

GM working on 200-mile electric car, exec says (Update)

September 16 2013, by Tom Krisher

As automakers race to make cheaper electric cars with greater battery range, General Motors is working on one that can go 200 miles (320 kilometers) per charge at a cost of about \$30,000, a top company executive said.

Vice President of Global Product Development Doug Parks wouldn't say when or if such a car will be built, however.

Currently GM sells the \$35,000 Chevrolet Volt plug-in hybrid, which can go 38 miles (61 kilometers) on electricity before a gas-powered generator kicks in. It also offers the all-electric Chevy Spark subcompact that can go 82 miles (132 kilometers) on a charge. It starts at \$26,685. Electric cars are eligible for a \$7,500 federal tax credit.

The 200-mile (320-kilometer) car would cost about the same as the current Volt, and it would match the range and be far cheaper than Tesla Motors' \$71,000, all-electric Model S. The Model S can go up to 265 miles (426 kilometers) on a single charge.

A moderately priced electric car with a 200-mile range would make electric cars more appealing to Americans, solving the two chief complaints about such cars: Anxiety over running out of power and high price, said Tom Libby, lead North American analyst for the Polk automotive research firm.

"That would be a huge step forward, no question," he said.

Currently, cars powered solely by batteries make up only 0.3 percent of U.S. sales, Libby said, but he's confident that would increase if an automaker came out with a moderately priced 200-mile car.

Tesla gets accolades for the Model S, including the highest test score ever recorded by Consumer Reports magazine. And the Palo Alto, California, company also is working on a mass-market electric car. CEO Elon Musk has said it will have around a 200-mile range and cost about \$35,000. It could go on sales as early as the end of 2016, he has said.

GM has taken a different approach from Tesla, Parks said, pricing electric vehicles from around \$25,000 to about \$40,000. They don't go as far after each charge, which has kept battery costs down and made the cars more affordable, he said.

"Their pricing is up there for a real unique customer," Parks said of Tesla. "The real trick will be who can do a 200-mile car for more of the price range I'm talking about. We're all in races to do that."

The 200-mile car won't be the next-generation Volt. Speaking at a Monday event to show off GM's expanded battery laboratory at its technical center in Warren, a suburb north of Detroit, Parks said that GM engineers are now working on a new Volt, which will go a little farther on electricity than the current model and cost a little less. He wouldn't say when it will arrive in showrooms or how much it will cost.

GM on Monday showed off a 50,000-square-foot (4,645-sq. meter) addition to the battery lab. The added space, which nearly doubled the lab's size, will let the company test batteries and computer controls much faster than before. Parks said the goal is to develop electric cars twice as fast as the company could in the past. It took GM about four years to develop the Volt and bring it to market.

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Citation: GM working on 200-mile electric car, exec says (Update) (2013, September 16)
retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-09-gm-mile-electric-car-exec.html>

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