World’s Cheapest Car Riles Environmental Groups

by Jason Lomberg, Technical Editor

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Tata Motors [1] has unveiled the world’s cheapest car, with potential for a vast standard of living increase. And Greenpeace doesn’t like it. The same organization that supported a ban on chlorine in drinking water [2] feels that the mass proliferation of cheap automobiles is a bad thing. Despite its eco-friendly 47 MPG rating, the Tata Nano [3] is seen as a threat to the environment. Why? Because lots of people want to buy them.

The Tata Nano fills a large void in the automotive market: a budget vehicle for low-income families. At 10 ft (L) x 5 ft (W) x 5 ft (H) [4], the Nano redefines miniscule. Weighing in at 1,323 lbs, the Nano is feather-light. As a point of reference, my car, a 1998 Chrysler Sebring, is over 100% heavier at 2,967 lbs. Its 2 cylinder engine achieves a maximum output of 35 PS @ 5250 rpm. The Nano’s selling point is its $2,000-2,500 price tag, though you’ll “pay” for the savings. The car’s top speed is 65 MPH, so highways are out, and despite its 47 MPG rating, its top capacity is 3.96 gallons.

For the Nano’s target audience, these handicaps are of little concern. As Tata said at the Nano’s launch, “I hope it will provide safe, affordable four-wheel transportation to families who until now have not been able to own a car.” The implications are obvious—a large standard of living increase. Tata is releasing the first run in July, and demand is so high that the first 100,000 customers will be selected at random.

What could irk Greenpeace about a cheap, compact vehicle that gets 47 MPG? Soumya Brata Rahut, a spokesman for Greenpeace India had this to say [5]: "My first reaction when someone says they need to buy a car is to say don't buy it." Greenpeace advocates public transportation instead. Another environmental group, Friends of the Earth UK, said that, "The Tata Nano makes motoring cheaper and growing car sales in India will lead to big rises in carbon dioxide emissions.” I guess the solution is to make cars expensive and undesirable. I’m sure that’d be a “great” business model. Small wonder that Greenpeace co-founder Patrick Moore stated [2], “Greenpeace has evolved into an organization of extremism and politically motivated agendas.”

Sadly, there’re no plans to release the Nano in North America (though overwhelming demand could change that). Our economic downturn practically begs for a car like the Nano.

Do you agree? Disagree? Think I should be committed to the nearest mental ward? Leave an online comment below, or contact me directly at jason.lomberg@advantagemedia.com [6].

Note: The preceding represents the view of the editor and not necessarily that of ECN.

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