

Der Sonnenfleck

Sunshine Bimmers Newsletter

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Fun Facts

- The BMW i3 rated best ever in fuel economy by Consumer Reports
- The BMW 3-series accounts for 25% of worldwide sales for BMW Group
- Toyota worldwide has 100 different platforms and 800 engine variations

(BMW in the USA currently has over 40 model variations on 3 platforms and 6 engine variations, Toyota will be reducing in every category and BMW will be increasing.)

Joseph Lenart

Feature Article

Where is the Karma?

Fresh from his successes at the BMW advanced design studio in Munich, most notably, the exterior design for the BMW Z8 roadster (E52), Danish born Henrik Fisker went on to become president and chief executive officer of DesignworksUSA, a BMW subsidiary industrial design firm headquartered in Newbury Park, California. He later worked on the design for the Aston Martin DB9 and V8 Vantage, along with some early Tesla involvement before starting his own car company in 2004, Fisker Automotive, located in southern California.

The Fisker Karma luxury sports sedan was unveiled in 2008 at the Detroit Auto Show with the first two US deliveries coming in July 2011; it was manufactured in Finland between 2011 and 2012. In December 2011, the Karma was chosen as “Luxury Car of the Year” by Top Gear Magazine and “Car of the Year” by James May of Top Gear; Consumer Reports was not so impressed; the Karma broke down and failed to start before completing a single test; the vehicle had to be returned to the manufacturer. It was determined that the problem was caused by a misaligned welding robot at the battery factory, and you thought you were having a bad day at the office.

The Karma is an electric vehicle (pure series hybrid) driven by a pair of 120kW (161 hp) electric motors that receive power from a 20 kWh lithium-ion battery (identical capacity as the BMW i3) and a gasoline engine-powered generator. Once the battery is depleted, or when the driver presses the “sport” mode button, the front mounted 260 hp, 2.0 liter four cylinder turbocharged gasoline engine powers a generator that sends electricity directly to the drive motors.

All electric range is 32 miles with a total range of 230 miles; the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) combined fuel economy is 52 MPG and 20 MPG in gasoline mode only. The interior is “eco-friendly” with more use of leather than other manufacturers would use due to marks and other “imperfections” with the leather.

With a very small cabin interior volume, the EPA rated the Fisker Karma as a subcompact; other subcompacts that come to mind are the Ford Fiesta and the Chevrolet Sonic, this seems somewhat unusual since the Karma appears to be large from the outside.

My first chance to see the Karma close up was at Fields BMW; a Karma was parked by the service drop off area, Fields Automotive Group was selling these vehicles at one of their other dealerships and for some reason, this Karma happened to be at BMW this

day. The exotic design of the Karma draws one in for a closer look; it has sleek lines with flowing fender lines and a nicely curving roof line, it is indeed an attractive design calling me for a closer look.

I pulled on the driver's side door and I was glad it opened easily; I sat in the driver's seat and held the nicely shaped steering wheel, a steering wheel that was pleasant to hold. The interior of the Karma was well finished, although cramped. I walked around to the front passenger side; I opened the door and the car tried to stab me. Okay, the car actually did not try to stab me, but it could have. I could have impaled myself on the front passenger door given the right circumstances, although not too deeply.

When the front passenger door is opened, a chrome molding strip along the top of the door extended beyond the end of the door by at least 2 inches with a sharp pointed tip. When the door is closed, this molding is flush with the molding that continues along the back door. No article on the Karma ever mentioned this useful feature before.

This did not scare me away from getting into the back seat, it was a tight fit, like sitting in a MRI machine; the EPA was generous labeling the Karma a subcompact, I am not sure if I could sit back there for even 10 minutes; I am not that tall at 5' 10", I can sit comfortably in the back of a BMW 3 series. That was all the "in person" exposure I had to the Karma this day; I left the dealership wondering if this car was worth the \$105,000 sticker price, maybe it was exciting to drive.

Then a rare opportunity came along to drive the Karma, my friend Ron called to say that Lexus had a trade in Fisker Karma that we could drive, after one year of prior ownership, this Karma was ignominiously relegated to the dark corner of the used car section of the Lexus dealership, abandoned in a row of cast off trade-ins. Daylight was fading by the time I arrived on this late autumn day, even though I hurried as much as I could.

The burgundy red Fisker had light brown interior and it looked nice with good curves and a stylish exterior, I noted the large exterior size of the vehicle when walking around it to admire the styling. This was a 2012 model with 3,000 miles on the odometer and the interior has nice styling and an opulent, high quality sense. Visibility was very restricted, forward and to the rear, due to the low window profile. The back seat of the vehicle is very difficult to get into as I tried again, and once inside, it is very cramped; Ron would not even make the attempt.

The Fisker Karma seemed to feel "heavy" and ponderous to drive on the local streets and indeed it is a heavy vehicle, with a curb weight of 5,300 pounds; this also explains why it takes over 6 seconds to reach 60 miles per hour according to the vehicle specifications, it seems that it should have better acceleration, even considering the weight. The Karma was not very responsive in cornering or steering agility; the ride comfort was good with a quiet cabin. The brakes provided confident stopping power.

The gasoline engine did not provide anything near enough power for an engaging driving experience as the battery system was in a low power state and the gasoline engine struggled to provide charge to the battery system and in turn power to the two electric motors, the gasoline engine is only a generator. Interestingly enough, this is also the same mode for the “Sport” setting. Overall, the Karma felt like a Mercedes S-Class running on three cylinders, shoved into a sardine can.

As the test drive ended in darkness, it reminded me of the vague future for the Karma; production was suspended in November 2012 with 2,450 Karmas built; a Chinese company called Wanxiang Group purchased Fisker Automotive and it plans to start production again in 2015, at least that is what their web site claims.

The Fisker Karma is a great example of a talented designer creating a vehicle with a great shape to be admired from the outside, while tight on the inside; and without strong driving dynamics to match the good looks. The next stop for the Karma may be the museum or one of those lists on the web that tout top 10 or bottom 10 cars of the last thousand years.

Joseph Lenart

Chapter Events

Bavarian Haus, March 22, 2015



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Caribbean Jack's, Daytona Beach, March 24, 2015



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Another fine evening of dining and camaraderie at alFresco for the May 28 Teutonic Tuesday gathering. Attending were Bob; Dave, Kathy and Betsy; Don; Gary and Vivian; Graham and Chris; Kevin and Jo Anna; Tom and Lina.

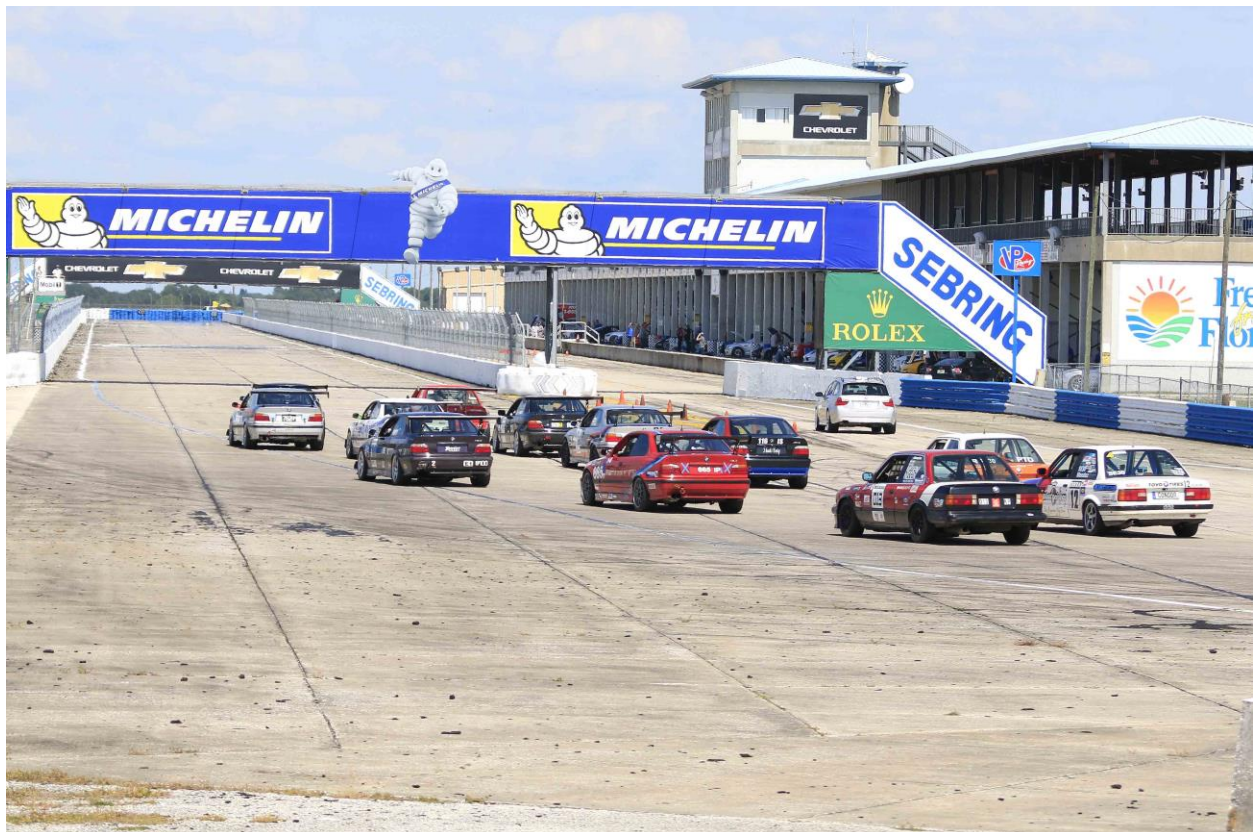
Bob Compton



Sebring Weekend May 2015



















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Brain Teaser

What was installed on the Empire State Building in New York and never used?

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Special Note: The Sunshine Bimmers Chapter was required to rent an official post office box as a condition of charter by BMW CCA. Our new official address is PO Box 3214, Windermere, FL 34786-3614; however, you should directly contact the person listed above who is most likely to be able to respond to your need, as the post office box is not checked daily.

