

COMMERCE

Bentley joins push for clean driving with hybrid concept

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Bentley's hybrid plug-in concept

By JOE MCCARTHY

British automaker Bentley Motors is venturing into the hybrid arena with a new plug-in concept that is expected to reach consumers in the form of an SUV by 2017.

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The concept vehicle will be unveiled at the Beijing International Automotive Exhibition April 20-29. Many luxury brands have been contemplating and executing hybrid vehicles to respond to a growing preference among consumers and the obvious need to address carbon emissions.

"The announcement of the hybrid is part of our strategy for responsible and efficient development," said Mike Sayer, product and motor sport communications manager at **Bentley Motors**, Crewe, Britain.

"Hybrid technology matches and enhances our brand values of luxury and performance perfectly, allowing us to improve response and refinement while also improving our vehicle emissions and efficiency," he said.

"It means we can continue to deliver the exceptionally luxurious high performance cars that we're renowned for, but in an environmentally responsible way."

Team green

The hybrid concept is based on the brand's flagship Mulsanne model and the brand claims that the upcoming model will offer a power increase of 25 percent with a carbon reduction of 70 percent.



Bentley's Hybrid concept

Drivers will be able to drive 31 miles with electricity alone, which is suitable for cutting down emissions while driving in cities.



Bentley's Hybrid concept

A distinguishing physical feature of the car, at least for the time being, will be the abundance of copper detailing. Copper will appear on the car's electrical veins, headlamps, radiator shell bezel, brake calipers, feature line details and badges. The diamond-quilted interior will be embellished with copper cross-stitching and the color will touch up other facets of the cabin.



Bentley's Hybrid concept

Bentley does not intend to stop its green improvements with the Mulsanne. By the end of the decade, 90 percent of the automaker's production will be available as a plug-in hybrid.

Just in time

Now that hybrid vehicles have been deemed a viable investment that does not forsake performance, automakers are clamoring for reputation points.

For instance, German automaker Porsche touted the 918 Spyder model as the brand's plug-in hybrid sports car of the future after its debut at the Frankfurt International Motor Show last year.

Prior to its debut, the 918 Spyder defeated the lap record for a street-legal automobile at the Nürburgring Nordschleife motorsports complex, marking a significant achievement for a hybrid vehicle. The brand may convert auto enthusiasts who had been wary about hybrid vehicles after posting such an impressive time ([see story](#)).

Also, as the BMW i series hits the roads in Europe and elsewhere, the brand's DNA will likely undergo an evolution that could result in its sustainable vehicles supplanting more traditional models as the quintessential BMW line.

Since its debut in Europe Nov. 16, the BMW i3 will open up electric vehicles to a broader audience, but it is the i8 model that will be a more formidable nemesis of Tesla. The i series will make its debut in the United States, Japan, China and South Korea in 2014, which will provide a more definitive glimpse into the future of the brand as consumers embrace or dismiss the line ([see story](#)).

Although the marketplace is starting to get crowded, Bentley views its hybrid as a novel offering.

"Bentley will be the first true luxury manufacturer to bring a plug-in hybrid to market," Mr. Sayer said.

"While the technology is well established, our uncompromising levels of luxury and refinement will combine with the extra performance and reduced fuel consumption to

deliver a unique driving experience," he said.

Final Take

Joe McCarthy, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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