

Vacuum maker Dyson plans expansion for UK electric car site

August 30 2018, by Kelvin Chan

Dyson, the British company best known for its ground-breaking vacuum cleaners, said Thursday that it plans to build auto test tracks as it expands electric vehicle development at a former Royal Air Force airfield.

The company said it plans to spend an additional 116 million pounds (\$151 million) to build more than 10 miles (16 kilometers) of test tracks at the former Hullavington Airfield in southern England. The cars are expected to launch in 2021.

It also plans new office buildings for more than 2,000 staff that will eventually be employed at the site. Overall, Dyson has said it will invest 2 billion pounds in its electric car program.

Billionaire founder James Dyson, one of Britain's most successful entrepreneurs, has been a prominent advocate of Brexit but has faced criticism for moving much of the firm's production to Asia. Dyson has said that the British government should leave the European Union immediately, then work out trade deals with the bloc and others.

The company has already spent 84 million pounds restoring two hangars dating from 1938, where 400 employees now work. In the next phase of development at the 750-acre site, the company is proposing to build tracks to put battery-powered vehicles through their paces, including handling and stability, off-road driving, a skid pan and a high speed runway for speeds above 100 miles per hour (161 kph).

It will join an increasingly crowded field, as traditional automakers such as Mercedes-Benz, Audi and Jaguar Land Rover launch their own EVs to compete with Tesla.

"Tesla has done some amazing things and survived against the odds but have failed to make a profit," said David Bailey, an auto manufacturing expert and professor at Aston University.

"My concern is that they've never made cars before."

The challenge for Dyson is to come up with a breakthrough technology, either in batteries or motors, he added. He also suggested that Dyson may be better off linking up with an established carmaker.

Dyson hasn't released any details about the vehicle, though it has indicated it plans to incorporate in-house solid state lithium battery technology, acquired through its 2015 purchase of Michigan company Sakti3. Solid state batteries are lighter than conventional cells but hold much more energy, promising extended range for electric vehicles.

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