

MOTORWORLD BY ALEX TAYLOR III

Fisker Auto's bad Karma

5 comments

By Alex Taylor III, senior editor-at-large @FortuneMagazine February 10, 2012: 12:13 PM ET

[Recommend](#) 13 [Tweet](#) 3 [1](#) [0](#) [Email Print](#)



PHOTO: MAX SHELTON/FILMMAGIC

It's going to take a lot more than an endorsement from Leo to get Fisker out of its rut.

FORTUNE -- The Fisker Karma is rolling onto the world automotive stage as car writers in the U.S. and Europe examine the car in person for the first time and take their initial laps behind the wheel. They could certainly be excused for seeing the car and its creator through rose-colored glasses. Both have been the recipient of more advance publicity than a Donald Trump presidential endorsement.

Henrik Fisker is the celebrity car designer who wants to do well by doing good. His creation, the Karma, a \$103,000 plug-in hybrid, has been collecting "Car of the Year" awards by the trunkload. As the first four-door ultra-luxury gas-electric car, it has been celebrated by environmentalists, blessed by the federal government with a guaranteed loan, and endorsed by celebrities. Leo DiCaprio ignited a swirl of publicity when he took delivery of the first production model.

Sponsored Links

60 Yr Old Mom Looks 25
Mom Reveals \$5 Wrinkle Trick That Has Angered Doctors!
ConsumerLifestyles.org

How Bad Is Your Heart?
Discover your risk of heart attack in minutes with online heart test.
SimpleHeartTest.com

But those who haven't been blinded by the glare of publicity are beginning to wonder whether the Karma will be a hit like DiCaprio's Titanic -- or a flop like his Body of Lies. More perceptive reviewers find the car overweight, inefficient, and capable of only mediocre performance that falls well short of its original eco-friendly goals.

Fisker is a 48-year-old Dane who

Most Popular

Buffett on housing: Was "dead wrong," but still believes	16
Buffett beats the S&P for the 39th year	29
Apple and those LOL numbers	6
Why did Apple close Friday at record high \$522.41 a share ...	10
Don't believe every "Buffett buys..." headline	0

Find Your Next Car

Aol Autos.

New Used

[Get Result](#)

Get the latest car news:

- [GPS Tracking Devices Warrant Fears](#)
- [Our Man Defends His Minivan Love](#)
- [2011 Best Tailgate Vehicles](#)
- [Five Most Expensive Repairs](#)

Hot List



Live in this luxury 'safe' house

This Hollywood Hills home has gorgeous views, an emergency chopper pad and an advanced

made his reputation designing BMWs and Aston Martins. He founded Fisker Automotive in 2007 and showed the concept for the Karma four months later at the Detroit auto show. Production began haltingly nearly a year ago at a contract manufacturer in Finland, and deliveries to dealers have just begun. Not inclined to understatement, Fisker calls the Karma the fulfillment of "a lifelong dream of designing and creating a range of beautiful cars that make environmental sense without compromise."

Like the [Chevy Volt](#), the Karma is designed to travel 30 to 45 miles on an electric charge before a gasoline engine kicks in. Unlike the \$40,000 Volt, the extroverted Karma is unabashedly aimed at one-percenters. Its lines are voluptuous and proportions unique. Fisker says the design was inspired by "the elegant lines of windswept sand dunes and the muscular grace of a cheetah." He showed his green side by fitting out the interior in politically correct materials: The seating foam is made from soy-based bio fiber, the carpet backing composed of recycled post-consumer materials, and the trim sourced from "fallen, sunken and rescued wood," including some that has spent the last 300 years resting at the bottom of Lake Michigan.

Inspired design is no substitute for manufacturing experience, however, and Fisker has encountered the usual problems that come from starting up an enterprise as complex as a car manufacturer: production delays, prices hikes, and canceled orders. In December, Fisker recalled all 239 cars built between July 1 and November because of a possible problem with the battery's cooling system. Early in February, it suspended production and [laid off 26 workers](#) while it renegotiated terms of its \$529 million loan from the Department of Energy. Some have begun [to compare Fisker to Solyndra](#), the failed solar panel maker funded by the government to create green jobs.

12 electric cars for 2012

When experts look beyond the Karma's drop-dead styling and scrutinize the car's functionality, they find it wanting. After complaining about "errant rattles here and there," an admittedly portly reviewer from *Road & Track* described climbing into the driver's seat as something of a "circus act" and declined to even make a try at getting into the rear seats.

More substantive complaints focus on the car's heft and fuel consumption. The Karma is only five inches shorter than a Ford Flex people-mover and only a few hundred pounds lighter than a Chevy Suburban -- not exactly the dimensions you look for in a sport sedan. The turning radius only looks impressive compared to a Kenworth hauling logs. Engineers at *Consumer Reports* figured that Fisker's claims for a 50-mile all-electric range are probably optimistic (the EPA rates the Karma at 32 miles). They also discovered that its acceleration "lacks the urgency you'd expect from a car of this price and presence," and its handling is "not at the level one would expect from a sporty high-end sedan." *Consumer Reports* concluded: "Whether [the Karma] is as green or as sporty as it ought to be remains to be seen."

The most scathing remarks to date came in the March issue of the usually authoritative *Car and Driver*. (Full disclosure: I am an occasional contributor). It complained that while the Karma is a "heartthrob" to look at, it is essentially a \$100,000 irrelevance and "not a rational choice."

security system that allows you to smoke out intruders. [Play](#)



Michigan's shrinking workforce

The unemployment rate in Michigan is dropping fast, but that doesn't mean lots of new jobs are being created. Many residents leaving the labor force. [More](#)



Gingrich's \$2.50 gas promise

The promise might garner attention on the campaign trail, but really, there's nothing but snake oil in that rhetorical well. [More](#)



Serious car-pimping in L.A.

Take a peek inside Galpin Auto Sports in Southern California where some of the most creative customized cars get their looks. [Play](#)



Staving off cell phone apocalypse

The wireless industry is facing a capacity crunch. There is no perfect solution, but here are some actions carriers are taking to avoid a spectrum crisis. [More](#)

CNNMoney Sponsors



Global diversification
with HSBC Premier



CDs and High Yield
Savings Accounts



Uber-lux green car

To *Car and Driver*, the Karma comes off as a blivet -- 10 pounds of material stuffed into a five-pound bag. The problem is trying to cram all those batteries, two electric motors, and a roof-mounted solar panel into that voluptuous body. The result is poor packaging and excessive weight. As the magazine discovered, the Karma's back seat is smaller than a tiny [Honda Fit's](#) and its trunk is less than half the size of an equally tiny Kia Rio's. The Karma's two and a half tons of avoirdupois impose a severe penalty in fuel economy -- under both electric and gasoline power. Test drivers were only able to squeeze 24 to 28 miles out of the battery, while the gas-only mileage ranged from 20 mpg to 28 mpg -- unlikely many awards from environmental groups. The magazine concludes that the [Mercedes-Benz S-class](#) is cheaper than the Karma, the Lexus LS600 better built, and the [Porsche Panamera](#) faster, nearly as economical, and \$20,000 less expensive.

The Karma may yet turn out to be an important milestone on the way to the all-electric car because it demonstrates that environmental sensitivity is not incompatible with luxury and style. Or it could wind up as an automotive oddity like the [Tucker Torpedo](#) or the DeLorean DMC-12 -- too ambitious by a half. ■

[Share](#)

Sponsored Links

[60 Yr Old Mom Looks 25](#)

Mom Reveals \$5 Wrinkle Trick That Has Angered Doctors!
ConsumerLifestyles.org

[How Bad Is Your Heart?](#)

Discover your risk of heart attack in minutes with online heart test.
SimpleHeartTest.com

[Orange Savings Account](#)

No fees. No minimums. Nothing standing in your way. Learn More.
www.ingdirect.com

[File Taxes for FREE](#)

Tax Season is here. File for FREE with TaxSlayer.com
www.TaxSlayer.com

[Buy a link here](#)

[Email](#)
[Print](#)

Related Articles

[8 luxury autos that flunk the value test](#)

[15 great cars that get overlooked](#)

[Akio Toyoda: Toyota's comeback kid](#)

Join the Conversation (5 comments)

Sort by [Newest first](#)

[Subscribe by RSS](#)

Login below to leave a comment



Guest, 02/17/2012 05:04 PM

A one side article designed to scare people away from embracing this innovative and extraordinary car. I know because I drive one. I have a 50 mile a day round trip commute. I've driven more than 600 miles. And I've used four gallons of gas. The most comfortable, fun, luxury vehicle I've ever owned.



MrNorth, 02/15/2012 04:59 PM

I'd like to see them PAY-OFF their government loans then sell as many cars as they can to the ubber-rich, until of course they go bankrupt given even they are not ubber-stupid, at least not for too long. And the guy who quotes European economy and performance numbers should be right at the head of the line. Maybe the EPA is off (they usually are on the low side) but Consumer Reports rarely... [show more](#)



dontrader, 02/13/2012 07:55 AM

I am a trader and I love doing my trading in g0ld trading academy.



davidy7, 02/12/2012 09:44 AM

Leave car production to the seasoned producers. No matter how great the design is, or how great the technology is, car ownership is also about the longevity of the company and brand. The spare parts and service centers in 10 / 20 years time? If you come to think of it, all these "green cars" are really not "green" at all. The source of the materials of the batteries are harvested, transported, and produced with... [show more](#)



Clayton Passero, 02/11/2012 12:19 PM

I found this article to be completely one-sided. It seems to have a lack of information when discussing aspects of the car. If you are referring to both U.S. and European outlooks on the car you may find it beneficial to include the not just the EPA rates, but also the TUV (European regulatory body which confirms Fiskers 50 miles in electric range and 112 mpg). Furthermore, the Fisker should not be... [show more](#)

3 people liked this.



About CNNMoney

- Contact Us
- Advertise with Us
- User Preferences
- Career Opportunities
- Business Leader Council

Content

- Fortune Magazine
- Money Magazine
- Business News
- Markets
- Term Sheet
- Economy
- Tech
- Personal Finance
- Small Business
- Video

Magazines

- Subscribe to Fortune
- Subscribe to Money
- Give the Gift of Fortune
- Give the Gift of Money
- Reprints
- Special Sections
- Magazine Customer Service
- Conferences

Site Tools

- Site Map
- Watchlist
- Search Jobs
- Real Estate Search
- Mortgage and Savings Center
- Calculators
- Widgets
- Corrections
- Market Data Alerts
- News Alerts

Stay Connected

- My Account
- Mobile Site & Apps
- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- YouTube
- RSS Feeds
- Newsletters
- Tumblr

Market indexes are shown in real time, except for the DJIA, which is delayed by two minutes. All times are ET. **Disclaimer** LIBOR Warning: Neither BBA Enterprises Limited, nor the BBA LIBOR Contributor Banks, nor Reuters, can be held liable for any irregularity or inaccuracy of BBA LIBOR. **Disclaimer.** Morningstar: © 2012 Morningstar, Inc. All Rights Reserved. **Disclaimer** The Dow Jones IndexesSM are proprietary to and distributed by Dow Jones & Company, Inc. and have been licensed for use. All content of the Dow Jones IndexesSM © 2012 is proprietary to Dow Jones & Company, Inc. Chicago Mercantile Association. The market data is the property of Chicago Mercantile Exchange Inc. and its licensors. All rights reserved. FactSet Research Systems Inc. 2012. All rights reserved. Most stock quote data provided by BATS.

© 2012 Cable News Network. A Time Warner Company. All Rights Reserved. [Terms](#) under which this service is provided to you. [Privacy Policy](#). [Ad choices](#)