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## Auto Show Preview: Luxury Car Bonanza

by Nick Kurczewski  
ForbesAutos.com

Germany's fifth-largest city becomes the center of the automotive universe Sept. 15-25 with the 61st Frankfurt International Motor Show. Held in the cavernous Frankfurt/Main convention center, this biannual event rotates with the Paris Motor Show and is easily the largest auto show in Europe.



*The Mercedes-Benz S-Class, pictured above, will be featured at the Frankfurt Motor Show.*

As the Detroit auto show caters to America's "Big Three" (General Motors, Ford, Chrysler), Frankfurt is usually dominated by Germany's "Big Drei": BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Volkswagen/Audi. German brands take center stage, dominating the largest acreage of floor space, but there's always an international mix of vehicles.

This year marks the debut of dozens of new vehicles from around the world—many of them high-end—and includes wild sports cars, sport utilities and gas-electric hybrids. The good news for Americans is that many of the vehicles this year are aimed at the U.S. market. The bad news is that many of them are high-performance or luxury models whose fate could be swayed by the ever-rising cost of fuel.

BMW will have three vehicles on display: an M-Roadster concept, a hybrid X3 and a Z4 coupe intended to battle the formidable

Porsche Cayman. It will be interesting to see how BMW executes the little two-door coupe. Its predecessor, the Z3 coupe, looked quirky but had a loyal following.

The Hybrid X3 SUV is also a curious development. In recent years, BMW execs have been vocal in their disdain for gas-electric hybrid power trains, dismissing them as heavy and inelegant solutions while standing behind hydrogen-powered combustion engines as the future for cleaner-burning fuel.



*The Audi Q7, pictured above, will also be featured at the Frankfurt Motor Show.*

Mercedes-Benz is using Frankfurt to showcase its first recipient of a new 6.3-liter V-8 engine that is to be the foundation for future AMG-tuned high-performance models. Not exactly the sportiest vehicle in Mercedes' lineup, the recently revamped ML sport utility will debut the new power plant at the show.

The all-new Mercedes S-Class sedan will showcase the company's design trajectory for the next decade, with styling cues taken from the Maybach. Mercedes' quality has nosedived in the past few years as reliability took a backseat to technical innovation. New CEO Dieter Zetsche, on the job less than a month, has the unenviable job of ensuring that the latest tech-laden S-class is free of the types of electrical gremlins that plague the current model and have led to a recent spate of embarrassing recalls.

Volkswagen and its Audi division are showing off significant new models that will take both companies into new market segments. Audi will unveil its first SUV, the Q7, which will come to market just as the decade-long truck craze that had seized America seems to be petering out. Volkswagen's Eos coupe/cabriolet is supposed to take the brand further up market—something the \$90,000 Phaeton sedan hasn't done too well.

One of the most interesting vehicles of the show is a new four-door concept vehicle from Porsche called the Panamera. A production version is set to go on sale in 2008. Porsche is extremely secretive about the car, releasing only sketches and basic specs before the show.

It appears that the Panamera will have its engine up front rather than behind the rear axle, like the iconic 911. Porsche is a conservative company, so launching this sedan is quite a bold move. If the Cayenne SUV—which proved skeptics wrong by becoming one of the company's best-selling models—is any indication, there seems to be a lot of potential for Porsches in other market segments.

Plenty of non-German vehicles will debut in Frankfurt. Jaguar's new 2007 XK coupe could steal the show. It's one of the most anticipated vehicles in years. It replaces the XK8, which dates back a decade. Volvo's attractive C70 convertible hard-top and a revamped Saab 9-5 will bring Scandinavian flavor to the event.

Following is a list of premium, luxury and high-performance vehicles that are likely to affect the market. We'll bring full coverage as the show unfolds.

- Audi Allroad
- Audi Q7
- BMW X3 Hybrid
- BMW Z4 Coupe
- Daimler Super 8
- Honda Civic Hybrid
- Jaguar XK
- Lamborghini Gallardo Spyder
- Maserati Quattroporte Executive GT and Sport GT
- Mercedes-Benz ML63 AMG
- Mercedes-Benz S-Class
- Mini Cooper S Lightweight
- Porsche Cayman S
- Porsche Panamera
- Saab 9-5 Sedan, Convertible and Sport Combi
- Volvo C70

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