



Self-Driving Taxi Concept Wins ‘New Designers’ Ford Award

The COVID-19 crisis has presented new challenges for mobility, with social distancing impacting public transportation, the flow of traffic being affected by more deliveries, and increasing concerns regarding personal health and well-being.

Now, a transport design graduate from Staffordshire University, in the U.K., has developed a unique solution that could help people – and particularly those with restricted mobility – get around safely and securely while also adhering to social distancing.

The “muvone” concept, developed by Marius Lochner, has won the Ford “New Norm Mobility Award”. This challenged design graduates to develop mobility concepts, ideas and solutions that address the new scenarios presented by COVID-19. As a self-driving taxi for one, the “muvone” concept puts the priority on secure individual mobility, enabling people to travel where and when they want in comfort.

“The COVID-19 crisis has greatly influenced our lives, changing the way people and goods move, and creating a ‘new normal’ for everyone,” said Chris Hamilton, chief designer, Ford of Europe. “This requires new ideas for apps, features, designs and mobility, at a time when the vehicle is a preferred private space and personal health is more important than ever.”

The “muvone” concept features a minimalist interior with flat surfaces and easy-to-clean materials so the vehicle can be disinfected between journeys. Designed to enable greater social inclusion at a time when disabled people need it most, the ease of accessibility makes “muvone” highly suitable for senior citizens and people with restricted mobility.

The award is part of the “New Designers Awards” – the largest design graduate show in the U.K. – open to students graduating in design. This year, the show was held virtually. For his winning concept, Lochner receives £1,000 (€1,120), plus a semester of mentoring from Ford of Europe chief designers Ernst Reim and Sonja Vandenberk, who were part of the judging panel along with Hamilton and Amko Leenarts, Ford’s European director of Design.

The award was run in partnership with Top Gear Magazine. Charlie Turner, editorial director of Top Gear, was part of the judging panel and gave detailed feedback on all the design proposals.

“The breadth and creativity shown in the entries for this challenge was deeply impressive and articulated the true depth of next-generation talent coming through the education system. However, it didn’t make picking a winner easy at all,” said Turner.

As a smart vehicle for a smart world – one that puts the focus on the privacy and security of the individual – “muvone” sits very closely with Ford’s human-centric approach to design. The concept’s welcoming design language, thoughtful branding and suitability for use with current urban infrastructure helped elevate it above the other entries.

Runner-up in the award was HALO Project, an idea for an app that helps users make travel choices and choose routes based on personal safety, rather than the fastest or shortest journey. Other entries included concepts for micro-mobility such as electric scooters and ride-on devices, and also for larger vehicles, such as an electric truck, a driverless chauffeur vehicle, and a vehicle that could be transformed from a sports car to a truck at the push of a button.

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About New Designers

Now in its 35th year, New Designers provides a unique platform for fresh design talent to connect with design educators, professionals and consumers for creative exchange and collaboration. Taking place as a series of digital initiatives in 2020, New Designers is a place to discover new ideas, products and trends. The show connects talented design graduates with businesses looking to bring in new design thinking; buyers looking to source the most innovative craft and design; and aspiring students wanting to explore the range of design courses available. New Designers champions and celebrates the future of design.

Due to the unforeseen circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, this year the event will take place digitally. New Designers plans to return for a physical showcase in 2021.