks in his hometown of Portland, Ore., to see when his car landed.

"I wanted something small and light like a go-cart," says Mr. Seeman, 36, a Web developer who once ran an independent Scion fan website, but has owned a Honda S2000 sports car among other non-Scion models.

Mr. Seeman says he likes cars that are light, driven by the rear wheels and not too expensive—a combination that just a couple of years ago was close to extinct in the U.S. market, except for the aging Mazda Miata.

"Most self-respecting men don't want to drive a Miata on the street," Mr. Seeman says. The 200-horsepower FR-S, which he got for about \$25,000, is bit underpowered for his taste, but "handles as good as any car I've ever had." He has already added a new sound system, high output headlights and new wheels.

It isn't a car he could have easily found on the market a few years back. The economic crunch slammed sales of small sports cars: Mazda Miata sales dropped by nearly half between 2008 and 2010, and Honda killed the S2000 after a nearly decade-long run, to the dismay of loyal fans. General Motors Co.'s spiral into bankruptcy killed off the Saturn Sky and Pontiac

### Chasing Porsche: How One Affordable New Sports Car Stacks Up

Engineers who designed the new Scion FR-S and Subaru BRZ used the mid-engine Porsche Cayman sports car as inspiration. Both new cars use 'boxer' engines that have the pistons oriented horizontally, for a lower center of gravity. Here's how the Scion compares to its more expensive inspiration.

PORSCHE CAYMAN	TECHNICAL SPECS	SCION FR-S
2.9 Liter 6-cylinder	Base Engine	2.0 Liter, 4-cylinder
265	Horsepower	200
5.5 seconds	0-60 mph	6.2 seconds
165 mph	Top Speed	137 mph
2,932	Weight	2,758
\$51,900	Starting Price	\$24,200

Solstice roadsters. Even Porsche felt the chill. Boxster sales dropped by 40% from 2008 to 2010, and Cayman sales plunged 60%.

But now, sporty cars sales are growing as the market recovers and more companies field new models. Brandon Ramirez, senior group manager for product planning at Hyundai's U.S. operations, says the segment that includes the Scion FR-S, Subaru BRZ and Hyundai's Genesis Coupe—all of which sell in the \$25,000 range—could grow by 16% this year.

The FR-S, which is actually the BRZ's mechanical twin under the skin, was developed collaboratively by Toyota and Subaru. But the companies market them to two different ends of the sports-car buying spectrum: Scion, Toyota's youth brand, targets consumers in their 20s and 30s. Subaru, with its more sedate ride and more luxurious, leather-seated "Limited" model, aims for empty nesters and other mature drivers.

They seem to be hitting the mark. A Scion FR-S or Subaru BRZ that hits a dealer lot now is selling in an average of just 11 days, according to Edmunds.com. (The industry average is 57 days.) That makes them the two fastest-selling cars among those that



The FR-S and BRZ pay homage to the Porsche Cayman, but at half the cost.

have been on the market for more than two months.

And with production runs for sports cars traditionally on the low side, buyers who didn't order early may have to wait. Toyota's U.S. sales arm expects to get just 10,000 to 12,000 FR-S's to sell this year, while Subaru's expects just 6,000 BRZs.

The early excitement over the FR-S—which stands out against Toyota's lineup of staid, front-drive sedans—points to a broader revival in interest for affordable cars that emphasize at

the least the image of fun.

But defining the class of affordable, "fun" cars isn't an exact science. The engineering and styling of the FR-S pays homage, in part, to modern Porsches. "We benchmarked the Cayman," says Subaru's Mr. McHale. "If you were to make a Cayman for \$25,000, what would it look like?"

Some consumers are comparing the FR-S to the Hyundai Genesis Coupe, a new rear-wheel-drive two door that weighs 600 pounds more than the Scion and has a standard 274

horsepower engine. Among people who use Edmunds.com to check out the FR-S, nearly 16% also look at the Genesis Coupe.

Hyundai recently launched another low-slung sporty car, the Veloster, a 4-seater that's driven by the front wheels but aims, with its looks, to lure budget-minded fun seekers.

Bob Jones, a 65-year-old retiree, says he bought a Veloster as a replacement for a Mazda Miata, in part because it was sporty, but easier to get in and out of.

"It isn't as fast as the Miata, but it's about \$10,000 less," he says. Mr. Jones lives in hilly country in East Tennessee. "It's a lot of fun in a sports car," he says. The Veloster "is a little sluggish in sixth gear going up a 30% grade, but that's what fourth gear is for."

Affordable sporty cars may not burn rubber on the sales front, but done right, their peppy performance and sex appeal can help generate global interest in the rest of a manufacturer's lineup. That is one reason industry executives expect more such cars will hit the market. "There never have been so many vehicles with a sports-car orientation than right now," says Tim Barnes, director of product planning at Mazda's U.S. arm.

His company, for one, has struck a deal with Italy's Fiat S.p.A. to share the cost of developing a new Miata and a new Alfa Romeo Spider, a successor to the car Dustin Hoffman drove to fame in "The Graduate."

Not all auto makers, of course, are investing in low-selling image boosters. Honda spokesman Chris Martin says the S2000 stayed in production far longer than Honda had originally planned, but after its sales fell, the company decided to refocus on more fuel efficient models. The current specialty sports-car in Honda's lineup? The CRZ, a two-door hybrid.

"We have a lot of past S2000 customers who ask us regularly to bring out another," says Mr. Martin. But so far, he says, Honda has no plans to revive it.

## Food Trucks: The Newest Rivalry on College Campuses

By SANETTE TANAKA

College students heading back to campus may notice some culinary changes. As food trucks become more popular among the college set, some on-campus dining programs are fighting outside competition by launching their own mobile eateries.

Savanna Harvard, a senior at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, was a regular customer last spring at Brothers Street Eats, an independent Cajun-style food truck that had permission to park on campus. "It was a nice change from the dining-hall food I usually had," Ms. Harvard says. "I liked the shrimp po'boy and gumbo the best."

Then, in April the university ejected Brothers Street Eats from campus. In its place, the university will debut its own truck called La Lola Loca next month, offering foods like chipotle BBQ pulled pork and chicken tinga with pineapple.

Virginia Johnson, the university's associate vice president for auxiliary services, says Brothers Street Eats was invited on campus only for a trial period to gauge student interest in food-truck dining. "Having a truck of our own gives us the flexibility to respond directly to our students, rather than working with off-campus vendors to address student requests," says Ms. Johnson.

College officials say running their own food trucks brings in more revenue for the universities. They also can tailor menus to fit the student body. The University of Texas at Dallas plans to debut its first food truck this fall, featuring a fusion menu of Asian, Indian and Mediterranean cuisines to reflect the school's large number of international students, who make up 19% of the student body.

Aramark Corp. and Bon Appétit Management Co., two companies that manage food services for universities, say they have seen an increase in demand for college-run food trucks, especially as a way to offer late-night dining options and serve remote areas of campus. Aramark says it will add nine more university-run food trucks this fall, and Bon Appétit says it will add five.

In total, nearly 100 colleges have their own university-run food trucks, compared with only about a dozen five years ago, according to the National Association of College and University Food Services, which represents about 550 higher education institutions in the U.S. and Canada.



versity still gets requests for access from outside vendors. "People want to bring their falafel trucks, their taco trucks, their pie trucks, their ice creams—but we already have our trucks," says Andrea Benson, general manager and head chef for the university's food trucks.

Some universities that run their own food trucks allow students to pay for meals by swiping their dining-hall I.D. cards, but other colleges haven't yet installed that technology. Even universities that allow independent food trucks on campus sometimes let them collect dining-hall dollars from students.

Laura Hall, of Durham, N.C., has owned and operated two on-campus eateries at Duke University. This year, she decided not to renew one of her contracts on campus and is instead launching her own food truck with the same name, Refectory on the Go, which will serve fare like oatmeal, tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches.

Although Ms. Hall won't be parking the truck on campus, she still expects to draw large numbers of students heading to and from classes. And, she says, her food truck won't have to pay fees to the university. "At the end of the day, I didn't want to be under the dining services' control," Ms. Hall says.

Many students may not be aware whether their favorite food truck is run by the college dining program or by an outside vendor. At the University of California, Riverside, the Culinary Chameleon, a bright green food truck launched in January that regularly changes its menu, doesn't advertise itself as college-run. "I don't think most students realize that dining services is running the truck," says David Henry, director of residential dining.

Jordon Warren, co-owner of Brothers Street Eats, says he tried to keep his customers after being kicked off the Alabama campus. "We would stay as close to campus as we could given the [Tuscaloosa city] regulations," he says. "We couldn't be on campus or within 120 feet of an existing restaurant's front door." Still, Brothers Street Eats, which was launched last year, recently shut down as sales dwindled.

"I loved the food at Brothers Street Eats," says Ms. Harvard, the University of Alabama student. "I'd eat there about once a week on my way to class." But loyalty only goes so far. "It doesn't make a difference to me who owns the trucks. All I want is fast service and good food," she says.

Many universities don't allow outside food trucks to come onto campus. But some, like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, grant limited access to select independent vendors. MIT, in Cambridge, Mass., doesn't take a cut of the vendors' revenue or profit, but charges a flat rate for the trucks to park.

Kaicheng Liang, a second-year graduate student in electrical engineering at MIT, eats at food trucks nearly every day. Some days he walks more than 25 minutes just to dine at the trucks. "Food on campus is so limited, so everyone goes to food trucks. You'll see grad students lining up for an hour to get food," he says.

The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa is launching the La Lola Loca food truck, above, this fall. The Culinary Chameleon, left, serves students at UC Riverside.

Mr. Liang's favorite is Momogoose, an Asian fusion truck, and he usually orders ga nuong, a Vietnamese dish with lemon-grass-infused grilled chicken. Timing is important for lunch, he says. "The latest I go is 12. At 12:30, it's crazy busy. By 12:45, they can run out," he says.

The University of Washington sidestepped competition by launching several of its own food trucks in 2010, early on in the food truck frenzy. About once a week, Thamar Theodore, a junior at the Seattle university, stops at the Hot Dawgs truck and treats herself to a "Seattle dawg," a hot dog topped with cream cheese and grilled onions. The wait is long, but the food is worth it, she says.

"Even if it's raining, I'll see long lines. People will wait for those dogs," Ms. Theodore says.

The University of Washington's three food trucks—Hot Dawgs, Motosurf and Red Square BBQ—have exclusive access to the college clientele, though the uni-