

Downsized SUVs Star at Geneva Show

By COLLEEN BARRY
and FRANK JORDANS
Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The small cars premiering at the public portion of the Geneva Motor Show this week are not the boxy fuel-savers of yesteryear — not even close.

European automakers have downsized SUVs and put all the luxury they can into premium subcompacts as they seek to dazzle consumers back into confidence after years of crisis.

European manufacturers are facing one of their toughest seasons yet.

Unemployment and continental austerity measures have made consumers in Europe skittish, factories are idle, and yet there is little automakers can do to close plants without upsetting politicians at home.

Their response, on view at the Geneva auto show, is to come on strong with small cars that pack value, with less of an emphasis on alternative powertrains such as electric and hybrid autos that have dominated recent editions of the Geneva event.

“Three years ago everybody was caught with their pants down and they are worried that it could happen again if the euro collapses or China stops buying,” said Frank Rinderknecht, CEO of

Rinspeed, a Swiss design company that specializes in developing new concepts for the automotive industry.

Even the premium makers have put the emphasis on their smaller cars. Mercedes is looking for younger buyers — read under 50 — for the new A-Class. Audi rolled out the third-generation in its A3 series, which 15 years ago was the first compact in the premium market. And Volvo launched its V40, a five-door hatchback that adds a compact design to the company's lineup of saloons, station wagons and SUVs.

From the mass-market producers, Ford premiered the B-Max, a family-friendly subcompact, while Fiat launched its 500L, a larger version of the tiny 500 city car that is being made in Serbia. Toyota has put a little snarl on the hybrid version of its best-selling Yaris to give it a more aggressive look.

Meanwhile Peugeot is turning automotive convention on its head by making the new 208 smaller than its predecessor.

The launches are a far cry from the days when small cars were spartan money-savers. While remaining easy on fuel consumption and light on emissions, these models are tooled with the latest safety features and touches of luxury to spruce up the compact

and subcompact segments that comprise some 80 percent of the European market.

“Remember when smaller cars used to be cheap and cheerful? Now the consumers want the finest quality, the finest fuel efficiency, safety and design,” said Ford CEO Alan Mulally.

The problem for European mass market automakers is that consumer demand has shriveled under the pressure of the sovereign debt crisis: this year sales are expected to shrink nearly 5 percent to 12.9 million units, according to the Center for Automotive Research.

Europe's mass-market automakers are overwhelmingly reporting losses: Fiat, Peugeot-Citroen PSA, General Motors' Adam Opel, and Renault. And their partners and parent companies are posting profits despite the European losses, thanks to sales in emerging markets or the United States.

Fiat and Chrysler CEO Sergio Marchionne warned that unless automakers are allowed to close unproductive factories, one or more automakers will fail in the medium- to long-term. But he said the issue can't be solved on a national level, and urged European officials to provide a “concerted road map” for the auto industry to close idled plants.

If that doesn't happen “some of us may not be around,” he said. “We need to be careful here. We are playing with fire.”

Marchionne said Fiat can survive thanks to its partnership with Chrysler. His aim is to produce cars for the recovering U.S. market at Italian plants, which analysts say are running at 60 percent capacity.

The CEO of Nissan-Renault, Carlos Ghosn, said Europe's car industry could see a wave of restructuring once one major company takes the first step.

“The day it will start, everybody is going to have to follow,” he said. “There is no such thing as one car manufacturer restructuring and everyone else stays idle.”

Detroit Auto Scene ROAD REPORT

Malibu Eco Offers Glimpse of Future

BY GERALD SCOTT
NEWS DEPT.

Both figuratively and literally, there is plenty riding on the success of the 2013 Chevrolet Malibu Eco car.

Literally, the safety and function of every family that buys one is riding on it. But also, figuratively, the success of GM's passenger car lineup as it relates to cars with the “Eco” or “eAssist” function also hangs in the balance.

We test-drove the 2013 Chevrolet Malibu Eco car for a week recently and we can testify that the “Eco” edition is different than, say, the 2012 Malibu mainstream passenger vehicle in ride and handling.

The Eco function helps push the vehicle deeper into the 21st century, where the electrification of all cars is beginning to take shape.

The Eco version of the Malibu is important to GM because it will tell the automaker if there is going to be immediate, mainstream acceptance of a popular family car, but one equipped with Eco, or electronic assist technology.

The 2013 Malibu Eco is described as Chevrolet's most fuel-efficient Malibu ever. It is the first Chevrolet to feature General Motors' eAssist battery electric/gas propulsion system, which uses a state-of-the-art lithium-ion battery and an electric motor-generator to enable regenerative braking, electric assist and start-stop functionality.

That helps deliver a GM-estimated 26 mpg in city driving and 38 mpg on the highway.

Malibu Eco's highway efficiency is comparable to the segment's popular full hybrids and diesels, but delivered at a lower price:

- 2012 Ford Fusion Hybrid — \$29,395 / 36 mpg;
- 2012 Volkswagen Passat TDI SE Diesel (with automatic) — \$27,895 / 40 mpg;
- 2012 Toyota Camry Hybrid — \$26,660 / 39 mpg;
- 2012 Hyundai Sonata Hybrid — \$26,545 / 40 mpg;

Malibu Eco is part of the all-new, 2013 Malibu lineup — Chevrolet's first global midsize sedan — designed to give customers more style, fuel efficiency, content and features,



2013 Chevrolet Malibu Eco 2SA

along with the craftsmanship and dynamic capabilities rivaling high-end sedans. It has a more powerful engine — 182 hp / 134 kW — than the Fusion (156 hp / 116 kW), Camry (178 hp / 132 kW) or Passat (140 hp / 104 kW).

The Eco-specific lightweight components and systems, include an aluminum hood, aluminum rear bumper beam, low-mass carpet and dash mat and more, which save approximately 130 pounds over a comparably equipped non-Eco model.

An Eco gauge in the cluster that continuously responds to driving behavior, encouraging fuel-efficient driving. An Auto Stop Indicator on the tachometer informs the driver when the engine is in start-stop mode on the highway.

Meanwhile, the eAssist system is mated to a fuel-efficient 2.4L Ecotec direct-injection four-cylinder engine and next-generation GM six-speed automatic transmission.

The 2.4L engine, a variant of the same engine that was recognized as one of the Ten Best Engines in 2010, is lightweight and features dual-overhead cams, direct injection, continuously variable intake and exhaust timing and electronic throttle control. It also has a lightweight aluminum cylinder block and cylinder head.

There is a five-year/100,000-mile powertrain warranty, as well as a three-year/36,000-mile bumper-to-bumper limited warranty is standard on the Malibu Eco. Certain eAssist components are covered by an eight-year/100,000-mile warranty, including the electric motor generator, three-



2013 Chevrolet Malibu Eco interior view.

phase electric power cables and high-voltage lithium-ion battery.

The Malibu Eco is offered with cloth or leather seats in eight exterior and three interior color choices. It is well-equipped in standard form and available with four equipment packages: Package 1 — Power Convenience; Package 2 — Premium Audio; Package 3 — Leather; and Package 4 — Navigation.

The Eco is the first trim level of an all-new Malibu lineup to launch in the United States. Other Malibu trim levels including LS, LT and LTZ are scheduled to begin production next summer in Fairfax, Kan. and Detroit-Hamtramck. The 2013 Malibu will be sold in nearly 100 countries on six continents and will serve as a flagship Chevrolet midsize in many parts of the world. The Malibu is built in multiple locations including the United States, China and Korea.

Finally, the interior of the car is . . . sweet. That's perhaps the best way to describe it: sweet. The Malibu interior these days feels much closer to the Regal GS interior than it does, say, something else that's larger or otherwise in the older “family car” realm.

2013 CHEVY MALIBU ECO

- Base Price: \$26,845
- As Tested: \$29,100
- Engine: Ecotec 2.4L
- Mileage: 29 city/38 hwy.
- Length: 191.3 inches
- Wheelbase: 107.8 inches
- Trans: 6-speed auto.
- Curb wt.: 3,620 lbs.
- Assembly: GM Fairfax, KS

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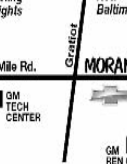


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