

Nissan-Renault boss upbeat about green car future

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Carlos Ghosn (left) with Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay at a press conference in Thimphu on February 21, 2014

Nissan-Renault chief executive Carlos Ghosn insists the future is still bright for electric cars despite pushing a global sales target back by four years, he told AFP in an interview on Friday.

Speaking in the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan where he sealed a deal to supply the government with a fleet of battery-powered Nissan

Leafs, Ghosn said the agreement highlighted the potential for the green vehicle market as pressure grows around the world to meet tougher emission standards.

Ghosn, who invited AFP and several other media organisations to accompany him on his visit, said that Bhutan could showcase the possibilities for a market which has had to battle complaints about range, performance, re-fuelling infrastructure and comparatively high prices.

As boss of Nissan and its French partner Renault, Ghosn has been a long-time evangelist for [electric vehicles](#) (EVs) and says he remains confident about the future.

"We had set ourselves a goal of selling 1.5 million units (worldwide) between Renault and Nissan by 2016 although we have now pushed that target date back to 2020," he said.

"We have to admit that the progress of sales has been slower than we thought it would be but the figures are continuing to grow.

"Sales of the Leaf have now gone past 100,000 and it is now selling at a rate of almost 60,000 a year. As for Renault, sales of the Zoe will increase in 2014.

"All of it is very closely linked on the development of infrastructures, but we are seeing more and more competitors coming onto the scene which is always a tell-tale sign."



Carlos Ghosn stands next to a Nissan Leaf electric car in Thimphu on February 21, 2014

The Leaf, which will now become a common sight on the streets of Bhutan's picturesque capital Thimphu, became the first electric car to sell more than 100,000 units at the end of last year.

'An ideal fit'

Ghosn said that the car was an ideal fit for Bhutan, a country which has an abundance of hydro-electric power. While it sells electricity to neighbouring India, Bhutan also has to import traditional fossil fuels to meet the needs of motorists.

"Bhutan has all the ingredients to be a success story when it comes to electric cars," said Ghosn.

"It generates its electricity through hydropower and so doesn't emit any CO₂. And it doesn't want to import petrol as it is worried about its balance of payments," he added.

Ghosn said that while the initial target was to see hundreds of electric vehicles in Bhutan, he said there was no reason why the number could not reach into the thousands with the country's prime minister setting a zero emissions target.

"This is a country that is saying the future is electric and that it wants to design a transport policy that preserve its environment," he said.

"It's important because it is the first country that has said this so clearly, and is implementing the necessary legislation, regulations and taxation to make it work."

One of the Leaf's chief attractions is its special fast charger which can be fired up in just half an hour, a vast improvement on the eight hours that it takes to recharge batteries linked up to the mains electricity.

It can reach speeds of up to 150 kilometres (93 miles) per hour and has a range of 200 kilometres.

While the Leaf is the clear market leader, Ghosn has previously revealed that Renault, which owns more than 40 percent of the Japanese company, is looking at producing [electric cars](#) in China to gain entry to the market.

Ghosn said the alliance had enabled the companies to make joint savings of 2.8 billion euros in 2013 and which he hoped would rise to 4.3 billion euros by 2016.

But he said that such "synergies" would not compromise the companies'

distinctive culture or brand, saying they would continue to have "a strong Japanese identity, a strong French identity".

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