

Ford's impressive Flex will be hard to ignore

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Special to The IFP

You are going to hear a lot about the 2009 Flex because Ford is justifiably trumpeting its arrival as the full-size completion of a crossover lineup that started with the Taurus X and the mid-size Ford Edge/Lincoln MKX siblings.

And in the midst of all the automotive downturn rumbles it's good to hear of 500 new Canadian jobs as the Oakville plant gears up meet demand.

But even if you somehow didn't hear about the Flex, you are going to notice it.

As a matter of fact, it'll be darned hard to miss with its unapologetic two-box design and a shape that's been compared to everything from the "woody" wagons of the past to an overgrown MINI to Scions and Elements to,

heck, I don't know what, since it's different from anything else in the full-size market.

Its shape is instantly iconic, with a profile that will be as readily identified as other distinctive vehicles, from the Model T to VW Beetle, HUMMER and Jeep.

Ford labels the Flex as "a vehicle that dares to be different".

Well, different can be good but it can also be dangerous, with a polarizing design that leaves little room for indifference. Which means you are going to either love it or hate it.

"At first we were uncomfortable with the way Flex could polarize but its ability to compel an opinion, good or bad, was fascinating," said Peter Horbury, executive director, Design, The Americas. "It inspired us forward with the courage to create a breakthrough design."

Horbury also joked that Flex design "started with an



As classy as its environment in downtown New York City, the 2009 Ford Flex "dares to be different" with a strikingly square-shaped design packed with innovative features.

Etch-A-Sketch instead of a computer".

The square-angled style stays faithful to the Fairlane concept that debuted in 2005, but it loses the dumb suicide doors and, like the rest of the modern Ford lineup, expands on the three-bar grille, horizontal inspiration of the 427 concept and production Fusion. It's hailed as a family-touring replacement for the Windstar/Freestar minivan, it's built on a stretched platform from the Taurus X (formerly Freestyle) and, despite Ford denials, together with Edge; it will probably doom that bland Taurus X within a few years.

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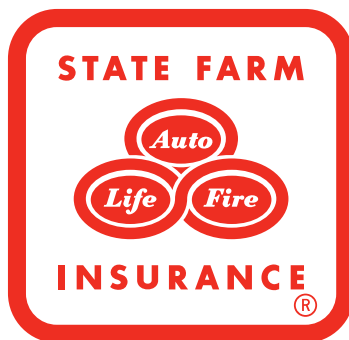
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