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Michelle Krebs, veteran automotive-industry authority, joins Edmunds editors, analysts and data experts to provide news and commentary.

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Inside Line



Venturi Automobiles: Homefield Advantage at EVER Monaco

April 02, 2008

By Nick Kurczewski

It's rare that an interview has to be postponed for royalty. But as Prince Albert of Monaco made his way through the displays at this year's EVER Monaco ecological car show, that possibility was business as usual for Venturi Automobiles, the world's only Monegasque car company.

AutoObserver caught up with Venturi's charismatic CEO, Gildo Pastor, to discuss his tiny company's latest electric, solar, and even wind-powered automotive technology projects. One eye scanning the floor to make sure Prince Albert's entourage was not approaching, he also provided us with a few tantalizing hints as to what lies ahead regarding Venturi's push into the American market.



Eco-friendly But Never Boring

Sitting in the middle of Venturi's display stand, we were surrounded by the company's current lineup, which includes everything from a rakish sports car to an innocuous electric-powered delivery van developed for the French postal service.

Pastor, a Monaco millionaire who made his fortune in real estate, bought Venturi in 2001 and relocated the French company to Monte Carlo. The company's previous lineup of handsome, mid-engine and gasoline-powered sports cars was abandoned in favor of an entirely new range of electric vehicles.

The Fetish is undoubtedly the most extreme and exclusive vehicle in Venturi's current lineup. Limited to a run of only 25 vehicles, the Fetish has the performance of a true sports car. Unfortunately, the car's \$450,000 sticker price means its appeal is limited to only the wealthiest of the world's eco-warriors.



Pastor promised upcoming improvements to the Fetish will make the car "so much better." He said Venturi will unveil a new sports car at the Paris auto show in October. "It will probably be the most innovative car you've ever seen," he said.

Cheaper, Smaller and Coming to America

Venturi will also use the Paris show to unveil the next generation of its Eclectic urban quadricycle. The current Eclectic was released for limited sale only last year, and Pastor said that the quirky-looking buggy has been a tremendous success.



With seating for three, a roof full of solar panels and a range of 30 miles, the Eclectic is targeted at primarily hotels and resorts looking for a clever, unique way to shuttle their guests. Its \$30,000 price tag — not including the optional wind turbine — makes it a far more reasonable proposition than its Fetish stablemate.

Prior to the EVER Monaco show, a Venturi representative told *AutoObserver* the next Eclectic will be both "smaller and more affordable." The new model will be adapted to city driving and "will not target not only companies, administrations and hotels but also individuals."

"We will definitely sell this car in the USA," Pastor said of the new city car. He said Venturi sales in

America would also correspond with stateside production. According to Pastor, a manufacturing site is yet to be determined, but will "probably be based in California."

The humble-looking electric-powered Citroën Berlingo delivery van —visually the least sexy of Venturi's projects — could be Venturi's most important undertaking. Developed in co-operation with PSA Peugeot-Citroën, the van is part of a trial run of electric vehicles being conducted by the French post office.

At the conclusion of a six-month trial period, La Poste will select the supplier for 500 mail delivery vans. After this step is complete, and should the larger trial run prove a success, the French post office would place an order for up to 10,000 vehicles.

Pastor said he sees a bright future for the company's electric conversion. "We have created a way to convert (the Berlingo van) in a very fast and economical way," Pastor said.

All electrical components fit in the space normally reserved for the Berlingo's internal-combustion engine. There are no bulky batteries lined up in the cargo bay, and the cabin is unchanged except for a small panel on the dashboard that displays remaining battery charge.

Pastor said he believes Venturi's electric conversion could appeal to private owners on either side of the Atlantic. "We really think this could be a great way to turn your car green."



Nick Kurczewski is a Paris-based correspondent working for AutoObserver.

Photos:

- 1 — Venturi Fetish
- 2 — Venturi Fetish interior
- 3 — Venturi Eclectic
- 4 — Venturi-Citroën Berlingo van

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