

In the fast lane: Rising demand for e-cars

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While electric mobility has not really gotten off the ground in Germany for years, the development in the field has become much more dynamic recently. But how do consumers perceive e-cars after the diesel emissions scandal, for instance? Produkt + Markt has conducted several representative surveys among German car owners since 2012, asking which car engine technology will prevail. Axel Schomborg reports on market trends.

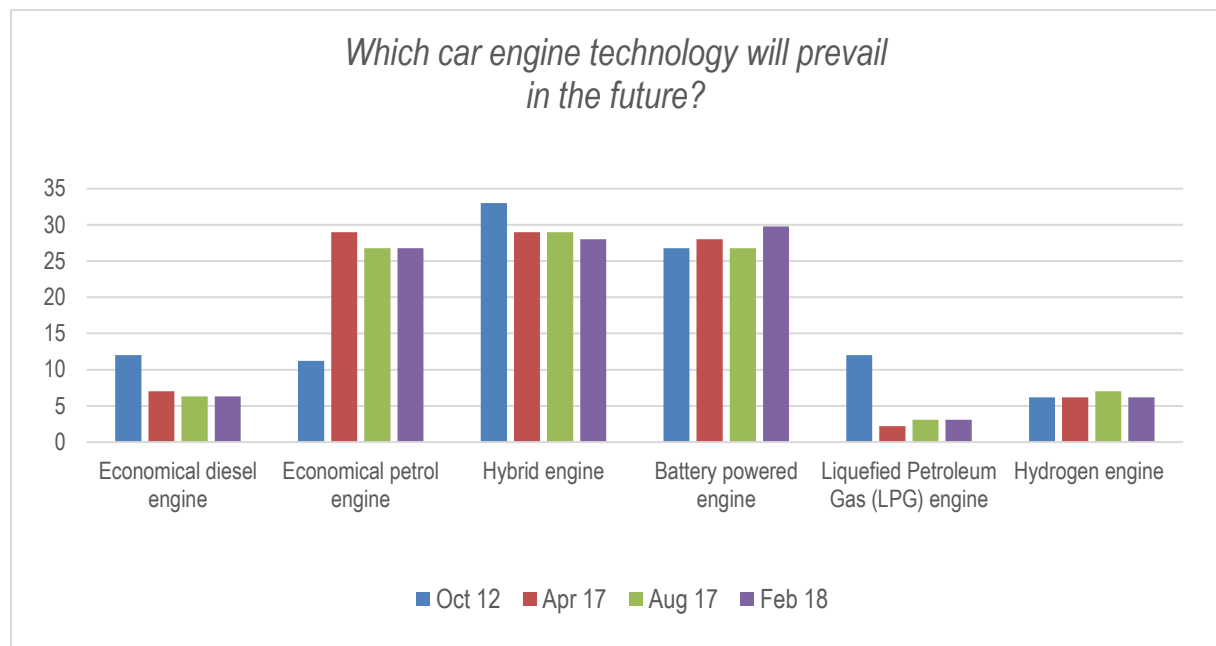
In March 2018, almost 3,800 all-electric passenger cars were newly registered; a peak thus far for the German market. This was an increase of almost 120 per cent compared to the previous year. However, this development must not obscure the fact that electric vehicles are still niche products in Germany: The share of cars with petrol or diesel engines was amounted to 95 per cent in the first quarter of 2018.

Nevertheless, German car manufacturers are also increasingly focusing on electric engines and are expanding their product range successively. And where traditional companies are not agile enough, users literally assume the role of the producer themselves, as the German mail service Deutsche Post has shown with the StreetScooter.

But what do consumers think of e-cars after discussions about legally permissible bans of diesel engines and the scrapping bonus for diesel cars? In the public's opinion, what engine technology will prevail in private motorised transport in Germany in the future?

Our surveys show the following: The belief in economical diesel engines as a promising technology of the future was already not particularly high in 2012. Currently, these engines are still mentioned by only 6 per cent of those surveyed. Participants consider economical petrol engines (27 per cent), hybrids (28 per cent), and battery powered vehicles (30 per cent) to be prevalent in the future. Whereas the high figure for purely battery powered motors was only achieved for the first time in the latest measurement.

E-cars gain importance (Figures in per cent)



Source: Produkt + Markt

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Despite this development, the results show that electric mobility is a tough act to follow for German car owners. And the current registration statistics indicate that it can often be quite a long way between believing in something and acting on it.

However, one needs to keep in mind that only about one in four owners of cars with internal combustion engines feels well informed about electric cars. About every other owner feels they need more information in order to be able to properly weigh whether an electric car could be a real alternative for them. This lack of information also becomes apparent when it comes to operation costs. According to their own estimates, more than two out of three owners of traditional cars have only a very vague or even no idea of the electric power consumption and the associated costs of an electric car.

But those who do go electric, often show unparalleled enthusiasm for their vehicle. Ethnographic in-home interviews supported by ethnographic self-observations provide remarkable insights. They show the integration of e-cars into everyday life, both in drive and charge mode: What effects does owning an electric vehicle have on mobility behaviour and routing? How do consumers deal with charge times? How do they solve the charging issue at home, how on the road? Which conscious and unconscious buying motives are there? What are the ideals and values of e-car owners?

Furthermore, starting points for improving the user experience can also be comprehensively identified. For example, if it takes three attempts to work the card reader at a public charging station. The owner did not even notice this problem at all and it also did not reduce his enthusiasm for his vehicle in any way. Here, the combination of immediate observation and qualitative survey shows its full potential.

Hence, this provides important information about experiencing electric mobility as well as for targeting.

The traffic light turns green. The e-car accelerates rapidly. The combustion engine in the next lane hardly gets off the spot. However, it is very noisy instead. – Anyone who has ever witnessed the sparkle in the eyes of an e-car driver in that kind of situation from the passenger seat or in a documentation video knows that ethnographic interviews really allow a lot more insights and thus also a lot more learning.

The Author



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