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AUTOMOTIVE PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

and the changing face of the auto industry

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At a press gathering in the commercial building of AM General in November 1992, Arnold Schwarzenegger got in and drove off with a beige Humvee, a road going behemoth as wide as a full size 18 wheeler lorry, half as tall with a 6.2 litre diesel engine that drank as much fuel as a tank. It was the road going version of a vehicle that was as much a celebrity as the Terminator himself – Operation Desert Storm and the 1991 liberation of Kuwait from Iraq by coalition forces propelled the HMMWV tactical assault vehicle to infamy, at a time when wars were the bomb and everyone was interested in it.

Arnold Schwarzenegger campaigned extensively to get the HMMWV into production, and in 1992 the M998 Humvee officially went into production and was made available to the general public as a civilian vehicle, complete with air-conditioning and padded seats. After a 7 year long production run, General Motors acquired the rights to manufacture and sell Hummer vehicles, with two subsequent models, the smaller and softer (!) H2 and the H3, released to the public.

Like Arnold's career as an actor, a changing political and social landscape would force significant changes to the kind of cars that would survive in a competitive market. Arnold's muscle toned action-hero would be replaced with the quietly confident and politi-

cally correct Jesse Eisenberg, the brute of a Hummer would be usurped by hybrid soft-roaders and electric Teslas.

For the past decade or so, political correctness has shaped the entire car industry in every way imaginable. The drivetrain powering even the biggest of SUVs such as the Volvo XC90 are now highly efficient and sip as little fuel as possible, crows are murdered less for leather interiors such as in BMWs (thanks to a material called Sensatec), and wood trim has almost entirely disappeared other than in the most atmospheric of Rolls Royce vehicles. Luxury no longer means damaging the environment irreparably, economy no longer means owners are at the bottom of the social ladder – political correctness has placed small displacement hatchbacks and highly efficient, low emission vehicles at the top, making you more in tune with the times than Snapchat filters and numerous Instagram hashtags.

How did political correctness come to be associated with the car industry?

As it did with the hyper-masculine stamp of approval placed on the poster-child of manliness that is the Hummer, it all started with celebrity endorsements. In the mid-2000s, following a wave of environmental consciousness fueled by Al Gore, carbon consciousness and knowledge of the effect of driving petrol cars reached new heights as

countless celebrities publicly joined the cause of environmental conservation. Starry eyed environment studies, political science and anthropology majors in left leaning liberal arts colleges in the US might disagree with who spoke of the damage caused by fossil fuels first, but it is well established that a cause does not get traction with a mass audience till a celebrity picks it up. 16 years after Al Gore made combatting global warming a presidential campaign mandate against George W. Bush, it is celebrities like Leonardo DiCaprio who carry on the battle against climate change. The Toyota Prius and more recently the Tesla vehicle range are the weapons these celebrities wield – in a celeb obsessed world, what they drive is what others want to drive, practically for the same reasons.

The world's roads may not be overflowing with Teslas and hybrid Priuses or hydrogen fuel cell Mirais, but the lean towards more efficient cars has created a public consciousness that has at least rid the world of obnoxiously thirsty, needlessly large and hilariously over the top cars like the Hummer. The Hummer brand is now defunct, and total sales of the off-roader are thankfully some of the worst ever in 17 years of operation for any brand. Even Arnold Schwarzenegger, once proud endorser of the Hummer, has resorted to converting his H1 Alpha wagon to run on

vegetable oil, lest someone points out the hypocrisy of the Governor in imposing ultra-strict smog laws in California while going to lunch in the most distasteful off-roader ever made.

Even off-roaders and Sport Utility Vehicles, the focal point of the hatred of environmentalists worldwide, are now highly efficient and softer on the planet. Covered in angel dust and riding on clouds of 20 inch wheels, the Volvo XC90 is currently the most highly awarded SUV ever. The XC90 range has Volvo's Drive-E powertrains, with petrol and diesel motors, and more importantly a petrol plug-in hybrid variant with the T8 Twin Engine model. Combined with the electric motors, the T8 Twin Engine's drivetrain produces 410 HP yet, where it counts, the XC90 produces only 49 g/km of CO2, making it one of the lowest emission SUVs on the planet. It'll seat seven people comfortably, comes with the largest selection of safety features in any SUV ever so the passengers are always in a cocoon of safety, has Pilot Assist (a semi autonomous driving feature) and even has a feature called Large Animal Detection, so the large SUV can avoid collisions with large animals on highways. With all of these safety features, Volvo is not only looking to lower the carbon footprint of their vehicles, they're also trying to actively keep the fragile ecosys-

tem of this planet in balance.

It might seem counter-intuitive to shower such praise on a car that still relies heavily on fossil fuels, but the argument that electric cars are the future is still highly flawed – the charging points that Tesla and other plug-in electrics use are still fed by the single most hated material on the planet – coal. Coal fired power plants provide most of the electricity to the planet, and no matter how clean the cars are, if they rely on coal power to charge up, they're damaging the environment nonetheless. While the electric car industry and mainstream manufacturers' foray into alternative fuels (most worthwhile pursuits being in the hydrogen fuel cell ring) are ongoing, the car industry must turn to more cars like the Volvo XC90 – providing a buffer till alternatives become mainstream.

Political correctness is a term hated by many, specially in the last few years, the term has had such negative connotations to it that the internet erupts in a frenzy of trolls and keyboard mashing to stomp down on any hint of political correctness. Even if political correctness limits your ability to express your true self (maybe you *really, badly*, want a Hummer to show everyone what a man you are), when it comes to fighting for your future generation's ability to breathe clean air, it's probably worthwhile to adapt to changing social norms.

SEMA 2016 - Our picks

SEMA is a platform for manufacturers to show off their fun sides and for aftermarket companies to display their wares with wild custom creations. This year the cars truly lived up to that promise, signaling that the tuning industry is far from stagnation. Here are our favourites, with more in our online edition.



Toyota LandSpeed Cruiser - a 2000 horsepower twin turbo V8 monster with an estimated top speed of 200 MPH. Official test will confirm top speed, so far has managed to do 167 MPH.



Chevrolet Colorado ZH2, powered by a hydrogen fuel cell, officially enters Chevy into the alternative fuel race. Bonkers? Yep.



Dodge showed off an AWD concept Challenger. How disappointed will Dodge owners be when they can't do proper burnouts?



Acura went with a race spec NSX complete with trailer hooked to an MDX SUV. Signals a return to competition in Le Mans GT3 class.



Honda displayed several tuned versions of the new Civic, showing off its tuning potential.



Mazda brought out a pair of wild track inspired MX5s. Fun, if you like bugs in your face at 100 MPH.



Ryan Tureck's Gumout GT4586 is a Ferrari 458 V8 powered Toyota GT86 with custom everything. Better than an LS1 swap just because of the soundtrack.



Lexus claims the LC500 will easily handle more than 800 HP on stock internals, and their SEMA entry...didn't have that. Still, could it fill the gap till the Supra lands?

COLLECTIBLES

1/43s: Premium vs basic



A quick search on Ebay or any online store will reveal a huge number of scale cars that are quite expensive - you'd be very easily misled into thinking they're of 1/18 scale. 1/43 scale is considered by many collectors to be the most valuable of scales to own - more 1/43 scale manufacturers operate in the high-end market than in 1/18, and the model range is quite a bit broader.

Brands like Minichamps and Kyosho make more cars in 1/43 scale than larger ones, with pre-

mium packaging, branding and detailing apparently justifying the huge prices.

What sets a "premium" 1/43 car apart from a "basic" one, such as one produced by Hi-Speed? Illustrating the point are the two cars you see here - Nissan Silvia S13 by Kyosho and Lexus IS200 by Hi-Speed.

Right off the bat, you notice the quality of the lights - the Kyosho replicates the clusters of the S13 in exactness while the Hi-Speed model uses dabs of orange paint on clear plastic as indica-

tors. The wheels are also scaled accurately on the Kyosho, while they're a tad too small on the basic model for what are 17 inches on the real car. There are major differences in the quality of the window surrounds and the interior is wildly differing in terms of detail quality - the S13 has a distinguishable tape player. Paint is more or less the same, set apart by more accurate badging on the premium model.

Is the Kyosho worth the 1000 TK you pay more than the Hi-Speed, then? Definitely.

AUTO NEWS

ALFA ROMEO'S FIRST SUV: STELVIO



Alfa Romeo, serial manufacturer of Italian heartthrobs, have revealed what might be the most exciting SUV to ever come out of Italy - the Stelvio Quadrifoglio, named after the famed Stelvio Pass in the Italian Alps - one of the best driving roads on the planet.

What made Alfa choose the name Stelvio for what is, at best, a soft-roader? The Quadrifoglio utilizes the 505-hp 2.9-liter turbocharged V-6 from the Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio, with smaller engines powering the basic models. It's made of lightweight composites, has an aluminum chassis and comes with All Wheel Drive.

Will it be as fun as the Giulia on the stretch of tarmac that shares its name? Doubtful, unless you like toppling off the side of a mounting pass. We're waiting for it to surprise us.

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