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Jim Mateja

## Electricity building

### Domestics make a run at high-mileage leaders by combining batteries with no-gas fuel sources

Published January 7, 2007

DETROIT -- If the Chevrolet Volt works as advertised, you could travel for weeks, if not months, without a drop of gasoline.

You can expect from 50 to 525 m.p.g., so get ready to thumb your nose at the gas pumps--at any price.

General Motors unveiled the high-mileage concept at a media preview of the Detroit Auto Show. The electric, powered by lithium ion batteries, is designed to go up to 40 miles before the need to recharge 6 to 6.5 hours in any 110-volt outlet.

After 40 miles, a 1-liter, turbo 3-cylinder gas engine fuels a generator to recharge the batteries. It also goes 600 miles before having to refill the 12-gallon gas tank.

That's 640 miles of driving range and better than 50 m.p.g. in fuel economy with regular unleaded or up to 525 m.p.g. with the E85 ethanol blend, GM estimates.

In November, GM spotlighted a plug-in Saturn Vue at the Los Angeles Auto Show that can travel 40 miles, period, on nickel-metal-hydride battery power. It gave no date for sale.

"Volt is a great idea, a major fuel-saving breakthrough and a way to defuse the hybrid innovation lead Toyota and Honda has over GM," said Dave Cole, chairman of the Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor, Mich. "It'll force Toyota and Honda to get more aggressive in electric cars and means one more thing Ford still has to do."

But, he added, "GM is totally dependent on battery technology to pull this off. Before I get too excited, I want to see it done and how quickly GM can do it first."

The sophisticated lithium-ion battery pack needed might not be ready until 2010 to 2012, though GM hopes to move from concept to reality sooner.

"This isn't a PR ploy or a science fair project, we're dead serious," said Jon Lauckner, vice president and global program manager for Volt. "We're working with battery-makers now on how fast the battery pack can be developed, but it's not going to be way out in the future. We plan a working Volt prototype this year."

The four-door, five-passenger compact is derived from the Chevy Cobalt and benefits from GM's experience with the EV1 electric it launched in 1996 but stopped producing in 2000 when demand fell.

"EV1 `died' because it had limited range, limited room, couldn't climb a hill or run the air conditioning without depleting the battery and had no device to get you home when the battery charge ran low," said GM Vice Chairman Bob Lutz of the car. It also sat only two, traveled just 60 to 90 miles before needing an eight-hour recharge and had a top speed of 80 m.p.h. (120 m.p.h. Volt).

"It [price] would have to be in the same range as other compacts, \$17,000 to \$18,000 [before a premium is added on] and not \$100,000," Lauckner said.

Tony Posawatz, Volt vehicle line director, estimates it would conserve 500 gallons of gas over 15,000 miles of annual driving.

GM expects the lithium-ion battery pack to have at least a 10-year life cycle.

Volt is GM's first example of E-flex vehicles capable of using gas, diesel, biodiesel, ethanol or

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hydrogen fuel cells to produce electricity to power the car. More will be unveiled at other auto shows.

Van-do spirit: Chrysler Group showed its 2008 model mini-vans coming out this fall--though the segment is shrinking and GM and Ford are getting out of it.

"Some are exiting, but after 24 years and 12 million sales, we're still No. 1, and we aren't going to leave the segment we created--and make money on," said Larry Lyons, vice president of the front-wheel-drive team for Chrysler Group.

The vans lose what Trevor Creed, executive vice president of design, calls the egg shape in favor of more of a rectangle on wheels with protruding hood.

Yet the focus is inside.

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