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2012's North American International Auto Show was different to 2011's in a very substantial way: Last year's was revolutionary, while this year's was mostly evolutionary. This is no great surprise; the 2011 show came after three completely awful years for the auto industry as a whole. Strong signs of life returned with a vengeance for 2011, and we were delighted to report on American automakers' notable discovery of lighting technology and technique as much more than just a necessary expenditure to comply with prevailing regulations.

This year's 2012 show could not reasonably be expected to provide last year's level of all-newness, but that scarcely means it was boring or anticlimactic. Far from it! In fact, it is exciting for the automotive lighting professional to see that last year's better-than-they-have-to-be car lights for the American market appear not to have been a flash in the pan, but rather the real beginnings of an awakening and arrival at the breakfast table by an American industry newly eager to contribute considerable skill, talent, and passion to the science and art of putting good lights on cars.



Ford Fusion



Dodge Dart



Chevrolet Miray



Ford Fusion



Ford MKZ



Chevrolet Tru 140s



Chevrolet Miray



Honda Concept Accord



Volvo Concept You



Hyundai Sonata Hybrid



Hyundai Sonata Hybrid



Lexus LF-LC

And that is what this report focuses on—good lights on cars. Not so much on the whole cars; there are hundreds of sources for photos from any angle and full specifications for all the cars displayed at NAIAS. What you can get only in this report is close-cropped photos of the lights, specially processed to show maximum detail of interest to Driving Vision News community members. Nor have we attempted to show the lights on every car that was displayed. Rather, we present some 200 photos of the new lights, the upgraded lights, the lights of particular technical, technological, design, or—in a few cases—historical interest. Yes, the bulk of the content of this report is pictorial rather than textual.

Most of the photos show production cars now or soon on sale, but many of them show concept cars. The lighting systems on these, too, are evolving visibly. Until as recently as the last concept displays of the Chevrolet Volt, for example, it was common to find the lights represented by simple red or white plastic plugs with little or no effort at evincing any kind of lighting-related design. Now, this year, we take keen note that the placeholders, the dummy-lights, have a much more salient "watch-this-space" aspect to them. They're no longer simple plastic plates, now they show us what the designers have in mind: more light guides. More artistic optics. More drawing with light. And lots more LEDs!

All of this is miraculous, though none of it is a miracle. Rather, it's the result of incalculable

man- and woman-hours of research and development, learning from the way it was done before, and doing it better the next time, and the next time, and all the times after that. We have a clearer-than-ever picture not just of what tomorrow's cars will look like, but what the lights on those cars will look like. And this report brings that picture—those pictures—to you.