

Nissan mass-produced EV Leaf debuts Dec. 20

YOKOHAMA (Kyodo) Nissan Motor Co. said Friday it will launch its Leaf electric vehicle in Japan on Dec. 20 as its first mass-produced electric car for the global market.

The 100 percent electric, zero-emission vehicle is designed for Nissan to take the lead in the fledging EV market, where Toyota Motor Corp. and Honda Motor Co. also plan to launch similar vehicles as early as 2012, it said.

The carmaker, 43 percent owned by France's Renault SA, will market the five-seat hatchback EV in the United States later in the month and in Europe in early 2011.

"The new era toward zero-emission mobility will start with the Nissan Leaf," Chief Operating Officer Toshiyuki Shiga said at a news conference at Nissan's headquarters in Yokohama. "We believe this will be the beginning of the new era for the world's automobile industry, as well as a sustainable low-carbon society."

The Leaf is the second electric vehicle to be mass-produced by a major Japanese automaker, after the hatchback i-MiEV launched by Mitsubishi Motors Corp. last year.

Fuji Heavy Industry Ltd., which launched the Subaru Plug-in Stella last year, also eyes mass-production.

Production will start in the U.S. at Smyrna, Tenn., in late 2012 and at Sunderland, Britain, in early 2013. Annual output capacity in Tennessee will be 150,000 cars, while the figure for Sunderland will be 50,000, Nissan said.

"It is Nissan's commitment to be the leader in zero-emission, and we will make various efforts and investments to achieve the goal with our alliance partner Renault," Shiga said.

The Leaf will be powered by lithium-ion batteries and will have a driving range of 200 km per charge. It takes about eight

hours to fully charge the car using 200-volt chargers, Nissan said.

The vehicle will have a starting price of ¥3.76 million, but the actual price consumers pay will be ¥2.98 million as the car will be eligible for government subsidies, the automaker said.

Nissan had set a sales target for the Leaf through next March at 6,000 units, but the automaker already reached that goal in the first two months after it started accepting preorders in April.

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