

Nissan rolls out electric car at new headquarters

August 2 2009, By YURI KAGEYAMA , AP Business Writer



Nissan Motor Co. CEO Carlos Ghosn poses with the automaker's new electronic vehicle 'Leaf' during an opening ceremony of the company's new headquarters in Yokohama, Japan, Sunday, Aug. 2, 2009.(AP Photo/Itsuo Inouye)

(AP) -- Nissan Chief Executive Carlos Ghosn drove quietly out of the Japanese automaker's soon-to-open headquarters Sunday in the first public viewing of its new zero-emission vehicle.

It was the first time the external design was shown of Nissan Motor Co.'s environmentally friendly electric automobile, set to go on sale in Japan, the U.S. and Europe next year. The blue hatchback had a sporty design and a recharging opening in the front.

Designer Shiro Nakamura said the vehicle was designed to avoid a stereotypical futuristic design.

"This is not a niche car," he said. "We didn't make it unusual looking. It had to be a real car."

Nissan has promised that the Leaf, which goes into mass-production as a global model in 2012, will be about the same price as a gas-engine car such as the 1.5 million yen (\$15,000) Tiida, which sells abroad as the Versa, starting at about \$10,000.

Ghosn drove out on stage with former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi sitting next to him, and with a Yokohama governor and mayor in the rear seats.

"This car represents a real breakthrough," Ghosn told reporters and guests at a showroom in the new headquarters.

He said the new car and new office building in Yokohama, southwest of Tokyo, marked two fresh starts for Nissan, which hopes to take the lead in zero-emission vehicles.

Nissan, which has an alliance with Renault SA of France, has fallen behind Japanese rivals Toyota Motor Corp. and Honda Motor Co. in gas-electric hybrids that have become increasingly popular recently.

Nissan said the new 22-story headquarters was designed to be sufficiently energy efficient to qualify as one of the most ecological buildings in Japan. The company, which is losing money amid the global downturn, is selling its old Tokyo headquarters as part of efforts to cut costs.

Koizumi said environmentally friendly auto technology is key to Japan's economic growth.

"It was so unexpectedly smooth and quiet," he said after getting out of

the car. "I am sure this car is going to be popular."

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