Interview with Honda R&D's Head Engineer

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by Emily Sopensky

Honda R&D's Head Engineer is "Interviewed" by IEEE ITS Council Secretary

October 8, 1999, Tokyo Japan. The ITSC'99 has just concluded and I am honored to be dining with Tsuneo Takahashi, executive chief engineer, Honda R&D Co. The occasion is an interview for this newsletter. As he assigns me the seat of honor at the table for two, I whip out my pen, notebook and microrecorder and shoot him a question on R&D in true reporter fashion. Takahashi smiles politely as he tells me that his English is much better after some sake. Understanding his professional "shyness," I assure him that this a friendly interview. The sake flows as does the conversation, but not necessarily answers to my "hard-hitting" questions. This is what I learned.

Takahashi, who spent two years at the Honda plant in Marysville, Ohio, now reports to work at the Wako Research Center. In 1972 he graduated with a degree in electrical engineering from Osaka University. His research in navigation has taken him back and forth across the Pacific numerous times and has involved him not only with Honda, but also with international consortiums and the Japanese government. During the last ten years, he has been specifically interested in navigation information systems.

In 1975, when he came to the U.S. to do some research, he had his first margarita in Newport Beach, California. The bartender had to wake him up after he drank his third. But he still loves them. I watched him drink one two nights earlier. So somewhere he learned how to drink margaritas. I also learned that he turned 52 the following week.

Takahashi's interest in the pursuit of research and development in ITS and the success of IEEE in ITS matters is backed by Honda's long history as an independent-thinking, research-based company. In 1975, Honda R&D established it's first facility in the U.S. Two days before our interview, Honda announced that it had joined the California Fuel Cell Partnership. Established in April 1999, the partnership includes other auto manufacturers DaimlerChrysler, Ford, and Volkswagen as well as energy providers ARCO, Shell, and Texaco, and fuel-cell maker Ballard Power Systems and State of California (California Air Resources Board and the California Energy Commission). The Partnership was established to demonstrate the potential of fuel-cell technology, identify issues regarding potential fuels and fueling infrastructure and to increase public awareness of fuel-cell technology.

In December 1999, Honda fans and environmentalists will get a chance to buy an Insight, the first hybrid gasoline-electric car to be sold in the U.S. It will be the most fuel-efficient car available in the U.S. (EPA city/highway ratings of 61/70 mpg), and will also meet California's Ultra Low-Emission

Vehicle standard. In addition, more than 85 percent of the vehicles it sells during the 2000 Model Year will be equipped with advanced low-emission technology.