

A GEM of an idea

Global Electric Motorcars are making inroads in NYC **By Nick Kurczewski**

They've got Madison Avenue style and Wall Street smarts. They're oh-so-cute—but whatever you do, *don't* refer to them as golf carts. Global Electric Motorcars (a.k.a. GEMs) are rolling all over Gotham—and chances are, you've seen one without knowing what it is. GEM, with the support of parent company DaimlerChrysler, is currently

touted as the vehicles that would save the world, and programs promising to electrify the American auto market offered much but delivered little. However, Fargo, North Dakota–based GEM seems to have learned from its seven years of experience in this field. Its raison d'être is not to replace all gas-powered vehicles. Instead, GEM views city agencies such as



JOYRIDE City agencies such as the New York Power Authority are fans of Global Electric Motorcars, which are also a hit among environmentally aware New Yorkers.

the nation's largest producer of electric cars and is using New York as a proving ground for its wacky yet smart little vehicles. These five-horsepower, front-wheel drive mighty mites can now be found performing crowd control in Times Square or gardening duty in Washington Square Park.

GEMs are classified as low-speed electric vehicles (LSEVs) by the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration. That means they run on electricity and so are emission-free; they can reach a top speed of 25mph; and though they don't have doors, they do have windshields, headlights and safety belts. In New York, these vehicles are legal on roads with speed limits up to 35mph.

Of course, you may recall that not long ago, electric cars were

New York Power Authority (NYPA), state and city parks departments, college campuses and police forces as the perfect markets for their vehicles and an important force for ecofriendly change. Rick Kasper, company president and COO explains that electric vehicles such as GEM's can serve a specific function "in city environments to help solve their congestion, mobility and emissions problems." Kasper cites extremely positive feedback in regard to the program under way in New York.

Last year, GEM donated 352 cars to the NYPA, a move that has helped to clean up New York's air while promoting the versatility of these unique cars. The NYPA divided the GEMs among various city agencies, including Battery Park City Authority, City

College of New York, Hudson River Park Trust and the Roosevelt Island Operating Company. "The Power Authority hopes these vehicles are being used to displace small SUVs or pickup trucks," Brian Warner, a spokesman for the NYPA, explains. "It makes no sense if you're in a park or on a campus and have the maintenance crews driving around polluting the air." The limited range of a GEM vehicle—about 30 miles—does not matter in these situations; thus, a major electric-car stumbling point is avoided. Combine that with the fact that GEMs never need a fill-up, oil change or new radiator, and you have a deal that is economically and environmentally rewarding.

Although city agencies have been making fair use of the cars, not all GEMs in New York City are forced into hard labor. Christina Straub, manager of Remsen Dodge in suburban Hazlet, New Jersey, has been an authorized GEM dealer for three years. She estimates a majority of the vehicles have been bought by security companies and college campuses that are moving out of "hunkajunka cars or golf carts." Surprisingly though, a handful of private customers have been snatching up GEMs. High-living Hamptonites have found them to be an invaluable means of avoiding traffic while running errands, as GEMs allow their owners to drive safely and legally on sidewalks or paths not open to regular auto traffic. And at about \$7,500 for a two-passenger model, or \$10,000 for the four-seater, GEMs are nearly cheaper than a nose job and a round of Botox.

One of Straub's customers, Nolita resident Steve Stollman, owns two all-white GEMs, which he views as a good "first step" toward alternatives to automobiles and subways. "If you make the [electric] vehicles look cool," Stollman explains, "people will want to be in them." Driving a GEM in New York "turns the city into a theme park.... It puts a whole different spin on everything." Stollman plans to retrofit his GEMs with bicycles someday, to create a sort of mobile transportation center.

The beauty of the GEM is this kind of versatility. Because of the success of the NYPA program and others like it, GEMs look set to take up longtime residence in New York. ■

Listings

IF YOU WANT TO BE LISTED

Submit information by mail, e-mail (aroundtown@timeoutny.com) or fax (646-432-3160) to **Ayren Jackson**. Include details of event, dates, times, address of venue with cross streets, nearest subways, telephone number and admission price, if any. **Deadline is 6pm on Monday, ten days before publication date.** Incomplete submissions will not be included, and listings information will not be accepted over the phone.

★=Recommended

Thursday 11

Urban affairs

★ "A Love Affair with Shoes"

Salvatore Ferragamo, 655 Fifth Ave at 52nd St (212-754-5290). Subway: E, V to Fifth Ave–53rd St. 10am–8pm. Through Apr 30. **FREE** Long before Manolo Blahnik and Jimmy Choo were celebrated for their fancy footwear, the late Salvatore Ferragamo enjoyed fame as one of the first shoemakers to the stars. Audrey Hepburn, Marilyn Monroe and Marlene Dietrich were just a few of the Italian designer's A-list clients back in Hollywood's golden age. Today, the House of Ferragamo outfits the footsteps of celebs such as Madonna, Drew Barrymore and Nicole Kidman. On display in the second-floor gallery at the boutique's flagship store, this survey of Ferragamo's work features photographs and more than 30 shoes dating back to 1927.

The Apprentice Viewing Party

The World Bar, Trump World Tower, 845 United Nations Plaza at First Ave and 48th St (212-935-9361). Subway: E, V to Lexington Ave–53rd St; 6 to 51st St. 8–10pm. Ongoing **FREE** Sip the bar's aptly titled specialty cocktail "You're Fired," while watching Donald Trump promote himself by canning employees on the hit NBC show centered on the fuzzy-haired real-estate mogul. Note that although admission is free, the average drink price is \$12.

★ Charles Darwin: A Musical Voyage of Discovery

All Souls Church, 1157 Lexington Ave at 80th St (212-535-5530). Subway: 6 to 77th St. 6:30pm. **FREE** Anthropologist-performer Richard Milner's science career hasn't exactly been by the numbers—except for the musical ones about Darwin. A witty, erudite blend of Stephen Jay Gould and Tom Lehrer that's accompanied by slides and taped music, *Darwin* is a journey through the history of the great man and his legacy.

"Code Orange"

National Arts Club, Gregg Gallery, 15 Gramercy Park South between Third Ave and Irving Pl (212-475-3424). Subway: 6 to 23rd St. 10am–9pm. Through Mar 20. **FREE** Relax! Although the title of Joan Elizabeth Meyer's 3-D showcase of cityscapes and landscapes was inspired by the government's color-coded terrorism-alert program, this exhibition does not pose a threat to national security.

★ "Current Visions: Inside Israel"

Contemporary Photography, 526 W 26th St between Tenth and Eleventh Aves, suite 214 (212-787-6363; www.artis04.com). Subway: C, E to 23rd St. 10am–6pm. Through Mar 31. **FREE** Part of Israeli Art Week. This exhibition of photographs examines Israel's natural and urban landscapes. See also Art listings, page 80.

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