



## Los Angeles 2009

### At the intersection of Surprise and Surreal

by John Miller  
Photos by Ray DiSilvestro and Jack White

The Los Angeles International Auto show, by most accounts has still not returned to ‘form’ of previous years, but the mood was far more enthusiastic than last year. For an (irrational) comparison, a media associate pointed out that in prior years, Press Day meant fresh Sushi and carving stations were not uncommon sights.

The 2009 show couldn’t have had a more exciting start. Less than 24 hours before the kickoff, the Keynote Speaker, Fritz Henderson, CEO of GM, was...kicked off (fired by the GM Board). Bob Lutz, the GM Vice Chairman bravely stepped in and made the best of the situation.

Porsche, AG went ‘Hollywood’ with it’s debut of the a new model, hosted in a completely separate area from all the other manufacturers, along with smoke, mirrors (a cliché of the surreal), and a live band. It was in November of 2008, Porsche chose the Los Angeles International Auto show to debut the 987 Generation 2 Boxster. The 2009 Boxster



Spyder public introduction filled the room with...yawns. There were numerous other unveilings at the Los

Angeles show (or first USA showings of vehicles) that included the Audi E-tron, the Mazda 2, the Ford Fiesta, the Chevy Cruze, and Honda Accord Crosstour. The fact that manufacturers had new offerings was encouraging. The actual cars unveiled....weren’t quite so. Take the Mazda 2, for instance. The draped version was more interesting than the undraped.



Ford was officially debuting the Fiesta...but you wouldn’t know it from the way it buried it behind a couple of Volvos. I had a chance to drive the Fiesta in Las Vegas at SEMA a few weeks ago -- another perfectly nice functional hatchback, with about the same level of eye-appeal as the undraped Mazda 2. If nothing else, the Honda Crosstour was



eye-catching. Of course you couldn’t get close to it without hearing repeated remarks, “The NEXT Pontiac Aztek”. Credit Honda with taking a chance---after hundreds of ‘hits’, the Crossdress....err, Crosstour, is a swing and a miss.

Curiously, (and sadly, given that it was Southern California, after all), notable absences from the LA Auto show included Ferrari, Lamborghini, and Bentley. Which is not to say there weren’t plenty of sports cars to gawk at. Lotus brought their latest offering, the Evora, in several colors and configurations. The Evora is sometimes referred to as the 2+2 version of the Lotus Elise. Some also call it the 2+0 much version.

The Evora took a Porsche Boxster-like detour on its way to the frame stretcher.



sportscars. Spyker, on the other hand, while displaying brilliantly crafted

The Elise tips the scales at less than 1900 pounds. The Evora adds a back seat, a few more creature comforts, a slightly bigger motor, and (somehow) rolls out the door at over 2900 pounds. Might as well be 29000....or to put it another way...Elise/Exige owners looking to step up may want to sit this one out.

Some other interesting (which will henceforth be read as EXPENSIVE) cars were offerings from Lexus, Fisker, Spyker and Viper. Lexus brought its LFA super car to LA ---the 'super' part being mostly the price ---approaching \$400,000.



Fisker appears poised to take the lead away from Tesla with it's hybrid



sportscars, appears poised to take....Saab (off of GM's somewhat incompetent hands).



Viper, which appears headed for independence from the somewhat incompetent hands of Chrysler (nee, Fiat), sent a best-for-last effort



--- the future of these beasts are truly unknown.

Speaking of somewhat incompetent, I accidentally happened across the 2011 Chevy Volt. The car isn't exactly a stunner on the outside, but inside is what counts. The Volt runs on batteries (approximately a 40 mile range) and then uses a gas powered generator to produce electricity to power it for hundreds of

miles (unlike hybrids by Honda and Toyota that actually switch between a battery-electric drive train and a gas engine+transmission drive-system). Many internal combustion die-hards



aren't big fan of hybrids or electrics...but I really want this one to succeed. The Chevy version is said to be a sounder, simpler, more efficient means of propulsion (compared to the hybrids presently produced by Honda and Toyota).



GM had (has?) a head start in the field of hybrids (the GM EV1, produced form 1996 to 1999) and yet managed to lose the market to Toyota and Honda. Question to GM: WHY THE HECK WASN'T THE VOLT GIVEN A FEATURE/SPOTLIGHT DISPLAY AT LA? Take a page from Audi -- the Audi e-tron was placed on a platform that you could not miss. Someone pay GM marketing a visit and give them a swift kick in the trunk. The Volt technology is poised to carry GM for the long term....and for GM, that may be 2015 or 2016 if they bungle this.

Back over at VW, showgoers were able to get a first look at the VW Uplite.



Not entirely a pleasant surprise. VW (new parent to Porsche) needs to 'borrow' a design engineer from Porsche. Until then, it may yet be another one that you may want to 'sit out'.