

Mitsubishi rolls out zero-emission electric minicar

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Japan's auto giant Mitsubishi Motors President Osamu Masuko introduces the company's first mass production electric vehicle "iMiEV" at the company's headquarters in Tokyo for the World Environment Day. The four-seater compact EV has a range of 160km and is chargeable from either a home power outlet or quick charge station. It will go on sale in July.

Japan's Mitsubishi Motors Corp. rolled out its first zero-emission electric minicar Friday, hoping to capture a slice of the fast-growing market for environmentally friendly vehicles.

The new "i-MiEV" -- short for Mitsubishi Innovative Electric Vehicle -- can seat four adults, emits no carbon dioxide and has a range of up to 160 kilometers (100 miles) on a fully-charged battery.

The distance should be enough for day-to-day city driving in Japan, said company president Osamu Masuko, who added that the automaker was initially targeting corporate and government clients.

"We at Mitsubishi Motors hope to build technology that will put us in a competitive position in the global market of the future," he told a press conference.

"Thinking about the Japanese [auto](#) industry in 10 to 20 years from now, we must make sure the industry does not fall behind our foreign rivals."

Mitsubishi says the car, priced at 4.6 million yen (47,500 dollars), runs quietly but accelerates quickly, and the running cost is one third of that of a petrol-powered car -- or less if it is charged during off-peak hours.

Because of its efficiency -- including converting braking energy into battery power -- the vehicle emits only one third of the CO₂ of a petrol car when the electricity generated to recharge it at a power plant is factored in.

The battery can be charged overnight on a domestic power source, or it can be powered up through quick-chargers now being developed by power companies, Mitsubishi said.

The i-MiEV is the latest addition to a lineup of Japanese autos with [green technology](#).

Industry leader Toyota Motors' Prius hybrid became Japan's best selling car in monthly sales in May, pulling ahead of its rival, Honda's Insight, also a hybrid.

The Japanese government has offered tax breaks and other incentives for consumers to buy [fuel-efficient vehicles](#).

Masuko said: "The current launch price is high for ordinary motorists to purchase. But mass production will allow it to fall."

He added that Mitsubishi hopes to eventually bring the cost down to around two million yen.

For the year to March 2010, the company aims to sell 1,400 i-MiEVs to government and corporate users in Japan, in addition to 250 units overseas.

The company will start selling the vehicle to the general public from April 2010, with an annual target of 5,000 units in Japan and 1,000 overseas.

In 2011, Mitsubishi hopes to sell as many as 15,000 units, Masuko said, adding that the company would make a profit on the model once production rises above 30,000 vehicles.

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