



PULL UP TO MY BUMPER
All's fare at the Taxi 07 next-gen cab exhibition.

Yellow fever

Designers take the iconic New York taxicab for a spin on its 100th birthday. By **Raven Snook**

With 13,000 taxicabs trolling our streets at any given time, the canary-colored chariot is as ubiquitous and easy to get into as Paris Hilton. And now that the New York cab is turning 100, a nonprofit group is whipping up a special birthday present—an exhibit of taxis past and (possibly) future as part of this weekend's New York International Auto Show at the Javits Center.

It was in 1907 when entrepreneur Harry N. Allen introduced the gas-powered taxi in Gotham. Two years later, the W. C. P. Taxicab Company painted their fleet yellow, figuring the color would stand out on New York's

already congested avenues. But despite celebrity seat-belt advisories and alleged efforts to install credit-card readers, not a whole lot has changed in the intervening century.

Enter the Design Trust for Public Space, who decided NYC taxis could do with a 21st century face-lift. In 2005, they brought together Taxi and Limousine Commission representatives, fleet owners and drivers with car designers and urban planners for a massive brainstorming session.

The Trust was initially resistant to taking on the project, as their main mission is to improve access and design in communal areas. But, as director Deborah Marton explains, "We realized that taxis really are a public-space issue in New York. Half of the cars on our streets are cabs—and they're out there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week."

From that initial meeting, nine prototypes were created for the auto show exhibit, part of the yearlong Taxi 07 initiative. Outside Javits, Hybrid Technologies is displaying a lithium-battery-powered, zero-emissions taxi, while Kia is showing off its Rondo taxi, made in collaboration with local design firms. "It's got a rotating front passenger seat so special-needs passengers can be lifted out, and a toddler seat that folds down," says Tim Kennedy of Smart Design, one of the firms responsible for the Rondo. "We also added additional interior lighting so riders are less likely to lose things."

Not all the prototypes are so pragmatic. A 200mph, 1,000-horsepower hydrogen-powered Crown Victoria, dubbed "the World's Fastest Taxi," will be parked outside, as will the Donk, a ghetto-

fabulous model from *Rides* magazine featuring exaggerated ground clearance, oversize rims and a tricked-out custom paint job.

The hope is that Taxi 07 will spur the creation of a permanent advocacy group that can shepherd progressive concepts like these into reality. "I think in the near future, taxis will become a kind of mobile office, with digital wireless technology and a personal information monitor," says Marton. "So if I'm cruising down Fifth Avenue and there's a fabulous red dress in Saks' window, it can tell me who made it and how much it costs."

The Taxi 07 exhibit will also take time to examine the cab's legacy, with placards detailing its history, vintage Checker Cabs, a video of great taxi moments in television and film, and a documentary about Big

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Apple cabdrivers. "I had an uncle who was a cabbie," says Marton. "I love finding out where they're from and what they did in their homelands. With cell phones we tend to talk with them less, but I don't see conversation totally going away. There will always be a way to make a connection."

The Javits Center isn't the only place you can wish the yellow cab a happy birthday. Every weekend in April, the IFC Center is hosting "Fares to Remember," a taxi-themed film festival including screenings of Jim Jarmusch's *Night on Earth*, Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* and the 1929 Harold Lloyd comedy *Speedy*, in which the silent-film legend plays a cabbie desperately trying to get Babe Ruth to Yankee Stadium on time.

This fall, New York taxis will get a somewhat lower-tech birthday makeover when thousands are adorned with bright floral decals as part of a citywide public-art program. Whether we can ever get them *smelling* like roses, though, is another matter altogether.

The Taxi 07 exhibit will be on display at the New York International Auto Show Fri 6–Apr 15. See Ongoing, or visit taxi07.org.