

# BMW plugs into the electric car 'revolution'

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The most important Briton in the global motor industry will unveil an electric car in nine days' time that could make or break the future of the battery-charged vehicle.

Ian Robertson, sales chief of BMW, will argue— after a suitably over-the-top simultaneous New York-London-Shanghai launch on July 29 — that the BMW i3 is no ordinary electric car.

The claim is this: electric car prime movers such as the Mitsubishi i-MiEV, the Nissan Leaf and the Chevrolet Volt/Vauxhall Ampera have all stripped out an internal combustion engine from an existing conventional chassis and inserted batteries wherever they can.

Instead, Mr Robertson says, BMW has built up a car from a base of a flat mattress of 230kg of lithium ion batteries sitting between the axles — like having the British Lions' second row under your feet. The rest of the car is made of lightweight carbon fibre, plastics, plant extract composites, aluminium and manganese. It is 20 per cent lighter than a Leaf and carries a third less poundage than an equivalent conventional hatchback.

It is also to be priced (after government subsidies) around the top-spec Leaf, at about £25,000. Or, if fitted with a back-up conventional engine to increase the travel range to 200 miles, at £27,500 — £2,500 cheaper than a Volt/Ampera. Speaking this week at the BMW roadtesting facility outside Munich, Mr Robertson claims that history is about to be made.

"This is a game changer. We are at the dawn of the electric car revolution," he said.

His argument is that if you are paying £25,000 or £30,000 for an electric car, you don't expect to be buying a Nissan or a Vauxhall, but it is the sort of money a BMW driver might spend. And, in any case, electric cars will be snapped up by fleet buyers, which need to cut their carbon emissions.

BMW and the big automotive manufacturers are building electric cars because by the end of the decade the average emissions of their models has to be 95g of carbon dioxide per kilometre travelled. Their cars, on average, need to be as green as the Toyota Prius within seven years.

Mr Robertson, who earns €3.8 million a year, claims that the i3 will be profitable but declines to say how many orders he has had. The real gains are to be had from the mistakes of building the i3. The lessons learnt will inform a whole BMW i1 to i9 sub-brand as well as drive the rest of the BMW fleet towards sufficient plug-in power and weight reduction to appease the regulator and please the customer.

*SOURCE The Times*