

Automobility LA concepts and new model first peeks

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There are two kinds of annual big city auto shows. Most every city has one where local dealers bring their wares and people can kick tires without the usual direct sales pressures. Then there's the international circuit—Paris, Geneva, Tokyo and so on. In the US, Los Angeles, Detroit and New York have had the gravitas of international shows, by virtue of market size and timing for LA (usually November, first of the season), the traditional Detroit factor itself (and long in January, first of the year, but now moved to summer), and New York (being New York, and usually in April or so), and have been built upon manufacturer presence—home to big reveals, concepts and first looks at new technologies.

A number of factors have been changing this. One is the dispersal of manufacturer headquarters and factories, while newcomer nations have also joined the parade. Then, with far more rapid development times and fast-moving shifts in market preferences, the traditional all-at-once every fall new model release cycle has turned into an endless, overlapping free-for-all.

Layered atop that is an increasing emphasis on elements other than the various new models themselves—LA is now also known as Automobility—with new technologies changing the flavor of the shows' contents as well as cycles. Schedule challenges of the past few seasons' pandemic have simply been icing on the cake. The LA Show this year had narrower manufacturer presence and wider tech and ancillary participation. Here are vehicle highlights from this year, in turn heavily wrapped around tech trends.

ALFA ROMEO returned to the US as part of the Fiat Chrysler Automobiles era and remains as part of Stellantis. A higher end, smaller volume brand, the badge expands for 2023 as the 2019 Tonale C-SUV (compact) concept comes to life. Available as a gasoline turbo or plug-in hybrid (PHEV)—in three trim levels—Tonale marks the brand's coming shift to full-line electrification and connectivity. A special claim is as the first vehicle including an NFT (non-fungible token) digital certificate from purchase, to evolve during ownership and "protect residual value." Note that the Tonale has a close cousin in the introduction of a Dodge Hornet C-SUV (compact) at the same time (but no NFT).

DODGE has held special interest—and admiration and angst among horsepower fans—as a high probably electric future has loomed industrywide. Here we have the first big answer to these questions, and things seem very promising indeed. Dodge notes that the Charger Daytona SRT Concept drives, looks and feels like Dodge—that just happens to be an EV. Proprietary features include a front R-Wing to keep the familiar Charger profile with aerodynamic efficiency boosted; an industry-first Fratzonic Chambered Exhaust system for an EV that rivals the glorious sounds of a familiar SRT Hellcat; and an eRupt multi-speed electro-mechanical transmission for that familiar feel. Muscle car legacy is also present through a new 800V Banshee propulsion system.

Red hot award-accumulating **GENESIS**, already with a broad offering of EV variants and emerging pure EVs, completes their X concept trilogy—following



• 2023 Alfa Romeo Tonale



• Dodge Daytona SRT Concept



• Genesis X Convertible concept



• 2023 Hyundai IONIQ 6

the X Concept and X Speedium Coupe concept with the X Convertible concept. Its folding hardtop roof is a nod to Korean roof architecture, while also advancing convertible roof design with an integrated moon roof, a best-of-all-worlds solution for those who have wanted a convertible but hoped a clear hardtop would satisfy them all the time. Brand cues include an illuminated echo of the Crest Grille and extended quad light. Two-door body shape avoids the wedge, instead emphasizing muscular wheel arches and a "Coke bottle" profile.

HYUNDAI follows its award-winning IONIQ 5 crossover EV with a notable departure in style and form in the IONIQ 6, a streamlined sedan with a single-curve profile achieving a Cd of just 0.22, the brand's best, while carrying across its dual-motor E-GMP platform, as well as its notably long wheelbase with its sizable passenger and cargo capacities and comfort, as well as optimized drive characteristics. Already noted for fast charging times, the new model promises 10 to 80 percent charge in just 18 minutes via its 800V unit. Look closely, and you'll see the first implementation of a new Hyundai "H" logo.

A limited edition of 2500 units, the 2023 **PORSCHE** 911 Dakar draws upon the brand's original 1984 Paris-Dakar rally victory—their first use of AWD in a 911—to create a modern car that similarly knows few if any boundaries, happy on country roads or off. Ride height—an integral feature of its new suspension system—is almost two inches greater than on the Carrera, with an additional inch-plus available on command, front and rear, and good for spirited rally driving up to 105 mph (upon which it returns to its normal raised height). Pirelli Scorpion All Terrain Plus tires are a staggered fitment, with Pirelli P Zero summer performance or snow tires also available. An optional Rallye Design Package add utility while echoing the style and feel of the 1984 winning car.

SUBARU introduced an all-new gen-six 2024 Impreza compact—the basis for other key vehicles also in their lineup—purely in a five-door hatchback form, with 10 percent stiffer chassis and improved performance. Above base and Sport trims, the Impreza RS has a 182-hp 2.5L version of the Boxer engine, exclusive 18-inch wheels, distinctive style elements inside and out, and of course Subaru Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive, adding standard active torque vectoring. EyeSight driver assist tech is standard, and Starlink 11.6-in screen (for the first time) has Apple/Android plus audio, climate and vehicle features.

TOYOTA Prius has been known since the turn of the century for its pure hybrid powertrains—now widely available throughout the industry—and for its styling, which had admittedly slipped into the "love it 'cause it's dorky" realm in recent years. The hybrid commitment remains—and grows—as the Prius name (with 5 million sold in North America and over 20 million globally) carries on in an all-new fifth-generation family, while styling, though immediately recognizable, is suddenly radically modern, sleek and turning heads wherever it goes. Prius (hybrid) and Prius Prime (plug-in hybrid) models have already produced manufacture-calculated combined fuel ratings of up to 57 mpg.

Vietnamese automaker **VINFAST**, established in 2017 as part of Vingroup, a regional conglomerate with \$35 billion US capitalization as of late 2021, has gained recognition rapidly, helped along by recent media trips to their 90-percent automated home facilities in Hai Phong. Following VF 8 and VF 9 EV models launched in 2021, VinFast revealed the VF 6 and VF 7 EVs in LA—now covering B, C, D and E segments—each to be offered in Eco and higher-performance Plus trims (up to 349-hp and 368-lbft, plus AWD, in the VF 7 Plus). All have an eye to sustainability, with even leather interiors vegan-sourced. ■



• 2023 Porsche 911 Dakar



• 2024 Subaru Impreza RS



• 2023 Toyota Prius Prime



• VinFast VF6