

More Space, More Freedom: ZF LIFETEC Unveils a Transformable Steering Wheel

- **In-Vehicle User Experience:** forward-looking features such as folding and interaction with the driver are pioneering future mobility
- **ZF LIFETEC's steering wheel system** folds the rim electromechanically downward in around two seconds, allowing car manufacturers to integrate a smooth retraction into the dashboard
- **Interior of the future:** The transformable steering wheel concept enables the vehicle to become a space for work or relaxation – for automated driving or when the vehicle is parked
- **"Our transformable steering wheel is a visionary concept that connects manual and automated driving in a seamless way."** – Harald Lutz, Head of Research & Development, ZF LIFETEC

ZF LIFETEC will present a pioneering steering wheel concept at IAA Mobility from September 9 to 12, 2025 (Hall A1, Stand D30). The concept responds to the transformation that vehicle interiors will undergo in the future in the age of automated driving. The steering wheel system from ZF LIFETEC features an internal electric drive unit that folds the rim downward in approximately two seconds – giving car manufacturers the option to integrate a smooth, silent retraction into the dashboard. This creates space for flexible, individual interior concepts ("Interior of the Future"). The transformable steering wheel offers greater comfort and space in the parking position, as well as in future automated driving modes.

The steering wheel is much more than a control element, it is the central interface between the driver and the vehicle. It represents quality, control, and the emotional connection between the driver, the vehicle, and the road. As a haptic experience, it appeals to the senses and inspires confidence. However, the shift toward automated driving is changing the requirements for the steering wheel fundamentally. "With the Transformable Steering Wheel, we have developed a forward-looking concept that establishes a context-dependent connection between manual and automated driving," explained Harald Lutz, ZF LIFETEC. "It combines classic functionality with new freedom in interior design."

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Switch quickly and quietly between driving modes.

The concept is based on a traditional steering wheel, complete with all familiar controls. The driver's airbag is integrated into the center hub of the new transformable steering wheel from ZF LIFETEC. In automated driving situations or in the parking position, the steering wheel rim can be folded downwards. Depending on the vehicle manufacturer's interior concept, car manufacturers can use this to retract the steering wheel rim into the dashboard.

With a folding time of just two seconds, the steering wheel enables quick transitions between driving modes. A light element in the center uses color differentiation to clearly indicate the current mode, ensuring easy recognition even in low-visibility conditions such as nighttime driving.

Compact technology for greater interior freedom

Vehicles are being used by consumers for various purposes. They are spending more time inside them, whether for work, relaxation, or consuming multimedia content. This is particularly evident in Asian markets, where there is a clear demand for spaces that seamlessly blend comfort and functionality. The idea behind ZF LIFETEC's transformable steering wheel is to support the evolution of future vehicle interiors. It creates additional space during parking phases or automated driving and enables the development of flexible, customizable interior concepts.

Thanks to its integrated anti-pinch protection, the steering wheel also ensures maximum safety in everyday use. This system protects limbs – such as fingers or hands – from being trapped during movement. ZF LIFETEC's transformable steering wheel concept can be adapted to meet customer-specific requirements, providing flexible solutions for various application scenarios. Depending on the use case, integration requirements can be addressed through a tailored development approach.

Caption 01: Retracted in seconds 01: The steering wheel creates space for new interior applications. Depending on customer preferences, it can be folded away to allow for relaxation or transformed into a platform for work and entertainment. Credit: ZF LIFETEC

Caption 02: Reduction to the necessary: The steering wheel only appears when needed, creating space for new in-vehicle uses, such as a mobile office or a relaxation area. Credit: ZF LIFETEC

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About ZF LIFETEC

ZF LIFETEC is a leading passive safety technology provider for the enhanced protection of vehicle occupants. Employing approximately 36,000 employees dedicated to the mission of saving lives with a technology driven approach, the company develops, manufactures and distributes a comprehensive product portfolio including airbag, seat belt and steering wheel systems, covering a wide range from small vehicles in the volume segment up to sophisticated luxury vehicles. Featuring a market share exceeding 20 percent in its core product categories, ZF LIFETEC has a worldwide presence at 51 locations across 22 countries. In the fiscal year 2024, the Group generated sales of EUR 4.8 billion. Based on its strong relationships with a diversified customer base of global OEMs, driven by outstanding quality, long-standing R&D collaborations besides a strong global innovation platform, ZF LIFETEC is well positioned for future growth opportunities arising from the automotive megatrends electrification, (semi-) automated driving, smart interior, as well as increasing safety demands and stepped-up safety regulations worldwide.

Learn more at www.zf-lifetec.com