

Japanese Carmakers Try To Revive U.S. Presence

DETROIT, Jan. 10 (Kyodo) — Japanese automakers showed their recovery from last year's devastating disaster in their home country by introducing new hybrids and other models with better fuel economy and improved performance on the second day of the annual North American International Auto Show that opened Monday.

On Tuesday, Toyota Motor Corp. introduced the NS4, an advanced plug-in hybrid concept, to the world while taking the wraps off its Prius c hybrid for the first time in North America.

Toyota hopes that the lower price and smaller size of the Prius will appeal to young urbanites that look for a less expensive hybrid.

"Our industry is changing and it's changing very quickly," Jim Lentz, president of Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A. Inc., said at a press conference. "The automobile is being reinvented because its role in our lives is being redefined."

"Lighter in weight, lower in stance and more than 19 inches (some 48 centimeters) shorter in length, the 'c' is designed to maneuver the city-scape...with nimble handling and responsive steering."

With a starting price under \$19,000, the Prius c features a 1.5-liter gas engine and a 144-volt nickel-metal hydride battery, according to Lentz.

Also on Tuesday, Honda Motor Co. revealed the direction of the ninth generation of its Accord line with a worldwide debut of the Accord Coupe concept. Along with the concept, Honda announced that a plug-in hybrid sedan version of the Accord will be available this winter.

Heavily hit by the earthquake and tsunami disaster, which triggered supply chain disruptions, leading to shortages in U.S. dealerships, Honda assured customers that although it cut more than 200,000 units from its production schedule, the automaker has now returned to full capacity.

"We're here to serve notice to the competition that Honda is again firing on all cylinders," Executive Vice President John Mendel told reporters. "We're back to full power and we're again racing with a vengeance."

After a three-year absence from the show, Nissan Motor Co. showed off two concept vehicles, an SUV concept for its Pathfinder line and an all-electric van.

Using the same powertrain as Nissan's Leaf electric car, the e-NV200's design is based on the NV200 multi-usage van, whose design won New York's "Taxi of Tomorrow" contest last year to become the exclusive taxi specifically designed for

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the city over 10 years from 2013.

On Monday, Acura, Honda's luxury brand, presented three all-new vehicles -- the new ILX compact sports sedan, which will have Acura's first hybrid powertrain, a sports utility vehicle and the NSX hybrid concept.

Toyota's luxury vehicle division Lexus unveiled the LF-LC, a futuristic hybrid sport coupe concept, which Group Vice President Mark Templin said "gives a sneak peek into the brand's future."

With more than 500 new cars and trucks displayed and an additional 25,000 square feet in the city's Cobo Center, organizers are optimistic about the annual show, which saw over 730,000 visitors last year.

The exhibition opened to the media Monday and Tuesday. It will open to the general public Jan. 14-22.

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