

Honda beats Toyota to a sporty hybrid for US market

January 12 2010, by Mira Oberman



The new Honda CR-Z is on display at the North American International Auto Show January 11 in Detroit, Michigan. Honda unveiled a sporty new hybrid vehicle Monday that will land in US showrooms this summer -- at least two years ahead of a similar prototype introduced by rival Toyota.

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"Now, I know you've heard from others with plans to offer up a product in this new segment," said American Honda Motor vice president John Mendel.

"But this is a real car coming to you in just a few months."

The Honda CR-Z is a sporty two-seater designed to evoke memories of the Japanese automaker's popular but now defunct CR-X.

It will build on Honda's existing US lineup of hybrid vehicles -- the Civic and the Insight. The automaker also announced plans to add hybrids to its luxury Acura brand. Related article: Optimism at [Detroit auto show](#)

"CR-Z is an altogether new vision -- a renaissance if you will -- for a car of the future," Mendel said.

"The CR-Z was developed for a more discerning customer who is seeking a unique combination of forward-looking style, fun-to-drive spirit, advanced safety and [fuel efficiency](#)."

Toyota, which is expected to introduce eight new hybrids in the next few years, introduced a prototype of a two-seater hybrid with somewhat less of a sporty style.

The FT-CH concept car is aimed at Toyota's strategy "to offer a wider variety of conventional hybrid choices to its customers," as it begins to introduce plug-in hybrids and battery-powered vehicles in global markets, the company said.

It is expected to go on sale in 2012.

Honda was the first automaker to introduce a mass market hybrid in 1999 with the hatch-back two door Insight, revived last year as a roomier four-door.

But Toyota soon dominated the hybrid market with its popular dedicated model, the Prius.

Honda said it is continuing to forge ahead in developing alternative

powertrains and plans to introduce an all-electric commuter car to the US market in the coming years.

"We continue to believe that a [fuel cell](#) electric vehicle is the ultimate solution to reducing CO₂ (carbon dioxide) emissions," said Takanobu Ito, president and chief executive officer of [Honda Motor](#).

"A fuel cell car is a full electric vehicle, but rather than use electricity from the grid, a fuel cell vehicle generates electricity on board and refills more quickly."

While the technology already exists to build fuel cell vehicles, Ito said the manufacturing costs must come down and the infrastructure to support hydrogen fueling must be developed.

"But make no mistake. As a vehicle, the Honda FCX Clarity is ready now," he said.

"Further, Honda is unique in making long-term investments to develop the refueling infrastructure for alternative fuel vehicles."

The automaker will begin operating its next-generation solar hydrogen station at its Los Angeles research station later this month.

Under the system, which could fit on the roof of a typical US home, solar panels help transform water into hydrogen fuel.

The latest generation eliminates the need for a costly compressor and also allows the system to be small enough to fit in a standard garage.

But Ito said expanding the use of hybrid vehicles is the "most important" near-term approach.

"To increase the opportunity for more customers to choose a hybrid we must be able to meet different needs with family, luxury and sporty hybrid vehicles," he said.

"We will apply hybrid systems which are compact, lightweight and affordable to a wider range of products in the near future."

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