

Survey: Consumers Willing to Pay Modest Premium for Electric Cars

Charging stations and battery swap locations are the most crucial to developing a sustainable electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure, according to more than 40 percent of respondents to PriceWaterhouseCooper's (PwC) Electric Vehicle Survey 2012.

Global hybrid and EV market share is forecast to reach 6.3 percent by 2020, according to PwC's Autofacts. As municipalities continue to work with the private sector to meet future demands and develop "Smart Cities," finding the ideal ratio between integrated public charging stations and the number of EVs on the road is a prevailing challenge when investing in existing and future infrastructure.

"Continued investment to improve upon the electric vehicle value chain, along with the pace of advancement in competing alternative fuel solutions will ultimately determine the level of success EVs are able to achieve," said Brandon Mason, senior analyst, PwC's Autofacts. "While we don't expect one to be parked in every driveway anytime soon, there is no doubt that EVs are here to stay."

Approximately 25 percent of survey respondents said one public station for every 20 EVs is an ideal ratio, while 20 percent indicated one station for every five vehicles is ideal. Roughly 80 percent of respondents also indicated that 30 minutes or less charge time is considered fast charging for EVs.

Focusing on price, nearly 46

percent of respondents felt that long-term total cost of ownership savings is the most likely reason consumers would be willing to pay an upfront premium for an EV. Automakers continue to evaluate the price premium consumers are willing to pay for an EV.

Survey respondents indicated that consumers willing to pay a premium price would need to see the electric car premium remain under \$5,000 (PHEVs 57.9 percent, PEVs 47.7 percent).

"Automakers accelerate their efforts to find solutions to reduce costs for battery, alternative drive train and the vehicle overall," said Oliver Hazimeh, automotive cleantech transportation leader, PwC. "Passing high initial development costs on to the consumer is not a long-term option as it is not viable to rely on long-term government incentives. Auto companies need to deploy smart vehicle and technology platforms and global partnerships to achieve economies of scale."

Survey respondents indicated global collaboration (26.6 percent) will lead the development and production of EVs and supporting technologies by 2020. Respondents said China will lead by 2020 (25.9 percent).

Automakers are working to find a balance between production and consumer demands. The trend is to build where you sell. Automakers planning for long-term success will likely have the competitive edge.

Ford Boosts Its Motorhome Chassis Output by a Third

by Irena Granaas

Americans value the freedom of the open road, and hitting the highway in an RV is a longstanding American tradition that is experiencing a renaissance as the U.S. economy begins to show signs of recovery.

To help the RV industry meet the growing demand for motorhomes, Ford is increasing production capacity by 35 percent for the Ford F-53 motorhome chassis and also the F-59 commercial chassis, both built by Ford's partner at the Detroit Chassis state-of-the-art plant in Detroit.

"We're pleased that while other chassis manufacturers have left this segment, Ford continues its commitment to the RV upfitter industry," said Ken Czubay, Ford vice president, U.S. Marketing, Sales and Service. "We're increasing our participation in this industry as motorhome customers return to the market."

According to data published on the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) website, shipments of Class A motorhomes rose more than 13 percent in 2012, with demand rising even more sharply at the close of the year, up 33 percent in December alone compared with December 2011, and up 43 percent in the fourth quarter. According to Ford, F-53 chassis registrations in 2012 reached their highest level since 2007.

The 285,749 towable units also bettered the year-end prediction posted in the Winter 2012 issue of *RV Roadsigns*, according to a recent news release on the RVIA website.

"The industry was able to capitalize on an improving economy and strengthening consumer confidence to post substantial gains in 2012," said RVIA President Richard Coon in the release. "We anticipate this moderate growth continuing in the coming year."

Class A motorhomes are recre-

ational vehicles built on a stripped truck chassis, using what otherwise would be the driver's area as part of the living area.

Ford supplies the suspension, powertrain, steering components and frame rails, and the units are sold to companies like Thor, Winnebago and Fleetwood for assembly into motorhomes, explained Ford Truck Communications Manager Mark Levine.

The RV chassis is offered in both the Class A and Class C (E-Series chassis) markets.

"We're pleased to be increasing our participation in this segment," Levine said.

Ford is also increasing production capacity of its 6.8-liter V10 engine that powers its F-53 motorhome chassis lineup by 25 percent.

The workhorse is also a very popular gasoline engine with Ford's commercial customers. The 6.8-liter V10 also is used to power the E-Series vans, F-Series Super Duty chassis cabs and the F-650 medium-duty truck.

The F-53 Class A lineup includes six choices, ranging from the 16,000-pound GVWR (gross vehicle weight rating) "tailgater's special" chassis up to the 26,000-pound GVWR chassis, from which motorhome builders can create the more advanced and luxurious RV bodies.

Library Class On Genealogy Quest

The Auburn Hills Public Library is holding a special program for adults titled "Using Vital Records in Your Genealogy Research."

The class will be held on Saturday, March 23, in the Large Meeting Room from 10:30 a.m. to noon. Those attending will learn what are vital records and why they are important in genealogy research. Eleven openings available. Go to auburn-hills.lib.mi.us to register.



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