

Electric cars slow to gain traction in Germany

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German Chancellor Angela Merkel (R) looks at a Mercedes E-drive electric car during the Electric Mobility conference on May 27, 2013. Germany plans to have one million electric vehicles on its roads by 2020, but so far that goal seems remote.

Germany plans to have one million electric vehicles on its roads by 2020, but so far that goal seems remote as the nation's motorists have shown little love for the quietly humming vehicles.

So far, the number of [electric vehicles](#) registered in Germany is just some 7,000.

Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) put on a brave face in light of the statistics, speaking Monday at a government-organised international forum in Berlin, where she affirmed that she is a believer in [electric mobility](#).

"Our plans are ambitious," she conceded about the one-million goal pronounced by her government in 2009. "But we have a good chance of sticking to the timetable."

Her government has spent almost 1.5 billion euros (\$1.9 billion) to subsidise research and development in electric mobility and is promoting the models by scrapping car registration tax for the first 10 years.

However, unlike neighbouring France, Germany does not offer bonuses for the purchase of electric vehicles.

[Electric cars](#) produce no exhaust pipe emissions and can help clear the air in congested cities, while their [carbon footprint](#) ultimately depends on the type of energy used to charge their batteries.

Problems so far include the high cost of the batteries, usually lithium-ion types, and limited networks of charging stations, which make drivers fear being left on the side of the road with dead batteries.

After Japan's 2011 [Fukushima nuclear accident](#) Merkel rang in an ambitious [energy transition](#) away from fossil fuels and nuclear power toward renewables such as wind, solar and biofuels.



A Smart Forvision concept car is pictured at the Electric Mobility conference in Berlin on May 27, 2013. Germany has spent almost 1.5 billion euros to subsidise research and development in electric mobility and is promoting the models by scrapping car registration tax for the first 10 years.

Speaking on Monday, she said the push for electric cars would dovetail with that plan, to ensure that the power that drives electric cars is produced from clean, [alternative energy sources](#).

She said electric cars could be a "core sector of our industrial production", with the [auto sector](#) making up one quarter of Germany's exports.

But so far Germans, used to putting their gas pedals to the floor on the famous autobahn highways, have been slow to accept electric cars.

In the first four months of the year, only about 1,500 electric cars were

newly registered, after a total of about 3,000 last year. There are also 65,000 registered hybrid vehicles with both electric and fuel engines.

Henning Kagermann, coordinator of the Platform for Electric Mobility that evaluates the electric car strategy, said that, under current conditions, 600,000 electric vehicles is a more realistic figure for 2020.

"Electromobility is treading water," said Ferdinand Dudenhofer, director of the automotive research centre of the University of Duisburg-Essen.

He said so far the market share of electric and hybrid cars is just 0.13 percent, calling it "less than a niche of a niche market".

But proponents say the boom is just around the corner.



Visitors look at an Audi F12 concept car during the Electric Mobility conference on May 27, 2013 in Berlin. Electric cars produce no exhaust pipe emissions and

can help clear the air in congested cities.

German carmakers plan to launch about 15 electric car models by late 2014, with plans to move into mass production by 2017.

Over the next three to four years, German industry is set to invest about 12 billion euros to develop alternative fuel engines.

VW chief Martin Winterkorn—whose company this year launches its new electric Golf—said at the weekend that the government must help by improving infrastructure, such as a network of charging stations and incentives such as electric-car-only lanes.

In comments to the newspaper Bild am Sonntag, he said the one-million goal was realistic if prices fall with mass production, adding: "I am convinced that that can happen."

Transport Minister Peter Ramsauer also insisted "the government sees no reason to step back from the goal of one million electric cars by 2020. The first steps are usually the hardest, but sales will increase rapidly."

Philippe Varin, chief executive of PSA Peugeot Citroen, said "it will be a gradual process over 10 years" to convince consumers to embrace first hybrids and plug-in hybrids and finally 100 percent electric vehicles.

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