



Zemo Partnership's Andy Eastlake

The electric revolution is gathering pace and innovation is everywhere

Well, what a year that was (in more ways than one)! The headline news that you'd have struggled to miss is that nearly one-in-five cars sold in 2021 can be recharged from a plug. That's extraordinary growth that wasn't foreseen just a few years ago.

Over 190,000 battery electric cars (11.6% of the market) and nearly 115,000 plug-in hybrid cars (7%) were sold last year (and 12 fuel cell ones too!). Indeed, more new fully electric cars were registered in the UK during 2021 than in the previous five years combined, according to the latest SMMT data.

Easily the biggest seller was the Tesla Model 3 at nearly 35,000 units, making it the second-best selling car of any fuel type.

How long before a battery electric vehicle is the biggest selling car of any sort? It's looking odds-on to me that this could happen in 2022 (delivery times permitting!).

In a distant second place in the BEV charts was the Kia e-Niro, selling just over 12,000 units, closely followed by VW's ID3, Nissan's Leaf and Audi's e-tron. A newcomer to the scene – the MG ZS EV – sneaked into tenth place, just behind offerings from Hyundai, Mini, Renault and Vauxhall.

The list of brands, both established and new, just keeps on growing.

Meanwhile, overall UK van sales (below 3.5t) rocketed by more than a fifth as registrations bounced back from pandemic-hit 2020. Growth was dominated by the larger 2.5-3.5t category, up by nearly 28%. While the van sector is still dominated by diesels (96% market share), the writing is on the wall here too; plug-in vans increased by over 140% in the year to nearly 14,000 units, representing 3.9% of sales and of these more than 90% were fully battery electric.

While the van sector lags cars by some way, it surely won't be long before we see sales at really significant levels here too as products develop rapidly to meet more and more of users' needs.

These stellar EV sales figures are putting the pressure on the UK's recharging infrastructure like never before. It's critical that we rapidly provide more infrastructure but also that both the infrastructure and the energy it provides are delivered in a smart way; we need better information, greater reliability, inter-operability and all this while we maximise the opportunities that EVs provide for supporting our energy grid – all aspects that the Zemo-convened EV Energy Taskforce is continuing to focus upon.

While the pace of progress in the EV sales sector is very encouraging we're well aware it isn't going to answer all our transport-related problems.

EVs can still create significant emissions over their life-cycle, present materials sourcing and end-of-use challenges as well as taking up a similar amount of road space to current vehicles. Also, we're in danger of simply replicating our current model of private car ownership which is certainly sub-optimal in terms of resources use and future mobility needs.

That's why one of the initiatives we're working on now is a project to encourage the production and uptake of smaller, lighter vehicles where these are the best fit-for-purpose, particularly in crowded urban settings. Powered light vehicles (PLV) could make a significant contribution to cutting the UK's transport-related emissions while cutting congestion and maximising the efficient use of both resources and energy. Zemo is working with the MCIA and key stakeholders in the micro-mobility space to help kick-start a PLV market in the UK.

By the time this article appears, our Action Plan for Zero Emission Powered Light Vehicles will be published (2 Feb). I do hope you'll give it a look because it is critical, particularly for fleets, to look beyond the obvious choice of just electrifying what you currently have and search for other areas where innovation and improvements can be realised in parallel.

So, on Valentines Day, just like love, innovation is all around!

FURTHER INFORMATION

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