

Norway first to reach 50% electric in new car sales

5 January 2021



Electric cars being charged on a street in Oslo, Norway has become the first country where more than half of new cars are electrically powered

Norway has become the first country in the world where electric cars account for more than half of new registrations, according to figures published Tuesday by an industry group.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic delaying the release of several new models, [electric vehicles](#) accounted for 54.3 percent of the new car market last year, up from 42.4 percent a year earlier, according to Opplysningsradet for Veitrafikken (OFV, "Information Council for Road Traffic").

In December, electric car sales set a monthly record in Norway accounting for 66.7 percent of new sales, the numbers boosted by the arrival of new models, OFV said.

"This is an extremely positive trend", Christina Bu, secretary general of the Norwegian Electric Vehicle Association, said.

Bu, who told AFP that Norway was the first country to break the overall 50 percent threshold, added that the country is "almost on track to meet the

2025 targets."

The Nordic country, which is ironically the largest producer of oil in Western Europe, aims to have all new cars being "zero emission"—meaning electric or hydrogen powered—by that year.

Heavy subsidies

Norway has pushed ahead of the rest of Europe when it comes to paving the way for [electric cars](#), by instituting heavy subsidies.

Unlike diesel or petrol cars, clean cars are virtually tax-free in the country, making their prices much more competitive, even if other benefits—such as being exempt from tolls and being able to use lanes reserved for public transport—have been cut back.

The four best-selling models in the Nordic country were the Audi e-tron, the Tesla Model 3, the Volkswagen ID.3 and the Nissan Leaf—all fully electric.

The fifth placed car —the Volkswagen Golf—can be bought in a rechargeable version but the statistics do not differentiate the engine types.

Hybrid vehicles, combining fossil fuel and [renewable energy](#), also gained market share in 2020, up to 29.1 percent compared to 25.9 percent in 2019.

Despite outpacing the rest of the world, the Norwegian Electric Vehicle Association was hungry for even more and had expected electric cars to account for around 60 percent of new cars last year.

"We would have made it if it hadn't been for the coronavirus," Bu said.

"But the virus has delayed several launches," she added.

Heading for more records

For this year the association expects electric cars to account for 65 percent of new cars.

"For the first time, the number of launches of electric models, up to 40, is expected to exceed that of other vehicles, less than 30, including rechargeable hybrids," Bu said.

Even if it is progressing at record levels, the electrified portion of the Norwegian car fleet is still small and at the end of 2019, only nine percent of the country's vehicles were electric.

The advances have also come at a steep price tag for the country. According to the Norwegian Ministry of Finance, last year the loss of tax revenue from the subsidies approached 20 billion Norwegian kroner (\$2.3 billion, 1.9 billion euros).

"It's not very well thought out," said Bjart Holtsmark, a researcher at the SSB statistics institute, who is critical of government subsidies and says they might not even have the intended effect.

"These subsidies meant that the best-selling [vehicle](#) last year was a large 2.5-tonne 4x4 which requires a lot of energy to move around and whose weight means that it causes noise pollution and harmful fine particles," he added.

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