

# ALL HAIL THE YELLOW TAXI



The Kia Ronéo cab (above); prototype cab stand has a built-in GPS.

Exhibit celebrates 100 years with a look ahead **BY GREG GATTUSO**

The yellow taxi is getting a makeover.

To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the gas-powered taxi in New York City, a coalition of designers, urban planners, fleet owners, cab drivers and other taxi experts have joined forces on a massive project that reimagines a new generation of taxi that's roomier, cleaner and easier to use.

The results will be unveiled at Taxi 07, a new exhibit opening today at the 2007 New York International Auto Show. Curated by the Design Trust for Public Space, the exhibit includes an array of concept cars, displays and full-scale "street treatments" that offer a glimpse into the future of the New York taxi experience.

The free exhibit, which runs through April 15, is located in the inner roadway of the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center.

Deborah Marton, executive director of the Design Trust for Public Space, said taxi cabs serve a completely different purpose than family sedans. Yet, over 90% of New York City taxis are essentially a reupholstered family sedan — the Ford Crown Victoria.

"The Checker cab was made to be

a taxi," Marton said. "But 25 years ago it was replaced by the Crown Vic. The Crown Vic is a tough car, and it served us well for 25 years. But after all the incremental improvements, you can't push the envelope any further."

Hybrid-based Standard Taxis will display its purpose-built taxi, which features a low floor, a high ceiling and an integrated ramp to accommodate passengers who use wheelchairs, walkers or motorized scooters. The Standard also offers a choice of three fuel systems: gasoline, ethanol or compressed natural gas.

Kia Motors America has contributed a 2007 Ronéo that has been transformed or "hacked up" — to become a New York City cab. The Ronéo cab features an easy-to-read LED-based roof sign from Antenna Design (the firm that designed the MTA's Metro-Card machines); a flip-down child seat from Birsool + Soek and new partition proposals from Setart Design.

The exhibit also includes a handful of other prototype cabs powered by alternative fuels, as well as proposed hailing areas, taxi stands and interactive screens that could help passengers estimate their fares, pay online and obtain tourist information.

"This technology already exists," Marton said. "It's not a matter of inventing it. It's a matter of integrating it into the system."

Taxi 07 also examines the taxi's past and present, with a collection of historic taxis and a film portrait of New York City taxi drivers. After the exhibit closes, the Design Trust for Public Space will release a strategic plan, Taxi 07: Roads Forward, in conjunction with the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission, that outlines long-term

recommendations for improvements to the taxi system. The group also will launch a public awareness campaign to generate more interest in the taxi's future, Marton said.

"New York is the capital of design, and it's the capital of design," she said. "Why shouldn't the taxi reflect our city's commitment to sustainable mobility, access for all and great design?"



The cab of the future may have an interactive touch screen.



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