Taxis of Tomorrow

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Taking a ride in the yellow cabs of the future
Hailing the future’s cabs

Concept taxis of the future on display at auto show

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They can reach speeds of up to 200 mph. They run on clean-burning compressed natural gas, or even pure hydrogen. They have lights under the rear doors so exiting passengers can see the puddle they’re about to step in.

These are just some of the innovations for yellow taxis on display at a special exhibit at the New York International Auto Show, which opens at the Javite Convention Center tomorrow.

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A total of eight concept cars — built as collaborations between automakers, industrial designers and artists — give a glimpse of the future of the city’s taxis. One model will be picking up passengers in New York City next year.

“The yellow cab is already a New York City icon the world over, and we wanted to explore what the next taxi would be like,” said Deborah Marton, executive director of the Design Trust for Public Space, which organized the exhibit, timed with the 100th anniversary of the gas-powered taxi.

The future cabs had to meet certain criteria such as built-in child seats and sunroofs and easy access for the elderly and disabled. They also had to run on alternative fuel and be made of environmentally friendly materials.

Not assuming the future to be a crime-free utopia, design criteria also included a safety partition to separate the driver from passenger.

While most of the models won’t see the lights of Broadway, one taxi on display, the Standard Taxi, will be released next year for use on city streets. At more than 6 feet tall, the Standard looks huge compared to the Ford Crown Victoria yellow cab of today and costs about the same at $25,000.

But all that height allows room for wheelchairs and a commercial-grade trucker’s seat for maximum driver comfort.

“The Standard Taxi is designed from the ground up specifically to work as a taxi, just like a postal truck is designed for the express purpose of delivering mail,” Marton said.

In recent years, the Taxi and Limousine Commission has approved a number of gas/electric hybrid models as part of the city’s effort to reduce its carbon footprint.