

Paris entrepreneur's 2CV tours to go electric

February 2 2016, by Tangi Quemener



An employee of the French tourist company Four Wheels Under an Umbrella drives a Citroen 2CV electric car close to the Eiffel tower in Paris

The humble "Deux Chevaux", once ubiquitous in the French countryside, chugging down tree-lined roads—cue accordion music—is now more of a curiosity than a cheap and cheerful runabout.

For entrepreneur Florent Dargnies, the Citroen 2CV—as the car is known for short—is the heart and soul of his Paris tour company, ferrying some 20,000 visitors around the French capital each year.

But the car comes with a built-in problem: its petrol-fuelled thermal engine does not meet ever-stricter emissions standards.

At the instigation of Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo, all cars registered before 1997 will be barred from Paris streets during the day beginning in July.

Dagnies, anticipating the problem, began working on going electric five years ago, delving into not only the research and development required but also the administrative hurdles he would face.

Late last year, he obtained a patent for the electric 2CV and a green light from Citroen.

His prototype has a 16-kilowatt powertrain manufactured by Mia Electric, a now defunct company that produced "made in France" electric cars.

The battery allows the car to cover 80 kilometres (50 miles) before recharging, enough for any of his tours, which include "Secret Paris", "Romantic Paris" and "Paris Impressionism".



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Its top speed is a nippy 110 kilometres (almost 70 miles) an hour.

"Our hope is to really work with City Hall not only so that this vehicle is accepted but so that it contributes to the image, to the French art of living," Dagnies told AFP.

Citroen's answer to the Volkswagen Beetle was first produced in 1948, and kept rolling off the production line until 1990, more than five million of them.

That was when the French auto giant had to stop producing them because of [emissions standards](#).



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These included instructions suggesting that a farmer's wife should have no trouble driving it on "the worst roads" and that the suspension should ensure that a basketful of eggs riding on the backseat would survive intact.

The cars are ideal for Dagnies' tours, which are heavy on nostalgia for the France of yesteryear.

Also, since they are convertibles, they "offer great views of the monuments", he says.

Set up in 2003, the company now boasts a fleet of 40 2CVs driven by around 100 chauffeurs.

But if Dargnies converts them all to electric power, would their silent operation make them unauthentic?

Dargnies concedes that the distinctive thrum of the original air-cooled motor was as familiar to generations of his countrymen as the car's rounded shape and its ultra-soft suspension system.

"The noise is part of the car's charm," he said, adding that his electric version could one day, like some electric BMWs and Renaults, come with recorded audio of the sound that gets louder with speed.

"It doesn't seem too complicated," he said.

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Citation: Paris entrepreneur's 2CV tours to go electric (2016, February 2) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-02-paris-entrepreneur-2cv-electric.html>

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