

Hybrid cars

Does the recent increase in production of 'hybrid cars' by manufacturers mean there is finally a market for these fuel-saving vehicles?

1 What car do you own? Which factors influenced your choice of vehicle? Use some of the ideas in the box.

manufacturers' reputation design speed environmental factors
 nationally-produced comfort fuel efficiency size price

2 Read the headings a–d. Match them to the paragraphs in the article.

- (a) 'Mild' hybrids (b) Ford announcement (c) Predictions (d) Hybrid cars

Is there a future for hybrid cars?

(1) One effect of the rise in oil prices is that debate about hybrid cars has increased. Sales of these fuel-efficient cars, currently produced by Japanese manufacturers Honda and Toyota, have been growing steadily over the last few years. It is not such a surprise, then, that Ford Motor has just announced a catch-up programme. It currently builds about 24,000 hybrid vehicles annually, and aims to create production capacity for 250,000 cars in the next five years. The South Korean car makers Hyundai and Kia also have plans to introduce hybrid cars next year. Kazuki Watanabe, president of Toyota Motor Corporation, wants to lower the cost of its hybrid vehicles, partly to accelerate sales.

(2) Hybrid vehicles use a combination of a conventional gasoline engine and an electrical motor. With their superior fuel economy coupled with the performance of a normal car, they have long been popular with environmentalists. Unfortunately, the first generation of hybrid vehicles has been loss-making. The groundbreaking Prius has been

around since 1997, but due to development costs, manufacturer Toyota loses money on every car sold.

(3) Daimler Chrysler is currently holding talks with suppliers to find partners for 'mild hybrids'. A 'mild hybrid' is a simpler and less expensive version of the technology and can make engines work more efficiently in traffic; however, it does not offer the same fuel savings as a full hybrid. Daimler showed 'mild hybrid' models at the recent Frankfurt motor show.

(4) The future is still not guaranteed. Toyota expects sales of its hybrid vehicles to hit 1 million vehicles worldwide by the early 2010s, and the firm is reportedly aiming to lower prices. In the meantime there continues to be ambivalence about whether these cars can ever offer low fuel consumption, low emissions *and* attractive pricing? One analyst thinks the mass market for hybrid cars is maybe five years away. Others predict that hybrid car sales will never rise above more than 1%–2% of the total market.

3 Read the whole article. What is a hybrid car? According to the article, will they become popular in future?

4 Replace the missing vowels in these words / expressions. Use some of them to create sentences about your company.

- (a) l_ss-m_k_ng (b) gr__ndbr__k_ng (c) _cc_l_r_t_s_l_s (d) s_ppl__rs
 (e) l_w_r_pr_c_s (f) _ttr_ct_v_pr_c_ng (g) d_v_l_pm_nt_c_sts (h) m_ss_m_rk_t

5 Read the e-mail from the CEO. Discuss your answer in small groups and present your decision to the class.

To: All staff **From:** Charles
Re: Company cars **Date:** 1 October 2005

Should we switch all company cars to hybrid vehicles? It might be good for our image. Pls meet and discuss the pros and cons of this suggestion, then let me know your department's decision. Thanks.