

Yamaha offers electric scooters for green errands

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Yamaha is targeting fashionable green-minded consumers with a new electric scooter designed for short city commutes.

The 240,000 yen (\$2,700) "smart minimal commuter" EC-03, shown to reporters Wednesday, is zero-emission and super-quiet, making it convenient for late-night city driving, according to Japanese motorcycle maker Yamaha Motor Co.

Its maximum cruising range on a single charge is technically 43 kilometers (27 miles) but in regular road conditions, drivers should not count on more than 25 kilometers (15 miles), Yamaha said.

"Aspiring to low-emissions societies is a certain global trend," said Hiroyuki Yanagi, Yamaha president and chief executive.

The scooter, which recharges from a regular home socket, goes on sale in September in Tokyo and nationwide in October. It is being introduced in Taiwan and Europe in 2011. There are no plans for the U.S. market so far. Yamaha hopes to sell 1,000 in Japan in the first year.

Yamaha believes it can compete against the Chinese and smaller manufacturers to gain top global market share in electric motorcycles in the next few years by exploiting its half-century of experience in manufacturing two wheelers.

It faces competition from electric bicycles, which are generally more simply constructed than the EC-03, and are already booming in China, with an estimated 20 million in use.

In April, Honda Motor Co. showed an electric scooter, EV-neo, but that was planned only for leasing in Japan in December, targeting companies like newspaper publishers and pizza joints that make deliveries.

Honda, Japan's No. 2 automaker, also makes motorcycles and competes with Yamaha in that sector. Overseas plans and sales to individual consumers for EV-neo are undecided.

Honda said it hadn't decided a leasing price for the scooter because of the high cost of the battery, a lithium-ion battery from Japanese electronics maker Toshiba Corp.

Yamaha's electric scooter is packed with lithium-ion batteries from Sanyo Electric Co., a subsidiary of Japanese electronics giant Panasonic Corp.

It is unclear whether Yamaha's target buyers — Japanese women, who routinely use bicycles for grocery shopping and other errands — will opt for a green scooter.

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Published on Electronic Component News (<http://www.ecnmag.com>)

Yamaha said it's investing 6.2 billion yen (\$70 million) through 2012, for introducing affordable motorcycles in emerging markets, developing green technology and products such as EC-03 and expansion in Southeast Asia.

Source URL (retrieved on 08/27/2014 - 5:40am):

<http://www.ecnmag.com/news/2010/07/yamaha-offers-electric-scooters-green-errands>