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Volkswagen Says It Will Bring Electric Vehicle to U.S. in Two Years

By BILL VLASIC Published: September 17, 2013

DETROIT — Volkswagen, the largest of the European automakers, will bring its first electric car to the United States in two years, joining an increasingly crowded field of battery-powered vehicles on the market.

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Uli Deck/European Pressphoto Agency An e-Golf at the Frankfurt Motor Show. Volkswagen said it would develop more electric vehicles.

A Volkswagen official said on Tuesday that the e-Golf — an electrified version of the company's subcompact car — would go on sale in 2015 as part of a broader plan to introduce more alternative-fuel models.

It is an important step for a company that is trying to expand rapidly in the United States, but has not kept pace with the market recently.

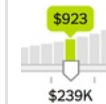
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Marc Trahan, an executive vice president for Volkswagen's American unit, said VW could follow the e-Golf with more electrified models if demand increased.

"We want to be the leader in the global context, but other manufacturers have gotten a little ahead of the curve," Mr. Trahan said after a speech to the Automotive Press Association here.

The company's entry into the electric market is another sign that automakers are pushing ahead with expensive new battery-powered models despite a tepid response from consumers.

General Motors, which has been moderately successful with its Volt plug-in hybrid sedan, which runs primarily on battery power but is backed up by a gasoline engine, is working on a purely electric model with an extended battery range.

Terry Rhadigan, a spokesman for G.M., said the company was experimenting with battery technology in the hope of one day offering an electric car with a 200-mile range on a single charge.

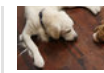
"That's the race for the holy grail," Mr. Rhadigan said. "The 200-mile battery will be an important milestone, and we are working on it."

G.M., the biggest American automaker, has set no timetable for the vehicle. The company will be bolstering its alternative-fuel lineup next year when it adds a Cadillac version of the Volt.

BMW, the German luxury car company, will begin selling an [electric car](#) in Germany later this year. The company is also planning a high-end, hybrid gas-electric sports car for the United States by 2014.

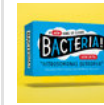
Volkswagen has relied on diesel technology as a fuel-saving alternative to conventional gasoline engines.

More than 70 percent of the diesel-powered vehicles sold this year in the United States



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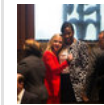


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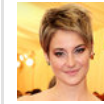
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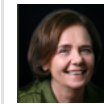
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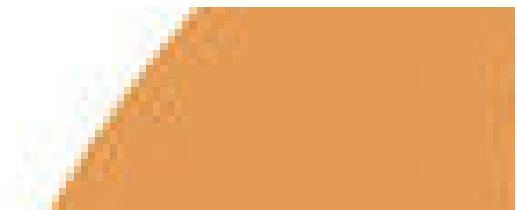


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have been Volkswagens.

But Volkswagen's chief executive, Martin Winterkorn, said at last week's [Frankfurt auto show](#) that the company was now accelerating its development of hybrids, plug-ins and electric models.

Mr. Trahan said that new flexible vehicle platforms for future mainstream models could be adapted for alternative-fuel variations.

"We don't have to have totally different platforms for hybrid or gas or electric models," he said. "Whether it's the Passat or the Beetle, we can react to what the market wants."

Volkswagen has doubled its sales in the United States in the last four years, and its Audi luxury brand has enjoyed particularly strong growth among American buyers.

But the company still has less than a 4 percent share of the United States market. This year, through August, the combined sales of the Volkswagen and Audi brands have increased just 2.5 percent, compared with 9.6 percent for the overall market.

The automaker is considering adding a small sport utility vehicle to its lineup, but no final decision has been made, Mr. Trahan said.

He also declined to comment on Tuesday about the drive by the United Automobile Workers to organize hourly employees at the company's new assembly plant in Tennessee.

The U.A.W. is trying to make the Volkswagen plant the linchpin of a broader effort to organize nonunion, foreign-owned auto plants in the southern United States. Its latest effort has focused on establishing a German-style works council at the plant that gives employees more involvement in the decision-making process.

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