

## Reva creator Maini sees power shift for automobiles

As the world rues high fuel prices, the man behind India's first battery driven car Chetan Maini says electric cars will overtake their gasoline and diesel-powered counterparts over the next 15 years.

'If the oil prices keep rising at this pace, it could even happen much earlier,' Maini, who is now deputy chairman and chief technical officer of Reva Electric Car Co that makes the battery-powered cars, told IANS in an interview.

'In the 1970s, we had the oil crisis, but there was no technology. In the 1980s and 1990s, we saw some good technology coming in, but oil was ruling at \$15-\$20 a barrel, and there was no environment consciousness,' he said.

'But now, fuel prices are very high, the technology is ready and environment consciousness is at its peak. Never before in history has everything come together like this for electric cars. The future lies here,' Maini added.

Commenting on G-Wiz, the name of his company's car for the British market, which is called REVAi in India, the mechanical engineer from the University of Michigan says the car enjoys several benefits.

'G-Wiz owners get a substantial subsidy on price, along with perks like free parking and charging points all over London,' added Maini, who also has a post-graduate degree from Stanford, where he focussed on hybrid electric vehicles.

Even though only 2,500 units of REVAi have been sold so far in 13 countries - Britain accounting for 1,000 units - Maini is unperturbed, as rising crude prices and environmental issues hold out major hope for him.

'The chief minister of Delhi (Shiela Dikshit) is very supportive of the idea. If we can start with the national capital, I'm sure other cities will follow suit,' he said, referring to the support from the Delhi government for charging points for battery-powered cars.

To popularise the battery-operated car, the state government has also announced a 15-percent subsidy on its base price, 12.5 percent exemption of value-added tax, and a refund of road tax and registration charges.

As a result, the base model of the car will be priced at Rs.299,000 (\$7,500), with a running cost of 40 paise (one cent) per kilometre.

In Banglore, where the car was first launched in 2001, the idea is already taking shape, and many malls now have parking lots with charging facilities. Wipro also offers charging facilities at its office complex, he maintained.

Yet, Maini - who as team leader for the solar car project in the University of Michigan won the General Motors Sun Race - confesses that it wasn't environment consciousness that was the prime driver behind REVAi.

'I was more excited about the technology and what it could do,' said the soft-spoken entrepreneur, whose team was also adjudged third for their solar car, which raced 3,000 miles across Australia a decade ago.

Maini, whose company is yet to break even, agrees that the competition now is hot for automobiles powered by alternative fuels, what with General Motors, Nissan and Mitsubishi having announced their plans to enter this segment.

'We, too, are gearing up and raring to go. We have \$20 million funding from the Global Environment Fund,' he said, referring to the prestigious agency based out of Maryland in the US.

'We have also started overhauling the assembly line for our facility. By the end of the year we will have a capacity of 30,000 cars per annum.'

*Himank Sharma ( © IANS / India eNews)*