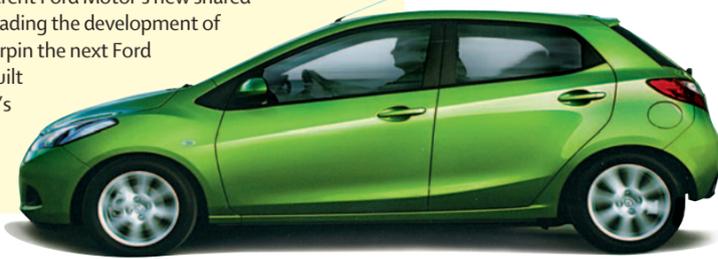


Geneva auto show preview

Mazda 2

The Mazda2 loses its boxy appearance and gets a sleeker, sportier look. While most minicars and small cars are getting bigger, the third-generation Mazda2 is downsized. At 3880mm long, it is 40mm shorter than its predecessor but 150mm wider at 1690mm. The new car's design closely resembles the Sassou concept that was shown at Frankfurt's 2005 IAA. When it launches early next year, the Mazda2 will be the first car underpinned by Mazda parent Ford Motor's new shared architecture for small cars. Mazda is leading the development of this architecture, which also will underpin the next Ford Fiesta and Fusion in Europe. Mazda built some units of the old Mazda2 at Ford's plant in Valencia, Spain. The new Mazda2 only will be made in Mazda's Hiroshima, Japan, factory.



Peugeot 207 Outdoor

The 207 Outdoor previews a new variant of the 207 small car that Peugeot will launch in the autumn. With its increased ground clearance, chunkier bumpers and other SUV styling cues, the 207 Outdoor looks similar to Volkswagen's Cross Polo, which has been a sales success. The production Outdoor will keep the SUV styling details and the concept's panoramic roof. Like the 207 station wagon that launches in the summer, the Outdoor will be marketed as a practical car that can carry more luggage than the 207 hatchback. The Outdoor also will be targeted at buyers who have active leisure pursuits.



Skoda Fabia

Skoda adds more technology to the Fabia, its best-selling model, to help improve its standing in the fiercely competitive small-car segment. Among new options are adaptive lighting and a tire-pressure monitoring system. The new Fabia's front-end takes styling cues from the Czech carmaker's Roomster small minivan. The second-generation Fabia is longer and taller than its predecessor. The Fabia goes on sale soon after the Geneva show. Prices will be about the same as the current Fabia, which costs about €10,250 in Germany. A station wagon version is due early next year.



Volvo V70

Volvo has made the new V70 station wagon more stylish than its predecessor to stop customers from switching to minivans, SUVs or crossovers. The Swedish carmaker also has tried to maintain the car's reputation for practicality by giving it an additional 55 liters of luggage space and a rear seat that includes an integrated, adjustable child booster seat. Volvo aims to sell 80 percent of its annual V70 production in Europe. The V70 is based on the S80 medium-premium sedan, which went on sale last summer.



Honda Small Hybrid Sports Concept

Honda aims to show that sports cars can be environmentally friendly. The Small Hybrid Sports Concept "explores the idea that a car can have a low environmental impact yet still deliver all the driving enjoyment expected of a compact sports car," Honda says. Designed by the Japanese carmaker's r&d center in Offenbach, Germany, the sleek coupe previews a potential future Honda small sports car powered by a gasoline-electric powertrain.

Mercedes C class

The new C class will play a key role in Mercedes-Benz CEO Dieter Zetsche's plans to return the carmaker to No. 1 in quality and customer satisfaction surveys. Mercedes cannot afford any electronics-related quality glitches on the lower-premium sedan, which accounts for a third of the carmaker's global sales volume. Two body styles will be offered in Europe. The Avantgarde variant has the three-pointed Mercedes star in the center of the grille (below), similar to the carmaker's roadsters and coupes. The variant is aimed at younger buyers. More traditionally minded customers likely will choose the Elegance variant, which has the star in its usual location on the hood.



Renault Twingo

Renault adds sporty Twingo variants to help the car compete in the minicar segment that has become more crowded since the car's launch in 1993. A GT version will have a 100hp, 1.2-liter turbocharged gasoline engine. The GT and basic Twingo versions keep the styling of a concept shown at the Paris auto show last September (below), except for the concept's wide wheel arches and fat tires. These features will appear on a high-performance Twingo RS, which launches next year. Renault also will debut a station wagon version of the Clio hatchback.



Diatto Zagato

Italy's Diatto brand will be revived in Geneva with the V-8 Diatto Zagato supercar built by Milan coachbuilder Zagato. Two collectors, whose names have not been disclosed, asked Zagato to build two modern-day versions of the lightweight supercars that Diatto made before it folded in 1932. Diatto was founded in Turin in 1835, the same year it patented an innovative wheel for carriages. It built its first car in 1905 and survived for 27 years building racecars and ultraluxury models.

