

Some concept automobiles point to a dead end

By Dan McCosh
special writer

Concept cars fit neatly into the American dream of the future, when everybody will be wearing strange clothes, living in odd shaped houses and, of course, driving weird cars.

It is a dream carried forth by a series of so-called "future cars" that mainly date back to the early 1960s, when the idea of a three-wheeled vehicle, powered by a jet engine, seemed just around the corner, after a few bugs were worked out.

IN FACT, auto styling and auto technology seem to work in a series of closed loops, with trends repeating themselves as relentlessly as the shift from wide to narrow tires. In the early days of the industry, a "concept car" was a ridiculous notion, since every bonafide concept was being tried out and marketed in a mad scramble between the hundreds of companies trying to get a foothold in a booming industry. There was no

time to fool around with future fantasy.

But when the post-World War II era seemed to offer stability, serenity and a touch of boredom, the automakers began to attempt to create their own vision of the future.

THE RESULT was a series of styling exercises considered so wild and crazy that they had to represent the future of automotive styling. This was a logical outcome of the mid-1950s fin-de-siècle era, when everyday cars were getting even wilder and crazier.

Today, there is more attention paid to concept cars than ever before. One reason is that auto stylists are still feeling the pulse of public interest, anticipating a change that could be as dramatic as the sudden adoption of the so-called "aero look" that altered the industry at the beginning of the last decade.

Today's concept cars are, in fact, much closer to production cars than in the past and frequently provide at least a broad-brush look at where contemporary car design is headed.



auto talk
Dan
McCosh

AT THIS year's North American International Auto Show, more than 25 futuristic design exercises will be on the show floor, probably the largest collection of such artificial fiberglass of any show in the world.

The large number of concept cars makes the auto show something of a forum for world design. All the domestic manufacturers will participate, along with Pininfarina, Bertone, Mercedes-Benz, Mitsubishi, Nissan and Toyota.

Few of these show cars even run, and most that do barely crawl around under their own power. And, needless to say, they are among the most expensive cars at the show, with a full-powered, high-tech exercise

costing in excess of \$25 million, while even a minor styling tweak running up a \$100,000 bill.

CONCEPT CARS have, in fact, created a minor local industry with a few highly skilled prototype shops specializing in the creation of these design exercises.

One of the largest is Special Projects, in Plymouth, founded eight years ago by auto designer Ken Vanez. Special Projects specializes in producing the on-off fiberglass bodies that clad the show cars. Some of their work is a joint effort with ASC Corp. in Southgate, another custom prototype operation that also has a joint venture with Metal-

crafters, a California-based custom bodybuilder.

THE CARS start out as a design exercise on paper, or more likely on a special design computer that allows a designer to build up shapes in three dimensions.

The computer in turn guides a milling machine to reproduce the designer's vision in three-dimensional clay. Often a 4-size model is built first to test the design, followed by a full-size clay.

"We take molds off the clay model, then develop the fiberglass body from the molds," said Bill Clark, special projects vice president.

Then the interior is modeled and the interior is fitted. Some of the cars use full trim, others don't. Often we have working headlamps and taillamps and an instrument cluster.

"ACTUALLY, you don't get too much out of a drivable vehicle, and you can run up a lot of cost." One exception is the HPG pace cars, which lead off major race series, developed with a special body on an

existing chassis.

Construction of a concept car usually is squeezed between the end of a model year and the beginning of the show circuit in January. That puts enormous pressure on the companies producing the cars, which normally are completed just as the show is opening.

At last year's show, one major display slipped from the pedestal the night before the show opened but was repaired and reinstalled before the curtain went up.

IF THE TEST of a future car is whether you ever see it in the future, most fail the test. Part of the reason is that there are serious problems with some favorite styling concepts.

Bubble tops, for example, are difficult to make without distortion, bring in an enormous amount of heat and always let the rain in on your head as soon as they are opened.

Regardless, bubble tops remain a styling favorite for concept cars, guaranteeing that that particular vision of the future will never come to pass.

Maybe the owners' divorce means it's time to find another job

Q. As employees of a well-known small business, we are all suffering from the effects of the owners' upcoming divorce. Aside from the fact that we never know who's going to be in from one day to the next, we are forced to witness and become involved in a lot of garbage we feel should not be brought into the office. Is there anything that we can do as a group to make things less volatile and out of control when both owners are here?

A. As employees, your ability to improve the present situation at work depends in large part on the level of influence you have with each

of the owners. Generally speaking, not much can be done as a group other than to agree on the ways in which you will respond to specific circumstances that come up. Responding as a unit is the key here because your message won't be as strong if there are different employee reactions to the same offensive behaviors.

It is also important to determine who among you is in the best position to serve as an objective spokesman on behalf of the group if and when necessary. I stress objective because all too often employees find themselves playing judge and jury without ever realizing it. When this



focus: small business
Mary
DiPaolo

happens, the group instantly loses its credibility.

Of course, the final alternative is to begin searching for employment elsewhere. Recent statistics indicate that a marriage dissolves, the business follows. Rather than being surprised by a company sale, bankruptcy or hostile takeover, each em-

ployee has the power to plan his or her future direction in advance of the final fallout.

Q. I'd like to start my own catering business after having had the opportunity to plan and coordinate several employee events at our company during the past year. How do I

make a smooth transition from my current position to this new career I want to pursue?

Keep in mind that the amount of time you were able to spend on your own company's event planning efforts during regular business hours was probably greater than what you will have to work on for non-company events. This suggests that future efforts would be limited to your free time before work, during lunch or after hours. If you find that you can successfully pursue this new part-time occupation without infringing on your present employer's time, more power to you.

Other than that, I question your description of this proposed venture as a catering business. From what you indicated it sounds as though you are best suited to conduct business as an event planner, with independent catering services made available to you on a sub-contract basis. This is a very important distinction because you don't want to mislead customers about what you actually do.

Mary DiPaolo is the owner of MarkTrends, a Northville business consulting firm. She is also producer and host of the cable television series, "Chamber Perspectives."

datebook

● **LEGAL ASSISTING**
Thursday, Jan. 3 — Free legal assistance evening begins at 7:30 p.m. in the Oakland Center on campus near Rochester. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

● **CAREER NIGHT**
Thursday, Jan. 3 — Free seminar on opportunities for legal assistants 2:30-8:30 p.m. near Rochester. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

● **GMAT WORKSHOPS**
Saturdays and Sundays, Jan. 5-7 and 12-13 — Graduate Management Admission Test preparation workshop 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturdays and 1:30-4:30 p.m., Sundays near Rochester. Fee: \$175. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

● **GRE WORKSHOPS**
Saturdays, Jan. 5-26 — Graduate Record Examination preparation workshop 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. near Rochester. Fee: \$135. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

● **RESUME WRITING**
Saturdays, Jan. 5-26 — Resume and cover letter workshop, "How to Write Resumes and Cover Letters That Open Doors," 9 a.m. to noon in Birmingham. Fee: \$30. Includes one hour of consultation. Information: 642-9150. Sponsor: Job Search Dynamics.

● **REAL ESTATE WOMEN**
Monday, Jan. 7 — Commercial

Real Estate Women Inc. meets at 6:30 p.m. at the Hudson House Hotel, 1509 Tenth Avenue, Southfield. Program: "Affordable Housing: Using Title Credits and State Programs to Create New Housing." Fee: \$10. Information: Lisa Martin, 855-3700.

● **ACCOUNTANT ASSISTANTS**
Tuesday, Jan. 8 — Free accounting assistant information night 6:30-7:30 p.m. near Rochester. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

● **EMPLOYEE HANDBOOKS**
Tuesday, Jan. 8 — "Developing an Employee Handbook" Seminar, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the American Society of Employers, 23815 Northwestern Highway, Southfield. Non-member fee: \$225. Information: Denise Moody, 352-1500. Society of Employers is a non-profit group.

● **VENTURE GROUP**
Thursday, Jan. 8 — Southeastern Michigan Venture Group meets at 9 a.m. in the Somerset Inn on Big Beaver between Crooks and Oakdale in Troy. Speaker: Carl A. Holth, president of the Greater Detroit Capital Corp. Non-member fee: \$25. Information: 689-8282. Ext. 260.

● **QUALITY CONTROL**
Thursday, Jan. 8 — Greater Detroit Section of American Society for Quality Control meets in Detroit. Program: "Quality: A Commitment to Continuous Improvement." Fee: \$10 in advance. Information: Jerry Brown, 234-1647.

● **BIRMINGHAM CHAMBER**
Thursday, Jan. 8 — Birmingham 165-member Chamber of Commerce meets at noon for lunch at the Kingsley Inn, 1475 N. Woodward, Bloomfield Hills. Speaker: Philip H. Power, owner of the Observer & Eccentric News-Paper. Non-member fee: \$23. Information: 644-1700.

● **JOB-SEARCH SEMINAR**
Tuesday, Jan. 8-29 — "How to Search and Thrive in a Difficult Economy" presented 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Birmingham. Fee: \$45. Information: 642-9150. Sponsor: Job Search Dynamics.

● **PLANNING**
Wednesday, Jan. 9 — Power Planning '91 covering estate planning, asset and income management, insurance planning, tax updates, investment planning and a question-and-answer session 2-5 p.m. at Petzel's, 6950 Rochester Road, Troy. Information: Mike Hart, 879-8100. Sponsor: Asset & Income Management Group of Bultman & Co. Inc.

● **BUSINESS PLANS**
Wednesday, Jan. 9 — Writing an Effective Business Plan 9-9 p.m. at the Novi Hilton, 23111 Haggerty, Novi. Fee: \$50. Information: Lisa Pajot, 1-769-6200. Sponsor: Deloitte & Touche.

● **PERSONAL ASSESSMENT**
Thursday, Jan. 10 — Personal Assessment Inventory required for entry into the Oakland University legal assistant program, 7:30-9:30 p.m.

near Rochester. Fee: \$25. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

● **DIRECT MARKETERS**
Thursday, Jan. 10 — Direct Marketing Association of Detroit meets for lunch at the Sheraton Southfield. Program: "Twenty-seven Ways to Use Databases to Improve Sales, Profits and Customer Relationships." Non-member fee: \$19. Information: 258-8803.

● **MARKET STRATEGY**
Friday, Jan. 11 — "Creating a Market Strategy" 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Novi Hilton, 23111 Haggerty, Novi. Fee: \$80. Information: Lisa Pajot, 1-769-6200. Sponsor: Deloitte & Touche.

● **INTERMEDIATE LOTUS 1-2-3**
Thursdays, Feb. 14 through March 7 — "Lotus 1-2-3 Intermediate" offered 7-9 p.m. in Bloomfield Hills. Fee: \$85. Information: 645-3635. Sponsor: Cranbrook Schools.

● **WORDPERFECT 5.0 INTERMEDIATE**
Mondays, Feb. 18 through March 8 — "WordPerfect 5.0 Intermediate" offered 7-9 p.m. in Bloomfield Hills. Fee: \$85. Information: 645-3635. Sponsor: Cranbrook Schools.

● **PURCHASING MANAGEMENT**
Thursday, March 14 — Joint meeting with APICS, program James Belasco on organizational change, "Teaching the Elephants to

Dance" at the meeting of the National Association of Purchasing Management - Metro Detroit at the Troy Marriott hotel in Troy. Information: 1-773-3737.

● **PURCHASING MANAGEMENT**
Thursday, April 18 — "Emerging Purchasing and Supply Strategies for Competitiveness and Risk-Management: Buyer-Seller Partnerships" at the meeting of the National Association of Purchasing Management - Metro Detroit at the Embassy Suites hotel in Southfield. Information: 1-773-3737.

● **PURCHASING MANAGEMENT**
Thursday, May 16 — Installation of officers of the National Association of Purchasing Management - Metro Detroit and luncheon by Rick Institute of Incom Computer

Centers "Keys Issues in Public Purchasing" at the Detroit Yacht Club. Information: 1-773-3737.

● **SMALL BUSINESS DIRECTORY**
Copies of the free "Small Business Resource Directory" are available at all National Bank of Detroit offices. The booklet, produced by New Detroit and NBD, offers resource information for operators of small business.

Information for this column should be sent to the business editor, Observer & Eccentric News-Paper, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

Information must be received by Monday to be published in the Thursday issue. Publication cannot be guaranteed. Information should contain a daytime telephone number where information can be verified.

marketplace

Brach Broadcasting and Professional Practice Resources Inc. has expanded office space at Tower 14, a 11-story 231,870 sq. ft. office building on Northwestern Highway, Southfield.

Ask Flowers Worldwide appointed 1001 Tremont Detroit as agency of record.

Premier Pools Inc. of Troy was featured on the November issue of Aqua Magazine as one of the "Aqua Top."

Land Data of West Bloomfield has merged with Shore Mortgage Co. of Southfield.

The Kroger Co. hosted a grand

opening for a newly renovated and expanded supermarket at 85 Livermore at Walton Boulevard in Rochester Hills. The expanded Kroger store is in the Campus Corners Shopping Center.

The Better Business Bureau Detroit and Eastern Michigan has moved to 30555 Southfield Road, Suite 200, Southfield. New phone numbers are 644-0901, administrative, 644-9152, administrative, 644-9153, complaint, 644-1012, inquiry, 644-9658, member hot line, 644-3339, membership, and 644-3026, fax.

Hoskinson, Lamell, Koshar, Anspaugh & Green completed the independent review of the accounting and auditing practice

Stanley Electronics of Troy has elected Stan August, Baker Communications Co. as its advertising agency.

Brush Electrical Machines has secured a major contract to supply four motor units for the chassis dynamometers for its Advanced Engineering Center to be built in Dearborn. The facility will be primarily for vehicle vibration and handling tests.

B.S.V.P. Public Relations was appointed to handle all public relations for the Promenade at Hope.

Lapides Publicity Group Inc. will do publicity for Chapman and Hauer P.C.

Hidden Creek Industries has completed the acquisition of the Dura Automotive Hardware and Mechanical Components divisions of Wickes Manufacturing Company.

Obesity Rehabilitation
Cookingham Clinic of Nutrition & Preventative Medicine, P.C.
Gail A. Cookingham, B.S., M.D.
Nutrition, Internal Medicine
Announces opening of New Weight Control Facility with Exercise Unit at Independence Pointe
7210 Ortonville Road / Suite 200-204
Clarkston, Michigan
1-800-962-6751
620-1900
Call for free consultation
Clinic is located within Beaumont Hospital Department of Preventative & Nutritional Medicine

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• BIRMINGHAM, 15000 Highway 24 at Riverchase Lane	644-5950
• EAST DETROIT, 22245 E. 14 Mile at Riverchase Lane	463-3620
• EAST DETROIT, 22245 E. 14 Mile at Riverchase Lane	778-7020
• ANN ARBOR, 1500 Cass at University Ave.	973-8340
• LINT, 4200 Michigan at Cass	313-732-5560
• FARMINGTON HILLS, 27000 Orchard Lane at I-24	553-5505
• TROY, 15000 Highway 24 at Riverchase Lane	616-228-6700
• TRAVERSE CITY, 1000 Front St. at Main St.	616-941-1999
• GRAND RAPIDS, 2300 N. E. between Boston & Water	616-452-1188
• NOVI, 15000 Highway 24 at Riverchase Lane	347-3323
• EAST LANSING, 2401 Saginaw at Grand	517-337-9696
• CLARION HEIGHTS, 2600 E. Grand at I-24	562-5560

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