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Horseless eCarriage

A Road-Legal Time Machine

Nostalgia gives everything a rosy tint. Bonnie and Clyde now have charm, and Elvis went out on top. When it comes to Brass Era cars, people first think of their elegance, not the fact that they were complicated machines that rode like bucking broncos. So when one company decided to bring this century-old design into the modern era, the result was more than charismatic—it was electric.

The Horseless eCarriage looks like the earliest Rolls-Royce or Pierce-Arrow, but underneath the coachwork is modern battery power.

This nine-passenger prototype was tailored for a project that aims to replace horse-drawn tourist cabs on the streets of New York City.

Actually, 100 years ago the electric car was the preferred taxicab because it was quieter and cleaner than any other alternative. The gas engine would eventually win mass acceptance, but now the nostalgic quality of Brass Era cars means electric power can be resurrected as a traditional alternative.

This car's exterior has all the right cues of old-world craftsman-

ship—except there is no hand crank for the engine. In fact, the hole at the radiator's base once used for labor-intensive manual starts is now the home of the battery's plug-in port. A key starts this carriage, and the expected hiss and pop of an early combustion engine has been replaced with a quiet hum.

Range for the lithium iron phosphate battery pack is around 100 miles. Top speed is limited to 30 mph, however with all of the exposure to the elements it feels twice as fast. There's a sense of more power ready to be unleashed, but ours was set up not to exceed the speed limits of Manhattan.

A bit of sway is purposely built into the suspension, but there is a very reassuring underlying stability. The battery pack is mounted beneath the floor, giving the car



a low center of gravity. This helps it settle quickly on bumps and behave on modern paved roads. In other words, if the original Brass Era cars felt like they were doing the Charleston, the electric carriage settles into a nice waltz.

Although power steering was eliminated to assure a period-correct feeling, it is hardly missed. A 45/55 weight distribution, tall tires and a high-ratio steering box all mean the carriage can be navigated with one hand. "We didn't set out to build a retro car," said Jason Wenig.

The Horseless eCarriage was created at Wenig's company, The Creative Workshop. "It is about having a car that makes every child—and child at heart—excited just by looking at it," he noted, "and at the same time, giving the driver and passengers the feeling of the 1900s with none of the stress."

This kind of custom-tailored nostalgia was commissioned by a group called New Yorkers for Clean, Livable, and Safe Streets. They'd like to find a suitable replacement for the horse-drawn carriages currently used

in Central Park. They funded this prototype to the tune of around half a million, but production ones will be available for everyone from The Creative Workshop for about a third of that figure.

Classic looks, modern technology and premium pricing usually come from Porsche, but that's not the right crowd for the Horseless eCarriage. Instead, this one can be used for everything from the coolest resort shuttle to someone living up to his "World's Greatest Grandpa" coffee mug. —Myles Kornblatt