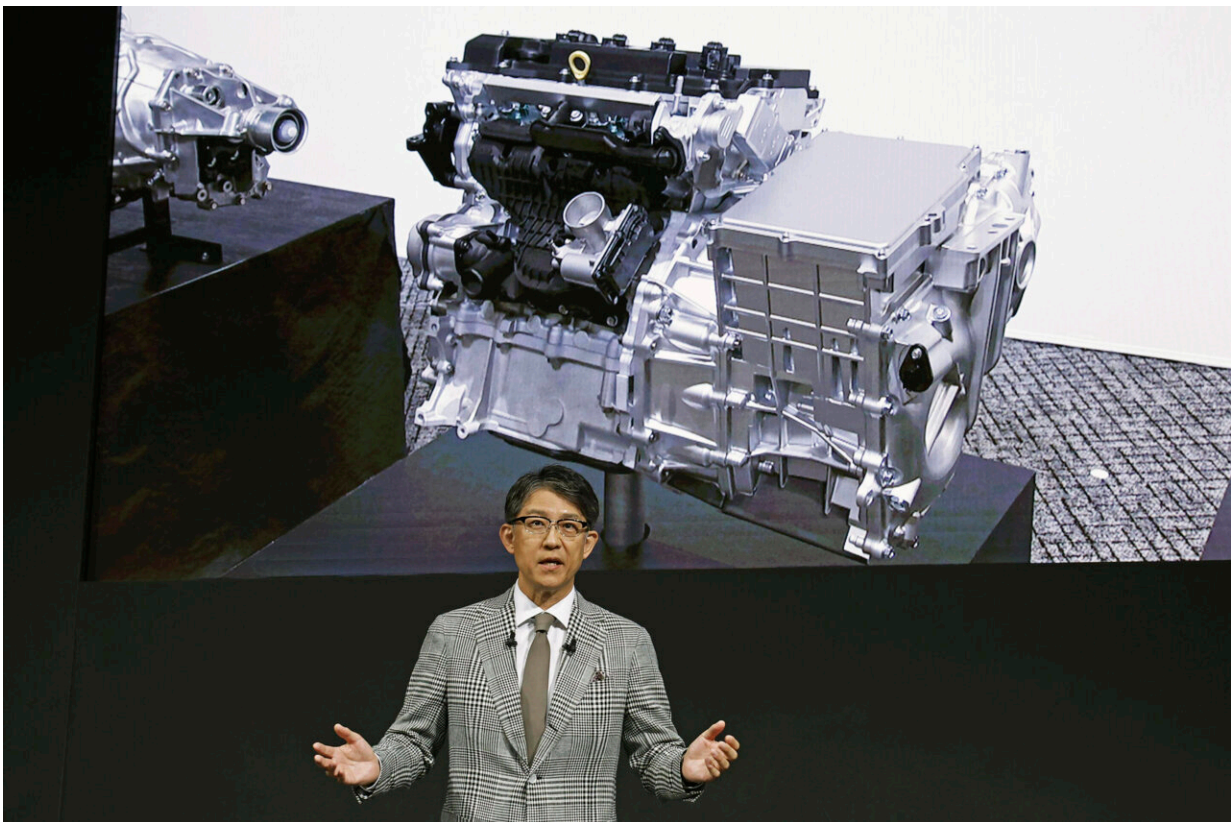


Toyota shows 'an engine reborn' with green fuel despite global push for battery electric cars

May 28 2024, by Yuri Kageyama



Koji Sato, chief executive of Toyota Motor Corp., speaks during a news conference in Tokyo, Tuesday, May 28, 2024. “An engine reborn.” That's how Japanese automaker Toyota introduced plans for a new lean compact motor that will cast a futuristic spin on the traditional internal combustion engine. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

"An engine reborn." That's how Japanese automaker Toyota introduced plans to cast a futuristic spin on the traditional internal combustion engine.

During a three-hour presentation at a Tokyo hall Tuesday, the car manufacturer giant announced it would offer lean compact engines that also run on so-called green fuels like hydrogen and bioethanol, or get paired with zero-emissions electric motors in hybrids.

This comes as many competitors in the auto industry are pushing for fully electric vehicles. China is revving its push for Battery Electric Vehicles, and its own BYD is threatening to outshine Tesla in that push.

Toyota's Chief Executive Koji Sato said the "engine is optimized for the electrification era" with hopes of helping push the world into "carbon neutrality."

Toyota already has a well-known hybrid car—the Prius—with a gas engine and an electric motor. It switches between the two to deliver a cleaner drive.

In future hybrids, the electric motor is set to become the main driving power, and the new engine will be designed to take a lesser role and help it along, according to Toyota.

Domestic allies Subaru Corp. and Mazda Motor Corp., both preparing ecological engines designed to meet the inevitably upcoming stringent emissions standards, joined Toyota's presentation billed as a "multi-pathway workshop."

"Each company wants to win, but we can be faster if we work together," said Sato.

But details on when the engines were coming to market weren't disclosed.

The legacy of the car engine could be felt everywhere.

Mazda said that its prized rotary engine, introduced more than 50 years ago, was being adapted for electric vehicles.

Subaru, meanwhile, showcased its trademark smaller horizontally opposed engine. While Chief Technology Officer Tetsuro Fujinuki confirmed the company was working on a great "Subaru-like" electric vehicle, he said the company wasn't about to dump the engine altogether.

Toyota, too, is working on stylish BEVs.

The executives said Tuesday that energy supply conditions differed globally, adding that products had to meet various customer needs and the investments needed for mass-producing BEVs were enormous.

Toyota officials also repeatedly noted that 5.5 million jobs were at stake in the overall supply chain for vehicle production in Japan nowadays, so a sudden shift to electric cars wasn't economically possible or socially responsible.

Takahiro Fujimoto, a professor of business at Waseda University, believes electric vehicles are a key solution for reducing emissions. But they still have weak points, such as large amounts of emissions produced while making lithium-ion batteries, a chief component.

In Japan, for instance, commuters use trains, so that may be a better ecological choice for transportation, Fujimoto said.

"At the very least, I believe the proliferation of and innovations in BEVs

are definitely needed. But that argument is logically not the same as saying that all we need are BEVs," he said.

Uncertainties remain, spanning research and development, as well as social, political and market conditions, said Fujimoto.

"The carbon neutrality the world is aspiring toward isn't likely attainable for decades to come. It's going to be a long marathon race," he said.

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