

NEW YORK

Horseless carriage designer wants to bring 'Great Gatsby' era cars to Central Park

Animal advocates are getting behind Jason Wenig's design for electric automobile that could replace horse-drawn carriages.

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SHAWN INGLIMA

Horse-drawn carriages are under threat by newly proposed electric 'horseless carriages' designed after a 1909 Pierce-Arrow and Packard.

A Brooklyn-born exotic car designer is putting a new spin on an old-fashioned vehicle that animal advocates hope will replace horse-drawn carriages in the city.

Jason Wenig of the Creative Workshop in Florida is building a prototype of an electric "horseless carriage" that could debut on city streets in about a year.

"It's a turn-of-the-century brass-era car reenvisioned for modern use," said Wenig, who is using the 1909 Pierce-Arrow and Packard as inspiration.

Wenig, an animal lover who shares his workshop with two rescued dogs, was contracted by New Yorkers for Clean, Livable and Safe Streets (NYCLASS) to build the car from scratch. The prototype will cost about \$450,000 to manufacture.

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The prototype model animal rights advocates hope will replace horse-drawn carriages.

The group, which has helped fund controversial television ads slamming City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, said it is determined to get the horseless carriage on the streets as part of a pilot program.

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NYClass' ultimate goal is to eliminate horse-drawn carriages in New York City.

"We recognize the City Council would like to see that this is a viable option before making any commitment to replacing the horses," said Allie Feldman, lead organizer for NYClass. "Let the tourists — and everyone else — try it."



Jason Wenig of the Creative Workshop in Florida was born in Brooklyn and excited to offer a more 'ergonomic' and comfortable ride through Central Park.

Feldman said the vehicle, designed to fit eight people, features ergonomic and safety features not available in horse-drawn carriages, such as a sound system and seat belts.

"Passengers will feel like they are being transformed into the 'Great Gatsby' era in a modern car," she said.

City Councilwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito (D-Manhattan) has been encouraging her colleagues to support a pilot project for the car.

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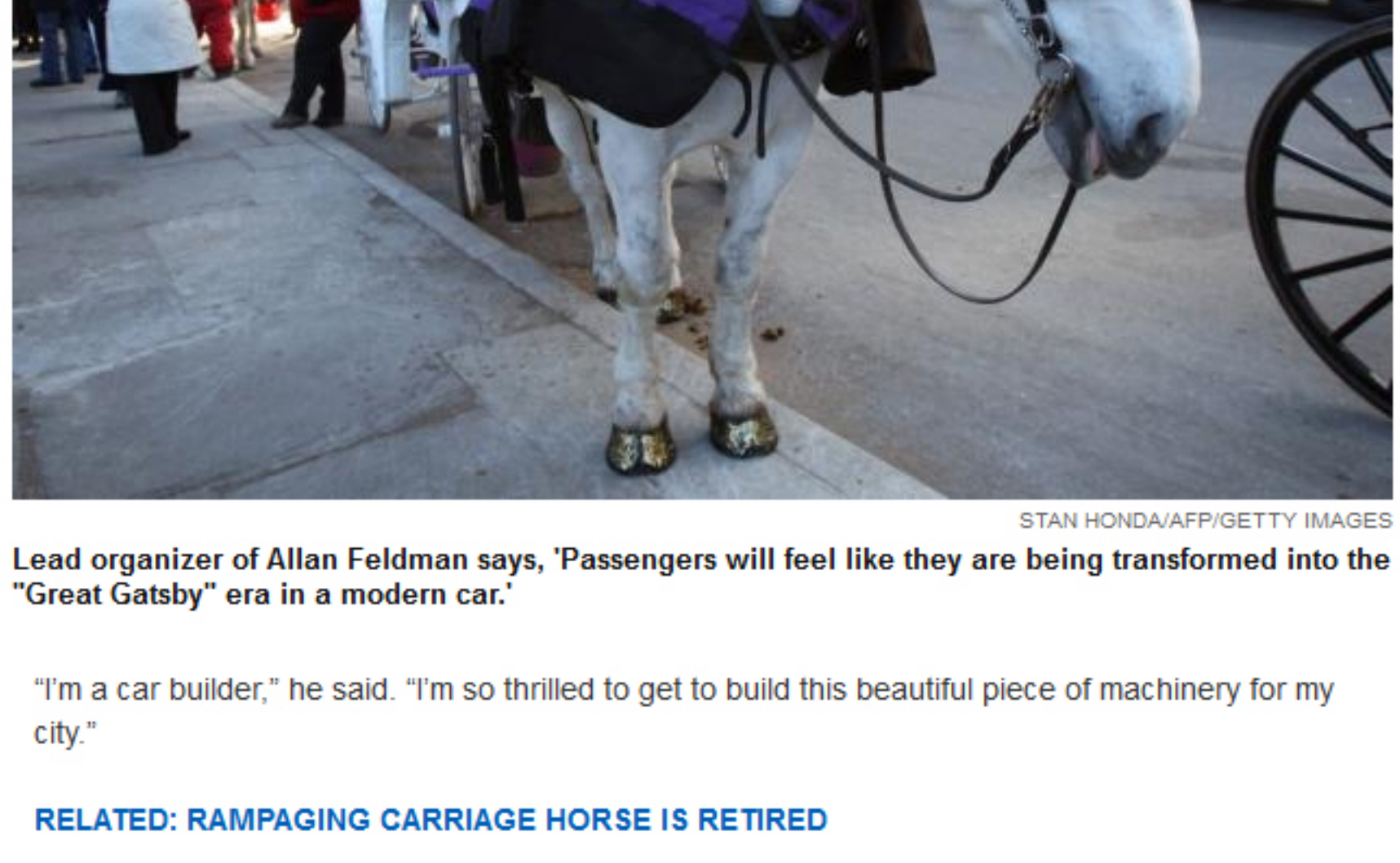
New Yorkers for Clean, Livable and Safe Streets (NYCLASS), which opposes horse carriages, has contributed financing to attack ads against Christine Quinn for mayor.

"The pilot would just allow an opportunity to try and gather some data on how it's received," she said. "This would show people the possibility of having these cars."

But Quinn (D-Manhattan) is not onboard with the plan.

"We've discussed this with (the) Central Park Conservancy, who expressed serious concerns about the project," said Quinn spokesman Jamie McShane. "Based on these concerns, Speaker Quinn does not support this proposal at this time."

While NYClass and lawmakers try to persuade the city to sign off on a pilot project, Wenig said he would not get involved in the sticky politics surrounding the project.



STAN HONDA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Lead organizer of Allan Feldman says, 'Passengers will feel like they are being transformed into the "Great Gatsby" era in a modern car.'

"I'm a car builder," he said. "I'm so thrilled to get to build this beautiful piece of machinery for my city."

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Horse carriage owner Ian McKeever said his industry is as "iconic as the Empire State Building" and cannot be replaced by fancy cars.

He had a supporter in Central Park on Saturday.

"It's classic to have the horses. There's something magical about horses being here still, in 2013," said Crystal Farrar, 29, of Boston.

"They stink and there's pee puddles everywhere, but you'd hate to see them go."