

Citroen unveils new hatchback as virus pushes event online

June 30 2020, by David McHugh



The Citroen e-C4 all electric hatchback is display during a media presentation in Paris, Tuesday, June 30, 2020. PSA Group's Citroen Brand is showing off a new version of its C4 compact hatchback, a model that will be key to the company's sales prospects as it faces a highly competitive European car market that faces severe headwinds from the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)

PSA Group unveiled one of its most important new models Tuesday with 20 people physically present and 2,600 watching online - a marketing configuration that the coronavirus seems likely to accelerate across the industry now that next year's Geneva auto show was cancelled.

The company's Citroen brand showed off the new version of its C4 compact hatchback at the event held in a Paris suburb. The vehicle will be key to the company's sales as it faces a highly competitive European car market amid severe headwinds from the coronavirus.

Citroen brand head Vincent Cobee said that the new hatchback represents "the core of the European market, which is the family car."

"We're talking about the largest segment of the European market," Cobee told The Associated Press. He said the vehicle's hybrid posture combining SUV elements means the C4 "is an interesting offer in this huge segment" and "quite significant in terms of brand direction and ambition."

Electrics have thus far carried higher purchase prices that outweighed lower running costs. but Cobee said that was changing. While prices won't be disclosed until later, he said that "the cost of ownership of this battery car will be completely comparable to the cost of ownership of the combustion engine" once all factors are considered. "Today, if your approach is cost of ownership, the gap is nearly closed," he said.



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Cobee called the presentation format "phygital," combining some physical presence by the presenters and a larger online audience.

The new C4 shakes up the design of its predecessor by adding elements more familiar from SUVs such as a higher seat position, more ground clearance and prominent wheel arches. In addition to diesel and gasoline versions it will come in an electric-only variant with a 50 kilowatt-hour

battery that offers range of up to 350 kilometers (217 miles) and can charge to 80% in 30 minutes - if a fast-charging station is available.

On top of the virus outbreak the auto industry faces headwinds from European Union regulatory requirements to lower average emissions of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas blamed by scientists for climate change. Carmakers are aiming to meet the new limits with a combination of battery vehicles, hybrid cars that use both electric motors and internal combustion engines, and more-efficient gasoline and diesel models.



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CEO of Citroen Vincent Cobee gestures as he speaks to the media during the presentation of the e-C4 all electric hatchback during a in Paris, Tuesday, June 30, 2020. PSA Group's Citroen Brand is showing off a new version of its C4 compact hatchback, a model that will be key to the company's sales prospects as it faces a highly competitive European car market that faces severe headwinds from the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)

Sales prospects for all carmakers are uncertain as demand recovers from lockdowns that closed dealerships and unsettled consumers. Citroen's sales fell 86.4% in April during the period of the most severe restrictions on activity, to 9,500 vehicles from 69,900 in the same month last year.

Automakers had been moving more marketing events online even before

the virus outbreak to save the costs of auto show attendance and to get exclusive focus on their product.

Geneva auto show organizers said that exhibitors told them they would rather wait until 2022 to resume the show. This year's edition was canceled in March due to the outbreak.

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