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**FRENCH NEWS IN ENGLISH**

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## **INSIDE THIS ISSUE**

### **Spotlight**



**Under current rules -  
France would pay you  
to drive this new air car**

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# This little French car runs on air, costs just €3,700, and is quietly taking over the world

Indian motor giant Tata Motors recently launched the cheapest small car in the world. The Tata Nano will retail in India for around €1,700.

The launch, however, precedes something even more revolutionary. **Tony Todd** meets the French engineer who has created a zero-emissions family car which will enter the French market in 2008 - with a price tag of just €3,700.

LAST year Tata Motors bought the exclusive rights (in India) to use a French zero-emissions technology, which it plans to adopt in future generations of its ultra-cheap family cars.

Now the man behind this technology, Frenchman Guy Nègre, is gearing up for commercial manufacture of his own range of cars across Europe - and South Korea - starting late this year.

His company MDI, whose main research facility is in Carros, near Nice, makes cars that run, literally, on air.

Powered by tanks of compressed air, these small cars can do more than 150km on a single tank.

It is estimated it will cost about 40 centimes to fill up at home and €1.50 at a filling station.

The cars - in five or three-seat models - come with an air compressor which will take about three hours to fill the tank when plugged into the mains.

With a large-scale compressor, which filling stations could be equipped with, the process takes less than five minutes.

The air is fed through a piston system, much like a traditional engine, which turns the drive shaft and propels the car forward.

It feels like driving a normal car except that the engine runs "cold" because there is no internal combustion and the engine shuts down completely when the car is sta-

tionary, starting again instantly when your foot comes off the brake pedal.

Inventor and company director Mr Nègre has been working on this technology for 15 years.

For years, he says, he has encountered hurdles put in his way by companies whose interests would be best served by the public continuing to buy petrol or petrol-driven cars.

He has persevered, however, and intends to start commercial manufacture in France at the end of 2008.

MDI maintains that their zero-emissions cars, which can comfortably reach 120km/h, will retail for about €3,700.

## Market

This is an interesting price - not only because it is enormously cheap compared with other new cars on the European market but because it is less than the €5,000 the French government has said it will knock off the price of ultra-low pollution cars.

The ministry of ecology confirmed this figure and said that as the rules stand, the government would have difficulty not providing a full, if not substantial, cash rebate to the buyer.

Mr Nègre told *The Connexion* such an idea is not practical and he does not anticipate it will remain in place long enough for his



INVENTOR: Guy Nègre at the MDI research factory near Nice. He hopes to be manufacturing commercially in 2008

customers to benefit.

He said: "It's a nice idea to think that the government would give people money to have one of my cars."

"But that's fantasy. The reality is that they are getting the money to help people buy low emissions cars from those people buying high polluting vehicles, which are surtaxed."

"Money comes out of one pot and goes into the other. "If everyone was to buy one of my cars tomorrow, where would the cash come from to subsidise low emissions vehicles?"

Another problem the technology faces is the fact that fossil fuels, as ecologically bad, still raise huge tax revenues for governments across the world.

This cash is used to maintain infrastructure, subsidise public transport, fund defence programmes... The list is long.

Mr Nègre said: "If we all stopped buying petrol tomorrow, the tax black hole would be vast."

"It's just like cigarettes. Everybody knows smoking is bad for you - and the government has banned smoking in public places."

"They still generate a huge amount of tax money from

“Generating reliable and constant electricity, liberating people from the grid, helping the environment and giving people affordable and clean cars, are all part of the MDI dream”

it, which goes some way to paying for the problems associated with the habit.

"Using petrol is a bad habit too and the government generates revenue from it."

"They will have to make up for this in some other way if everybody was to start using cars that do not use petrol."

Mr Nègre's cars do themselves have an option to use a burning fuel to improve performance, recommended for long-distance drives.

By heating up the air as it moves to the pistons, the power output of the engine is hugely increased and the increased pressure means that the air tanks can be replenished as you drive.

Although this does mean that there will be some CO<sub>2</sub> emissions - around 30g per kilometre - this is still far below the emissions of even the smallest petrol-engine vehicles.

He calculates that you could drive from Nice to

Paris, a journey of almost 1,000 kilometres, on about €16 of petrol.

The technology is not limited to cars. MDI have also produced working models of forklifts and stand-alone electricity generators that will power an average-sized family home for a fraction of the cost, in the long term, of being attached to the electricity grid. The generators would cost about €3,000.

Mr Nègre said: "Generating reliable and constant electricity, liberating people from the grid, helping the environment, giving people affordable and clean cars, and eventually providing free public transport, are all part of the MDI dream. This should start to become a reality in the next year."

The business model for the way the cars will be manufactured and distributed is also a radical shift away from the traditional automotive industry.

Although Mr Nègre plans to have a manufacturing plant of his own for the French market, he does not intend to export. Instead, MDI will be exporting the technology and tools so cars can be made in standardised factories around the world, in a kind of franchise.

Without having sold one vehicle, MDI has managed to generate enough revenue to continue an extensive research and development programme by selling territories across the world to industrialists keen to turn their hand to the manufacture of MDI-branded air cars when the concept is ready.

Unlike the Tata deal, where the company intends to put the engine in its own models, these territories will benefit from centralised marketing and technological improvements from MDI.

Territories have been sold across Europe, and Mr Nègre told *The Connexion* that last month he secured a deal in South Korea which has reserved each of the country's allotted 22 zones of manufacture. MDI's ball is rolling and gathering momentum. They hope the same will go for their cars on the streets of European cities by this time next year.



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