



GROUND-UP AND GREAT

The economic slump following the aftermath of last year's devastating earthquake and tsunami doesn't seem to have put the Japanese off stride

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IF there were ever any doubts about the possibility of a 42nd Tokyo Motor Show being staged last year, they were soon laid to rest. Despite facing enormous challenges, the Japanese vehicle-manufacturing industry has prevailed.

Of course, supply chains and production suffered major delays, but the Japanese have made a tremendous effort in recovery. Toyota, having only

recently faced a huge recall debacle, made right with the long-awaited reveal of the GT 86 (read a driving impression on page 34), as did Subaru, which also provided its own take on the co-developed car, albeit with a racing variant, too.

Honda's array impressed as well, notably the EV-STER concept, an electric view on fun urban motoring. Mitsubishi and Mazda didn't sit back – each

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showcased concepts that could very easily preview the next generation of SUVs and mid-size saloons. Nissan, Daihatsu and Suzuki were more low-key but nonetheless put on impressive displays.

At the time of writing, not much else was known about the new NSX, except that it was touted to make its debut at last month's North American International Auto Show.

HONDA EV-STER

If enthusiasts of the brand were concerned that the mild-mannered CR-Z hybrid hatch would be the sportiest model produced by Honda in its intensified effort to lower emissions and maximise efficiency, the manufacturer's stand at this year's show put their minds at ease; the unveiling of the EV-STER electric roadster concept proved the manufacturer hadn't sidelined its focus on engineering exciting vehicles.

But don't make the mistake of thinking that the EV-STER is a spiritual successor to the S2000 that served the marque and its brand loyalists well over the previous decade. The only thing that will definitely be carried over when the EV-STER goes into production is a strong fun-to-drive factor, because Honda is keen to make this element a hallmark of its future products.

Rather than an all-out sports-coupe, the EV-STER follows in the mould of the Honda Beat, a mini roadster that contested the Kei car market alongside the likes of Suzuki's Cappuccino. Japanese Kei cars are subject to special regulations, insurance and tax because of their size, weight and engine capacities. This is certainly evident in the concept's compact dimensions, measuring just 3 570 mm long, 1 500 mm wide

and 1 100 mm high – as well as in the projected performance. With a zero-to-60 km/h sprint of 5.0 seconds and a top speed of just 160 km/h, the EV-STER would be a perfect mode of private transportation for the environmentally conscious urbanite.

Honda is keeping mum on much of the EV-STER's hardware, only revealing that it has a maximum output of 58 kW provided by a 10 kWh lithium-ion battery pack (charged to full capacity in under three hours using a 200 V power source). A range of 160 km would suit those who don't leave the confines of a metropolis too often. To ensure maximum performance on the road and from the battery pack, Honda has kept the EV-STER's mass to a minimum using an array of carbon materials.

Adjustments to the engine's output and characteristics, as well as its suspension settings, can be made via a sophisticated onboard computer. The interesting three-pod instrument cluster displays essential vehicle information and the vital statistics for all the auxiliaries such as navigation, Internet access and audio, and could make production (the same can't be said for the aircraft-inspired twin-lever steering system).

The EV-STER is also believed to model the future face of the brand and signals a focus on creating a globally recognisable face for its vehicles.

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