

EVENTS/CAUSES

Automakers showcase technological innovations at CES 2016

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Mercedes E-Class interior

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

Technological innovation reigns supreme for automakers participating at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas Jan. 6-9.

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A number of brands, including Audi, Mercedes-Benz and Aston Martin, have detailed new initiatives focusing on the technological breakthroughs of upcoming vehicles. With autonomous vehicles visible on the horizon, the intersection between automobiles and technology will become increasingly obvious.

"Showcasing these technologies is at least in part a desire for automakers to position themselves as leaders when it comes to tech to preemptively capture that market for vehicles that drive themselves," said **Lauren Fix**, automotive expert, Lancaster, NY. "Everyone wants to be first, but we won't see fully autonomous cars until the late 2020s.

"Audi is calling their technology 'piloted driving' which they have been testing on real roads and showcasing at CES since 2012," she said. "They will rollout this technology slowly so there is a higher acceptance from drivers."

On your mark...

Many are expecting automakers to announce partnerships with technology companies at CES, as big players in both sectors have been putting effort into self-driving automobiles in recent years ([see story](#)).

Regardless of whether partnerships are cemented or announced, numerous brands have already made clear that being on the cutting edge when it comes to integrating technology into vehicles is a top priority, perhaps with the hopes of establishing good positioning in the years leading up to autonomous vehicles.



Audi e-tron quattro concept

German automaker Mercedes-Benz has given CES attendees a chance to see the brand's new E-Class vehicle ahead of its impending official debut in Detroit. A leader in integrating the latest technology with automobiles, it is no surprise to see Mercedes take advantage of an opportunity to advance its positioning.

The E-Class is set to "herald an all new era in digitalization." The electric vehicle will be able to charge wirelessly and will feature high-resolution animations, touch-sensitive control and connect with the driver's smartphone.

Not to be outdone, Audi debuted the concept e-tron quattro, which showcases the brand's commitment to three major trends in the auto sector electrification, digitalization and piloted driving. Drivers will be able to use their voice to control certain functions and download data into the car at almost 40 megabytes per second, and the vehicle will serve as a WiFi hotspot, letting passengers connect to the Internet with speeds up to 12.5 Mb/s.



Audi e-tron quattro concept

As with the Mercedes E-Class, Audi e-tron quattro drivers will be able to lock and unlock the vehicle or view status reports on the smartphone and also check where and when they parked.

Most notably, the e-tron quattro will also have piloted, or autonomous driving capabilities. Although it will not drive itself entirely, it will be able to park and maneuver traffic jams on its own.

A fully autonomous vehicle is still five to 10 years away, but cars capable of certain functions without a driver will help prepare consumers and convince them of the necessity of such automobiles. These will also position Audi as a leader in the race, possibly netting them new fans in the process.



Aston Martin Letv Rapide S Concept

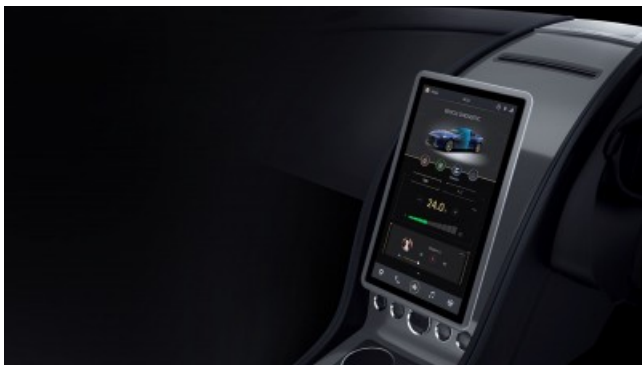
Even Aston Martin, known primarily for its fast and stylish sports cars, is involved in the technology front. The brand has partnered with global tech company Letv to research and develop connected electric vehicles, such as the previously announced RapidE ([see story](#)).

"Despite the importance of this hand-crafted excellence to our brand, the integration of Letv's advanced connected-car technologies is a very natural progression for Aston Martin," said Matthew Clarke, head of PR & brand communications for Aston Martin The Americas.

The first vehicle unveiled that the two partnered on is a Rapide S model, which now includes a 13.3 inch HD touch screen, an instrument panel complete with electronic instrumentation and gauges and speech recognition technology.

Aston Martin's Rapide S will also be equipped with WiFi and will work with other Letv devices, allowing for remote monitoring and service.

"We see connected vehicles as a vital part of our future product portfolio and we welcome Letv as a research partner in this exciting concept venture, providing a glimpse into a future that is perhaps just around the corner," Mr. Clarke said.



Aston Martin Letv Rapide S Concept interior

Although Mercedes and Audi are expected players on the tech front, the inclusion of Aston Martin suggests that no brand can ignore the demand for the convenience and safety that technology is enabling, even those that define themselves primarily by their speed.

There are also legal reasons that automakers are developing electric vehicles. California will require that from 2020 on, 10 percent of auto sales must be emissions-free vehicles or else the automaker will face a \$5,000 fine per vehicle. The Environmental Protection Agency, for its part, is mandating a brand's fleet average 54.5 mpg by 2025. Given the size of California's auto market the country's largest and the repercussions, even brands for whom electric vehicles are largely unexpected must enter the market.

Tech time

Indeed, other high-end auto brands not present at CES have also begun to move in another direction.

For example, German automaker Porsche is turning the page in its history with the first electric vehicle in its fleet.

The Mission E, which debuted as a concept car at the Frankfurt Motor Show will be 100 percent electrically powered and will launch at the end of the decade. Environmental concerns are growing among consumers, and the Mission E is Porsche's first step in blending its heritage with contemporary concerns ([see story](#)).

Also, British automaker Jaguar is returning to the racetrack with its entry into the FIA Formula E Championship.

Throughout the brand's 70-year racing heritage, it has used competition as a chance to push its cars, learn more about them and fine-tune the vehicles. By participating in the third seasons of the Formula E, Jaguar will be able to design and develop electric technology, which may make it into consumer vehicles one day ([see story](#)).

Others are going even further to showcase their interest in technology.

In particular, British automaker Jaguar partnered with Wired magazine to reach a new market segment with its latest innovations.

The luxury carmaker unveiled the XF C-X75 supercar, featured in the most recent James Bond film "Spectre," while

the Land Rover brand unveiled its new "Mind Sense," "Air Bubble," "Predictive Infotainment" and "Cargo Sense" technologies. By coupling a hyped vehicle that has wide interest among consumers with technological advances, Jaguar will be able to reach a larger audience when it details its innovations and position itself as a leading adapter of technology in the automotive sector ([see story](#)).

"Electrification is something manufacturers are showcasing, but drivers aren't buying these cars in big numbers," Ms. Fix said. "Most of the hype is to showcase the advancement and to assist in meeting California fuel emission standards.

"California requires manufacturers selling cars in California to offer a plug-in version," she said. "Sports cars are utilizing electric motors on each wheel to boost performance and certain consumers are interested but true car enthusiasts aren't running to dealers.

"Consumers are expecting luxury cars such as Audi, BMW and Mercedes to offer new technologies; other manufacturers offer these high end technologies but most of their customers know it comes with a price."

Final Take

Forrest Cardamenis, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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