



If you're designing cars today, you have to know what the people of tomorrow will want in terms of mobility. In a special market research program, Audi identifies future trends early on.

Looking ahead

Already on the test bed today:
visions of individual Audi designers
for tomorrow's mobility.



On this day, the future of the automobile is not being debated behind the gates of large plants, but rather at a small agency in Munich. There's a surfboard propped up against the door and a soccer table next to the espresso machine. Other than this, the creative minds at gravity design agency have cleared out their premises. Nothing should divert the observers' gazes and thoughts from the objects located on chest-high platforms: four vehicle studies by young Audi designers who have made their individual visions of the Audi of the future into reality – as 1:4 scale models, at least. Two women and three men then study the models. They silently move from design to design, jotting things down here and there on yellow adhesive notes. Their faces reveal nothing.

"I wonder what they'll have to say," whispers designer Juan Carlos Huerta Martinez to a colleague. The Spaniard doesn't take his eyes off the man in the blue jacket who is currently examining his quattro PowerSpace, a high-capacity sedan with large wing doors. The design is meant to combine the driving pleasure of a sporty Audi with the roominess of a van. "Just because you have a family doesn't mean your car shouldn't be fun to drive," says Huerta Martinez, explaining his concept. But will they understand it? Today's the day to find out.

It takes a lot of time to develop a car – and a lot of money to build it. That's one reason why there is scarcely a market as well researched as the car market. Cockpit layout, glove box

styling, turn signal design – there are surveys and studies on just about every detail of a vehicle. Audi alone requests feedback from car drivers in 70 to 80 studies each year. On the way to production readiness, new models pass through so-called car clinics, in which they are analyzed and discussed down to the smallest detail by test persons. The information gleaned from the clinics is incorporated into further product design. By the time an Audi car is launched on the market, its creators already have a precise idea of the emotions and associations it will evoke.

Juan Carlos Huerta Martinez's glass quattro PowerSpace is far from market-ready; even further removed are the more futuristic designs of his colleagues. Take, for instance, the buggy-like Audi quattrix whose cockpit rotates along the longitudinal axis. It can jump and, "like a cat, always lands on all fours," explains its creator Elmar Reich. Or the ultra-flat vehicle by Björn Wehrli, which with its fully faired wheels resembles a catamaran. Its propulsion comes not from an engine, but from the wind, which is caught in a swiveling airfoil. "Perhaps the car races of 2040 will take place with this type of 80 km/h Speed-sailor – with a zero carbon footprint," says the designer, describing his vision.

By now it's clear that we're not talking about Audi innovations for the year 2014. This is also not your average market research session – it's called a "trend receiver" analysis. Here, based on personal visions of the Audi designers, a select group of people with vision get together to reflect on what the mobility of the future could look like. These are visions that could become

reality years or even decades from now – or perhaps never.

"When the timeline to market relevance is particularly long or the questions are extremely complex, conventional market research reaches its limits," explains Dr. Rupert Hofmann, who develops the trend receiver studies for Audi. The participants he enlists for this differ from those of a market-representative study. These are not specifically automobile experts, but rather individuals selected based on specific themes, who perceive changes early on and are good at discerning the potential of new concepts. They are people from a whole range of industries, but all have one thing in common: They are exceptionally curious, have connections in a range of contexts and enthusiastically observe what it is that drives people and what things are changing.

These experts hold nothing back. "I bet you couldn't hold a teleconference in it," Bernd Blumoser quips dryly in reference to Elmar Reich's buggy. Blumoser, who is responsible for Corporate Technology for Open Innovation and Ideas Competitions at a large firm, voices an opinion that illustrates just how different requirements for vehicles can be. "Drivers will have to have a certain amount of skill to control the Speed-sailor – they won't be able to rely on the assistance system to handle that," jokes Birgit Schaldecker, innovation manager at a high-tech textile manufacturer, referring to Wehrli's design. On the other hand, she says, thinking aloud, technologies are already being developed for



Eager anticipation: Four young Audi designers (left) present their visions of the future, which are then debated intensely in a group meeting with the trend receivers (right).





Lively discussions: The trend receivers don't judge every idea exactly the same way as the designers. But their feedback often provides new impetus.



motorsport today that will one day be used in everyday driving. "And we are not going to stop thinking about the future in the future either."

Then designer Markus Klug enters the contest with his Audi Grid, a sports car with two separate cockpits. Its main attraction: landing flaps of sorts in the wheel wells that lift when the car is on the verge of fishtailing. "They provide a warning as soon as things get dicey. The car trains the driver, instead of taking responsibility away from him," Klug explains the concept, which is intended above all to convey driving pleasure. Surprisingly, this elicits the strongest reactions from the women in the group. "A car that communicates with me. Like a horse that pricks up his ears and tightens his muscles before breaking into a gallop," says

an enthusiastic Birgit Schaldecke. In the design language of the Audi Grid, by contrast, she sees very little in the way of communication. "I would have expected something a bit more subtle," says the innovation manager.

As the discussion intensifies, Claus Potthoff is listening in the background. "This feedback is very important for our work," says the Head of Design Strategy/Communication at AUDI AG. With collaborative projects such as these, involving market research and design, it's not so much about evaluating individual models as it is about getting outside feedback on new ideas. "Design mustn't be created in an ivory tower. Only if we continually ground ourselves can we build cars for people." But people sometimes see things differently than the designers, as Juan Carlos

Huerta Martinez must admit: Although the teardrop form of his quattro PowerSpace certainly does elicit enthusiasm – there is even mention of the word "art" – none of the trend receivers see a family car in it, despite the integrated ski and bicycle tunnel. "For me, it's more a vehicle for the business sector," says Dr. Jan Oliver Schwarz, who works in the Corporate Development division of a large insurance company. Surprisingly, the vehicle study elicits completely different associations than first assumed. But then this is precisely how it provides the desired impetus. <<



See here how the Audi quattro concept showcar is created.