

Hayes reinvents the wheel

■ Northville-based company licensed to manufacture California-designed wheel

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The Northville-based company unveiled what it's calling the most dramatic change in wheel technology in more than a decade at the Society of Automotive Engineers 2001 World Congress in Detroit March 6.

According to Ronald L. Kolakowski, vice president of Hayes Lemmerz' North American Wheel Group, the new design, which the company is developing under license from The Epilogics Group, based in Los Gatos, Calif., is 20 percent lighter than conventional steel wheels and half to one-third the cost of cast metal wheels.

The new process uses a five- or four-spoke metal center that is welded and riveted to an outer rim, producing a wheel that while 10 percent heavier than the typical cast metal wheel is substantially less expensive," said Kolakowski.

He said the new wheel was designed to meet the demands in the latest wheel trends - which include "bigger wheels, both physically bigger in diameter, as well as looking as big as possible, wider wheels, lighter wheels and brighter wheels -



Hayes Lemmerz executive Ronald Kolakowski believes his company's new steel wheel design will capture a significant portion of the midrange aluminum wheel business.

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big as possible, wider wheels, lighter wheels and brighter wheels - and then what we would call highly-style, which means really a three-D look, kind of a sculptured look rather than a flat look with holes in it."

He said the new design offers manufacturers the advantage of having just one wheel per platform that has to undergo extensive and expensive safety testing, but then can provide a wide range of looks using bolt-on covers.

"What we've basically developed here is a stamped-wheel that has some spoke design, so we get stiffness in the spoke, gives you the three-D look, gives you a huge window - the biggest window you can possibly get," Kolakowski said.

He added that basic wheel can be painted for a base-wheel and then either clad-trimmed or fitted with a bolt-on cover to mimic bright aluminum wheels. "And throughout this whole thing you only tooled one wheel, you only tested one wheel, he declared.

While Kolakowski and his team are excited about the new wheel, they haven't got a paying client yet.

"We're working with several OEs and we're probably about a couple of model years away from seeing them on the road," he said. At least two OEMs are slated to begin in-house testing on the new wheel next month.

Once they do make it to the road, the new wheels are likely to be produced at Hayes Lemmerz plants in Bowling Green, Ky., and Sidalia, Mo.

Kolakowski said that while the new wheel may replace some conventional steel wheels, he sees it primarily as a competitor to mid-level aluminum wheels.

He predicted by mid-2005 Hayes will be producing "several million" of the new wheels annually.

By Phil Foley IJB