

AUTOMOTIVE

Automakers stress connectivity, comfort with CES concepts

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Audi's AI:ME concept. Image courtesy of Audi

By SARAH JONES

At the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, automakers are rolling out innovations designed to make transportation more entertaining, intuitive and homey.

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From Amazon Alexa integration to an "empathetic" artificial intelligence-enabled car, technology is being used to create a more natural interaction between vehicle and driver. Another focus at CES is the car interior, which is getting a cozy and comfortable remodel in anticipation of autonomous mobility.

"Connectivity is a technology that's ready to go today," said Tyson Jominy, vice president of data and analytics consulting at **J.D. Power**, Nashville, TN. "While many companies were busy pursuing headlines with autonomous drive claims, a few companies had their heads down over the past several years working to get ready for what we saw at CES 2020.

"As background, 2019 forced a reckoning for many in the automotive technology space that autonomy and driverless cars are a much more difficult problem to solve than perhaps initially expected at the beginning of the year. Whereas many may have believed autonomy was close, most now recognize that the problem will take many years to solve," he said.

"In its place we saw many other ready to go in-car technologies emerging and in particular, connectivity."

Car as second home

Italian automaker Lamborghini has become the first marque to leverage Amazon's Alexa for full in-car control. The feature will be rolling out to the brand's Huracn EVO line in 2020, enabling drivers to vocally request temperature changes and interior lighting settings.

Through an infotainment center, Alexa can also handle requests such as making phone calls, playing music and getting directions.

"The Huracn EVO is an outstanding driver's car, and connectivity enables our customers to focus on the driving, thus enhancing their Lamborghini experience," said Stefano Domenicali, chairman/CEO of Automobili

Lamborghini, in a statement. "Lamborghini is a future shaper, and this is the first time an automaker will deliver in-cabin car control through Amazon Alexa to bring together car controls as well as smart commands and Alexa's standard capabilities."

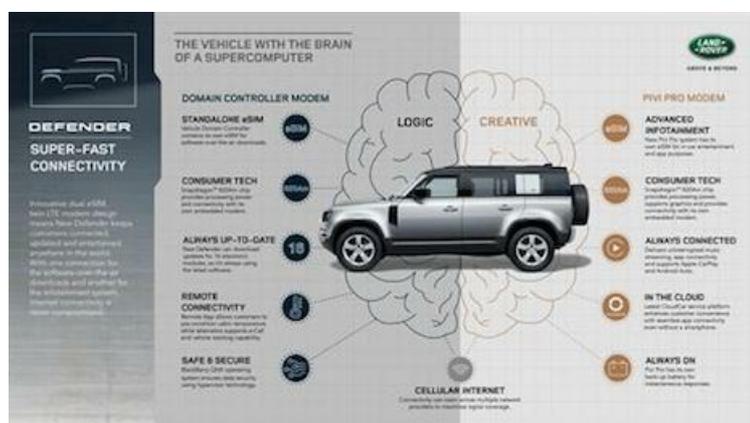
Lamborghini's Huracn EVO with Alexa connectivity

Britain's Land Rover is also putting the focus on infotainment in its new Defender model. At CES, the automaker is showcasing its dual-modem, dual-eSIM design, which it says is the first of its kind.

One of the two LTE modems is devoted to software-over-the-air (SOTA) technology, which powers remote updates. The other identical modem powers the infotainment system, which has added features such as the ability to connect two different phones via Bluetooth at the same time.

"With one LTE modem and eSIM dedicated to the software-over-the-air technology and the same set-up looking after music streaming and apps, New Defender has the digital capacity to keep customers connected, updated and entertained at all times anywhere in the world," said Peter Virk, director of connected car and future technology at Jaguar Land Rover, in a statement.

"You could liken the design to a brain, with each half enjoying its own connection for unrivaled and uninterrupted service," he said. "Like the brain, one side of the system looks after logical functions, like SOTA, while the other takes care of more creative tasks."



Land Rover Defender's two modems take care of different connectivity tasks. Image courtesy of Land Rover

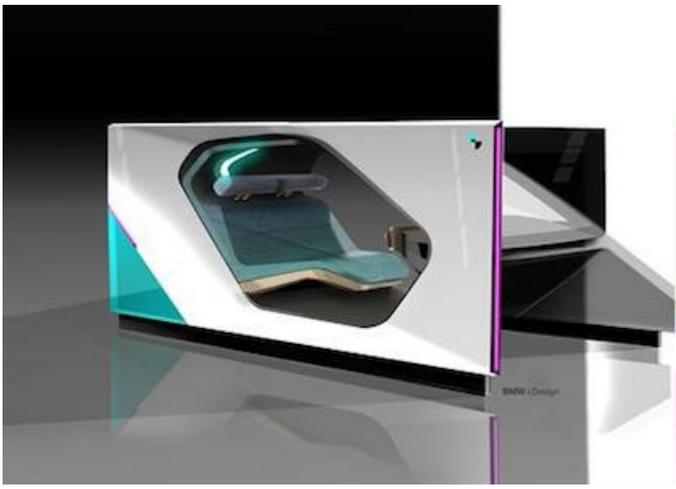
Even Sony joined in to imagine next-generation connectivity through a concept car named the Vision-S. While it is unclear whether the technology company is planning to put its model into production, the Vision-S serves as a platform to show off the brand's products, from screens to sensors and audio.

"General Motors has been in the connected space for several decades with Onstar, but recently we have two companies pushing the industry to adapt technology widespread," Mr. Jominy said. "First, Tesla introduced over-the-air updates to its vehicles. With the push of a button in Palo Alto, a car in New York or Florida can accelerate faster, stop sooner or travel farther on a charge, not to mention play video games or even add Netflix capabilities.

"Second, and what we've seen lately from incongruous competitors Lamborghini and Rivian, Alexa Auto from Amazon was integrated into cars," he said. "Alexa allows a driver to change the temperature, start a music playlist or even make a reservation, all without taking a hand off the wheel. These technologies, which most consumers now have in various levels in their own homes, were one of the most exciting parts about CES 2020."

At CES, BMW is looking to help consumers #ChangeYourPerception with a focus on future mobility.

BMW's i Interaction EASE concept vehicle imagines what the interior of a car will look like when autonomous driving becomes the norm. Artificial intelligence enables the car to sense when the passenger is looking at something outside of the vehicle and provide additional information to the rider about the object.



BMW i Interaction EASE. Image courtesy of BMW

"The BMW i Interaction EASE demonstrates what mobility might feel like in the future once autonomous driving becomes commonplace: luxurious, human and intuitive," said Adrian van Hooydonk, senior vice president of BMW Group Design, in a statement. "Passengers start their journey with the feeling of having already arrived."

Other BMW innovations center on passenger comfort.

The marque has outfitted three of its X7s with ZeroG Loungers, which enable riders to recline up to 60 degrees without compromising safety. BMW expects to be able to put this type of seating into its production models within a few years.

In another comfort-focused move, BMW's i3 Urban Suite is modeled after a boutique hotel, with leather replaced by fabric and wood to embody a hospitality-style interior design. Every seat except the driver's has been removed and the interior cabin has been outfitted with a lounge chair for relaxation.

The automaker has created 20 of these Urban Suites, which consumers in Las Vegas can hail using an application.

Similarly to BMW, Audi is using eye tracking to create a more intuitive and hands-free assistance experience. The automaker's AI:ME concept is "empathetic" and learns its owner's preferences and habits to create a seamless experience.

The concept car is designed to be a third living space, complete with a wellness experience that uses virtual reality goggles to transport travelers.



Audi's AI:ME concept. Image courtesy of Audi

Looking to make driving more pleasant, Audi is also introducing new lighting solutions that can help tired eyes and a navigation system that is presented via a 3D mixed reality head-up display.

"In many ways, the concepts unveiled at CES this week show the future of mobility will be an attempt to bridge the connectedness that we get from smartphones and social media with the tedium of commuting," Mr. Jominy said.

"Many of the vehicles and technologies are still very experimental and probably won't see production, at least not in the form shown at CES, but there was a concept vehicle from BMW that doubles as rolling living room and one from Audi that retracts the steering wheel while in autonomous mode to allow the 'driver' more space to work.

"While these are at best several years away from production, a common thread through most concept vehicle design at CES is maximizing space to make the commuting time more enjoyable," he said. "Once autonomy is available widely toward the end of this decade, consumers will begin to value space in their vehicles like never before.

"Even Land Rover's new Defender is maximizing technology with dual modems designed to handle different tasks: one for OTA updates and the other for streaming entertainment. So, even if crossing the Gobi Desert in 2040 is your commute, the Defender can be updated with the latest software and tunes, all without having to visit a dealer."

Retail revamp

Aside from imagining the future of the driving experience, automakers also took CES as an opportunity to rethink the auto retail experience.

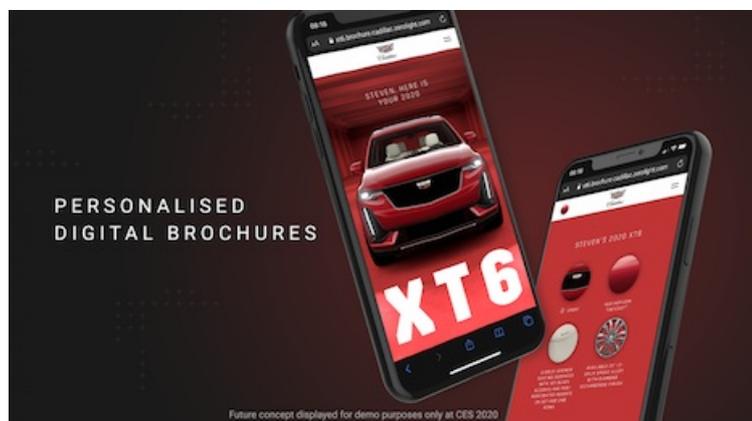
Fisker is debuting its Ocean electric SUV at CES, which is being sold primarily through a flexible lease option ([see story](#)).

U.S. automaker Cadillac is working with Amazon and ZeroLight to create a more personalized purchase journey. The cloud-based concept is centered on Cadillac's XT6, taking potential buyers through a four-stage process.

Shoppers are first served a digital ad based on a persona. On click-through, consumers will be taken to an Amazon Vehicles page that includes a configurator powered by ZeroLight's visualization software, enabling the browser to select options to see the car in their chosen color, wheels or interior.

This customized car is then featured in a programmatic video ad, and it is also used in email marketing from Cadillac. Once at the dealership, this configuration can be pulled up and further tweaked on an iPad and through AR and VR interactions to complete the buying process.

If the shopper needs to think about their purchase, they leave the dealership with a personalized digital brochure that includes an AR integration.



Digital brochure for Cadillac's purchase journey. Image courtesy of ZeroLight

"Effective personalization can significantly enhance engagement and conversion rates," said Francois de Bodinat, chief marketing officer of [ZeroLight](#). "With this concept, we are demonstrating how this can be achieved at scale by leveraging the cloud to create a streamlined journey that is built around customers' needs, interactions and devices.

"Adopting this centralized, cloud-based approach enables us maintain consistency across each touchpoint and automatically produce hyper-personalized content on demand," he said.

The automaker previously sought to create a more compelling online research path through Cadillac Live, a digital showroom that facilitates one-to-one interactions between consumers and agents. Similarly to the concept being introduced at CES, Cadillac Live was designed to drive customers to a dealership to complete their purchase in person ([see story](#)).

"Digitalization is sweeping through every facet of automotive retail," Mr. de Bodinat said. "This is something we've seen first-hand through our projects with forward-thinking clients like Cadillac, Audi and Lamborghini, with many more set to follow.

"This trend will culminate in the creation of consistent ecosystems like this concept, where every touchpoint seamlessly flows into the next and each interaction is tailored to each customer," he said.

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