

Three to a space: the folding car

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If you're of a certain age - or just watch a lot of Hulu or Nick at Nite - you probably remember the folding (and flying) car from "The Jetsons."

The forthcoming Hiriko Fold doesn't fly, but it does fold.

To make this work, regular controls had to be replaced with drive-by-wire, and the accelerator, steering wheel and brake are gone in favor of an aerospace-type yoke that (as in a Segway), is moved forward to move the vehicle forward, and back for reversing. Left and right are for steering.

Just like in the Jetsons' car (and the 1950s BMW Isetta), the driver climbs out through the glass canopy. It's strictly for the urban driver, with top speed of about 31 mph, and range of 75 miles on quick-recharge (15 minutes) lithium-ion batteries. Electric motors are at the car's four wheels. It can be registered as a quadricycle or motorcycle in some markets.

[Electric cars](#) are urban vehicles whose short range are well-suited for city driving. But cities don't have many split-level homes with garages - people live in tight quarters in apartments. So where's the charging going to happen? [Parking garages](#) and, to a lesser extent, pay lots, offer some kind of solution, but not everybody can afford those choices.

If you could get cars more tightly packed - three to a space, for instance - then city charge farms could work better. I've seen the concept of autonomous-driving cars dropping off their passengers, then boarding an

elevator to be put away in a high rise until needed again. That works - but only if the tech does. Having the cars fold up for storage makes it work better. "A systematic solution to major societal changes," said Jose Manuel Barroso, the president of the European Commission, at the time of the unveiling. You couldn't say as much for the fascinating concept at right, a folding car that looks cool but would never make it on the road.

The Fold, as it's known, has its genesis in a MIT Media Lab project sponsored by GM. Writes Steve Ashley for the BBC, "The discussion led to the concept of a small EV that could be folded and stacked in line, and shared by multiple users in urban environments in Asia, North America and Europe."

The Hiriko Driving Mobility Group, based in the Basque region of Spain, visited the MIT lab in 2009, and leveraged some Spanish government funding to produce what became the Hiriko Fold. According to Kent Larson, director of the Media Lab's Changing Places Group, everything is a tight fit. "It's designed more like an iPhone than a tower computer," he told Ashley.

The Fold is going into production in Europe next year, priced around \$16,400. Trucks and convertibles are envisioned.

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