

GM: Chevy Volt Glides Past 40-Mile Electric Range

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DETROIT (AP) — Real-world tests show that General Motors Co.'s rechargeable electric car can travel 40 miles on battery power as promised, company engineers said Monday.

Engineers are testing six Volts that recently were made on a Detroit assembly line, driving them at the company's proving ground and on roads around Detroit.

The automaker still has a "few things to tweak" with the car, including computer software and controls, but the Volt is on schedule for full production in November, said Andrew Farah, the car's chief engineer.

The Volt, which has a 1.4-liter gas engine that kicks on when the batteries are depleted, is due in showrooms in December.

Later this month, GM also will start making test versions of a similar car for Europe called the Opel Ampera. It will be distributed in Europe as a 2012 model, but no timing has been announced.

Farah said he got 41.5 miles and 42.5 miles on his last two electric cycles of the Volt, which he said were under normal driving conditions running errands to buy tax preparation software, basketballs and baked goods.

"I'm not speeding, I'm not taking it particularly easy either, because I'm driving the way I would normally drive," he said.

The car will get about 50 miles per gallon when the gas engine turns on to generate electricity to power the electric motor. Farah says the range will depend on weather, terrain and driving habits and can vary 20 percent up and down. The Volt, he said, will have a lower range when the batteries have to heat the passenger compartment in colder climate.

Engineers said the gasoline engine will add more than 300 miles to the Volt's range, but they wouldn't say how many gallons the gas tank will hold. Under both full-electric and gasoline engine power, the car will get about 230 miles per gallon under U.S. government standards, the company says.

GM also announced on Monday that it will spend \$8 million to double the size of its suburban Detroit lab that engineers and tests electric vehicle batteries.

The automaker said the expansion of the facility in Warren, Mich., won't create any new jobs, but will allow it to centralize its battery testing and do tests in-house rather than with outside contractors.

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The expansion will also allow GM to do safety and abuse tests, manufacturing engineering, charger development and heat tests at the lab, spokesman Brian Corbett said. In addition, areas in the lab that were previously used for engine testing will be renovated for battery development.

Construction will start this month and the expanded lab is set to open this summer, GM said. About 1,000 engineers now work on electric vehicle development at GM, and the company has 40 to 50 openings for more.

Nissan Motor Co. plans to start selling its all-electric Leaf about the same time GM will put the Volt on sale.

The Leaf can get 100 miles on a single charge, Nissan says, but GM contends the Volt is a better value because it can travel much farther.

Nissan plans to price the Leaf, a four-door hatchback, at \$32,780, but that drops to just over \$25,000 when a \$7,500 U.S. tax credit is included.

GM won't officially say the price of the Volt, but it's believed to be around \$35,000.

Engineers said they are working to reduce the price as battery technology improves and becomes cheaper.

It will take eight-to-10 hours to recharge a Volt from a standard 110-volt home outlet, but that can be cut to four hours with an optional 220-volt charging box that will have to be installed in an owner's garage.

GM engineers also confirmed they are looking into a version of the Volt with the backup engine powered by natural gas.

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