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Source: <http://feeds.wired.com/wiredautopia>

Updated: 11-21

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Report: Tesla IPO “Coming Soon”

Tesla Motors is on the verge of going public.

So says Reuters, citing two sources “familiar with the matter” who say an IPO filing from Tesla is coming any day now. No one’s offering specifics on when or how, but as Reuters notes, an initial public offering can take months. Tesla Motors has never commented publicly on IPO rumors and isn’t starting now.

“We don’t comment on rumor and speculation,” said company spokesman Ricardo Reyes.

That said, CEO Elon Musk said early last year that an IPO could come in 2008 or 2009. And he’s undoubtedly watched battery company A123 Systems, which saw its stock climb 50 percent on its first day of trading on Sept. 25. That company saw its third-quarter revenue exceed expectations but A123 still posted a loss.

More info when we have it.

Photo: Jim Merithew / Wired.com

Fisker, Mission One Snag Design Awards

Say what you will about electric vehicles, the Fisker Karma and Mission One are sexy rides indeed. The judges at Spark agree and have honored the two EVs in the annual Spark Design and Architecture awards.

The Fisker Karma plug-in hybrid and Mission One electric superbike snagged gold awards, joining the exhibits at the California Academy of Sciences, the videogame Tony Hawk: Ride and a long list of other winners in the international design competition.

Spark honors the best designs in everything from architecture to advertising, and the jury includes more than a dozen designers, creative directors and professors. They considered more than 370 contenders before naming 93 winners in four categories.

Photo of the Fisker Karma taking a lap at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca: Jim Merithew / Wired.com.

Photo of the Mission One at the Bonneville Salt Flats: Mission Motors.

Going Rogue in a Luxury Hybrid Snowmobile

When we heard that Sarah Palin got a \$1.25 million advance for *Going Rogue*, we wondered how she was going to spend the loot. With a new wardrobe in the closet and donors clamoring to her PAC like cranky old people to a town hall meeting, we think it's time for her to listen to her new pal Oprah and live that best life now.

We've got just the thing: a luxury snowmobile snow machine just perfect for a fabulously wealthy Alaskan former First Family.

The i-Scoob (Get it? No? Sound it out! Ice cube — good one!) is a concept from designer Jeff Darling. It's a plug-in hybrid with a well-appointed interior that can also be hosed out. It's designed to be as capable carrying precision instruments to measure the thinning permafrost as it is hauling bullet-riddled polar bear carcasses. Plus, there's an electric-only feature for crossing those especially environmentally sensitive areas of the tundra on the way to a seal hunt.

It's purely a concept — even in Alaska it'll never see the light of midnight, but gosh is it fun.

Depending on the time of year, Darling said that on-board solar panels may be useful for when all other fuel sources are expended. "While there may not be much sun in the areas the i-Scoob would operate, every little bit helps," he said. "Even if it takes a couple days to generate enough power to finish the journey it's better than being permanently stuck."

The passenger compartment of the i-Scoob is enclosed by a front-hinged capsule, and every hollow compartment is filled with foam for insulation and flotation. "Should the vehicle fall through ice into frigid water it will remain afloat," Darling said. "The foam also helps insulate the drivetrain components and occupants from the harsh environment." A glazed cockpit traps warm air from the sun, providing skeptics a real-life demonstration of the greenhouse effect.

Steering and acceleration are via joystick, while a radio and climate control keep passengers comfortable and entertained.

Images: [Jeff Darling/disen-art.com](http://JeffDarling/disen-art.com)

VW Builds the World's Coolest SUV

The Paris-Dakar Rally is a race so crazy competitors have been taken out by land mines. To say it's grueling is like saying Carrie Prejean likes shooting video. Just what sort of vehicle is required to take on a race where normal conditions include searing heat, towering dunes, ginormous rocks and weather conditions that would give a crab boat captain pause?

Volkswagen has the answer in their new Touareg for the next Dakar.

The cars, trucks, bikes and buggies that run in the Dakar rally are tech porn of the highest order. Take a look at what VW has to offer for the 2010 running of the race, which will be run through Argentina and Chile. (The name comes from the days when the race ran from Paris to Dakar, Senegal.) The Germans made history last year by taking the checkered flag in the first diesel-powered entry in the automobile class. It entered the diesel 'Reg in the Baja 1000, too.

This time around, the Touareg features such cool features as a carbon fiber-reinforced outer skin that weighs a mere 50 kilograms, a braking system capable of exerting pressure equal to that of 700 meters below sea level and a data acquisition system that can store 250 MB of data that is read and analyzed by race engineers at the close of a days stage.

Just the run of the mill specs for the Touareg shows you how serious of a challenge the Dakar is. The VW is powered by a 2.5-liter five-cylinder TDI diesel engine with two-stage turbocharging system with exhaust turbochargers and intercooling. The mill, mounted longitudinally behind the front axle, puts out approximately 280 horsepower and more than 440 pound-feet of torque. Gotta love diesels for buckets of torque.

All that power and grunt is put to the ground — no matter what kind of ground it is, tarmac, sand, gravel, rocks, you name it — via a longitudinally mounted sequential five-speed gearbox and a permanent all-wheel-drive. More slick hardware includes selectable viscous locking mechanical differentials and an hydraulically actuated three-plate ceramic clutch. Stopping power comes from 320 mm ventilated disc brakes squeezed by aluminum calipers with six pistons up front and four out back. The Dakar Touareg even has power-assisted rack and pinion steering.

All this is done in a surprisingly lightweight package that tips the scales at just under 4,000 pounds. The Dakar Touareg can hit 100 km/hr

from a standstill in 6.1 seconds on firm ground and tops out at , on hard ground, and will top out at approximately 118 mph, which may not seem like much.

Unless you're running flat-out through the desert.

Photos: VW

Big Brother Zeros in on License Plates

The town council in Tiburon, a Marin County community just north of San Francisco, has unanimously voted to install license plate recording cameras in a bid to bring down crime.

So what's the story? Does the town have an unusually high level of violent crimes? Hardly. From 2001 to 2008, this community of less than 9,000 people saw a total of 47 violent crimes, of which only one was murder. And Marin County is the richest in all of California.

To add to the metropolis suburb Shangri-La image, the town boasts a median household income of over \$100,000, a median home value of almost \$2 million with a list of residents –past and present– that makes the cast of *Oceans Eleven* look like a high school musical.

Will Tiburon track boat traffic too? *Photo: Flickr/nik.clayton*

Tiburon officials voted 4-0 — one member was absent — to install six license plate recognition cameras on the only two roads that feed into the community, Tiburon Boulevard and Paradise Drive. When they go live in six months, the system will compare the plates to databases of “vehicles of interest” — those that are stolen, or used in kidnappings, etc. Should they find a match, the cops will be alerted. The system will archive the information for 30 days to help identify or rule out suspects for current crime investigations.

The program will cost \$195,000, and the council vote was, predictably, met with mixed reaction. Police Chief Michael Cronin of course said it will make the city safer. But some residents, like 72-year old William Rotham, consider it an invasion of privacy and “overkill” akin to “going after a flea with a cannon.” Rotham told the *San Francisco Chronicle* he also worries the immediacy of the system will cause dangerous confrontations between police and criminals on the town's two major roads.

Yami Anolik, a 64-year-old real estate investor thought otherwise and told the *Chronicle*, “If it lowers the crime rate even a little bit, then it's a great idea.”

Similar programs, like the camera system in Denver, have proven valuable to law enforcement. Denver's system scanned more than 40,000 cars in two months and found 250 needle-in-a-hay-stack vehicles of interest. We don't debate the benefit such technology brings law enforcement, nor do we question the value of lower crime rates. But we do question the actual return on this kind of reactive technology versus a

proactive system like adding to two more police officers in a town that already has a crime rate lower than that of Pleasantville.

Who can we expect to be photographed by Big Brother? The list of current and past noteworthy residents of Marin county includes tennis star Andre Agassi, Metallica vocalist and guitarist James Hetfield, rocker Sammy Hagar, director George Lucas and actors like Sean Penn and Brad Pitt. We wonder how long before Tiburon's big-brother license plate tracking system is hacked and turned against them as a paparazzi informant 'bot.

Main photo: Flickr / Snapsi

Welcome to Iowa. Please Plug In Your Car.

California is the birthplace of the coming EV invasion, but a tiny town in Iowa wants to be the birthplace of a “Pony Express” of charging stations that will keep those cars going.

Businessman Mike Howard has erected four charging stations in Elk Horn, a town of 650 people about an hour east of Omaha. He has plans to install four more soon. No, that’s not many at all, and they’re in the middle of nowhere. But Howard says you’ve got to start somewhere, especially if you envision a network of charging stations stretching from Denver to Chicago along Interstate 80. He likens his network to the Pony Express.

“They had to have stations to continue on to deliver the mail,” Howard told the Associated Press. “This is a modern-day Pony Express.”

Many automakers are developing electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids, and cars like the Chevrolet Volt and Nissan Leaf are expected by the end of next year. The big question has been where people are supposed to plug them in when they aren’t home. We’ve seen campaigns to create “charging corridors” spring up in California and Arizona, and of course Better Place has an ambitious plan for a charging infrastructure people would subscribe to. The Obama Administration is providing \$3.4 billion in grants this year to spur development of EVs and bolster the grid.

But Howard wants to bring chargers to the heartland, even though there are, according to the AP, just 96 electric cars in Iowa and only one in Elk Horn.

“He’s definitely being progressive, but you know, somebody’s got to be first,” Pat Davis, program manager for the U.S. Department of Energy’s Office of Vehicle Technologies, told the Associated Press.

Amen.

Photo: General Motors

See Also:

- [A Roadmap to Vehicle Electrification](#)
- [EV ‘Charging Corridor’ Links L.A. and San Francisco](#)
- [Nissan Scrambles to Create EV Charging Stations](#)
- [Driven: Shai Agassi’s Audacious Plan to Put Electric Cars on the Road](#)

John Surtees Drives an EV Across the Channel

How cool is John Surtees? At 75 years old, the racing legend isn't slowing down. The motorcycle *and* F1 champ decided it would be fun to drive a Ginetta electric vehicle through the English Channel Tunnel, or the Chunnel, as they so cleverly call it.

Why? To mark the 15th anniversary of the Tunnel's opening, of course. And to pick up some rather nice French wine.

For those of you who don't know Surtees, he was a grand prix motorcycle champ who won the title in 1956, 1958 (twice, in two divisions), 1959 (twice) and again in 1960 (twice again). Then he won a Formula One championship for Ferrari in 1964.

What prompted him to do something so barking mad as a dash through the Chunnel, which, by the way, is not open to automobile traffic? It was part of the 37th Annual Beaujolais Run, which is little more than an excuse for Brits to drive from England to France, pick up some wine and have some fun. Not that there's anything at all wrong with that.

Surtees became the first person to drive the Chunnel in a production car. He used the rail link's central service tunnel. Surtees started the 31-mile trip in Folkestone, Kent. He did it in a sweet little car, too — a British-made Ginetta GV50EV electric prototype. The two-seater sports tops out at 120 mph and has a claimed range of 250 miles. It uses a brushless DC motor that is designed and manufactured by Zytek. Yes, that would be the same Zytek that's got all kinds of hybrids and EVs in motorsports.

The Telegraph newspaper says Eurotunnel, which runs the Chunnel, thought having Surtees make the dash to France in an EV would be in keeping with the firm's reputation for providing the "greenest" way to cross the Channel with a car. "Two forward-looking businesses, with ground-breaking, environmentally friendly products are working together to show the world that low carbon travel is now a real option," a Eurotunnel spokesman told the paper.

Yeah, yeah. We're sure it was more like someone thought the idea of letting Surtees loose in a quick car on a closed course would be fun.

Photo: Ginetta

Electric Rolls-Royce, In Time For Christmas 2010

Rumors of an electric Rolls-Royce Phantom are back, with the word being the super-luxe automaker could have one on the road within 12 months.

We've been hearing mumbling about this car for more than a year. It started when CEO Tom Purves said an e-Rolls would be perfect for well-heeled city dwellers. The car, he said, could build upon the drivetrain in the Mini E. The rumors picked up again in September when a Rolls spokesman let slip that an electric Phantom was under consideration back in Goodwood (or, more likely, Munich, since BMW owns Rolls).

Now *AutocarUK* cites an unidentified "company source" saying the e-Phantom could be on the road by the end of next year. Why the rush? Because BMW is a big sponsor of the 2012 Olympics in London, and my wouldn't it look green bringing a flotilla of electric land yachts to the games?

Personally, we think an electric Rolls makes perfect sense. Most owners simply tool around town, so range isn't a big issue. It could save owners some serious coin on emissions and road taxes in cities like London. And electric motors provide boatloads of torque and they're quiet — two hallmarks of a Rolls-Royce.

Besides — we love the idea of a Rolls plugged into a socket. "Jeeves, please *do* remember to plug the car in."

Photo of a regular ol' gas-burning Phantom: Rolls-Royce

Sugar Cane-Fueled Airliner On the Way

Brazilian aircraft maker Embraer and General Electric are working with renewable fuel company Amyris to develop sugar cane-based jet fuel for airliners. They say a test flight by Brazilian airline Azul Linhas Aereas could come in early 2012.

It's no surprise such an experiment would come in Brazil, which leads the world in the use of ethanol. The country's sugar cane crop has led to widespread use of ethanol-powered vehicles, and Embraer produces an ethanol-powered crop duster. Sugar-based ethanol provides a better energy return than the much-debated corn ethanol common in the United States. This is the first effort to produce a sugar cane-based jet fuel for widespread use by the airlines.

Air New Zealand, Virgin, Continental and Japan Airlines have tested biofuels in Boeing aircraft. Airbus and JetBlue also are working together on alt fuels, and the Air Force wants alt-fuel too. Most biofuels have faced stiff criticism as the environmental costs of growing and producing the crops have been shown to offset some of the gains. But with airlines struggling with rising fuel costs and increased pressure on emissions, many are eager to find alternatives to petroleum.

Amyris' synthetically derived biofuel doesn't avoid the land use issues facing many biofuels, but it claims its technique of bioengineering microorganisms like yeast allows it to transform Brazil's sugar cane into several renewable fuels including diesel and jet fuels.

Photo: Azul

Electric Smart Rolling Down the Line

Drum roll please! The electric Smart ForTwo is officially underway at Daimler's factory in Hambach, France.

From an urban mobility standpoint, there's been a lot to love about the Smart from the get go. Although small, it's built like a tank, it offers the comfort and convenience you'd expect and it gets great mileage. But if you're of a green bent and you want to get even better "mileage," so to speak, the car for you arrives soon.

We've been following the Smart for awhile, from the new car-sharing program in Austin, Texas, to those crazy Dutch treating them like cows and taking Daimler to task for not offering the diesel Smart or hybrid version on this side of the Atlantic. Yeah, you can say we're fans.

Like a lot of you, we've wanted to see the EV version of the fortwo as well. It makes total sense – because, let's face it, the fortwo isn't exactly a road trip kind of car. Around the city though, it makes total sense. So here comes the EV version — Tesla Motors helped with the drivetrain — off the assembly lines.

The first 1,000 customers to receive their Smart EVs, or Smart electric drive as they are officially called, will be participants in a variety of mobility projects in major cities in both Europe and the United States. Daimler is taking a page from BMW, which is doing the same thing with the Mini E. After Daimler gets feedback on electric driving under everyday conditions for the fortwo electric drive, it will be available to the general public in 2012.

"With the start of the series production of the smart fortwo electric drive, the Hambach plant enters a new era – at the same time, the smart fortwo emphasizes its pioneering role on the way to individual mobility with local zero-emissions in cities and urban areas," said Marc Langenbrinck, managing director of Smart. "Its innovative battery-electric drive makes the smart fortwo electric drive the ideal vehicle for the city: it combines responsibility to the environment with driving fun and joie de vivre in a virtually perfect manner."

This is the second-gen fortwo EV, but the first that isn't strictly an R&D project. By the time 2012 rolls around and Daimler's gotten feedback on how the little car performs in the real world, the Smart EV will be offered alongside other models in showrooms. Getting a practical, sorted city EV will be as hard as checking an option box on a sales form.

Photo: Daimler

See Also:

- [Smart EV Gets a French Connection](#)
- [So Smart: Electric ForTwo Arrives This Fall](#)
- [Share in Tesla Electrifies the Teutons](#)



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