



LA Auto Show sampler: 24 world premieres and 25 North American premieres

The Los Angeles Auto Show, in early December 2012, featured world debuts ranging from electric vehicles to performance and luxury designs from a global array of the world's top automakers. Debuts included world-firsts from Chrysler, Ford and General Motors; European automakers Audi, BMW, Fiat, Jaguar, Mercedes-Benz, Porsche and Volkswagen; Asian brands Acura, Honda, Hyundai, Kia, Nissan, Subaru and Toyota; and more.

We like the LA show because it's right next door to our own market. It's also valuable because greater Los Angeles is the largest luxury and performance market in the U.S. Debuts in these categories included Acura RLX, BMW i8 Spyder, Jaguar F-TYPE convertible, four from Mercedes-Benz, and more from Bentley and Porsche.

The volume and range of debuts was taken by many as a sign of rebounding strength overall in the automotive industry. We attended the show's press preview days at the end of November. Here are just a few highlights.

- The **Mercedes-Benz Ener-G-Force** concept spins off requirements of Los Angeles Design Challenge 2012 to develop a Highway Patrol Vehicle for 2025. This civilian version shows how the G-Class could appear by then, or sooner. Small glass areas signal a safe and secure cockpit. Headlamps (with LEDs forming the letter "G") are integrated into a powerful grille. The image of tall suspension underpinning huge tires on 20-inch wheels (each individually powered) suggests the vehicle can "guarantee the right-of-way even where no way exists." On the greener side, however, the Ener-G-Force stores recycled water in tanks on the roof, to strip into hydro-

gen for operating its fuel cells—with an operating range of about 500 miles, and emitting nothing but water.

- Mercedes-AMG also introduced their fifth Black Series model, the **2014 SLS AMG Black Series** (see also page 13). Inspired by the SLS AMG GT3 race car, and weighing 3,417 pounds, the car bears a 622-hp 6.3L V8 and accelerates from 0-to-60 mph in 3.5 seconds, making it the most dynamic SLS yet. Features include special suspension, brakes, wheels and tires; an available aerodynamics package; an engine that revs up to 8000 rpm, with a modified high-speed valve train, race cam, air intake and engine mapping.

- First shown at the last big domestic auto show—New York, last spring—the **2014 Chevrolet Impala** is a significant step forward from the prior model. The Impala grows in size, sharing its platform with the Cadillac XTS, to distance itself better from the Malibu. And its new styling assures that it will stake a place in the hearts and minds of those who remember the nameplate from legendary cruisers of decades ago, moving away from its rental car image of the past few years.

- California is also tops in all things green and all things tech. LA is a showcase for the latest in-car technologies, as well as rapidly developing fuel-efficient drivetrains—with two dozen electric models, at least a dozen clean-diesel vehicles and nearly 20 vehicles achieving 40-plus MPG with advanced four-cylinder gasoline engines. Debuts included Fiat's first electric vehicle, the Fiat 500e, and GM's first all-electric vehicle, the **Chevrolet Spark EV**. Ford releases included the



• Mercedes-Benz Ener-G-Force concept



• Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG Black Series



• 2014 Chevrolet Impala



• Chevrolet Spark EV



• Mazda CX-5 Dempsey



2013 Ford C-MAX Energi plug-in hybrid, the Fusion Energi plug-in and the Focus Electric. Honda debuted its new Accord plug-in hybrid.

- A trio of Mazda CX-5 crossovers originally shown at the recent SEMA show appeared again in LA, appealing to urban and active lifestyles: the Mazda CX-5 Urban with a combination of fashion and architectural cues, highlighted by its finish in a variety of flat and matte charcoal black and grey paints; the Mazda CX-5 180 with a snowboard- and surf-themed active lifestyle outfitting (one side finished in artwork suitable for each); and the **Mazda CX-5 Dempsey** (shown), named after actor and race car driver Patrick Dempsey, also featuring all it takes to bring along his favorite cycling gear (or your favorite equipment) to any remote location.

- **Lincoln** took an unusual approach with their show space. As they work hard to establish a new brand image and message in the marketplace—in the absence of the Mercury brand, and in the presence of Cadillac, who has a good decade's head start in rebranding themselves—Lincoln brought beautiful examples of some of their most prominent machines from the past century. Shown at upper right is the Continental Mark II from 1956-57 (which actually did not bear the Lincoln name, though the combined Lincoln Continental name has appeared plenty over the years).

- One of the first things you would see upon entering the LA Convention Center was a banner promoting two reveals from the same company: the **2014 Kia Sorento** and **2014 Kia Forte sedan**. The new Sorento, built in West Point, Georgia, has an all-new chassis, a new GDI V6 engine, a redesigned interior and a next-generation infotainment system. The redesigned Sorento also adds a top SX Limited trim level to its lineup. The Forte sedan is also all new, with European-inspired design, a longer, wider and lower chassis, and more performance and premium amenities, all with a choice of 1.8L or 2.0L engines. Both new Kia models have their press launch

in Arizona in late January, and we'll be covering that.

- The Ford Transit Connect commercial van has been a huge success, rightly so, and it was no surprise that families consistently inquired about a window version. Enter the **Ford Transit Connect Wagon**—expected to deliver at least 5 MPG better fuel economy on the highway and 2 MPG better in the city than competing seven-seat minivans, more cargo space and passenger seating than competing crossovers, yet having a heavier payload than a midsize double-cab pickup. Anticipating 30-plus highway MPG with EcoBoost, the Transit Connect Wagon offers a choice of two fuel-efficient four-cylinder engines, two wheelbase lengths and three series models: XL, XLT and Titanium. Adaptability includes sliding side doors, fold-flat second- and third-row seating, a 1200-pound-plus payload, and choice of rear liftgate or side-hinged cargo doors.

- Model year 2013 brings two new **Dodge SRT Viper** models—the SRT Viper and **SRT Viper GTS**. With a top speed of 206 mph, a 0-to-60 time in the low threes, quarter-mile in the mid-elevens and braking from 60-to-0 in just 106 feet, this supercar also boasts a Cd of just .369, to slither through the wind at speed. Hand-built at the Conner Avenue Assembly Plant in Detroit—home to the Viper since 1995—both models have new interior and exterior designs, with premium materials and a new aerodynamically functional carbon fiber and aluminum skin. The SRT Viper GTS adds driver-selectable two-mode suspension, all the better for track time.

- Fiat delivered two largely-expected surprises. First is the **Fiat 500e**, a 100 percent electric version of the still relatively-new-to-market retro-classic Cinquecento, this time equipped with a 100-hp-equivalent electric motor. This seems like a very good fit for the brand. Next is the all-new **Fiat 500L**. Many had anticipated a four-door Fiat 500—somehow—but the degree to which this is

KEEP RIGHT >>



• Lincoln's Continental Mark II, among its classics



• 2014 Kia Sorento and Kia Forte sedan



• Ford Transit Connect Wagon



• Dodge SRT Viper GTS



• Fiat 500L four-door



an entirely new car, with a significantly different look, surprised some. It should draw more people to the brand, which has been primarily perceived as simply very small. Fiat describes the 500L's spacious interior and panoramic views as having an "urban loft" feel.

- Another surprise entry was the **Honda EV-STER concept** electric roadster, fresh from the Tokyo show. This car is surrounded by rumors—seemingly a big and somewhat risky departure for small and conservative Honda, but popularly received in Japan, it had not seemed destined for production. But as they test the waters in the US, they just might be gauging the market, to see whether the math could add up for this machine. We would love to see it come to fruition.

- The Volkswagen Beetle has started to propagate on America's highways once again, in its newest form, generally considered to have a more masculine profile, still in a front-wheel-drive layout, but more reminiscent of the shape and spirit of the original Bug from decades prior. (See our writeup of the Volkswagen Beetle Convertible in this issue, along with some of its evolutionary heritage.) Given its new cajones, the **Volkswagen Beetle Turbo** iteration is a natural, and it has arrived, with horsepower boosted to 200 from the 170 hp of the regular Beetle.

- The **Nissan GT-R** has blown away everyone who has driven it, including us (see *Exceeding Even Its Reputation*, in our July/August 2012 issue). Not only is it dangerous to mess with success, but the GT-R's success is rooted in some of the most thorough engineering imaginable—so what would you change? They are rounding off a few spots on the exterior in ways almost too subtle to notice, and they are adjusting the engine's power curve for a wider power band, while also improving engine oil stability under track-caliber g-forces. Bring it on.

- Jaguar Land Rover had a variety of new product on their stands, including the popular new downsized Range Rover Evoque and a new aluminum-bodied full-

size Range Rover. The hottest item in the group, though, was surely the all-new **Jaguar F-TYPE** two-seat convertible sports car. On sale this summer, the F-TYPE brings Jaguar closer to some of its best-loved roots—a front-engine, rear-wheel-drive roadster—now built with Jaguar's mastery of lightweight aluminum architecture and engineered to be a true performer, at a price point below the XK convertible and coupe. Engines will include Jaguar's new 340-hp 3.0L supercharged V6 and a new 380-hp version of its 5.0L supercharged V8. Three F-TYPE models are expected to start at \$69,000.

- Under the appropriate heading of "The Future is Closer Than You Think," BMW showed the latest iteration of its sexy electric **Concept i8 Spyder** hybrid roadster. Added to it this year was the world premiere of the **BMW i3 Concept Coupe**, a study in a sustainable premium-class production car with zero tailpipe emissions. After showing both a year earlier in very loose sketch form, BMW is reportedly hard at work getting the first model within their new i brand ready for mass production, using these two concepts to demonstrate potential breadth and depth to a model range.

There were enough other reveals at the Los Angeles Auto Show to of course fill an entire issue—the 2013 Acura RLX luxury sedan, more Mercedes-Benz launches, the Bentley Continental GT3 race car, the North American debut of the Porsche 911 Carrera 4, the MINI Paceman and Clubvan, special editions of the new Volkswagen Beetle Convertible, the new Hyundai Santa Fe 7-passenger crossover, which now joins the 5-passenger Santa Fe Sport and replaces the Veracruz, a new Mazda6 sport sedan, the new Subaru Forester and much more. And a new Advanced Technology Showcase presented by the Auto Alliance, an industry trade group, focused on the expanding list of applications and tech solutions now being designed into vehicles in pursuit of making drivers safer while more connected.

Stay tuned. Detroit and Chicago are coming up. ■



• Honda EV-STER concept



• Volkswagen Beetle Turbo



• 2014 Nissan GT-R



• Jaguar F-TYPE



• BMW i3 Concept Coupe

