



EDF Electric Transportation

The Network's Electronic Newsletter

N°149 - October 2009

News from Japan



A number of Japanese automobile manufacturers sent electric models to markets this past summer. Subaru, and its Stella Plug-in is a case in point, as is Mitsubishi's i-MiEV, whose sales for the month of August passed the 900-unit mark. Development of electric vehicles is benefitting from **financial assistance on the part of national and regional public authorities**; an example is the electric vehicle purchase one the part of the Tokyo Prefecture. Public agencies have also committed to various initiatives toward the development of recharging infrastructure.

Transportation services were the first businesses to embrace the electric vehicle. Kashiwasaki Taxi led the way in July with its i-MiEVs (160 km autonomy) in Niigata, quickly followed by Fuji Taxi in Matsuyama, who began the replacement of half of its fleet (30 or so liquefied natural gas powered vehicles) with i-MiEVs in August. On another front, Nihon Kotsu, one of Tokyo's biggest taxi companies has taken the decision to test electric vehicles and a rapid battery exchange system beginning in January 2010.

Car rental agencies have also weighed in with industry leader Nippon Rent-A-Car offering the Stella Plug-in since September, and MMC Rent-A-Car proposing the i-MiEV.

The movement toward electrics continues to gain steam, and is only held back by the vehicle's stiff price tags, and the lack of available recharging infrastructure. More and more businesses, however – particularly service stations and local retail shopping centers – are beginning to equip their parking facilities with recharging terminals. At the same time, several infrastructure manufacturers are preparing to install 300 rapid-charge stations in 2009 in a move towards the goal of 100 installations per year per manufacturer.

Research and development work goes on, with continuing investments on the part of equipment makers towards extending battery life and boosting recharging speeds. Toyota Motors is working with the University of Tohoku on a new type of lithium-ion battery capable of storing 10 times the charge of current li-on batteries of equal dimensions, and set to enter the market within the next 10 years. Panasonic, for its part, foresees conversion of the li-ion batteries used in laptop computers to use in vehicles in a move towards their goal of a 30% reduction in costs. Nippon Mining & Metals has perfected a process enabling the extraction of lithium from used batteries, and plans construction of a pilot factory at its R&D center in Ibaraki. The project is one of strategic importance for Japan, where the price of lithium has tripled over the past five years, and whose supplies depend completely on lithium imports from America and Chile.

Continuing in the footsteps of the Frankfurt Auto Show, the 2009 **Tokyo Motor Show** will increase floor space dedicated to rechargeable vehicles. Japanese automakers plan to unveil new models like Toyota's mini compact FT-EV II, an electric urban runabout with a 90 km autonomy, and which can attain speeds of up to 100 km/h.

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