

MotorWeek Transcripts

Over the Edge 'X-Prize Automotive Competition'

JOHN DAVIS: Jumping on the bandwagon is not always a good thing. But, when it comes to the cleaning up the environment and using less imported oil, it should be a free-for-all. So, enter Progressive Insurance, with a unique challenge that just might produce remarkable results. And as our Steven Chupnick found, X marks the spot, just over the edge.

STEVEN CHUPNICK: These are the kinds of cars normally seen inside this classic car club, but it was a whole different story when the Progressive Insurance Automotive X PRIZE invaded.

Progressive Insurance, along with the United States Department of Energy, launched the X PRIZE to find the everyday car of the future... one that will be super efficient—getting at least 100 miles per equivalent gallon of gasoline—and practical. Fifty-three cars were selected for the finals of the X PRIZE. We caught up with five of them in New York City at the Classic Car Club of Manhattan.

The X PRIZE was founded by Peter Diamandis. His dream has always been to travel into space, and wanting the public to have the opportunity of space flight as well. The X PRIZE was also inspired by flight—Charles Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic Ocean.

PETER DIAMANDIS: That he actually made the flight to win a \$25,000 prize inspired me to create an incentive prize competition to bring about a new generation of private spaceships. That worked so well that we're now carrying that forward into other areas, including to bring about a new generation of super efficient cars.

CHUPNICK: Once Peter had that plan, he teamed with Progressive Insurance to draft a \$10 million automotive challenge, and open it up to the world.

GLENN RENWICK: It's really about creating a stage, creating a forum where we can actually bring scientists and engineers to the forefront to do something really worthwhile. So the real prize was sort of to create something meaningful, but really more of a catalyst and a stage for people to perform on.

CHUPNICK: And the teams we met were ready to talk about their concepts. Team OptaMotive replaced the stock 1400cc Kawasaki motorcycle engine in this three-wheel, two-passenger Campagna T-Rex with a super clean electric drive.

MARK DEMERS: We're really competitive guys and we heard about the competition and just the notion of the competition was really attractive. Two, the idea that we could also do something to make a positive influence on the planet.

CHUPNICK: Already on board with their planet-wide environmental focus, the U.S. Department of Energy set up the DASH+ portion of the X PRIZE, focused on education.

CONNIE BEZANSON: Getting high school students involved was a key aspect of the education program that we wanted to have on there.

CHUPNICK: Fittingly, one of the teams in the finals is from a high school in West Philadelphia.

Led by their teacher, Simon Hauger, they're converting a lightweight Ford Focus into a plug-in hybrid, replacing the stock four-cylinder with a 60-horsepower electric motor and an 80-horsepower Harley-Davidson motorcycle engine.

SIMON HAUGER: As educators, we want opportunities like this for our students, and the fact that people are taking us serious—and we are a serious competitor—in many ways makes me feel like we've already won.

CHUPNICK: Probably haven't seen too many cars where you can enter from the driver side and exit from the passenger side.

That could only be one car-- the Tango. This tandem seat all-electric may look like an enclosed motorcycle, but it uses the weight of its batteries to give it the stability of a sports car.

RICK WOODBURY: This is the only car in the world that can fit in a half lane on the freeway with more clearance than a truck has in a full lane.

CHUPNICK: Originally designed by the top brass at Lotus comes the Alias—a three-wheeler from ZAP Electric Vehicles. This team's aim is to come up with something that's cool, sexy, safe, as well as efficient.

STEVE SCHNIEDER: We think this vehicle represents individualism in your automobile, and here in America, different than other places in the world, it's not always about getting from point A to point B, it's about being recognized while you're getting from point A to point B.

CHUPNICK: Finally, the AMP Motorworks Saturn Sky: a converted electric sports car with the battery in the front, two motors in the back, and a 150-mile range. AMP feels just being a part of the X PRIZE competition is a huge step forward...

JOHN WIRES: It helps the cause; it's awareness of electric vehicles. The technology actually exists to do this stuff.

Progressive's Eric Cahill has been blown away by the support of everyone around the globe. Knowing both the automotive and aeronautical world, this contest can only fare well for the future of the environment.

ERIC CAHILL: The X PRIZE has a very almost-celebrity reputation within the engineering world. I've worked some years with Boeing, leading technology efforts in the Navy as well, and then at General Motors. And frankly, as soon as we hear the name X PRIZE, you think 'wow, this is something about changing the world, this is something about innovation, about entrepreneurship and doing something for the benefit of society and mankind.