

AUTOMOTIVE

## Automakers rush to electrify as opportunity window for traditional cars narrows

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*Bentley Motors plans to be fully electric in its next 100 years. Image credit: Bentley Motors*

By ELLEN KELLEHER

Luxury automakers are pushing ahead with electrification efforts, as consumer interest builds and many governments pursue restrictions on traditional combustion engines.

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British automaker Bentley Motors recently revealed a full-court press towards electrification, while others are gradually expanding their hybrid and electric vehicles offerings. The innovative efforts are smart business decisions, as some European governments are moving to ban all petrol- and diesel-fueled cars as soon as 2030.

"The government there is now driving legislation, but 2030 is probably a stretch goal," said Tyson Jominey, vice president for data and analytics with [J.D. Power](#), Nashville. "It's a few years early."

"But most of the companies are moving that way, anyway, particularly the European manufacturers," he said. "There is potential that a lot could change in the next ten years, making the technology cheaper."

It's electric

In recent years, affluent consumers have been hesitant about EVs ([see story](#)) and automakers have emphasized education about electrification in their marketing.

Those efforts seem to be paying off as the EV market becomes more competitive.



*The iX will begin production in 2021. Image credit: BMW*

According to survey from [CarGurus.co.uk](https://www.car-gurus.co.uk), the automotive shopping site, more than 75 percent of inquiries about EVs from British consumers from the last 12 months took place between July and September of this year. September market share of electric vehicles increased by 235 percent year-over-year, per the United Kingdom's Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders.

"Consumer interest in electric vehicles is increasing with CarGuru's data around EV inventory and enquiries mirroring the dramatic rise in battery electric vehicle registrations," said Chris Knapman, editor at CarGurus.co.uk, in a statement. "Across the UK, the continued investment in infrastructure combined with the increasing numbers of electric cars arriving on the new and used markets mean we are almost certain to see more drivers making the switch."

Nearly 40 percent of EV inquiries originated in Greater London. Meanwhile, the East of England and Scotland are the areas with the next highest-level of interest.

CarGurus analyzed inquiries for electric vehicles on its site between October 2019 and September 2020 from each region of the U.K.



*Car-charging stations are becoming ubiquitous. Image credit: CarGurus.co.uk*

The survey results were released as Prime Minister Boris Johnson is facing growing pressure from some consumers and environmental activists to move up a ban on new petrol and diesel vehicles.

Originally set to go into effect in 2040, the prime minister announced in February the ban would begin in 2035. However, in effort to reach a target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, Mr. Johnson is being pressured to ban new cars with combustion engines as early as 2030.

This political appeal is being echoed globally, including in some of the world's leading luxury markets. China has set a target for 20 percent of the vehicles sold in the country to have plug-based powertrains by 2025, while Paris will be banning gas-engine vehicles by 2030.

In September, California governor Gavin Newsom signed legislation barring the sale of new fuel cars, SUVs and light trucks in the state beginning in 2035.

#### EV innovations

As consumers slowly come around and with business at stake, luxury carmakers are moving a lot faster to follow Tesla's lead and embrace electrification.

Bentley plans to introduce its first fully electric model in 2025 and only offer plug-based hybrid and electric models by 2026 from its factory in Crewe in the U.K.. By 2030, Bentley will only be offering battery electric vehicles in its bid to become a carbon neutral luxury car brand.

"Within a decade, Bentley will transform from a 100-year-old luxury car company to a new, sustainable, wholly ethical role model for luxury," said Adrian Hallmark, chief executive officer, in a statement ([see story](#)).

Other luxury automakers are not far behind and are pouring resources into developing electric cars.

British automaker Aston Martin partnered with Mercedes-Benz to access to powertrain architecture for conventional, hybrid and electric vehicles for its next generation of vehicles, to launch in 2027 ([see story](#)).

German automaker BMW has finally unveiled its iX, its next-generation electric SUV which is expected to go into production in 2021. BMW introduced its first EV, the i3 in 2013, but has not been innovating in the category at the same pace as other luxury carmakers in recent years ([see story](#)).

Ferrari is also getting in on the act and this week drew the curtain on its new SF90 Spider, which retails for \$558,000 and is effectively its SF90 Stradale hybrid in convertible form with a sliding hard-top roof. The car maker's hope is to make more than half of its sales from hybrid technology by 2022 and introduce a fully-electric car in a few years time.



*The SF90 Spider has a retractable roof. Image credit: Ferrari*

Rolls-Royce is also planning to make the shift and German automaker Audi's new e-tron GT is part of its drive to electrify one-third of its suite of new models by 2025. Next year, meanwhile, brings the launch of the EQS, Mercedes-Benz's first electric vehicle to hit the market in the United States.

The vehicles these luxury brands are producing are sleek, with an almost undetectable sound and excellent torque. The BMW's new iX, for instance, has a full range of 300 miles with 500-horsepower. It can also be charged from 10 to 80 percent of its full capacity in less than 40 minutes.

Fully electric, Porsche's Taycan's attributes are equally impressive. A pair of permanent-magnet synchronous motors provide the Taycan Turbo S with up to 560kW of over-boost power, which allow it and other models to go from 0 to 60 mph in 2.6 seconds.

As government regulations continue to shake out, there is little question that the ground has shifted and automakers must respond in canny ways or face a difficult business quandary.

"We want a cleaner future, but the technology is very expensive," J.D. Power's Mr. Jominy said. "It's a difficult value proposition for some consumers."