Japanese Automakers Show Off Luxury Offerings

The Associated Press

NEW YORK, March 27 (Kyodo) — Japanese carmakers showcased their sports utility vehicles and luxury cars at the annual New York International Auto Show, which opened on Wednesday.

Toyota Motor Corp. debuted the 2014 Highlander SUV with a redesigned exterior, increased interior space and three engine choices including a hybrid option.

"We think it will wow buyers with its sophisticated look," Toyota group vice president Bill Fay said at the event to introduce the eight-seat vehicle that will be built at the company's manufacturing plant in Indiana.

Honda Motor Co. will show off their refreshed 2014 Odyssey minivan with a unique optional vacuum system built into the vehicle that can reach all areas, according to the Japanese automaker.

Honda's luxury brand unveiled the production model of the 2014 MDX after showing a concept version in January's North American International Auto Show in Detroit.

"More sport, more utility, and a big dose of added luxury, the 2014 MDX raises the stakes in the very competitive luxury SUV segment," Acura vice president Jeff Conrad said in Manhattan, adding that it is about 125 kilograms lighter than previous generations.

The mid-size SUV was designed and developed in the United States and will have, for the first time, a front-wheel-drive option.

Nissan Motor Co. revealed a hybrid version of the 2014 Pathfinder SUV as a part of their plan to use electric technology know-how to make "greener, cleaner cars."

"We have entered an era of electrification. The 100% electric Nissan LEAF is only the starting point to our green effort," Nissan senior vice president Jose Munoz said at the presentation, also hinting that the GT-R sports car may be added to the line of electrified products.

Infiniti, Nissan's luxury brand, announced on Wednesday that the seven-passenger 2014 QX50 SUV will have an optional hybrid engine

Nissan CEO Carlos Ghosn earlier told a group of journalists that the company was dedicated to its goal of producing one million cars in Japan per year despite the "huge handicap" of a strong yen in the exchange market.

"This handicap is being removed little by little," Ghosn said, adding that the Bank of Japan's recent credit easing stance, leading to a weaker yen, help "maintain the

commitment."

Meanwhile, among U.S. automakers, General Motors Co. focused on performance cars and unveiled the 2014 Chevrolet Camaro on Wednesday. It also announced the return of the "legendary" Z/28 model for the next generation of Camaro.

Chrysler Group LLC unveiled the 2014 Jeep Cherokee on Wednesday and is expected to introduce the 2014 Dodge Durango SUV on Thursday.

About one million people are expected to visit the New York show, which will be open to the public from March 29 to April 7.

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