

COMMERCE

BMW pursues carbon neutrality via solar carport

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BMW i solar carport concept

By JOE MCCARTHY

German automaker BMW is assuaging remaining criticisms of electric vehicles with a solar carport concept that brings its i series closer to carbon neutrality.

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The carport was designed to mesh with the aesthetics of the i series and features bamboo as its primary material. BMW will officially introduce the carport alongside the BMW i8 launch in Los Angeles in July.

"The moment you decide to be a BMW i customer is probably also the moment you think about your home charging solution," said Katharina Singer, spokesperson for **BMW i**, Germany.

"We heard in our market and customer studies a lot that people who decide to use an electric car are also very interested in charge the car with green / regenerative energy," she said.

"That can be solved by using the BMW i offer for green energy, especially for customers who might not be able to install solar panels or such. That can also be solved by using self-generated energy e.g. out of your solar carport."

Almost there

Batteries for electric vehicles generally charge at stations powered by electricity created from oil or coal, which obviously results in a net carbon gain.

This hard-to-shake dependence on fossil fuels has provided ammunition for those scornful of electric vehicles, on top of the increasingly dubious criticism that electric vehicles have shoddy performance.

BMW aims to get the i series closer to carbon neutrality with the carport, a goal that would likely make the vehicles more attractive to casual environmentalists who are waiting for a definitive turning point.

Designed by DesignWorksUSA, the carport generates electricity through high-grade, glass-on-glass solar modules on the sides and roof.



BMW i series solar carport concept

The structure's transparency symbolizes the i series mission to present an authentically viable alternative to the tyranny of fossil fuels.



BMW i series solar carport concept

Adding to the symbolic nature is bamboo, an exceptionally sustainable raw material, that acts in opposition to the traditionally unsustainable metals used for garages. The struts are all made from bamboo.



BMW i series solar carport concept

The angular structure is softened by rounded hinges to reflect the designs of the i3 and i8. While the i3 maintains the egg-shape that has come to represent electric vehicles, the i8 has a feline body that recalls Tesla's vehicles and conventional high-performance vehicles.

Owners will be able to use the BMW i Wallbox Pro to charge their cars with the electricity harnessed. The Wallbox indicates the amount of solar energy used and analyzes the charging process to show the proportion of solar versus grid power.

However, the hybrid i8 still has a relatively small range with a fully-charged battery. The i8 hybrid can travel about 22 miles in all-electric mode.

Leftover energy produced by the carport can be used for domestic purposes.

"The carport will be an attractive feature for a segment of the really serious 'green' consumers and thus potentially make the i series more appealing to them," said Ron Kurtz, president of the [American Affluence Research Center](#), Atlanta.

"As for general appeal that will attract more buyers to the i series, I doubt the carport will make any difference," he said.

"The carport has other value for BMW as it gives them a new item to incorporate into their overall story about 'sustainability.'"

Bamboo and glass

Other automakers are reacting to the widespread aversion to fossil fuels.

For instance, U.S. automaker Tesla is responding to growing popularity overseas with a European expansion plan.

Tesla plans to open 30 new stores and service centers in Europe, creating a marked difference in the brand's presence in countries like Britain, Germany and France. Making itself more available to consumers will help the car company, since knowing a brand-operated service center is nearby may help car buyers make the commitment to what is a comparably young brand ([see story](#)).

Also, 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.

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 ([see story](#)).

BMW's aggressive push into electric space has already made a large enough impact.

"While the carport may make it a little easier to charge cars and more effective as a source of energy for the i series cars, I don't think it will result in them being perceived as now being any more viable as an alternative to conventional cars," Mr. Kurtz said.

Final take

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