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Michelle Krebs, veteran automotive-industry authority, joins Edmunds editors, analysts and data experts to provide news and commentary.

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Inside Line



Leave the Lamborghini at Home. Electric Vehicles are Big News (and Big Business) at the EVER Monaco Ecological Car Show

March 27, 2008

By Nick Kurczewski

MONTE CARLO, Monaco — Corporate raiders and business tycoons beware, the supercar-saturated streets of Monte Carlo are about to be flooded with environmentally friendly automobiles. But don't worry: A weak American housing market, collapsed banks and the falling dollar have nothing to do with the world-famous principality's sudden change from its usual chest-thumping four-wheeled displays of wealth.



The EVER Monaco ecological car show opened its doors Thursday; it will run through Sunday. Now in its third year, the annual green-car show is dedicated to all forms of transport powered by fuels offering environmental benefits. The show is proof that, even in the glitzy confines of Monaco harbor, Earth-friendly automobiles are making big waves.

In an unsteady global automotive marketplace, alternative-energy vehicles have provided one of the few bright points for many auto manufacturers — not to mention the promise of future profits. The race is on to find a balance between corporate black ink and green-car tech.

Chevrolet and Toyota are jostling to be the first to bring plug-in hybrids to market. German manufacturers continue to push their development of hydrogen-powered vehicles. And even boutique car companies, such as Fisker and Tesla, are offering glamorous-looking hybrid or fully electric-powered sports cars that wouldn't look out of place parked in Monaco.

The unlikeliest car company can score a tremendous marketing coup by displaying an alternative-energy concept car. At this year's Geneva show, the fledgling Chinese auto company BYD ("Build Your Dreams") Auto displayed its F3DM, a hybrid sedan powered by lithium-ion batteries. In early January at the New Delhi Auto Expo, Mahindra & Mahindra — an Indian company best known for building large, boxy SUVs — had two hybrids on its stand.

Is the next big green-car breakthrough about to come courtesy of a corporate giant such as BMW or Toyota? Or will a minnow of the automotive world, such as Venturi and Think Auto, end up stealing the show in Monaco? We'll be able to find out, not only by talking to executives and seeing the cars, but by taking some of the vehicles for test drives.

EVER Monaco is unique in that it offers prospective buyers (and probably a few investors) the chance to climb aboard and experience alternative-vehicle driving firsthand. The eclectic list of exhibitors should offer a wide variety of production-ready vehicles and technology, along with plenty of bizarre concept cars and envelope-pushing high-tech features.

As one of the show's official partners, Nissan will be showing its Mixim electric vehicle. First seen at last year's Frankfurt auto show, the Mixim is powered by what Nissan not-so-humbly calls its "Super Motor." Separate electric motors and generators send power to the front and rear axles. Compact lithium-ion batteries — like you'd find in your laptop or cell phone — provide the Mixim's energy.



Other entries we've penciled into our auto show dance card include BMW, which will showcase its hydrogen-powered 7-Series sedan. Venturi, Monaco's only auto company, will also be present and certain to feature in its hometown show.

Venturi has changed its focus from building fast and glamorous sports cars to constructing

electric, solar, and even wind-powered automobiles. The tiny company has recently begun a partnership with PSA Peugeot-Citroën to develop electric-powered delivery vans for the French postal service.



Also at the EVER show will be Think Automotive, a Norwegian manufacturer of small electric-powered urban vehicles. Think will be displaying its latest model, which promises a top speed of 65 miles per hour and a range of more than 120 miles in city driving.

There will be much to see, and drive, and we'll be there, at EVER Monaco, to let you know which environmentally friendly concepts are the most promising and which would be better of cashing in their chips at the Monte Carlo Casino.

Nick Kurczewski is a Paris-based correspondent for AutoObserver.

Automotive photos by manufacturers

1 — Nissan Mixim

2 — Think Ox

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