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Honda to Back Trade Show

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Honda Motor Co., aiming to heat up performance enthusiasts' interest in its cars, has agreed to sponsor this fall's giant Specialty Equipment Market Assn. trade show in Las Vegas.

Honda will become the first import brand to sponsor the SEMA trade show, known for its massive display of customizing and performance equipment.

The show, which began in Los Angeles in 1967 and moved to Las Vegas in 1979, is now the world's largest devoted to aftermarket equipment that consumers purchase to dress up their vehicles.

The November event regularly draws more than 100,000 industry representatives. The gathering, designed to allow the more than 5,000 members of Diamond Bar-based SEMA to show off their wares, also has become a major venue for automakers.

Ford Motor Co. used last year's event to boost interest in its 2005 Mustang. A sponsor typically has 50 or more vehicles customized and displayed at the show by SEMA members who develop parts and equipment especially for the new models.

Torrance-based American Honda Motor Co. will use its sponsorship to promote vehicles including the new Ridgeline pickup and the 2006 Civic Si, a youth-oriented model.

"It gives us a great opportunity to showcase in front of the aftermarket sellers and [performance] tuners who are so important" to the success of vehicles such as the Civic Si, Honda spokesman Andy Boyd said.