

# Updated Chevy Aveo, Ford Focus Steal Spotlight In Detroit

Tom Krisher, AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — More than any auto show in recent memory, the new cars rolled out this week out at the Detroit auto show will redefine what we drive in the future.

As the show opened to the public on Saturday, small cars that push the previous limits on gas mileage, performance, quality and looks took the spotlight.

But the show also features a fun gas-electric hybrid sports car and a just-plain-gorgeous convertible. And there's an electric car that soon you'll be able to buy.

Here are five of the hottest cars at the show:

**CHEVROLET AVEO:** General Motors transformed its cheap and ugly Aveo subcompact into a muscular, well-equipped five-door hatchback that gets around 40 mpg on the highway.

The company unveiled the athletic-looking European-inspired Aveo RS. Technically it's just a concept vehicle, meaning GM hasn't decided to build it, but insiders say it almost certainly will be assembled in Michigan with the standard Aveos.

Designers lowered the grille and slapped on 19-inch tires and a spoiler for a tougher appearance. It has a 138 horsepower, 1.4-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine, and GM says it will be quick and agile.

Lesser-equipped Aveos will be in showrooms in 2011. GM won't say the price, but the base is expected to be competitive with the Honda Fit and others in the subcompact class, around \$15,000.

"I thought the concept was sizzling," said Erich Merkle, president of the consulting company Autoconomy.com.

Mike Johnston, 35, a factory foreman from Windsor, Ontario, said he'd consider an Aveo as a second car because it's sporty and has an aggressive-looking front.

"If you're coming up on somebody in that, they're not going to think it's a little car," he said Saturday at the show.

**AUDI R8 SPYDER:**

OK, so they unveiled the convertible version of the legendary R8 sports car in Frankfurt, Germany, in September, but it's so gorgeous that it stood out from everything else in Detroit.

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Outside, the all-wheel-drive Spyder looks like a cross between the sleek Audi TT Roadster and a Formula 1 racer. Its brown-and-gold metallic paint is dazzling, and the white interior is simple yet elegant.

And it's not all good looks. Specifications for the convertible aren't out, but the R8 coupe powered by a 525 horsepower V-10 engine goes from zero to 60 in a breathtaking 3.7 seconds. Gas mileage isn't so great, up to 20 mpg on the highway.

The convertible is due in showrooms in July. No price was released, but it's likely to be north of \$155,000.

"You have to be dead not to look at it twice," said IHS Global Insight analyst Rebecca Lindland.

"It's sexy," said Steven Tutino, 39, an information technology specialist from Ann Arbor, Mich. "The engine's great. The car looks great. It's an Audi."

### FORD FOCUS

The Focus pushes the compact car to a new level of appearance and quality.

Its body is sculpted and aerodynamic, and creases in the sheet metal give the impression of air flowing smoothly from front to back. It has expensive-looking headlamps and tail lights, and the silver paint on a display model is top-notch.

The new Focus, due in showrooms early in 2011 as a 2012 model, is powered by a new two-liter four-cylinder engine. Ford says it will have crisp handling, yet preserve a smooth ride. Gas mileage wasn't released, but Ford says it will be around 40 mpg on the highway.

Ford also didn't reveal the price, but says the Focus will be competitive with the Honda Civic, which has a base sticker of \$16,405 with automatic transmission.

"You would think that this vehicle should be priced much higher," said Merkle of Autoconomy.com.

In the past, Ford would penalize people who bought small cars by giving them cheap interiors and few options, said Tom Ellul, 21, a student from Canton, Mich. The Focus, he said, is much better equipped than previous small cars.

"If I saw that car on the street, I'd take that any day over a Honda," he said.

### HONDA CR-Z

Most gas-electric hybrids look like tulip bulbs, slender and low in front and high and bulbous in the back in order to reduce wind drag, yet they usually don't handle or accelerate that well.

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But Honda Motor Co. unveiled a hybrid that will bring fun to those who want to be green with the 2011 CR-Z, a sporty two-seater that goes on sale late this summer in the U.S.

The sleek hatchback comes with an electric motor plus a 122 horsepower, 1.5-liter four-cylinder engine. It has a six-speed manual transmission available, and unlike other hybrids, the driver can choose between sport, normal and economy driving modes.

What you gain in fun you lose in gas mileage. The new CR-Z will get 31 city mpg and 37 highway with the manual transmission. Drivers will get 36 city mpg and 38 highway with a continuously variable automatic. That's below the Prius, which gets 51 city and 48 mpg highway.

Pricing will be announced later this year.

"It's really going after the performance crowd," said Lindland of IHS Global Insight. "That's an issue because most greenies aren't performance oriented."

Yet Sandeep Chelliah, 18, also of Windsor, said it's a good idea to mix performance with a hybrid because people want fun yet need to economize.

"This really has a good look to it even though it's a hybrid," he said.

### NISSAN LEAF

This model debuted in Tokyo last summer, and was on display in Detroit just for the press preview days, but the Nissan Leaf still gets a slot in the top five because it begins the new era of electric cars.

You will be able to buy one toward year-end, for about \$30,000.

Nissan says it had been working on lithium-ion batteries for years and decided to build a chassis to optimize space around a large battery pack.

The result was the Leaf, which looks like a stretched, more aerodynamic version of a Nissan Versa, a standard subcompact powered by a gasoline engine.

The company says the Leaf is big and roomy for a compact car.

It's designed to go 100 miles before the batteries run down, and can be recharged in eight hours from a home outlet. A quick charger can take it to 80 percent of battery capacity in 30 minutes, Nissan says.

The zero-emission car will be fun to drive, Nissan says. It had to leave Detroit early to continue a 22-city tour of the U.S.

James Bell, an executive market analyst for Kelley Blue Book, said the Leaf gives Nissan a public relations advantage over rivals because it's fully electric at a

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relatively low price.

General Motors will begin selling the Chevrolet Volt about the same time the Leaf comes out. It can go 40 miles on electricity but has a gas engine to generate power when the batteries are depleted.

"A car that doesn't even have an engine that can go 75, 80 mph for 100 miles, that just screams more advanced than the Volt is," Bell said.

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*Associated Press Writers Jeff Karoub and David Runk contributed to this report.*

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