

CHICAGO AUTO SHOW

Compact, green cars popular this year

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Years ago, when gas prices started to skyrocket, the popularity of the SUV declined and was replaced by smaller cars. Other than the economic and environmental advantages of a small car, it is a great fit for people who do not need all the extra space of a truck or SUV. Furthermore, navigating the city and finding convenient parking becomes much easier because of their small size. Others like the look of smaller cars over bulky vehicles. Either way, small cars and green cars have grown in popularity. Many of these cars were shown off at this year's Chicago Auto Show.

There are many options for small cars, but two that really stand out are Fiat and

Smart. Their quirky look makes them initially appealing, but upon further inspection they do not stand up to other competition. Back in 2010, Fiat unveiled their first car in the United States in over 25 years. There was only one model available, the Fiat 500. Since then, they have expanded their options in the United States to include variations of the 500 model. While these cars are suitable for some, there are other options that will provide similar of better features for around the same price. Take for example the Mazda 3. Both of these cars get the same gas millage; however, the Mazda engine gets 54 more horse power. The Mazda has more cargo volume, four doors instead of two, and more passenger space. Plus, both of these cars are the same price, so unless the car has to

be less than 140 inches long, the Mazda seems to be the better option. In test drives of these cars, the Mazda had a sportier feel to it than the Fiat, but the unique look of the Fiat certainly makes it stand out.

The other popular ultra-compact car is the Smart car. This is less expensive than the Fiat, but there are only two seats instead of four. It is a very short car, giving it a unique appearance and a squashed looking front. While a good fit for some, if you can spare a few hundred more you can upgrade to a Ford Fiesta with more cargo room, power, and seating. However, Smart does offer many customizable packages, giving the customer the option to change the look of their car. In California, Smart sells one of the cheapest electric cars on the

market, making it the best option if no more than two people ever need to get around with very little cargo and limited driving range. If this expands to the rest of the states, Smart cars might see a boom in popularity, especially in the cities where electric cars are reasonable to drive.

Fiat and Smart have risen into fame because of their quirky looks and unique marketing approaches, but there always seems to be a better option on the market. The only thing they still have going for them is their extremely short length, however most people do not put restrictions on the length of their car while shopping around. For price, fuel economy, storage space, and power, there are many better choices to choose from.

Scion debuts new look, booth

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Scion has gone through many changes in the past year.

Most of these are done by adding more cars to their lineup and revamping their marketing strategy. This year at the Chicago Auto Show, their booth went through a complete rework. What used to be a darker both directed toward a younger crowd has now become a professional-looking booth featuring some sportier cars and a more professional staff.

This well-planned change complements their rise in popularity and their new lineup of vehicles, making Scion a

surprising yet serious alternative.

Over the past year, they have had a spike in popularity for many reasons. First, all over Chicago and other major cities, there is a growing number of Scion taxis, able to be spotted anywhere with their boxy shape. Second, what was once marketed at teenagers is now being considered by many more serious car buyers, especially after their joint project with Subaru.

From this project—aimed at reducing development costs for both companies—the Scion FR-S and Subaru BRZ were born. Other than the sporty FR-S, Scion has also added the iQ to their product line, a four-seater ultra-small car resembling a Smart car or Fiat.

Years ago at their both, Scion had some cool pimped-out cars. One featured a full grill and fridge in the trunk. Another included crazy sound systems and a cool paint job. The square shapes of their vehicles lend them easily to these customizations. While a lot of options still exist, they have scaled back on their tricked-out machines to focus on the larger car buying audience. Plus, their new lineup includes fewer boxy options for those who do not like the old Scion look.

The new FR-S resembles a sports car without an over-exaggerated front. Unlike traditional sports cars, there is not a huge engine in the Scion, not making it very zippy, but still fun to drive. It also includes a back row of seats

that feature very little room, to be expected with any sports car. Unlike most cars nowadays, the dashboard is simple, leaving out complicated touch screen interfaces (although available as an accessory). While there is not too much flash about this car, the \$25,255 price tag makes up for it.

Scion is growing in popularity. Their booth was actually lit up this year to look more professional, as compared to their darker and more hip look years ago. Plus, their staff was some of the nicest this reporter talked to at the car show this year. While I will miss the dark trendy look that Scion used to use, I'm interested to see where they take it next. Be sure to check out their both at the next Chicago Auto Show.

