

The Movin' On Summit 2019 Part Two: The Future of Transportation

By Skid Crease

I expect that our horse and buggy elders thought the same thing when they saw the first car. An end to a way of life, of blacksmith's shops and anvils and harness maker guilds. Just as our First Nations Elders had seen their way of life change forever with the coming of the tall ships and the white sails. Change is a guaranteed constant.

And so comes the new age of transportation. An age of autonomous, decarbonized vehicles. The transport of goods and services along mag lev tracks and via drone air corridors. The evolution from a fossil fuel age to a renewables renaissance.

The Movin' On Summit at the beginning of June in Montreal showcased all of those technologies. Accompanied by professional race car drivers, participants got to test drive a variety of cars from the Toyota hydrogen fuel cell Mirai to the all-electric BMW i3 sedan. And if you wanted to feel as if you had just won the lottery, the BMW i8 hybrid roadster was plugged in and ready to go.

Being on a modest budget, I opted for my test drive in the BMW electric sedan. My driver took me through the streets of Montreal pointing out the electric charging stations we passed on almost every block. They install them in pairs so multiple cars can charge up. And sure enough, every city street charging station had vehicles plugged in to the hydro powered Quebec grid.

Then he took me to their test strip. Sit back, he smiled, This little i3 has some kick. He stepped on the accelerator and I was pressed back into my seat as the full torque of the electric engine hit me. When we arrived back at the Summit, the little i3 got plugged in for a recharge. I suddenly had a vision of the intersection of Keele and King ten years from now as a fleet of quiet, clean electric vehicles dropped off their passengers at the high speed mag lev GO train station. Ah, perchance to dream.

On a more practical note, and more befitting of my budget, I went to the test track inside the Summit grounds to try out the electric bikes and scooters. One of the vendors rents out fleets of the electric assist bikes to corporations who make them available to employees working on large sites. The model I tested was on a very sturdy frame with substantial saddlebags over the rear wheel. As soon as you began to work the pedals, the electric motor kicked in silently to ease the journey. Just what I need for that grind up the four corners valley along Queen Street in Bolton.

The younger set flocked to the electric scooters which they had zooming gracefully and silently around the test track. In the middle of the test track oval sat a huge hybrid-electric truck cab. The large scale version of a clean vehicle to show us how the big trailers could sustainably move our goods across the country.

My two favourites were in another part of the Summit grounds. The all-electric Navya bus is what I pictured moving citizens around our towns. Eight passenger, fully accessible seating, and comfortable. The Navya is French technology currently being produced in Detroit. The current short range is perfect for in-Town transit, but battery capacity is increasing by leaps and bounds every day, so the Navya's range will extend accordingly.

My other personal favourite was the Wello. A tricycle vehicle with electric solar assist. Two wheels in the front and one in the rear, with a weather sealed back cab for gear (or children or pets), an ergonomic seat in the front that makes pedalling a pleasure, and a cabin hood that extends into an aerodynamic windshield to protect the driver. Cycling has never felt so good. Being a guy who now walks and cycles everywhere, this one really appealed to me.

The Wello was designed for warmer climates, but the developers agreed to bring one to Canada with fat tires for a winter test drive. And I get to be the test driver. Elon Musk, eat your heart out.

The Summit presented a host of vehicles for all types of drivers, from farm pick-ups to tractor trailer units to electric scooters. From luxury roadsters to solar assisted e-buses and e-bikes. All clean, quiet, green, and waiting for us to make the move.

The inspiration provided by the physical evidence of these machines and the people behind them was proof that this talk of sustainable mobility is not a pipe dream. Even more inspirational was the discovery that the driving force behind the dream came from a large multinational corporation with a vision that is moving them from Ambition to Action. Next column: Surpetition, moving beyond competition.