

# BUBBLEWRAP, BRANDS AND (NO) TRENDS

It's that busy 'motorshow' time of year again, with vehicle manufacturers revealing concepts cars, new production models and fresh ideas. Some are radical and unlikely to affect us in a big way, but others are very relevant indeed.

Bosch has released a new 'jet wiper' which integrates the washer jets into the wiper arm to spray the washer fluid just ahead of the wiper blade. This is partly a safety improvement to avoid obscuring the driver's vision with spray as much as a conventional system, but it is also more efficient as it gives an even spray ahead of the blade for better cleaning. An additional benefit is that it uses less fluid too. This is very similar to the Mercedes-Benz Magic Vision Control for the convertible SL, which cites an additional benefit in that the controlled fluid spray prevents the occupants getting indirectly wet when the roof is down. As an option, the Mercedes-Benz system can feature a heated wiper blade for those freezing mornings.

Citroën has unveiled a crossover concept named Cactus. This will lead to a production model, but not without side and rear glazing as the concept was presented. What's really caught the public's attention was what Citroën called Air Bump. This is essentially a protective trim collection, likened to bubble wrap as it features air pockets, to protect the key areas of a vehicle body that can pick-up minor scuffs and parking dents such as the doors and bumpers. This idea, if it comes to market, looks a bit better than some of the alternatives currently available.

The Cactus also showcases the HybridAir system that Peugeot and Citroën are developing as an alternative to petrol-electric hybrids. This system, shown on other concepts over the past year, uses compressed air, again regenerated through braking energy, to power an engine assisting pump. Last, but not least, it shows Citroën developing natural materials with vegetable tanning much as BMW has done with its i3.

## BRIDGE

Ford has revealed its range-topping Vignale Mondeo, effectively a sub-brand to bridge the marketing gap between Ford's higher specification models and the prestige brands. But this is far more than a trim kit of LED lamps and bright chrome finishing trims. This will be part of a brand giving Vignale customers (especially corporate and fleet drivers) additional aftersales care including free car washes for life.

Potentially much more important is Ford's boss, Alan Mulally confirming the company is developing important new technologies to keep pace with others who are having success with advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS). Ford will soon be releasing pedestrian recognition systems to add to its autonomous emergency braking (AEB) systems. The company is also working hard on vehicle-to-vehicle communications (V2V) which it predicts will be able to warn the driver of oncoming vehicles on the wrong side of the road or vehicles in their path on a blind bend.

Longer term research for Ford includes heart rate and glucose level monitoring, to warn the driver of imminent health issues. Incidents caused by heart attacks at the wheel are not unique to any country and Toyota is another company working towards this technology.

Bosch has also revealed it has developed greater integration of vehicle dynamic control functions, such as electric power assisted steering and anti-lock braking system (ABS), to be able to offer the driver a degree of customisation of the vehicle handling.

## AUTONOMOUS

All this comes in a month where Daimler and Nissan have both announced they would make autonomous self-driving cars available by 2020. Whilst German original equipment manufacturer (OEM), Continental intends to enable this to be possible by 2016.

It is little wonder that in a recent interview, a prominent car designer suggested there are no key trends in design today, but rather that a huge range of technologies and systems are being developed. Many of these we can already see on the roads, and more are soon to come. Some, such as Air Bump, are simple and of no real risk for the repairers, but others will pose a far greater challenge.

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