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Auto Industry Shows Off Alternatives at Annual Show

CLEAN: Electric car, new generation hybrids on display.

If it's early December then that means it's time again for the Los Angeles Auto Show.

The first two days were restricted to the media, giving reporters, photographers, bloggers, and video camera crews access to the new

ago it was to serve the auto market but as there was no market in place, the microturbines were used for stationary generation. Capstone, however, did get its microturbines in other vehicles, primarily buses.

Now that a market has emerged for electric vehicles, Capstone uses the race car to promote the C-30 for personal vehicles. There are hopes that it will open the door to other vehicles using the C-30 although for Capstone it will always be a low-volume business, Crouse said.

"This can be the drive solution



AUTOMOTIVE
MARK R. MADLER

claimed. Among the vehicles at his exhibit area was a 1999 Cadillac that had gotten 20 miles to the gallon. After being fitted with the combustion device, the mileage improved to the mid-30s, Zupancic said.

At last year's auto show 100 devices were sold and Zupancic hopes to improve that by five times this year.



Emissions: Derek Zupancic explains how the HH2 Hydrogen Clean Air Combustion System works.

vehicles and concept cars still in development and seating for announcements by the car manufacturers in attendance.

In Kentia Hall on the lower level of the convention center was where the auto accessories and detailing exhibitors could be found. Among the companies exhibiting were Galpin Auto Sports, HydroLectricPower LLC, in Canoga Park, and Capstone Turbine Corp.

This was the first year Chatsworth-based Capstone took part in the auto show. At its space the company showed off a race car fitted with its C-30 microturbine that powers up the electric battery after it gets depleted. With the microturbine the hybrid supercar can go between 400 miles and 500 miles on a tank of fuel, said Jim Crouse, executive vice president for sales and marketing for Capstone.

When the company was founded 20 years



Wheels: Car makers showed off their new vehicles at the Los Angeles Auto Show.

for a higher duty cycle applications to get the benefits of lower emissions, less noise and fuel efficiency," Crouse said.

No emissions are the benefit of the device invented by Derek Zupancic of HydroLectricPower.

The HH2 Hydrogen Clean Air Combustion System can turn any car into a hybrid, Zupancic

Like Capstone with its microturbines, Zupancic wants to get his device fitted onto more than just cars.

"We are looking for companies to make and distribute (the device) and to get OEM (original equipment manufacturer) licenses," Zupancic said. "This will work with natural gas, will

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Auto: GM Reanimates the Electric Car with Chevy Volt

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work with propane. Just think how many forklifts out there with a stink to them.”

High Voltage

General Motors CEO Fritz Henderson, the announced keynote speaker for media days, had to cancel for a good reason: he was out of a job.

The day before his scheduled Dec. 2 appearance at the auto show Henderson stepped down as the head of GM. Robert Lutz, the automaker's vice chairman of marketing and communications served as a replacement and he did not reveal the how or why of Henderson's departure after only eight months.

After specifically prefacing his remarks that he would not take questions about Henderson, a USA Today reporter did just that, asking if the timing of the resignation was “crummy” in that any news about GM coming out of the auto show would be about the executive turmoil.

Lutz, showing why he's the vice chairman of communications, sidestepped the question and instead wanted to talk about the Chevrolet Volt and other efforts by GM to develop alternative fuel vehicles.

Just three years ago there was only one car company actively involved in electric vehicles and that was startup Tesla, Lutz said.

“Now just about every company is planning a lithium ion electric vehicle including a few that were not on the radar screen,” Lutz said.

GM took its lumps a few years back by taking back all of its EV1 electric cars that were on the road and destroying them. An effort to save the cars and protests against GM (at a training center in Burbank where the EV1s were stored before being crushed) was featured in the documentary “Who Killed the Electric Car” by filmmaker Chris Paine.

Movie titles aside, Lutz said, the electric vehicle is not dead at General Motors.

On the contrary, the company, even as it went through a bankruptcy, was making development of lithium ion batteries and electric engines one of its core competencies, Lutz said.

The Volt is the first product of reanimating the electric car.

The first cars will be made available toward the end of 2010 with an expectation that between 8,000 and 10,000 of the model will be made during 2011, Lutz said, adding that California will be one of the markets selling the car.

Success of electric vehicles will be dependent on support from the public sector, namely getting chargers into parking garages and attached to parking meters, Lutz said.

doesn't give much in terms of head or legroom.

The Honda Insight gave more headroom than I expected but lacked legroom. The Toyota Camry hybrid was the opposite: great legroom but not so great headroom.

The Hyundai Element Blue provided adequate headroom but was just short of what would be comfortable with the legroom

The Lexus RX 450h hybrid cross-over had great legroom, adequate headroom but had a



Power: California will be among the markets for the Chevrolet Volt when the vehicle goes on sale in 2010.

“If we don't get it done it will limit the use of the pure (electric vehicles) because people need a place to charge,” Lutz said.

Cars for the Tall

While I am not in the market for a new car, out on the convention floor I did gravitate toward the alternative fuel vehicles to see which ones had the most comfortable driver's seats.

At 6'6" I approach buying a car like I do buying a pair of shoes – the first criteria is one of fit followed by price and color.

The Ford Fusion is a nice looking car but

sticker price equal to my gross salary.

And then there was the Toyota Prius IV that, like the Insight, was roomier than expected.

As I don't expect to buy a new car for a few more years the car companies have more time to not only improve hybrid technology but come up with a design that will accommodate those of above average height.

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