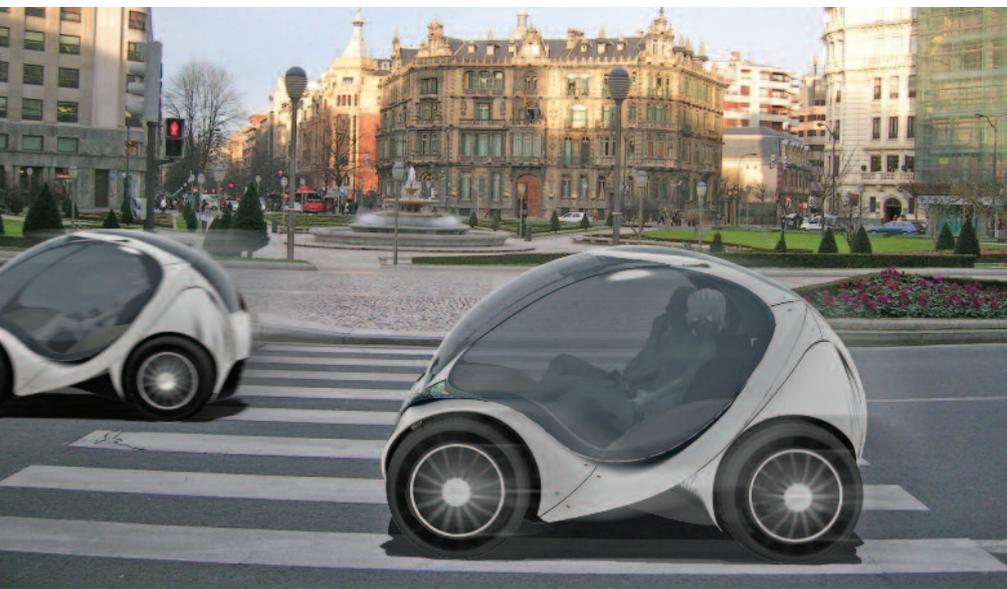


Compact Creations

Imagine a tiny car that works like the bicycles in the Barclay's Bicycle Hire Scheme. Strategically located around the city, these cars produce zero emissions and fold up into themselves for parking ease. It sound futuristic, but the Hiriko is on its way.



The Hiriko, meaning urban, is an electric two-seater car created in Spain's Basque country that aims to address the dual issues of urban stress and pollution. Launched in January in Brussels, the concept was dreamt up and designed by The Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media lab and development has been continued by a consortium of seven small Basque firms under the name Hiriko Driving Mobility.

The compact car looks like something out of a science fiction movie. Bubble shaped with no side-doors, the entire front windshield panel opens up for access. At 2.5 metres long, the size is comparable to a Smart car, but here's where the technology kicks in. The rear of the capsule folds to slip under the

chassis, so that in its parked state the car takes up a mere 1.5 metres of space. The entire passenger cabin tilts upwards and the seats angle forward for an easy dismount through the forward door; in theory releasing many square miles of parking space in major cities across the globe.

Second only to its folding capabilities is the technology used in the wheels, which effectively house the motor. Based on robotics, each wheel is independently driven and steered by in-wheel electric motors. This gives the Hiriko incredible maneuverability. It literally turns on a dime, completing a 360 degree turn on the spot. Three point turns may no longer be required on driving tests if these become the city car of choice.

If that's not impressive enough, the Hiriko is also fully electric, rumoured to fully charge in less than 15 minutes. It is unlikely to be breaking any speed records, with a top speed of just over 30 miles per hour, but that's reasonable for a city run-around. The maximum distance between charges is a respectable 70 miles or so.

In case a fully electric, robotic-wheeled, bubble-shaped zip-around is not quite fun enough, the car is steered by a haptic steering wheel, meaning it can physically nudge a driver's fingers if told to do so by the on board navigation systems. There is also the option of replacing the steering wheel with a joystick steering mechanism to the right of the driver to control speed, steering and braking.



Aside from impressive engineering, the Hiriko project is being touted as public mobility solution. The idea is that a local authority owns a fleet of Hiriko cars and rents them as needed for a small fee. On-board computers in each car allows the cars to be instantly located by smart phone, so they can be parked almost anywhere, following the mobility on demand concept.

The Hiriko cars and mobility system are to be tested in Malmo in Sweden towards the end of the year. Other cities considering involvement include Berlin, San Francisco, Hong Kong, and Barcelona, amongst others.

The Hiriko will be built by modules; therefore no assembly line will be

necessary. Almost all of the car's components will be manufactured by the seven members of the Basque enterprise consortium for later assembly in distribution centers around the world.

The question now becomes whether they will be available for private sale, however, with full scale production currently scheduled for 2012, it is likely to take some time for them to fully hit the market. Mass production should bring the retail price down, suggested to be in the vicinity of £10,000, which would make it a realistic option as a daily run-around vehicle for city dwellers.

In the meantime, keep an eye out for these compact cars to hit the streets of major European cities, touted to be early

2013. According to the project developers, wide scale introduction is the first step towards more sustainable, more social and smarter cities.



for more information please go to <http://hiriko.com>