

Detroit Auto Show Reveals Latest Trends in Consumer Tastes

By DEE-ANN DURBIN and TOM KRISHER
AP Auto Writers

DETROIT (AP) — Beyond the usual hype at the Detroit auto show, automakers have plenty to brag about this year: U.S. sales are the highest since 2008 and they're expected to keep growing. Buyers are being lured by cheap loans and an improving economy.

The timing is perfect for automakers to unveil more than 40 new cars and trucks this month at the industry's annual trade show in Detroit. While there will be a few wild concept cars, like a tiny pickup from Smart, there will also be many models that will go on sale this year.

Carmakers, feeling buoyant about their prospects for 2012, are trying to outdo each other with lights, music and models to generate buzz among the show's 750,000 expected visitors.

Here are three trends the public can look for at the show: Fuel-efficient cars with more style and safety features; trendy subcompacts for younger buyers; and small luxury sedans.

Smaller but stylish: Gas prices have dropped from their \$4 peak last spring but remain high. People looking for a more efficient car will have plenty of choices among midsize sedans and compacts.

Being efficient doesn't mean these cars will be stripped down. They'll be loaded with gadgets to win customers in these fiercely competitive car segments.

Midsize and compact cars are nearly tied as the largest segment in the U.S. and combined they make up more than 40 percent of U.S. sales.

Ford has unveiled a redone version of its top-selling Fusion midsize sedan. The new model, which goes on sale this fall, will feature a sharper, more chiseled design and a warning system to alert drivers when they drift into another lane. It's the first time such a system has been on a non-luxury car, Ford says. The

price and fuel economy of the Fusion aren't finalized, but expect them to be competitive.

Honda, normally a top-seller of midsize cars, unveiled a new Accord coupe, a model that will foreshadow the looks of its new sedan due in showrooms later this year.

Both cars will compete with Chevrolet's new Malibu sedan, which goes on sale this spring. With better fuel economy, improved styling and new features, the three cars hope to steal sales from Toyota's Camry, the perennial leader among midsize sedans.

The show also features smaller cars, including the

Dodge Dart, which is the first car jointly designed by Chrysler and its Italian owner, Fiat SpA.

The Dart's name is borrowed from a hot-selling compact introduced in 1960. It's Chrysler's latest effort to launch a strong competitor in small cars, a segment where it normally falls short. The Dart will heat up an already competitive market that includes the new Hyundai Elantra, Chevrolet Cruze and Honda Civic.

Volkswagen also debuted a hybrid version of the Jetta, hoping to keep its sales momentum going. Last year,

sales of the Jetta jumped after it was redesigned.

Downsized Luxury: Luxury car sales grew just 2.8 percent compared with 10 percent growth for the industry as a whole, according to Autodata Corp. But an improving economy and a slew of new cars could turn that around, especially since many of those new models are less expensive, small sedans.

Cadillac, BMW and Acura all unveiled new small cars. Hyundai — a company that targets more budget-minded customers — is launching a new car called the Genesis Coupe, aiming for luxury buyers who

want to spend less.

Ford's Lincoln brand, which is being overhauled, has given a big hint about its new direction with a concept version of the MKZ midsize car. The new MKZ will go on sale later this year.

But the most striking luxury model may be at the Lexus stand, which displays the swooping LF-LC hybrid sports car concept that was crafted in Toyota's California design studio.

Mad for Millennials: Millennials — the 70 million people born between 1981 and 2000 — are a growing force in the market. But they'd just as

soon buy a smart phone and text their friends as purchase a car to go visit them.

Like buyers from the past, Millennials will start out with small, more affordable cars. But unlike earlier generations, they expect luxury and connectivity, automakers say.

To appeal to this group, this year's show features subcompacts with perks like leather seats, ambient lighting, and easy connections to cell phone applications like Pandora.

Subcompacts unveiled at the show included Toyota's new Prius C hybrid, and the sporty Chevrolet Sonic RS.



Airmen of the 107th Expeditionary Flight Squadron pose with an A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft at Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan. The airmen, part of a group of about 300 members of the Michigan Air National Guard, returned to Selfridge Air National Guard Base last week. The A-10 Thunderbolt II is a subsonic, anti-tank and armor aircraft that made its mark in the Persian Gulf War of 1991.

Selfridge Flight Squadron Returns from Afghanistan

Approximately 300 airmen of the Michigan Air National Guard have returned to Selfridge Air National Guard Base this month, after a four-month deployment to Afghanistan.

The airmen operated and maintained the A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft while deployed, serving with the 451st Air Expeditionary Wing, based at Kandahar Airfield.

"The safe return of our Michigan airmen is a very welcome way to begin the new year," said Col. Michael Thomas, commander of the 127th Wing, the home unit of

the returning airmen.

"The selfless service rendered by these men and women, which included being deployed over the holiday season, epitomizes the core values of the U.S. Air Force."

The assignment was the fourth major deployment of the unit since 2001 and the first for the Selfridge fighter aircraft unit to Afghanistan.

It was also the first since the 107th Fighter Squadron made the transition to flying the A-10, an air-to-ground attack aircraft.

The deployment included

members of the 127th Operations Group and the 127th Maintenance Group.

Over the 120-day deployment period, the unit logged approximately 8,300 flight hours in 2,000 sorties, or flight missions.

While the bulk of the unit returned home in early January, a small cadre remains behind to assist with the transition of the unit that replaced the Michigan Air Guardsmen at Kandahar, a NATO base in southern Afghanistan.

Composed of approximately 1,700 citizen-airmen, the

127th Wing of the Michigan Air National Guard is the host organization at Selfridge, flying the KC-135 Stratotanker, an aerial refueler, and the A-10 Thunderbolt II, also known as the Warthog.

In addition to the Wing, Selfridge is home to numerous other military and federal agencies, which fly a variety of helicopters and small, light, fixed-wing aircraft. It also hosts a biannual air show.

More information on the 127th Wing and Selfridge Air National Guard Base is available at www.127wg.ang.af.mil.

NAIAS to Remain At Cobo Center For Next 5 Years

DETROIT (AP) — The Detroit auto show will remain at Cobo Center at least through 2017 under an agreement completed recently.

The Detroit Auto Dealers Association signed a five-year contract to keep the annual North American International Auto Show at Cobo. This year's show is open to the public Jan. 14-22.

The dealers had repeatedly warned that Detroit could lose the show to another city unless Cobo expanded and improved.

The Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority took control of Cobo from the city in 2009 and began what are expected to be \$200 million in renovations. That's adding about 150,000 square feet of display space to the 700,000 it has now.

"This is a triumph for the city of Detroit, the region and the state and a huge endorsement of the transformation we're making at Cobo Center," said Authority chairman Larry Alexander.

"Four short years ago, we were in danger of losing this region's most recognized annual event and one of its most valuable assets."

Cobo Arena is being renovated into a ballroom as well.

Delphi Promoting Wireless Device Charging Option

LAS VEGAS — Delphi Automotive displayed its Wireless Device Charging System at the Consumer Electronics Show last week.

Currently under development, the system transmits power over distance to deliver a charge without precise positioning of the electronic device receiving the charge.

It would eliminate the clutter, inconvenience and distractions associated with multiple charging cords in the vehicle cabin and replace them with a safe, convenient and efficient automatic charging system.

"From navigation systems to

cell phones to personal computing devices, we are tied to our favorite electronics, but we won't always have to be tied to charging cords for them to work," said Christopher Reider, global director of engineering, Delphi Connection Systems.

"Instead, our system will use magnetic fields from hidden power source resonators placed in the vehicle interior to automatically power these devices through high-efficiency, hands-free charging."

Delphi is testing the system on research vehicles and intends to be production-ready by model year 2014.

The Delphi Wireless Device Charging System makes use of the same magnetic resonance technology as the Delphi Wireless Electric Vehicle Charging System.

Magnetic resonance technology is superior to traditional inductive charging because it can transmit power over greater distances, does not require precise device positioning in order to deliver a charge and will be able to charge multiple devices at the same time.

The consumer devices simply need to be in proximity to the power source, not directly touching it. Traditional induc-

tive charging systems are limited to charging only one device per charging coil and the device must be resting on top of the pad to receive a charge.

Freeing drivers from charging cords is not only convenient, it will help create a safer driving experience.

The Delphi Wireless Device Charging System is being engineered with consumers and automakers in mind, and will provide a competitive advantage to OEMs who choose to offer it as an option on their future vehicles.

Delphi has a full portfolio of plug-in and wireless charging systems for EVs and hybrids.

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