

Croatian aims for high-end niche with electric city car

March 10 2013, by Lajla Veselica



The Dok-ing XD electric car created by Croatian industrialist Vjekoslav Majetic is on display at the LA Auto Show on November 17, 2011 in Los Angeles, California. A Croatian car buff has briefly set aside his day job of building demining and firefighting robots to satisfy his childhood dream of making a high-end electric auto he hopes will be a global hit with eco-conscious customers.

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The first model, a pinkish violet three-seater with gullwing doors, proudly dominates the workshop of Dok-Ing, a company run by Vjekoslav Majetic in one of Zagreb's industrial suburbs.

More than two decades of experience producing [robotic systems](#) for use in extreme conditions have provided the know-how that propelled Majetic's company into a sophisticated but risky car-making adventure.

"We had the knowledge, technology and desire to make such a car, on top of our other products," Majetic told AFP.

The 57-year old transport engineer began developing his idea five years ago and presented the first "Loox" prototype at the [Geneva Auto Show](#) in 2010.

Apart from batteries and windows, most parts for the 2.9-meter (nine-foot) long vehicle are made in Croatia, which currently has no [car industry](#) at all.

Dok-Ing engineers were tasked with designing a luxury city car defined by "fine curves, elegant wheels and a stunning interior," Majetic said.

"It is a status symbol, an expensive small [city car](#) that is easy to park, with high performance and all possible electronic comforts," he added.

High quality components such as a reinforced-aluminium chassis and carbon-kevlar body, as well as cutting-edge technologies used in Loox's production might well give a buyer sticker shock however.

At 50,000 euros (\$68,000), the car is considerably more expensive than

similar vehicles.

Majetic knows the Loox is "not profitable," contrary to his other products, like the MV-4, a portable, highly maneuverable mine clearance system.

"Loox's future will depend on the market: if it is interesting for European or global market, we will start a mass production," he concluded.

"If not, it will become a tailor-made vehicle in line with client's wishes."

Experts say the price is too high for Croatian drivers whose average monthly salary is 730 euros.

"It is hard to imagine that someone would pay such a price for a no-name car," auto journalist Marin Galic said.

Although it is primarily an urban vehicle, Loox boasts the performance of a sports car.

With synchronized 45 kW electric motors front and rear, it can reach 100 kilometres per hour (63 mph) in just 7.5 seconds.

A 32 kWh battery provides range of up to 250 kilometres (155 miles) at an average speed of 40 kilometres per hour (25 mph), and charging the Loox takes three to eight hours from an ordinary power socket.

The company is planning to produce five vehicles by the end of this year, to be driven by its employees.

Majetic said his company could build up to 100 cars a year while maintaining its core business, but Galic believes the best way forward

would be to hook up with a powerful, strategic partner.

Croatia, which is set to join the European Union in July, has only a few hundred electric and hybrid vehicles of a total 1.4 million cars, a small market that Volkswagen leads with a share of 14 percent.

One potential customer said that Loox's chances for success would depend on how electric cars fare in general.

"Dok-Ing should turn towards the local business sector as well as the foreign market," advised Nenad Tonkovic, a 45-year-old lawyer from Zagreb.

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Citation: Croatian aims for high-end niche with electric city car (2013, March 10) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-03-croatian-aims-high-end-niche-electric.html>

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