

# Chevy Spark: A mighty tiny car

May 8 2012, By Jim Motavalli

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Growth has long been Detroit's mantra, but now the industry is surviving by thinking small. I'm writing this from Germany, where gasoline costs \$7 or \$8 a gallon (you thought \$4 was high!) and a Jetta is a big car. More typical of what's going on in Berlin these days is the launch of a fleet of 1,000 Car2Go Smart share cars - the largest concentration in the world.

America is finally getting hip to [small cars](#), and the 2013 Chevrolet Spark, set to go on sale in the U.S. around now, is set to take advantage of that. I saw one of these minis on display at my local Earth Day

celebration and admired how well it stacks up against equally diminutive competition.

To say that it looks and feels Korean is quite a compliment, considering how the restyled Kia Optima and Hyundai Elantra are. The Spark was designed at GM's studio in Seoul. Expect the less-than-2,000-pound [car](#) to start at less than \$13,000 and get about 45 mpg on the highway.

Consider these size facts:

- The Spark, the smallest Chevrolet ever to be sold in North America, is half the size of typical full-size cars from 1973 (think Chevrolet Impala, Ford LTD, Cadillac DeVille), the year American car size hit a peak from which it has retreated only gradually.
- Like the Honda Fit, the Spark is tall - six inches taller than that 1973 sedan. You could wear a top hat at the wheel. Adding vertical space is a great idea, because it makes small cars much better load haulers than they have any right to be.
- The Spark has the same front and rear legroom as that '73 landmark. That's a great retort to an over-six-foot friend of mine who told me that his '73 Cadillac was the only car he could fit into. He'd fit fine in the back seat of the Spark.

Buoyed by statistics like this, the Spark mini car could do as well as Chevy's new subcompact, the Sonic, whose sales are 38 percent higher than the indifferent compact it replaced, the Aveo. In March, 8,251 Sonics were sold.

Americans are continuing to buy Ford Fiestas and Focuses in great numbers. Focus sales in California (the nation's largest car market) are up 135 percent in the first quarter of 2012. The fuel-efficient Fusion and

the Focus are Ford's sales leaders. And the Chevrolet Volt plug-in hybrid has rebounded from a fire scare, with sales of 1,462 in April.

By 2015, Toyota expects to sell 200,000 Priuses a year in the U.S., and 400,000 from the expanded Prius family. In the first quarter, Toyota sold 60,589 Priuses of all types in the U.S.

It will be interesting to see if Chrysler can strike gold with the new Dart, set to get 41 mpg on the highway with a 1.9-liter four, a manual transmission and a special aerodynamic-enhancing eco package. The Fiat 500 hasn't been a huge hit, but bringing back the iconic Dart name was a smart move. Sales for Chrysler overall are high, thanks in part to its first credible compact in a long while, the 200.

American automakers, tempered by the near-death experience that resulted from an over-dependence on trucks and SUVs, are unlikely to make the same mistake again. They have to stay lively, because the imports are likely to get much better, too: consider that Mercedes-Benz is about to bring a whole new class of fuel-efficient subcompacts into the American market.

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