

• One of these every 30 minutes for two days straight. Here, Maserati is about to reveal the Ghibli.

22 WORLD DEBUTS, 56 DEBUTS OVERALL AT LA AUTO SHOW

Among the world's biggest auto shows—LA, Detroit, Chicago, New York, Frankfurt, Geneva, Paris, Shanghai, Tokyo—we value the Los Angeles International Auto Show because it comes first (late November this time), and also because it's right next door, so it's not only easy to attend, but it's also well-tuned to Arizona's own style of driving—LA being the largest luxury and performance market in the US (there were close to 20 reveals from luxury manufacturers).

California is also a well-established harbinger of rapid advances in technology, and the show's Connected Car Expo this year emphasized that. It also leads in green tech, and this show is the venue for the Green Car of the Year award. More than two dozen green vehicles were featured, from Acura, BMW, Honda, Hyundai, Mercedes-Benz, Porsche and Volkswagen—a full range of alternative fuel models, plus brand new plug-ins.

Global debuts included two from Nissan, four from Mercedes-Benz and three from Porsche, plus ones from BMW, Chevrolet, Ford, Honda, Hyundai, Jaguar, Land Rover, MINI, Subaru and Toyota.

North American debuts included six from BMW—including their new electrics. And US reveals were presented by Audi, Cadillac, Jaguar, Nissan, Volkswagen (with three) and others.

The crystal ball delivered leading-edge con-

cepts by Cadillac, Jaguar, Mercedes-Benz, Subaru, Volkswagen and Volvo.

Here are a few highlights.

- The German automaker once known for small sports cars only—until they entered the SUV market with the highly successful Cayenne over a decade ago—now connects small sport and the SUV, in the **Porsche Macan**—Porsche's fifth model line. Declared trail- or pavement-ready, the Macan has active all-wheel drive, PDK double-clutch transmission and two twin-turbo V6 engines—a 3.0L in the Macan S (340 hp, 0-to-60 in 5.2 seconds) and a 3.6L in the Macan Turbo (400 hp, 0-to-60 in 4.6). Knock a couple of additional tenths off those times with a Chrono package on either.
- The **Subaru WRX** has a very focused core of devotees, yet is known for taking significant evolutionary strides regularly. For 2015, an all-new WRX receives a stiffer chassis, tighter suspension and a highly modified AWD system. It's powered by a new 268-hp 2.0L turbo boxer, delivered through the first six-speed manual in a WRX or an optional new Sport Lineartronic performance CVT with SI-Drive and two manual modes.
- As the brand works hard to establish its brand, niche and luxury credentials, the **Lincoln MKC** shows that they may be taking some cues from Mercedes-Benz and Porsche, both of whom intro-



• Porsche Macan



• Subaru WRX



• Lincoln MKC



• Chevrolet Colorado



• Volkswagen e-Golf



• Mercedes-Benz AMG Vision Gran Turismo



• Jeep Wrangler Willys Wheeler Edition



• Kia K900



• Acura RLX Sport Hybrid SH-AWD



• BMW 4 Series Convertible



• Ford Edge concept

duced smaller luxury crossover utility vehicles. The MKC is available with a 2.3L EcoBoost four-cylinder offering 275 hp and 300 lb-ft of torque. It appears to have the style, brand identity, features and luxury touch Lincoln needs to deliver, in what may be a very hot niche. We'll watch this closely.

- The midsize pickup market generates much interest among consumers, but less among manufacturers, who find their big trucks so profitable. GM has not let this market down, though, as the new **Chevrolet Colorado** sees daylight for the first time. Hitting dealers next fall as a 2015 model, the new Colorado is expected to lead its class in power and towing, with up to 6700-pound tow capacity behind a 2.5L I-4 or optional 3.6L V6.
- Take one of the most popular vehicles in the world and combine it with one of the hottest emerging powertrain trends, and you get the **Volkswagen e-Golf**. This electric Golf's drivetrain comprises a 24.2 kWh lithium-ion battery and 115-hp electric motor (7.2 kW onboard charger is standard, and fast charging capability allows 80 percent charge within 30 minutes). Range is boosted by three driver-selectable regenerative braking modes, and a Roadside Assistance Plan provides comfort against any "range anxiety."
- One of the single coolest things at this year's LA show—the **Mercedes-Benz AMG Vision Gran Turismo**—is not even, per se, real. Actually, that's commonly the case at the biggest shows—much gets presented in concept form, shiny and solid to the eye, but often not even fleshed out inside or under the hood. If the response is good, the development teams may take things

further. The AMG Vision Gran Turismo is not even slated for that kind of review—it's simply a life-size representation of their entry in the popular *Gran Turismo 6* electronic game. Then again, raging popularity of a concept has driven many an automaker to make many an unexpected move. We can always dream.

- Use of the word "iconic" will earn you 50 lashes from fellow automotive writers, but then there's the Jeep Wrangler, which has always fully earned the term. To underscore this, they have brought the vehicle's founding name back into play, with the **Jeep Wrangler Willys Wheeler Edition**, including style and function cues evocative of the original Willys CJ from the 1940s, in of course a thoroughly modern package. Besides its attractive visuals, the Willys edition has a Dana 44 rear axle with Trac-Lok limited-slip diff and 3.73 gears, BF Goodrich KM Mud Terrain LT255/75R17 tires, rock rails and a new Jeep Trail Rated Kit with D-Ring, tow strap and even Jeep-branded gloves. Jeep Command-Trac 4x4 and two-speed transfer case with a 2.72:1 low-range ratio make for serious off-roading. This model starts at \$25,795.
- Kia continues to push its lineup a bit upscale and a bunch upsize. Its cousin company Hyundai has had the flagship rear-drive Equus for years. Now Kia—who just introduced a front-drive flagship Cadenza last spring—brings us the rear-drive **Kia K900**—not the cleverest name in their otherwise clever lineup, but a car we look forward to driving. If you doubt that this is influential, just

KEEP RIGHT >>



• Jaguar F-Type Coupe

look at how quickly GM has responded by bringing the rear-drive Chevrolet SS—a rebadged Australian Holden VF Commodore—to market. When Kia says flagship, they mean it, as the K900 has a 420-hp V8 under the hood (or optional 311-hp V6) and has scheduled maintenance included.

• After introducing the RLX in early 2013, Acura wrapped up the year with its **Acura RLX Sport Hybrid SH-AWD** variant, raising horsepower from 310 to 377 by adding its three-motor SH-AWD electric sport hybrid all-wheel-drive system. This Acura claims a longer wheelbase and wider cabin than competitors, for the most spacious five-passenger seating in its class, while delivering 28/32 MPG (city/highway) fuel economy.

• The relegation of former 3 Series coupes and convertibles to a 4 Series slot was really only evolutionary (and perhaps debatable). Thus, the new **BMW 4 Series Convertible** may not seem like the most groundbreaking car in this group. But it does have a hard folding top—previously a feature only on BMW's roadsters—and it is of course a red-hot-selling car in Arizona. Expect to see plenty—with the top down, you'll know them by their badges.

• Ford makes a familiar move in the **Ford Edge concept**—surely more of a product preview than raw concept—by applying its broader family face to the vehicle. By now they have several family faces (the Focus-Escape look, the Aston-like Fusion, the F-Series and Edge bars, the world-of-its-own Flex and so on.) This one reminds us of the Taurus, and it seems to fit the Edge well. Besides style evolution, the Edge concept includes

self-parking and obstacle-avoidance systems.

• The Jaguar F-Type roadster was one of the hottest hits on the show circuit last winter. At LA, the company revealed its stablemate, the **Jaguar F-Type Coupe**. As with Jaguar, Aston Martin and some other roadster/coupe pairings in the past, we recognize the fun of having the top down, but find the coupe a gorgeous (and more identifiable) alternative. The F-Type Coupe starts at \$65,000, and reaches \$99,000 base for an F-Type R Coupe. In between is an S Coupe at \$77,000. The R Coupe sports a 550-hp supercharged 5.0L V8 with a 4.0-second 0-to-60 time, while the other two are 340- and 380-hp 3.0L V6 models, with 5.1 and 4.8 times, respectively. An eight-speed ZF Quickshift transmission has full manual sequential control via paddles or lever. The R Coupe outperforms the roadster version's V8 (known as a V8 S, not an R), the top-model droptop at 495 hp.

• As the company dips into smaller sizes and even smaller budgets—witness the new under-\$30k CLA—we have the new 2015 **Mercedes-Benz GLA 250**—engineered for daily comfort but fully off-road capable. This is the first Mercedes-Benz SUV to have new-generation 4MATIC permanent all-wheel drive with fully variable torque distribution. The GLA 250 4MATIC—arriving this fall—has a 208-hp 2.0L four-cylinder turbo with 258 lb-ft of torque, and a 7-speed dual-clutch automatic. Its 0-to-60 time is 6.4 seconds. A front-wheel-drive version follows in early 2015. The GLA gives Mercedes five premium utilities, joining the G, GL, GLK and ML.

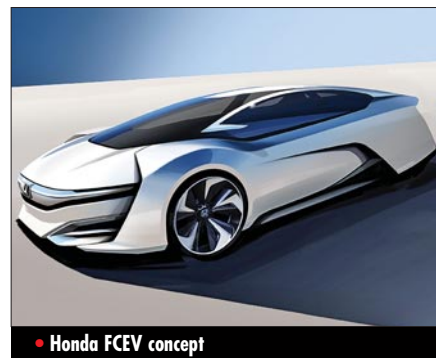
• A long time coming—we've seen it in concept



• Mercedes-Benz GLA 250



• BMW i3



• Honda FCEV concept



• MINI Cooper



• Nissan Juke NISMO RS

form for a couple of years—the **BMW i3**, their first mass-market electric car, is now in full production, (being joined by a sleek i8 coupe). The BMW i3's hybrid-synchronous electric motor generates 170 hp and 184 lb-ft of torque—with torque all on tap right from the starting line. Power is from a 22-kWh lithium-ion battery, with 80- to 100-mile range. Interior volume is comparable to the 3 Series, but on a shorter body with a 32.3-foot turning circle, for tight urban areas. Both the i3 and i8 are expected during the second quarter of this year. The i3 will have a base price of \$41,350, or \$45,200 for an extended-range model. The i8 will start at \$135,700. BMW sells well in Arizona, and interest in electrics is running high, so we expect to see these on the road soon.

• We first encountered the Honda FCX Clarity hydrogen car at the LA Auto Show in 2007, so it is only fitting that the **Honda FCEV concept** was revealed in LA this year. An eye-catching exercise all around, with concealed rear wheels à la Insight, the FCEV gives a solid hint of what Honda expects to bring to market in 2015. Stay tuned.

• **MINI** has had another growth spurt, as its third generation (of the modern era) is revealed. A lot of its second-generation enlargement was due to European pedestrian crash standards, which pretty well mandated higher hoods for everybody. The car's character and sales were maintained, so why stop there? The 2014 model is 4.5 inches longer, 1.7 inches wider and 0.3 inches higher than the outgoing model. While the body gets bigger, though, the engines get smaller, with a new three-cylinder as well as a new four-cylinder, with output of 134 and 189 horsepower, respectively. A welcome 6-speed manual is standard, with a 6-speed automatic optional.

• With the Juke well-established by now as a surprise hit, while NISMO's popularity was never in doubt, the two combine in the **Nissan Juke NISMO RS**—a hot little item that enhances the exhaust system of the Juke NISMO, bringing horsepower from that Juke's 197 up to 215 hp for the RS with front-wheel drive and a 6-speed manual. There is also a 211-hp AWD model with CVT—only. The AWD is not available with manual, nor is the front-driver available with CVT. As usual, that leaves us wishing for a manual AWD.

There were enough other reveals at the Los Angeles Auto Show to of course fill an entire issue—Porsche for example, in addition to the Macan, introduced the 911 Turbo Cabriolet and 911 Turbo S Cabriolet, the new Panamera Turbo S and Turbo S Executive grand touring sedans and the 918 Spyder plug-in hybrid super sports car.

But the game moves forward, so stay tuned—Detroit and Chicago are coming right up. ■

Where the roads are dry and the cars are slick.



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