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The Next Generation

BIG TRUCKS, SMALL CARS, BEAUTIFULLY CRAFTED INTERIORS, MULTIPLE HYBRIDS, FUEL CELLS, AND PURE ELECTRIC VEHICLES RING IN DETROIT'S NEW YEAR BY GARY WITZENBURG

Most of us grew up with fall vehicle introductions. Some of us may even recall when showroom windows were covered in late September to hide the new models just inside. But in today's cutthroat competitive automotive market, new cars, trucks, and concept vehicles are unveiled wherever and whenever they're ready, and typically long before they hit the road. To preview the coming attractions, we worked the floor at the recent Los Angeles Auto Show. We also visited with the global design leaders at General Motors Corp., Ford Motor Co., and Chrysler LLC to get the first glimpse of the future production iron that will be on display at the 2008 North American International Auto Show at Cobo Center in January.

Los Angeles

GM announced that its Chevrolet division would lead the company's effort to "reinvent the industry" with a global portfolio of cars and trucks "ranging from gas-friendly to gas-free." Besides the world premiere of the 2009 Chevrolet Silverado 2-Mode Hybrid full-size pickup and the first auto show appearance of Chevy's Malibu Hybrid sedan, Los Angeles also saw the North American debut of a 2-Mode

hybrid Cadillac Escalade luxury SUV that (like the Silverado hybrid) boasts 40 percent better city and 25 percent higher overall fuel economy vs. conventional counterparts, all the while retaining full-size truck capabilities.

The costly but highly efficient 2-Mode hybrid system jointly developed by GM, Chrysler, BMW, and Mercedes "is the only hybrid system that's scalable up to this size," says Bob Lutz, GM's vice chairman of global product

development, adding that Toyota's Synergy Drive and similar systems are not. "We're going all-out on environmental and fuel-saving technology," he says, "and striving to make our Chevy brand the world's most fuel-efficient in every segment where it competes."

Also unveiled at L.A. were the Korean-built '09 Chevrolet Aveo5 subcompact hatchback and a redesigned Pontiac Vibe small crossover.

Ford, meanwhile, debuted a striking new 2009 Lincoln flagship full-size sedan called MKS, which "pulls together the new design direction of the Lincoln brand," says Derrick Kuzak, Ford's group vice president of global product development. Set off by a modern interpretation of a historic Lincoln split waterfall grille, the new model's styling is cleaner, crisper, bolder, and more elegant than any Lincoln in recent memory. Designed to compete with Cadillac's hot-selling new CTS sedan, it should also compare favorably with "entry-luxury" imports from Germany and Japan when it hits the road this summer. Ford also introduced a new high-performance Mustang Bullitt model fashioned after Steve McQueen's famous ride in the classic movie by that name.

Chrysler showed off Chrysler Aspen and Dodge Durango Hybrid SUVs powered by Multi-Displacement System Hemi V-8s and the same 2-Mode hybrid drive train shared with GM, BMW, and Mercedes. "The 2009 Chrysler Aspen and Dodge Durango Hemi hybrids will offer our customers the sought-after blend of performance, utility, capability, and vastly improved fuel economy, all in one package," says Frank Klegon, Chrysler's executive vice president of product development. "Combined with Chrysler's Multi-Displacement System, our advanced, 2-Mode hybrid technology immediately delivers a more than 25-percent fuel economy improvement

"We have a lot of investment going on in powertrain and overall vehicle fuel-efficiency, as well as additional focus on interiors. We'll have an all-new gasoline V-6 for passenger cars and light trucks, and new light-duty and heavy-duty diesels. We believe diesels will be very important." —Frank Klegon, executive vice president of product development, Chrysler LLC



COURTESY OF CHRYSLER



"We realize there's still much work to be done, but we're very, very encouraged by the press and public reception of our recent products. It shows that GM's Global Product Development System can turn out absolutely world-class products at an ever-accelerating pace." —**Bob Lutz**, vice chairman of global product development, General Motors Corp.

and up to a 40-percent improvement in the city."

Also making their U.S. debuts were the Dodge Journey mid-size car-based crossover, Chrysler's first entry in that fast-growing class, and a new 600-hp Viper SRT10 ACR (American Club Racer) race-prepped but street-legal version of Dodge's iconic V-10-powered Viper sports car.

Detroit

GM will power up a pair of pulse-pounding, high-performance models—the 2009 CTS-V version of Cadillac's widely acclaimed BMW-fighter CTS luxury sedan (equipped with a Corvette engine), and the long-rumored, 600-plus hp Corvette internally code-named "Blue Devil" after GM Chairman Rick Wagoner's favorite college basketball team (Duke University). The CTS-V will square off with BMW, Mercedes, and Audi ultra-performance sport sedans at a much lower price. The Blue Devil will be GM's latest right jab in the ongoing one-upmanship battle between Chevy's Corvette and Dodge's Viper.

There will also be an all-new entry from Swedish-connection Saab and a Saturn plug-in hybrid concept on the versatile E-Flex architecture that debuted a year ago under the Chevy Volt plug-in EV concept.

Ford will proudly pull the wraps off the latest generation of its longtime family jewels, a substantially upgraded lineup

of 2009 F-150 pickups, which will take America's best-sellers "to the next level in all areas," Kuzak says. "They'll raise the bar in interior quality and craftsmanship, and will debut some interesting new utility and storage features in their beds." There will also be another new Mustang variation, this one with a panoramic glass roof, and a highly significant Verve concept previewing Ford's future global "B-segment" sub-subcompact.

Ford unveiled a three-door hatchback Verve small-car concept at Germany's fall Frankfurt Motor Show and added a sporty four-door notchback version at China's November Guangzhou International Automobile Exhibition. The third and last Verve concept will debut at Detroit to complete the picture of Ford's

global small-car design direction.

Chrysler will roll out a trio of electric vehicle concepts, each "fun and interesting," Klegon says, and each very different from the others. The mid-size coupe-like four-passenger, four-door Chrysler ecoVoyager will be a fuel-cell EV with "very American styling" and 300 miles of range. "It has design reach," Klegon says, "but you'll know it's a Chrysler." The Dodge Zeo, a small 2+2 sport wagon with a "bold, expressive, muscle-car feel," will boast sub-six-second 0-60 mph muscle and a 250-mile range. The Jeep Renegade, a small, lightweight, off-road two-seat runabout, will pack a range-extending Bluetec diesel engine. Klegon calls it "a very far-reaching interpretation of a Wrangler." **db**

"Our product strategy centers [on] vehicles that are great to look at, with continuing focus on interiors, including innovative comfort and convenience features. They'll offer fuel economy as a reason to buy, and will be fully competitive in safety and in every other way."

—**Derrick Kuzak**, group vice president of global product development, Ford Motor Co.

