

Mazda's 2009 LA Design Challenge Entry - Mazda Souga

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The Story of the Mazda Souga*

The year is 2030 and 18-year-old Max is off to Mazda's Direct Digital Manufacturing (DDM) plant just outside of Los Angeles. It is here where he will pick up his new vehicle - the one that he has been designing with the help of Mazda's "Virtual Designer" Web site. Finally, a car that is as attainable as it is exotic. It is Max's perfect fit in every way -- from the gorgeous shape to the absolutely perfect packaging.

During the global recession of 2008, Los Angeles, a city already known for its creative industries, began seeing a new movement of young entrepreneurs. With many of the traditional economic engines in crisis, necessity and emerging technology dictated a new economic model. For example, at the turn of the century, the recording industry was turned on its head when technology-enabled youth created records and shared them from their home computers. In similar fashion, Los Angeles became a hub of 16 to 23 year olds creating their own brands and products on desktop 3D manufacturing software. Educational institutions began restructuring their curricula to teach this "micro-manufacturing" model of entrepreneurialism. Never before had there been such a variety of brands and products. The phenomenon soon went global via the virtual Web -- an evolution of the Internet.

Mazda quickly took notice. Recognizing the historically slow pace of the auto manufacturing industry and comparing it to this nimble and youthful movement, Mazda began assembling a new creative outlet for its design and manufacturing activities. A new virtual-reality based Web site - VMazda.com -- was created and is now home to an unprecedented level of entrepreneurship and creative expression for young people. VMazda is a design playground that allows young enthusiasts to experiment with, build and share their automotive dreams in a virtual world at no cost. Mazda Design Mentors guide users through several areas of design in order to create successfully branded Mazda vehicles. VMazda acts as a talent pool to identify future Mazda designers and has eliminated the need for customer clinics. Future customers and mass trends are identified simultaneously.

Max has been using VMazda for the past year, slowly creating and refining his dream vehicle with Talvin, one of the Mazda Design Mentors available to him. With Talvin's guidance, Max has created a compact two-seat sports vehicle, placing the driver's seat front and center, tightly wrapping its mesh-like surfaces around the driver's seat. With this new type of rapid manufacturing, Max's vehicle has no limits when it comes to shapes and surface treatment. If Max can dream it, he can build it!

The sustainable composite mesh surfaces provide strength, rigidity, and translucency (for high visibility), while also becoming an aesthetic of Mazda products. Max wants a car that is as thrilling to drive as it is practical for his daily needs. The extra seat is for his girlfriend, and he has opted to add a small storage area for models he carries around for his desktop product-design business. A totally unique asymmetrical layout is created, with a graceful S-curve defining the architectural spaces from plan view. Max now has enough of an income to bring his virtual car into reality and eagerly heads to his nearest DDM plant where his car is rapidly manufactured from sustainable

materials grown on-site. Once there, Max watches as his beast is born. The design that Max has created is incorporated into standard Mazda components such as the electric wheels and the energy storage cell, which doubles as the floor.

Max has entered into a contract with Mazda similar to the one with his cell phone. Because manufacturing costs have been drastically reduced, he will pay a low price for his new car (about \$2,000 in 2010 dollars). This price pays for the physical property (like an iPhone or Blackberry). During this two-year contract, Max will pay a monthly bill for the energy used to power his car (like AT&T or Sprint). After the two-year period, Max will return to a Mazda DDM plant and "renew" his car if he wishes to do so. All materials in the car will be re-used to create another new vehicle that fits his evolving needs and desires.

Max climbs into his new car -- a minimal, lightweight sports coupe. It is dramatically proportioned and ornately detailed. Most digital communication and information devices are now integrated into clothing and fashion accessories. As a result, Mazda has removed these redundant and costly devices from the interior in favor of driver-focused, lightweight performance. The interior contains only the essentials: seats, steering wheel, throttle controls and a display surface. Every penny spent to manufacture a Mazda vehicle goes into creating a race car-like experience. Max accelerates onto the freeway as acres and acres of sustainable corn and bamboo fields race by...

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