

Drivers, start your batteries: electric cars to race

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Motor racing is set for an electric makeover that will see a new generation of green cars speeding at 220 kmh (138 mph) around urban racetracks—at least until their batteries run out. Alejandro Agag, CEO of Formula E Holdings, pictured in 2011, says the global championship, which has been authorized by motorsport's governing body will help finally make electric cars popular.

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Alejandro Agag, CEO of Formula E Holdings, says the global championship, which has been authorized by motorsport's governing body the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile, will help finally make [electric cars](#) popular.

"That is one of our main objectives: to change perceptions of people about electric cars if we manage to have a championship that is sexy, that people like, that they see people racing without breaking down," he told AFP.

Formula E is planned to start in 2014 with 10 races staged worldwide between about May and November.

Organizers hope for all the races to take place in city centers, potentially stretching from European capitals like Paris, London and Rome to more far-flung locales like Moscow, Beijing, Sydney and even Morocco's ancient city of Marrakech.

[Rio de Janeiro](#) is the first city to come on board.

New York is another priority, although no formal talks have been held, and several other US cities could be involved, including Los Angeles, said Agag, who spoke to AFP in New York on Wednesday.

"We want this to have quite a strong American DNA, because (despite) what everyone says, innovation is still here in America. America is the home of innovation."

Agag said he wants races inside cities partly for the spectacle and partly to exploit what he says is a major advantage of the electric cars over [Formula One](#)'s scream machines: relative quiet.

"We have noise, but it's a very moderate noise. The spectators will still have the emotion of watching the race with that noise there..., but you won't hear that noise up to one mile from the track.

"So it's ideal for city centers, where [noise pollution](#) is a very serious problem," Agag said.

The big unknown is whether racing fans—who generally thrive on Formula One's extremes of speed and noise—will embrace Formula E.

The prototype vehicle developed by France's Formulec has a maximum speed of 220 kmh and accelerates from zero to 100 kmh in three seconds.

That's not quite as fast as the monstrous Formula One cars, which can hit 100 kmh in less than two seconds.

The most crucial statistic, though, is battery life: 25 minutes.

That means that instead of Formula One's pit stop ballet of tire changes, Formula E drivers will change batteries. Or, rather, they'll hop out of their cars half way into the one-hour race and get into other ones.

To make things more interesting, the second car will be waiting 100 meters (328 feet) away.

"The drivers will have to race. It will be very spectacular on television," Agag said.

Tire changes, which Agag criticized as environmentally unfriendly, won't take place at all.

At the end of 10 races there'll be a champion, while each race winner stands to get about 400,000 euros (\$516,000) in prize money.

Agag says he hopes traditional racing teams—McLaren has already expressed interest—will be joined by big brands like Google or Coca-Cola, as well as electric car companies, in creating the 10 teams.

"It's a great occasion for companies to put their money where their

mouth is. Many companies speak about environment, the problems of sustainability. This is a very good opportunity to show their commitment," he said.

The broader impact, Agag hopes, will go far beyond the race track. Ordinary drivers who are still unconvinced by the emerging technology will see "that electric cars are a valid option for their daily lives."

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