

Chicago Auto Show

By Ryan Hynes
A&E EDITOR

The TechNews Editorial Staff attended the 2012 Chicago Auto Show Media Day to brush shoulders with fellow reporters and journalists, and to get a good look at just what the automotive industry has to offer in 2012.

The Auto Show is hosted every year at McCormick Place, a quick trip from campus. The show runs through February 19th, and features virtually every major automaker, from Aston Martin to Subaru, it covers the entire automotive spectrum.

Your TechNews crew paid special attention to automakers' offerings in the hybrid and alternative energy category. Among the standouts were Toyota's FCHV Prius, which utilizes a hydrogen fuel cell as its power plant, the Nissan Leaf, one of the most popular and practical electric vehicles on the market. The Chevy Volt is also a contender, but is hindered by its high price tag, \$39,145 and relatively low range of 40 miles.

Chevy also introduced two new additions to the compact car market, the Spark, an affordable ultra-compact, and the Sonic, a sporty hatch that made its debut in Chicago band Ok Go's music video Needing/Getting,

which premiered during the Super Bowl. The Sonic is competing with another Super Bowl star, the Fiat 500 Abarth, which boasts one of the most controversial ads of the game. The Abarth is a souped up 'rollerskate' that promises performance at the expense of value. The 500's stiffest American competition, the Ford Fiesta, was proudly bedecked in racing trim for the World Touring Car Championship. The Fiesta is perhaps the best value in the hatch market, offering performance on par with the 500 and VW Golf, but at several thousand dollars less than the pricier Europeans.

For those with less conservative tastes, there were also plenty of muscle and high performance exotics on display. American Muscle was well represented by the new Centennial Corvette, celebrating Chevy's 100th anniversary, along with the 45th anniversary Camaro. Ford's Mustang is available in GT and Shelby trim, and a new Boss 302 edition, a throwback to one of the great early Mustangs. Mopar madness was rampant at the show. The Dodge Charger, Challenger, and a reissue of the Dart were nostalgic, while incorporating modern automotive sensibilities. The most impressive exhibit was Chrysler, who has unleashed an incredible marketing campaign designed to reignite the brand and reclaim the

market share that maligned management lost over the past twenty years. Their Detroit-centric strategy is an inspiration for the automaker, and the city itself.

Foreign automakers were no slouches though. Mercedes introduced a new roadster version of its phenomenal SLS Coupe, Lotus unveiled its new weekend-racer track specialist Evora, and Aston Martin and Porsche's four door offerings, the Rapide and Panamera also made strong showings. The Asian automakers were even more exciting. Lexus brought an entire fleet of its hit-tech LF-A, a car who's performance is rivaled only by its price. The Nissan GT-R, each with a hand built engine, still dominates the Asian high-performance market, but the Acura NSX may challenge Nissan's claim to the title. The Subaru BRZ and Scion FR-S also look promising, and while they may not offer the same performance of the higher end sports cars, they are much more realistic for drivers who still want to go fast.

Media Day was a great first look at one of Chicago's longest running exhibition, and your TechNews crew was there to cover the action and bring you an exclusive look of some of 2012's hottest cars. The Auto Show leaves town this Sunday, and is definitely a worthwhile trip.



Photos by Ryan Hynes & Ryan Kamphuis

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111 E. Wacker Drive Suite 555, Chicago, IL 60601

T: (312) 427-0310 F: (312) 376-2489

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