

Toyota aims to roll out plug-in Prius in two years

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A Toyota Prius is seen in a Tokyo showroom. The world's biggest car-maker Toyota Motor said Monday that it plans to begin commercial sales of its first plug-in hybrid vehicle in about two years, aiming to meet growing demand for fuel-efficient cars.

Toyota Motor said Monday that it plans to begin commercial sales of its first plug-in hybrid vehicle in about two years, aiming to meet growing demand for fuel-efficient cars.

The Japanese giant, the world's largest automaker, hopes to sell several tens of thousands of the plug-in Prius car, which it says will have an affordable price tag.

In part to gauge demand for the cars, Toyota said it would start leasing some 600 [plug-in hybrids](#) in the first half of 2010 to government agencies and businesses -- 230 in Japan, 200 in Europe and 150 in the United States.

The French city of Strasbourg is leasing about 100 of the plug-in Prius vehicles, powered by a combination of petrol and lithium-ion batteries that can be charged from a conventional electrical outlet.

The plug-in hybrid runs 23.4 kilometres (14.5 miles) in the electric mode alone on one charge and has an average fuel efficiency of 57 kilometres per litre, based on Japanese road conditions.

The efficiency is an improvement on the conventional Prius which boasts an average fuel efficiency of 30.6 kilometres per litre.

Combining the plug-in system with a conventional [hybrid technology](#) allowed the company to keep down the production cost compared with a full electric car, said Toyota vice president Takeshi Uchiyamada.

"The plug-in hybrid also solves users' concern about an electric car running out power," he said.

Toyota is also considering starting marketing a fuel-cell hybrid in 2015, he said.

Japanese automakers have made strides with [hybrid cars](#) because of high oil prices and growing concern about emissions blamed for global warming.

Toyota has sold more than 1.25 million Prius vehicles since the first version's launch in 1997, making it the world's most popular hybrid.

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