

VW makes headway with its E-Bugster

August 1 2012, By Jim Motavalli



Volkswagen brought some reporters to Europe recently to talk about green cars, and then spent much of the trip deriding the whole concept of battery vehicles. I drove a prototype electric Golf (with 26.5 kilowatt-hours of Sanyo batteries) in California in 2010, and the car has been making slow progress. A fleet of 20 of these competent but underwhelming buggies are quietly on the road, and production will

reportedly begin in 2014. But don't expect a big push-they could be "compliance vehicles" to satisfy California green car regulations. I saw the hybrid version of the Jetta in New York, and found it amazingly cautious-not likely to dent the Prius' domination of the market.

And then came the E-Bugster, quite a leap forward for VW. The company has showed off this dashing [concept car](#) several times, first in Detroit early this year and then a few months later at the Beijing Auto Show. Things are advancing quickly, because this month VW handed the keys to some journalists at the Laguna Seca race track in California. There was no opportunity to prove that VW had built a Tesla Roadster killer-speeds were limited to just 20 mph.

But it's the concept that counts. And the E-Bugster is a killer concept with a dumb name. E-Bugster? Try to say that with a straight face. I didn't much care for the styling of the new Beetle, but the Bugster crosses it with that of the original and classic Porsche Speedster to come up with something bold and sexy, with just the right spicing of retro. The E-Bugster could park right next to the Tesla.

From the look of it, the E-Bugster has a similar drivetrain to the E-Golf, but with 28.3 kilowatt-hours of lithium instead of 26.5. With an 85-kilowatt electric motor and 114 horsepower, it's not likely to be a road burner like the Tesla Roadster, but if it sees production there are likely to be beefed-up performance versions. As shown, zero to 60 comes up in 10 seconds, and range is 110 miles.

The electric roadster is a preview of the next gas-powered Beetle convertible, though in production it will have four seats instead of the E-Bugster's two. So, again, we're seeing a [car](#) primarily intended for internal-combustion being compromised in its plug-in version. Electrics probably won't come fully into their own until they're all on dedicated platforms.

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Citation: VW makes headway with its E-Bugster (2012, August 1) retrieved 24 May 2024 from
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