

Cars go green and online as Tokyo Motor Show opens

30 November 2011, by Harumi Ozawa



The BMW i3 concept (L) and the BMW i8 concept (R) are on display at the 42nd Tokyo Motor show on November 30, 2011. Energy-saving electric cars with advanced green technology were vying for attention as the Tokyo Motor Show opened with robots and computers becoming ever more part of the vehicles on display.

Electric cars with cutting-edge green technology and vehicles remote-controlled by smartphones caught the eye Wednesday at the first Tokyo Motor Show held since Japan's devastating earthquake.

Companies showcased concept cars with "transformable" bodies and automotive computers linked to smart phones, while showing off energy-efficient vehicles with electric, fuel cell and hybrid engines.

Compact, fuel-efficient cars are also on display, with Japanese [carmakers](#) hoping they can galvanise moribund domestic sales as the sector tries to pick itself up from March's quake-tsunami and the ongoing global [economic downturn](#).

"2011 has been an unprecedented year of challenges -- the March earthquake and tsunami, the highly uncompetitive yen, the flooding in Thailand (which forced production shutdowns for [Japanese automakers](#))," said Nissan Chief

Executive Carlos Ghosn.

"The Tokyo Motor Show this year, more than any previous year, demonstrates the resilience and tenacity of Japan and the strength of its people."



Toyota Motor president Akio Toyoda (L) and Yamaha Motor president Hiroyuki Yanagi display the electric commuter "EC-Miu" (R) and electric power assisted bicycle "Pas With" in Tokyo on November 28. Companies are showcasing concept cars with "transformable" bodies and automotive computers linked to smart phones, while showing off energy-efficient vehicles with electric, fuel cell and hybrid engines.

Japan's second-largest automaker Nissan, which is part-owned by France's Renault, is trailing several electric concept cars, including the Pivo 3, which can be remotely manoeuvred with a smart phone.

Nissan has already installed automotive telematics in its Leaf electric car, allowing drivers to remotely control the air conditioning system and check on a car's battery using their smart phone or personal computer.

Rival Honda showed off a sports bike and small sports car called the EV-Ster, both with electric engines.

Honda President Takanobu Ito said the automaker planned to install large solar panels at its factories to make its entire operation free of [carbon emissions](#) -- from its plants to the products they churn out -- as it looked to "a society of the future where no environmental stress is imposed."

Toyota is also looking to burnish its green credentials, unveiling the "Aqua", a compact hybrid and an advanced fuel cell car touted as the world's most fuel efficient vehicle.

Akio Toyoda, the president of Toyota which also displayed a plug-in hybrid car, said future consumers will have even more choices when it comes cutting-edge vehicle technology.

"I don't think the debate over cars in the future would be whether it should be an electric car or a plug-in hybrid," he said.

"Many different cars will probably find their own positions in the market."

The Japanese auto giant also plans to launch the five-seater model in late December in Japan, before a gradual global roll-out.

"The Japanese market is still important for European carmakers that are interested in environmental technologies such as electric and hybrid cars," said Tatsuya Mizuno, a director at Mizuno Credit Advisory in Tokyo and a vehicle industry expert.

The motor show, which is held every two years, will feature 179 exhibitors from a dozen countries and the venue is almost twice as large as the 2009 edition of the event.

Several major foreign manufacturers who skipped the last show are back, including Germany's Volkswagen, BMW, Mercedes and Porsche; French carmakers Renault and Peugeot-Citroen and Britain's Jaguar and Land Rover.

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Japan's auto giant Mazda Motor displays the concept mid-sized sedan "Takeru" with an economy efficiency Skyactiv-D diesel engine at a press preview of the Tokyo Motor Show on November 30, 2011.

The Aqua, to be sold under the name Prius C outside Japan, does 35 kilometres per litre of gasoline (82 miles per gallon), beating the firm's existing Prius model at 32.6 kilometres per litre.

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