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# Hyundai Going Green



Hyundai's been making so many announcements about electric vehicles and hybrids lately you'd think it was ZAP. The Korean automaker's promised to put a hybrid subcompact, a hybrid mid-size and a plug-in competitor to the Chevrolet Volt on the road within five years. There's even some speculation at least one of them could be stamped "Made in the USA."

Hyundai's going full-bore with its electric program, launching a partnership with Korean companies LG Chem, SK Energy and SB LiMotive to develop the batteries its cars will need if they're to start hitting the road by 2010 as promised. LG's got a solid background, having provided some of the batteries General Motors is considering for the Volt. The Japanese dominate battery tech these days, but Hyundai says the Koreans could catch up by 2013 -- at which point the company hopes to put a plug-in hybrid on the road. Korean automakers are spending nearly \$1 billion on battery tech, and the government has kicked in \$40 million.

We'll see the first of the Hyundais to use that technology in November.

John Krafcik, Hyundai's VP of product development, announced the new Sonata hybrid will make its debut at the Los Angeles International Auto Show in November and could be on the road by 2010. It'll use a lithium-ion battery, making it the first partially-electric Sonata since Switched-On Bach.

Don't confuse the gas-electric mid-size Sonata with another hybrid Hyundai in the works -- a propane-electric hybrid based on the Avante (known here in the states as the Elantra) that promises 37.9 miles per gallon. The subcompact could be on the road as early as next year, but there's almost no chance we'll see it here even though its propane powertrain could make a billionaire out of Hank Hill.

Early signs suggest the Sonata hybrid will be made in America. Hyundai spokesman Jim Trainor was coy when asked if the hybrid will be built in the same Alabama factory that cranks out the standard Sonata (pictured) and would only say Southerners build some mighty fine cars. "The workforce down there and the products they're building are awesome," Trainor told the Birmingham News. "The quality coming out of the plant is awesome. Certainly careful consideration will be given to those sorts of things when we're looking at where a vehicle like that will be built."

Hyundai's a rags-to-riches story better than any early-evening nominating convention speaker could offer. From

the dowdy Excel to the overly tarted-up sedans of the early 2000s, Hyundai has matured into the ultimate "cocktail party car" -- comfortable yet unobtrusive, well-built but not overwrought. The incredible Genesis and stately Sonata prove the carmaker has truly arrived.

Producing what could be the first lithium-ion hybrid to hit the street would be a major coup for Hyundai and a boon for Korean battery manufacturer LG.

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