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PHOTO: JIM STICKFORD

Visitors check out some of the new Ford technology that will be available soon. The telematics and communication technology was on display at last week's SAE Convergence Conference.

Ford Upgrades SYNC System

By Jim Stickford
Staff Reporter

Ford Motor Co.'s high-end telematics and communication technology will be migrating from the Lincoln MKX to the company's more economic vehicles over the next year.

Jim Buczkowski, director, electrical and electronic systems – Ford research and advance, at the SOE Convergence Conference in Cobo Center in Detroit on Oct. 19, demonstrated some of the technology that will be available to consumers in the near future.

Buczkowski said the company's SYNC technology has undergone an upgrade. SYNC was first launched in 2007 with the 2008 Ford Focus. The new Lincoln MKX now features SYNC technology that will enable users to link their smart phones into the SYNC system.

"It's now possible to bring your smart phone or media player and connect it directly into SYNC," Buczkowski said. "What we've done is, when challenged, take this technology to the next level and make it more interactive and integrated with the driver."

Cars today are hugely different from when Buczkowski first started getting involved in convergence at Ford 20 years ago. Back then, electronics was limited to the radio and a few parts. Now, they are integrated in every part of the vehicle.

Buczkowski said they worked hard to make the new MKX SYNC system intuitive to use. Meaning, it's simple to operate and the user should be able to figure out how to use the system without having to refer to the instruction manual every five minutes.

An example of the intuitive operating controls is how the control buttons are designed and placed, Buczkowski said. The driver can use the thumbs of his right or left hand to access the button on the steering wheel. The buttons are designed along the line of control buttons on

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Not All Plug-in Vehicles Are Created Equal

By Stefanie Carano
Staff Reporter

Ford Motor Co. is currently developing technology intended to improve charging times for today's plug-in vehicle consumers.

Rich Scholer, Ford systems engineer for Hybrid and Plug-in Vehicles, is leading a Ford team that's developing advanced charging options intended to give plug-in vehicle consumers what they really want – quick, convenient charging times.

"Our task force kicked off two years ago and spent the first year, year-and-a-half talking to utility companies," Scholer said. "We spent a lot of time doing use cases – tools to identify requirements, to know what to do to develop these vehicles."

The team examined all the available architectures (electric charging capability) for today's plug-in vehicles and made the determination that not all plug-ins are created equal.

Electric power provided in most of today's outlets and light sockets is AC, or alternating current. As such, most of today's vehicles are equipped to be charged with an AC Level 1 (using 110 volts) and 2 (using 240 volts) charge level only – the same form of electricity providing power to lights and electronics. Yet, according to their research, it takes approximately seven hours to charge a standard plug-in hybrid electric vehicle, 17 hours for a pure battery electric vehicle using either an AC Level 1 or 2 power source.

The group determined that using a direct current, or DC power to charge a vehicle delivers better result for the customer.

If these same plug-in vehicles could be charged with a DC Level 1, 2 or 3 power source, the amount of time it takes to charge their vehicle would be reduced to one hour, or even 10 minutes, depending on what level of charge they used.

PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

Ford's Rich Scholer leads a team developing advanced charging options for plug-ins.

Scholer said none of the vehicles on the market today can be charged from a DC power source with the exception of the Nissan Leaf, which has an optional connector for a DC Level 2. Charging from a DC Level 2 power source takes about 10 minutes for a plug-in hybrid electric like the Leaf, 30 minutes for a battery electric vehicle.

"We may consider a 'dealer installed' upgrade on existing vehicles to add the DC capability," Scholer said. "It would require additional contactors in the battery pack, wiring to bypass the onboard charger including potentially charging the inlet connector in the battery back, wiring to bypass the onboard charger including potentially charging the inlet connector to make sure it's rated at the higher current. A communication module would also be required and tied to the connector wiring."

He also said that utilities may find that after smart meters are installed they could 'adjust' what homes are tied to each transformer, once

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

PHOTO: STEFANIE CARANO

North Brothers Ford senior sales manager Matthew Vazana at his dealership's Ford Premiere event highlighting the 2011 Fiesta and Edge models.

Propane Seen by Roush as Fuel of Tomorrow, Today

By Stefanie Carano
Staff Reporter

Livonia-based Roush Enterprises, an engineering company that creates performance engines as well as a number of other products, has started a new venture called Roush CleanTech, which will specialize in propane fuel systems.

"The goal in forming this company is to have a focus specifically on alternative fuels," said Todd Mouw, vice president of sales and marketing at Roush.

"Today, the one we're most bullish on is propane, because, if you look at all the factors, propane really offers the most compelling business case today. It's domestically produced, it's clean, it's safe, it's low cost, it's easily integrated into vehicles and, ultimately, we can start running vehicles tomorrow on propane.

"We're not waiting for the battery technology to come far enough where it's actually viable for our fleet customers' mass adoption. From our perspective, we're going to need all these alternative fuels to get away from foreign oil – but propane today."

Propane consists of about 40 percent biproduct from the oil-refining process, 60 percent biproduct of the natural gas refining process.

"As we find more and more natural gas shales around the country, that biproduct of finding that natural gas will also be finding propane," he said.

"We sell 10 billion gallons of propane a year to the chemical feedstock industry, guys like Dow Chemical, for things like plastics. We're giving it away.

"So, here we have a great fuel that's performance-based so fleet customers aren't compromising horsepower and torque and we could be using it to power vehicles to get away from gas and diesel. But we're just kind of giving it away to the chemical feedstock business."

Mouw said propane is currently the third common engine fuel in the world and the fueling infrastructure is already in place.

"We already have 3,000-plus fueling sites, companies like U-Haul have another 1,000 that are available, that can be upgraded to fill fleet vehicles like the ones we're talking about," he said.

A Ford F-150 powered by the Roush CleanTech propane system lets folks know it's using a clean fuel that's domestically sourced.

He said another benefit to propane fuel is that it's not only clean but domestically sourced.

"Ninety percent of the content that goes in our propane fuel systems comes from Michigan-sourced companies," Mouw said. "So, we're creating green jobs here in the state."

CleanTech is already providing propane systems for a number of customers across the country, providing systems for Ford F-150s, F-250s and Econoline cargo vans, and is working on the development of propane-powered F-450, F-550, F-650, and F-53/F-59 strip chassis, all with a 6.8-liter V10 propane engine.

"We just really went mass scale this year," Mouw said. "We spent the last three or four years doing engineering and development, but we're already working with companies such as ThyssenKrupp elevator, Frito-Lay, just to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Ford Dealers Reporting Good Consumer Reactions

By Stefanie Carano
Staff Reporter

"The nice thing about the Ford lineup is that we have something for every age, every demographic," Matthew Vazana said in an interview at North Brothers Ford last week.

Vazana, senior sales manager at the Westland dealership, said a Ford Premiere event was being held simultaneously at different dealerships by the Southeast Michigan Ford Dealers to showcase their current vehicles, highlighting the 2011 Fiesta and Edge models.

He said his dealership is seeing high sales in a mix of models across its lineup and that the dealership is currently running out of inventory of the 2010 Fusion and Escape models.

The Fusion model in particular, he said, is attracting customers from a variety of other automakers.

"With Fusion, we've had a significant amount of conquest sales, imports as well as domestics," Vazana said.

Of the Fiesta model, a subcompact vehicle produced for Ford's European market only until this year, Vazana said sales are great.

"The demand for them outweighs what's available," he said.

Vazana said Fiesta buyers so far are making up a wide range of demographics.

"It's been attracting young people as an economical entry-level car, as well as older customers looking for a great value," he said. "It's bigger in size and more usable than it looks."

He said the F-150 pickup continues to be the dealership's consistent top seller.

Jay Sturtz, general manager at Village Ford, reported from that Dearborn dealership that they're seeing similar sales patterns.

"The Fiesta is coming in and we're selling every one that comes in," he said.

He said some of the older Explorer models have been slower to move, but the public has been excited about the 2011 model.

"People have been coming in, asking about it," he said.

Sturtz said it's been a good year for sales at Village Ford.

Eric Ryan, manager at Fairlane Ford in Dearborn, said the Fusion, Focus, Fiesta and Edge have been the dealer's high-selling vehicles.

"These are our price-point

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Hitting the Finish Line is Just a Habit For These Ford Dearborn Employees

By Stefanie Carano
Staff Reporter

Striving for a personal best in human acceleration, the Ford Runners Club takes to the track to represent Ford Motor Co. in marathons across Southeast Michigan.

The club consists of 495 runners, mostly employees from Ford's Dearborn locations.

"We keep membership to active employees, retirees, interns/co-op students and people that have been associated with our club for many years," said Jeff Roggenbuck, manager of engine mapping at Ford and sergeant-at-arms of the club.

"Ford runners are from all across the company – from finance to engineering, from custodial folks to some middle management."

The club's highest-ranking runner is Jim Farley, Ford's group vice president of global marketing, sales and service.

From March to November, Ford Runners Club regularly meets to practice and participate in a number of track-and-field and cross-country events, including the Midwest Athletic Association Corporate Cup Relay in June, where they compete against employees from General Motors and Chrysler and help raise money for Special Olympics and the Michigan Humane Society. The Ford club has won this cup for the past five years.

Ford Finance employee and club president Gayle Krueger said the club's strength is in its consistency, as the club is able to get a significant amount of people to show up

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

The Ford Runners Club ran the Detroit Free Press Marathon, with the best time – 3 hours and 7 minutes – being set by active safety manager Mark Shehan, front row, plaid shirt.