

Small SUVs, pricey sports cars dominate at Geneva auto show

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The undated photo provided by Audi Media Services shows the new Audi R8 V10. The car will have its world premiere at the Geneva International Motor Show that is open to the public from March 5 through 15. (AP Photo/Audi)

(AP)—Small SUVs for families and powerful sports cars for the rich are the big things this year at the Geneva International Motor Show this year. Environmentally correct electrics and hybrids, not so much—thanks to cheaper gas and limits on battery life.

Here are the major themes for the March 5-15 show:

LOOKING FOR A WINNER

Analysts say this show is more about the search for hit vehicles than new technology, since automakers are trying to boost sales as Europe slowly recovers from its debt crisis.

Car registrations in the 28-country European Union increased 5.4 percent last year to 12.5 million, but remain woefully below their peak of around 16 million in 2007. High unemployment and weak growth are still holding back the industry, despite 17 straight months of increasing sales.

And there are headwinds from Russia, which appears headed for recession after the ruble's plunge.

On the other side of the ledger, expensive new luxury and sports cars will cater to demands from buyers in the recovering U.S. economy and China.

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING SUV

Small SUVs and car-like SUVs known as crossovers have become a hot seller for growth-hungry automakers. The category will get even more crowded with new vehicles on display at Geneva. Renault will offer the Kadjar, a crossover in two- or four-wheel drive versions, while Honda blurs the borders between car and hatchback with its new HR-V, touting acoustic insulation that reduces road noise and three different ways to configure the interior to carry things. At the higher priced end, Infiniti shows off its QX30 concept with carbon-fiber trim and big 21-inch wheels. Concepts are clues to what the company may introduce in the

future.

Small SUVs are the same length as compact or smaller midsize cars, but have more ground clearance and off-road features such as cladding protecting the wheel wells and underside.



This undated photo provided by McLaren shows the new McLaren 675LT. The car will make its world debut at the Geneva Motor Show, with a clear focus on performance, light weight and ultimate levels of driver engagement – all key attributes of a McLaren 'Longtail'. (AP Photo/McLaren Automotive Limited)

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

High-priced sports cars and luxury vehicles will be on display in abundance. Audi is showing a new version of its R8 with a 10-cylinder

engine churning out 610 horsepower and acceleration of 0-100 kph (0-62 mph) in only 3.2 seconds. It's priced at 165,000 euros (\$185,000) for the basic version, 187,000 euros (\$202,000) for the more powerful one and goes on sale in Europe this summer.

For those lusting after a bit more pickup, the McLaren 675LT offers 0-100 kph in 2.9 seconds and 0-200 kph in 7.9 seconds, on your way to a top speed of 330 kph (205 mph). The engine puts out 675 horsepower under the metric PS standard. The price will be around \$345,000 when the car goes on sale later this year, although the U.S. version is already sold out.

Ferrari will join in with its 488 GTB, powered by a turbocharged eight-cylinder engine.

In the ultra-luxury market, Daimler AG's Mercedes-Benz has the Maybach Pullman, a stretched high-end version of its S-class. It's 6.5 meters (21 feet) long and lets people in the back sit facing each other behind an electric partition window separating them from the chauffeur. Prices start at around 500,000 euros (\$560,000).



The undated photo provided by Renault media services shows the new SUV Kadjar which will have its world premiere at the Geneva International Motor Show that is open to the public from March 5 through 15. (AP Photo/Renault)

THAT OLD ELECTRIC DILEMMA: BATTERY LIFE

Electric models and hybrids have lost some buzz. They are still arriving, as Mercedes introduces a plug-in hybrid version of its C-class sedan. Problem is, as a class they don't sell well yet. Only 75,331 electrics and hybrids were sold in the EU last year. That's up 37 percent, but their limited range and higher costs mean little demand aside from environmental enthusiasts.

"You've got low gas prices at the moment, and the e-mobility issue is at a very difficult phase of development," said Stefan Bratzel, an industry expert at the University of Applied Sciences in Bergisch Gladbach.

For electric sales to take off, he said, the battery range will have to expand from around 150 kilometers (93 miles) now to 400-500 kilometers (250-310 miles), and there have to be more charging stations. That could happen—but not this year.



The undated artist rendering provided by Daimler Media Services shows the new Mercedes-Maybach Pullman in front of a Mercedes-Benz 600 Pullman. The new Mercedes-Maybach Pullman will have its world premiere at the Geneva International Motor Show that is open to the public from March 5 through 15. (AP Photo/Daimler Media Services)

LET'S NOT FORGET THE FAMILY CAR

One of BMW's new vehicles is the 2-Series Gran Tourer, a seven-seat family vehicle that's something of a contrast with the company's powerful sedans and SUVs. Analysts say luxury carmakers have dipped into more moderately priced categories in search of more sales revenue. The basic version starts at 26,950 euros (\$30,000) in Germany.

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