

Get Ready for the Next Generation of Electric Cars

By GEOFF WILLIAMS, AOL SMALL BUSINESS

Posted: 2009-12-04 17:15:20

Filed Under: [Business Auto Center](#), [Small Business](#)



Toyota

It's become something of a cliché during this decade to point out that anyone who grew up watching *The Jetsons* expected by now we'd all be driving hovercraft cars whizzing through the air. But the future is finally, in a way, here. It may not fly, but the electric car is definitely in that futuristic vein Baby Boomers and Generation Xers expected of the 21st century.

So if you're wondering what's out there for entrepreneurs and commuters, here's a list of what's on the market right now or coming soon.

Chevy Volt: It's coming in the latter half of 2010, but [it will be unveiled at the Los Angeles Auto Show on December 2](#). The tagline for the Chevy Volt goes, "Charge the battery, change the world," and it's easy to see what they mean. The car is expected to get 230 miles per gallon, driving around town.

They're marketing the Volt to Americans who have fairly short commutes -- because you can drive 40 miles at a stretch without using any gas. If you drive more than 40 miles, well, after 40 miles, a lithium ion battery with a gasoline-powered, range-extending engine then kicks in, [according to the Chevy Volt website](#), creating electricity for the engine. If you're wondering exactly how that works, [the Volt folks have put up a video on YouTube](#). But whether you drive it 40 miles or 80, it's easy to imagine impressing colleagues and clients.

Ford Transit Connect: Already on the market, the [Transit Connect](#) is a battery-powered electric commercial van designed for small businesses that do a lot of deliveries. Think: flower shops and catering services. The website AutoBlog is a fan, calling it "[a stout runabout and a testament to Ford's engineering abilities.](#)"

Toyota Prius: OK, everyone knows about these, and, yep, they're still around. The [Toyota Prius](#) came on the scene in Japan in 1997 and were introduced to the U.S. and the rest of the world in 2001. It's a hybrid electric midsize car and the most popular electric car in the U.S.; about half a million of them are estimated to be tooling around the

country.

Nissan LEAF Electric Car: Not expected on the market until late 2010, the [Nissan LEAF](#) isn't a hybrid car -- it'll be a completely electric car with a reusable lithium-ion battery. It was just unveiled to the media earlier this month. [Nissan CEO Carlos Ghosn raved at the time](#), "LEAF represents a totally new transformational technology that will change the way people drive, use and power their vehicles. And the time is right for this breakthrough."

Of course, just because electric cars are coming into the marketplace doesn't mean businesses will jump all over this. Daniel Burrus, CEO of [Burrus Research](#), is skeptical. Burrus Research monitors global advancements in technology trends, to help businesses better do their business. He believes electric cars will be fairly common in five to 10 years, but he predicts the consumers are going to do the heavy lifting in buying electric cars, and not the typical small business owner.

"Due to the high cost, and the slow recovery with the recession, businesses will be taking a wait-and-see approach to electric cars," says Burrus.

That sentiment is probably why the [Electrification Coalition](#) just unveiled their plan for making electric vehicles pervasive across the U.S. (The Electrification Coalition is a nonprofit organization made up of 13 for-profit businesses, including automakers, battery manufacturers, utility operators and shipping companies). If they have their way, for the next decade or so, [the American government will offer tax credits](#) -- in addition to what's already being offered -- for purchasing all-electric plug-in vehicles.

The EC is pushing for the American government to select six to eight cities to act as test sites for electric vehicles. In that case, "faster chargers" would be at public facilities, like gas stations, where drivers could charge their cars while driving about. The EC's goal is to have each city with 50,000 to 100,000 electric car owners and shooting for a mission of 7 million plug-in cars by 2018.

The EC's idea just may work. They already have a catchy name for the proposed tax credit program -- a name that sounds vaguely familiar to the Cash for Clunkers program that fueled the auto industry earlier this summer: Cash for Volts.

Geoff Williams is a regular contributor to AOL Small Business.

2009-11-23 13:05:37