Portable chargers, boosters to ease green car woes

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A Renault Zoe electric car is displayed at the French carmaker's booth at the 82nd Geneva Motor Show on March 7, 2012 in Geneva.

Chevrolet Europe's president Susan Doherty drives to work every day in an electric car, and thanks to a recharging station at work, she never worries about running out of power.

For most other people, however, it remains a challenge to find electric charging stations to refuel.

As a result sales of electric cars have lagged, with most consumers going for hybrid options that at least offer the possibility of running on petrol or diesel.

But with interest in going green growing among consumers, and with

tougher emissions standards to kick in from 2013 across the European Union, companies are beginning to introduce new solutions.

At this year's Geneva Motor Show, several car components firms exhibited portable chargers while others announced deals with major automakers to build more charging stations to ease refueling headaches.

After all, "electricity is the way to go in the future especially if we want to have zero emission vehicles," Doherty said.

Swiss firm Alpiq E-Mobility AG announced an agreement with Toyota to fit charging infrastructure at its 250 dealers across Switzerland.

In addition, it will also offer a charging station to go with each of Toyota's best-selling hybrid car Prius.

It is an "an important step towards establishing e-mobility in our country," said Alpiq managing director Peter Arnet.

Another Swiss company, Green Motion, exhibited several types of chargers at the show, ranging from a portable gadget that weighs just 6 kilogrammes (13 pounds) to a 210 kilogramme installation which looks much like a petrol pump.

"People will want to charge at home," a spokeswoman for the firm said, as she showcased the portable version.

British company, Controlled Power Technologies, however, had another solution.

Rather than offering chargers, it showcased an energy booster that would allow a car to run with the same power as a larger one even though it was using a smaller engine.

"We offer the economy of a diesel, low C02 emissions and the performance of a two litre engine at an affordable price," said the company's chief executive Nick Pascoe.

Despite substituting a two litre engine on a Volkswagen Passat with a 1.4 litre one, the company's booster gave the car greater pulling power, while at the same time meeting tougher emission standards, he told AFP.

"Instead of adding thousands of euros to the cost we add tens of euros," Pascoe added.

Manufacturers are progressively having to increase the percentage of cars they sell in the European Union with carbon emissions below 130 grams per kilometre, with passenger cars to meet this level by 2015.