



Something for Everyone

Technology Highlights from SEMA's New Products Area, Part One



■ While not a replacement for a racing harness, the CG-Lock allows the weekend warrior to snug up and fix the lap portion of a three-point seat belt to prevent a driver from sliding around under hard cornering. It's an easy and inexpensive way to lower lap times.

just be doing it in a new way.

Since there were so many new products at the 2004 Show, we'll look at non-performance items this month and then look at the hot rod stuff next month. We'll make a special effort to show items that have the potential to make an enthusiast or businessperson step back and think to himself: "what a great idea." There won't be too much detail regarding each item so that more items can be addressed. Readers who are interested in more in-depth information regarding a particular product may either contact the manufacturer or send questions via email to frankb@sema.org.

Starting with the vehicle interior, a fine example of a product that meets the guidelines mentioned above is the CG-Lock. For anyone with leather seats who's ever entered an autocross or other production-based, road-racing-style event, this product is a true gift from God. Amazingly simple in both design and concept, the CG-Lock allows the lap portion of a normal three-point seat belt to be snugged up so that it holds the occupant more firmly in place during aggressive driving maneuvers. Instead of having to continually brace himself against the dead pedal, wheelwell or whatever, a driver can keep his mind on

When you're at the point where you've got over 1,000 entries in any kind of an exhibit, chances are good that you've pretty much got most of the possibilities covered. Such is the case with SEMA's New Products display area. For the 2004 Show, there were 1,114 entries from 418 companies competing in 12 award categories. Four of the award winners were first timers—a good sign that the flow of new ideas into the industry remains strong.

The category with the most entries was the Performance Street classification with 160 entries, so the occasional rumors about the death of performance parts would seem to be premature.

Clearly, we cannot cover all 1,114 products in this column, and consistent readers have already seen photos of each of the entries and have been informed as to the

winners of each of the awards in last month's *SEMA News*. In this issue, though, we'll try to identify those products that address a special need or use a unique approach and/or technology to perform their tasks. The emphasis will be more on the "wow" factor than on trying to identify a trend. Some of these products may not necessarily be doing anything new; they'll



his driving and not get as tired from exerting himself against the forces of inertia. While the lap portion of the belt remains fixed, the upper/shoulder portion of the belt stays flexible so the driver may easily reach the shifter, dash switches and so on.

The CG-Lock is not a replacement for a full-on racing harness; if the car lives only at the track, its driver will probably need to go that route. For many people who use their daily transportation in the occasional track event, however, this device provides

■ The stand-alone GPS-based speedometer kit by Nordskog can be installed in virtually any vehicle without regard to the transmission, rear gear or tire sizes being used.

the ability to retain a regular three-point harness for comfort and legality while also providing a very clear benefit in terms of better retention/location when at the track. The driver won't be sliding around on his seat anywhere near as much and



■ The Vehicle Courteous Message Display allows a driver or passenger to communicate personal and/or advertising messages to others in a quick, easy and effective manner.

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■ The Flaming River electric tilt/telescopic steering column brings new-car luxury to virtually any vehicle. The column can be adjusted 2 inches and has two memory settings.

thus will likely have better lap times and miss fewer shifts. It's also easy to use, so the racer won't have to give the occasional passenger a lesson in how to put on racing harnesses. The CG-Lock is not very expensive and is super-easy to install

Another new approach to an old problem is the GPS-based speedometer by Nordskog. As the trend toward putting newer-technology engines and transmissions into older vehicles continues to increase, this product will surely see increased sales. Instead of having to come up with all kinds of speedo gears, cables, adapters, interfaces or whatever, this device takes a totally new approach to indicating vehicle speed: It uses GPS signals to determine speed in a totally self-contained manner, so it doesn't matter what engine, trans or rear gear the vehicle runs. The gauge fits in a standard 2 $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch mount, and the speedo can go up to 160 mph. It's a new and simple approach to a very old problem.

Another take on this concept is the electric heater valve kit from Old Air Products. Again, a simple solution to an old problem: sticking/failing heater valves. The mechanical or pneumatic designs of most heater valves in older vehicles were not shining examples of reliability, to say the least. Toss in the hassle of trying to route actuator cables and/or the worry over vacuum lines getting old and cracking, and you can see this area was one that was ripe for a new approach. The solution:

electricity! By designing a valve that's based on a high-torque servo motor with rotary switching, Old Air Products has provided not only a quantum leap in terms of expected reliability but has also eliminated the need to route the aforementioned cables and/or hoses. Now the installer need only snake a few wires through to the valve, a much easier thing to do in a crowded dashboard or engine compartment. The valve's action is also much more accurate and smooth, plus it should stay that way since it's made primarily from

corrosion-resistant materials. Lastly, it will fit virtually any vehicle.

A final item for the vehicle interior is the Vehicle Courteous Message Display (VCMD) from Auto Plus. Simply put, this is a way to let others know what a driver is thinking. It involves a fairly large LED display that can be mounted more or less anywhere on the vehicle but will most likely be placed on the rear window shelf. By means of a handheld remote control and some fairly easy-to-use software, the message of the driver's choice can be input in a matter of seconds so that it can be scrolled across the display for others to read. Such messages can be anything from advertising to greetings to impromptu social commentary on the situation at hand. The appeal of this product is not only the relatively low cost but also the ease/speed of use and the flexibility of the outcome. Previously, such scrolling "tickers" were limited mainly to large, expensive commercial displays that required more sophisticated training to use or to smaller units with more limited functionality and visibility.



■ The DriveMate adjustable cleaning mat catches overspray from tire detailers, and it can be easily adjusted to fit various tire sizes. It is also reusable and can be cleaned.



■ The Roadster Valet allows travelers to bring more of what they want with them yet allows them to do so in style by providing a towable trailer that looks like the tow vehicle.

A good example of an idea that's been around for a while but hasn't been readily available from the aftermarket for custom/specialty vehicle is Flaming River's electric tilt/telescoping steering column. Such technology has long been available on new cars and now can be installed in older vehicles while retaining such features as having two memory settings and a 2-inch range of telescopic adjustability. Constructed from laser-cut stainless steel, this product not only delivers the functionality but also looks right for its target vehicles.

For those who prefer a "clean" appearance in a different respect, there were a couple of unique products relating to what a driver might want to leave behind—or not. The first of these is a very simple but useful idea: The "Driveway Mate" from Trayco Innovations helps resolve the dilemma of keeping overspray off of the floor when a tire detailer is sprayed onto tires. Rather than using towels, cardboard or whatever, this device can be adjusted to better fit the tire and provide superior

coverage, plus it is washable and thus reusable.

While many people are concerned about what they leave behind, there are also quite a few who are interested in taking more stuff with them. Such people who also happen to be driving something special are no longer limited to going to U-Haul for a small storage trailer to tow. Thanks to the good people at Second Trunk Trailers, drivers can now have a "Roadster Valet" custom built to match the look of their rides. This towable cargo trailer allows travelers to bring along stuff they can't fit into their special cruiser yet allows them to do it in a unique and stylish way. One might say it provides the "stow" when you want to show and go.

Lastly, for those who prefer not to be seen as much, there's the "Smoke'em" smokescreen kit from Auto Loc. Whenever an adventurous driver wants to make one of those 007-style getaways (or just wants to show off at a car show) he simply pushes a button while the engine is running and you'll instantly have billowing clouds of smoke coming out of the exhaust. The idea is not new, but being able to buy a kit to do it so easily and effectively is. It may not be revolutionary in the technical sense, but it definitely has lots of "wow" factor, as do the other products we've discussed here.

Next month we'll take a look at the performance side. **SN**

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