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GREEN: Nissan EV - Does it have the power to win?

June 12, 2009
By Nancy Dunham

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Attending a press event for the Renault Nissan EV - slated for a 2010 U.S. launch - is akin to attending a high-energy cult rally.

If such events are any indication, many in the press are willing to spread Nissan's message that its EV is the affordable, comfortable, solution to the struggle over CO2 emissions and gas pump pain. The system upon which the plug-in EV will run -- generally standard 110-volt electrical outlets at residences and placed in key public centers throughout municipalities -- will also spur a highly-efficient traffic management system designed by the automaker in partnership with local governments. Or so Nissan hopes.

Like proud parents with a child in a beauty contest Nissan contends the EV has it all -- space for five people, a 100-mile range, advanced safety technology, reliability and zero emissions - all at a lower total cost (four cents per mile) than a vehicle with a comparable Internal Combustion Engine (13 cents per mile).

Mark Perry, director of Product Planning for Nissan North America, is coy about the EV's appearance, place in the product line, and price (rumored to range somewhere between the low 20's to low 30's) but isn't hesitant to insist this car will fit the majority of consumers' needs.

"What you are seeing is 17 years worth of R&D coming to market here," he said noting Nissan's experience in lithium-ion battery/car applications. No question Nissan has invested plenty of money, time and energy in creating this beauty contender so it's not unexpected that they'd push naysayers away.

"You will always find outliers," said Perry when asked about concerns that

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many drivers travel more than 100 miles a day, sometimes unexpectedly. "Research shows that 70 percent of the population goes 40 miles a day."

Then just how does an EV driver handle a cross-country or even cross state jaunt if power stations aren't available to them? Perry's answer: Buy a second car and if you can't afford or store one "That's why you have Zip car, Avis or Hertz. The EV is the car you use everyday."

Although the EV is publicly aimed at "every driver" industry experts think urban and suburban dwelling Baby Boomers with "green guilt" will be the primary market.

"A lot of this hinges on consumer preference," said Brandon Mason, lead power train analysis, Automotive Institute, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Detroit. "Most consumers aren't going to switch unless they are green conscious. They don't switch because it's good for them financially but because it's good for the environment." ...next page >>

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