

BUSINESS

# Hyundai finds ways to thrive in a beleaguered industry

Designed for Success

Thursday, October 08, 2009

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Stacy Innerst/Post-Gazette

These are important times for Hyundai. The Korean company has become an automotive giant, with sales that many analysts think will soon threaten Toyota's sales leadership worldwide.

Hyundai had its best August sales record in history with a 47 percent increase over August 2008 figures and a 33 percent increase over July 2009 results. It also was the eighth consecutive month of year-over-year retail share gains in a market that has been down by as much as 35 percent to 40 percent overall.

Often accused of taking cues from other cars instead of coming up with its own designs, Hyundai has in the last few years been steadily developing a design language of its own. It was first evident with the Genesis Coupe and continues in the upcoming revamped Sonata.

One of the people heading up the effort is Andre Hudson, design manager for Hyundai North America, a 33-year-old designer from Aurora, Colo., and a graduate of Detroit's College for Creative Studies.

He graduated in 1998 with a bachelor of fine arts in industrial design, and worked for General Motors for four years in Detroit and three years at the company's advanced design studio in Coventry, England, on such projects as the Chevrolet SSR and the Cadillac Cien concept. He has been with Hyundai Design America for four years and has contributed to the upcoming Elantra, the 2009 Nuvis Concept and was lead designer on the new Sonata.

In a recent interview, he talked about the company's challenges:

**Q. For such a relatively new company as Hyundai, how important is design and styling?**

A. I think with Hyundai trying to establish itself here in America, it's vitally important. Remember in the mid-'80s when Hyundai started selling products here? Hyundai was criticized for doing copycat designs. Well, for the past 10 to 12 years they've been trying to establish themselves as a serious player, and design is important for that.

**Q. What's it like working at a relatively new auto company as a designer?**

A. It's challenging but very exciting at the same time because we are allowed the freedom to try things that other brands couldn't simply because of their long, established history in the U.S.

**Q. We know that Kia is owned by Hyundai and Kia intends to be the youthful, fun brand with pace-setting styling. What will be the overall image of Hyundai that you want potential buyers to pick up on?**

A. We're choosing to take Hyundai slightly upscale, more mature, with more sophisticated but still expressive design.

**Q. So what styling elements and clues will send that message?**

A. For instance, with the all-new Sonata coming, you will have very emotional, expressive sculpture all over this sedan. We looked at the trends in the segment and the kind of boring products that there were in the midsized sedan class.

Then we saw how BMW, Mercedes and Lexus were bringing in this kind of sculpting and expressiveness that we're choosing to do with Hyundai. Slightly more mature, but still much

more expressive design. We were trying to do the same thing with Sonata, bringing emotion and passion to midsized sedans.

**Q. What's Hyundai's reasoning for that approach?**

A. Lots of people and companies write off the midsized sedan buyers, saying they think they are more concerned with safety, resale value and not so much concern about what it looks like and how it drives. Our all-new Sonata will still be a family car, but it has some style, presence and emotion to it.

**Q. What elements on the upcoming Sonata will suggest sophistication, expressiveness and maturity?**

A. The descriptive term we will use for all our new products going forward is "fluidic sculpture." What that means is that the lines and forms of the vehicle look as though it is in movement and gives you the impression that even when it is standing still, it looks like it is in motion.

Lines and detailing literally wrap around the car, and it's very much a three-dimensional presence. Instead of looking something like a box from the side, rear and front views, you will be able to pick a line on the car and follow it all the way around the vehicle and see several different views.

**Q. Is it true that you all regard the new Genesis as an important marker for your company in terms of design?**

A. I'd say the Genesis Coupe was that more so than the sedan. The coupe was the first vehicle that was out of the gate with a new, expressive Hyundai design language. The entry-level to midlevel Genesis luxury sedan needed to be reined in a bit more, a bit more conservative for that buyer.

You have to be a little careful with what you tread on design-wise since that was our first take on the luxury market.

**Q. Hyundai, of course, has a large number of smaller cars in its portfolio. Is it harder to design a smaller car to come up with something distinctive?**

A. I don't think there's any more difficulty, except for the proportions. That's the main thing as designers that we deal with that we have to get right.

With a smaller vehicle, you don't have the length and line that you can work with on a big car. Your concern is how do you make that small car look as energetic, interesting and athletic as a car that might be longer and lower.

In terms of the car industry in general, that's the difference between America and Asia and Europe. In America, small cars have always looked like large cars shrunk down, which looked awkward to me. The whole design of compact cars in Europe is unique. They don't put lines from a larger car on a smaller platform.

But you'll see what I mean with the new Hyundai Accent that is coming. It's very expressive, and looks much more upscale than the current vehicle. By the way, over the next several years, we have a major barrage of new model releases coming. It is all pretty exciting.