

VW's next electrification project: A Jetta hybrid



NICE - Volkswagen is getting ready to launch its next hybrid. In 2012, the German automaker will start selling a hybrid version of the new Jetta mid-size sedan.

It will be the second VW model to combine a gasoline engine with an electric motor. Last year, the company unveiled a hybrid version of its Touareg large SUV, with a 3.0-liter supercharged direct injection V6 gasoline engine coupled with an electric motor. The combination helps lower the vehicle's CO2 emissions by 40 percent.

At a press event here for the European launch of the new regular Jetta, Volkswagen officials declined to provide many details of the upcoming hybrid, saying only that it would have a 1.4 liter, 110kw TSI gasoline engine, a 20kw electric motor and an automatic transmission. The electric motor would be similar to the one in Jetta, but with different, lower capacity.

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The vehicle will have a lithium-ion battery that will give the Jetta an electric range of about 2km, VW officials said. The Touareg hybrid has a nickel metal-hydride battery pack.

Like all new Jettas, the hybrid will be built at VW's Mexico plant in Puebla. The initial production run will be destined for the North American market, officials said.

Kai Buehring, the VW technical project manager for the hybrid Jetta, said his goal was to build a car that was a pleasure to handle and gives drivers the full benefits of electric propulsion.

"The Toyota Prius is the benchmark and we want to be better than Toyota," he said, referring to the first volume-segment hybrid, which was built by the Japanese carmaker. The VW group has as one of its goals to become bigger than Toyota and top 10 million unit sales globally in 2018.

Under VW's "Strategy 2018," which was announced in early 2010, VW "is seeking global economic and environmental leadership in the automotive industry by 2018."

VW is working on a range of models with either hybrid or full electric propulsion to meet these goals. A VW spokesman said more hybrids would be announced in the near future.

With the new Jetta, which has been on sale in the US since October and will be in German dealer showrooms this month, the company is launching a car that will be sold in most major markets.

"This car is a real global player that meets global customer requirements," said Marco Weiss, who is in charge of product marketing for the Jetta. He called the model a "driving force" in VW's passenger-car strategy.

The new Jetta is positioned midway between the C and D segments. At 4644mm, it is 90mm longer than its predecessor. It is also bigger than the VW Golf, but smaller than the Passat. And it weighs 50 kilos less than the previous Jetta.

New electronics features include new airbag sensor technology, keyless access and a camera-based headlight adjustment system that adapts front lighting to the environment.

-By Arjen Bongard