

Nissan invests in production to prepare for electric age

November 28 2019, by Yuri Kageyama



Engineer Makoto Yamada talks to reporters about using robotics for sealing as part of Nissan's new production methods at its "intelligent factory" during a press conference at the company's headquarter Thursday, Nov. 28, 2019, in Yokohama, near Tokyo. Nissan is investing 33 billion yen (\$303 million) in its flagship auto plant in Japan's Tochigi prefecture in a first rollout of a production system geared toward electric vehicles. (AP Photo/Yuri Kageyama)

Nissan is investing 33 billion yen (\$303 million) in its flagship auto plant in Japan's Tochigi prefecture in a first rollout of a production system geared toward electric vehicles.

Nissan Motor Co. Executive Vice President Hideyuki Sakamoto said Thursday that manufacturing methods must change because vehicles increasingly have both hybrid and electric engines and new parts for connectivity and artificial intelligence services.

Sakamoto said the production changes, set to be completed next year, use robotics and sensors to decrease physical stress on assembly-line workers. They are tailored for a workforce increasingly manned by senior workers and women.

Among the innovations for Nissan's so-called "intelligent factory" is a powertrain mounting system that allows at least 27 configurations to be installed in one procedure.

The parts, including the battery for electric vehicles, are put together on one "pallet," or foundation unit, for easier installing into the [vehicle](#).

Another innovation involves programming a worker's craftsmanship into robotics. The moves are so finely tuned in the automated sealing process that the delicate angles and touches of a human worker are duplicated.

The advantage to such a system is that a robot's work is consistent and tireless, maintaining the quality of craftsmanship, according to Nissan.

"The competitiveness of an automaker lies in production, as well as design and technology development," Sakamoto told reporters.

Auto production methods have remained basically the same since the early 1900s. But vehicles are becoming more complex, as driver-support

technology, hybrid systems and various kinds of batteries must be fitted in, depending on the vehicle, Sakamoto said.



Nissan Motor Co. Executive Vice President Hideyuki Sakamoto speaks during a press conference at the company's headquarter Thursday, Nov. 28, 2019, in Yokohama, near Tokyo. Nissan is investing 33 billion yen (\$303 million) in its flagship auto plant in Japan's Tochigi prefecture in a first rollout of a production system geared toward electric vehicles. (AP Photo/Yuri Kageyama)

The production methods will be later rolled out in Nissan's plants in Japan and elsewhere around the world but details are undecided.

Yokohama-based Nissan, which makes the Leaf electric car, March

subcompact and Infiniti luxury models, is eager to relay a message of innovation as it battles a serious risk to its reputation amid plunging profits and sales.

Nissan's former Chairman Carlos Ghosn is awaiting trial on various financial misconduct allegations. Nissan has acknowledged failings in its [corporate governance](#).

Its new chief executive is taking office next week. Ghosn's successor Hiroto Saikawa also stepped down, acknowledging financial misconduct.

All other major global automakers are working on smart, connected and electric vehicles. But Nissan has a [head start](#) in many of the innovations, especially [electric vehicles](#), thanks largely to Ghosn.

Ghosn says he is innocent and accuses others in Nissan of colluding to get rid of him to block a fuller integration with its alliance partner Renault SA of France.

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