

Toyota rolls into TED with zippy new way to get around

March 20 2015



A visitor negotiates a course in a 3-wheel Toyota i-ROAD urban mobility prototype being demonstrated at the TED Conference in Vancouver on March 19, 2015

Steve Gundrum was grinning on Thursday when he climbed out of a Toyota some might call a cross between a zippy scooter and an eco-friendly electric car.

Gundrum was among the TED Conference attendees who test drove one of the company's i-ROAD prototype "personal mobility vehicles" on a

course set up in the basement of the Vancouver Centre, where the gathering took place.

The second seat in the small, electric two-seater vehicles is likely to be better used for backpacks or grocery sacks than passengers.

Steering was accomplished with the single rear tire of the i-Road's three wheels, meaning drivers needed to turn a few heartbeats earlier than in a typical [car](#).

"It's easy and intuitive," Gundrum said.

"It's kindred to a motorcycle, but it's really a very small automobile," the California man added.

Toyota brought the prototypes to TED to find out how the gathering's attendees see the future of mobility, said Jason Schulz of Toyota Motor Sales USA.

Schulz pictured i-Road being used for everyday short trips—such as getting to train stations, darting to markets or commuting to jobs.

"Look at San Francisco or Manhattan where parking is so constrained," Schulz said.

"You could get around with this and then park a couple of them in the same space as a typical car today."

The i-Road weighs about 660 pounds (300 kilos), has a top speed of 35 miles per hour (56 kilometers per hour) and a range of about 30 miles (48 kilometers). It recharges in three hours and plugs into standard outlets.

Gyroscopes and sensors for balancing the three-wheeled vehicle result in it leaning through turns similar to the exhilarating way motorcycles take curves.

"In the 20 years I've been in the car business, this is the most fun, interesting ride dynamic I've ever had because of the rear-steer and the active lean system," Schulz said.

"It is just a total blast to drive. We have seen so many 'Tedsters' come out of the car smiling and happy."

The vehicles are being tested in Tokyo, Silicon Valley and via a carsharing program in Grenoble, France.

Toyota has yet to figure out how it will price i-Road, but Schulz said it will need to be attractive enough to compete with new cars.

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