Ford Hopes New Fusion Will Be Camry Killer

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DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) — Ford hopes the redesigned 2013 Fusion will finally be its Camry killer.

The Fusion has become Ford's best-selling car since it went on sale in 2005, and it's one of the top sellers in the country. But Ford hopes the sexier styling, improved fuel economy and features like automatic parallel parking on the new Fusion will help it trounce the perennial leader, the Toyota Camry.

Ford is enlisting "American Idol" host Ryan Seacrest to introduce the redesigned sedan alongside CEO Alan Mulally in New York's Times Square Tuesday. It also is holding events in Los Angeles, Miami, San Francisco and on the lawn of its headquarters in Dearborn, Michigan.

The publicity blitz underscores the importance of the Fusion to Ford, which is rolling out the car to U.S. dealerships later this month. The midsize car segment is the biggest in the U.S., making up half of all car sales so far this year. It's also one of the most hotly contested. Three of the Fusion's biggest rivals — the Honda Accord, Nissan Altima and Chevrolet Malibu — are also new this fall.

Here's more about the 2013 Fusion:

PRICE: The Fusion starts at $21,700, which is less than the current Camry and in line with the new Altima and Accord. But the price rises quickly. A top-of-the-line Fusion with Ford's automatic parking system, lane departure warning, navigation and other goodies is $34,580. An Altima with similar features is $31,950.

POWER: The base engine, a 2.5-liter four-cylinder that gets up to 33 miles per gallon on the highway, is carried over from the old Fusion. But there are four new engine choices: a 1.6-liter, four-cylinder EcoBoost that's expected to get 37 mpg; a 2.0-liter, four-cylinder EcoBoost in its top-of-the-line Titanium model; a hybrid that gets an industry-best 47 mpg in the city; and a plug-in hybrid, called the Fusion Energi, which runs for longer on the battery and should get the equivalent of more than 100 mpg.

EXTERIOR DESIGN: The Fusion has a more aggressive look, borrowing the chiseled, aerodynamic profile of Ford's other new cars, the Fiesta and Focus. Its shuttered grille is gone, replaced by a diamond-shaped one at the end of a sharply creased, pointed hood.

Ford wanted the car to have a premium feel, so it took the extra — and more expensive — step of embedding the Ford badge in the hood instead of attaching it to the grille. Designer Chris Hamilton said the company wanted the car to look like it was worked on by hand.

Ford also incorporated feedback from global focus groups, since the Fusion will be sold all over the world. It redesigned the headlights, for example, after Chinese customers found them too sinister.

INTERIOR: The 2013 has more rear-leg room thanks to thinner seats up front. Ford says it has used better, softer materials. Among the options are Ford's Sync voice-controlled entertainment system and its My Ford Touch dashboard screen, which has had some glitches but it still cited by many customers as the reason they buy a Ford, since the technology is far ahead of some rivals.

OPTIONS: Options include a lane-keeping system, which uses cameras to monitor whether a driver is staying in his lane and alerts him if he swerves off course. There's also a system that parallel parks the car automatically, a blind-spot warning system and a cross-traffic alert monitor that beeps if traffic is coming while the car is backing out of a parking space. Toyota only offers a blind-spot monitor on the Camry. The 2013 Accord has lane-departure warning and a forward collision warning system. Neither has the automatic parking feature.

CHEERS: Analysts and fans were wowed by the design when Ford showed the car at the Detroit auto show earlier this year. The Fusion is likely to follow the success of other recent Ford redesigns, including the hot-selling Ford Explorer SUV.

JEERS: The Fusion can get expensive fast when buyers pile on options. It's unclear if Ford will see much demand for the hybrid and plug-in hybrid, since sales of the previous Fusion hybrid were anemic.

WHY IT MATTERS: The Fusion is the fourth-best selling midsize car in the U.S. right now, at 182,000 cars through August, and it's a key moneymaker for Ford. It's a strong new model but must duke it out in a hyper-competitive midsize segment.

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