

Volkswagen calls the pace of the green technology race into question

The German car giant's bosses are concerned about the pressure they are under to slash emissions, and legislators would do well to listen

VW's
R&D
boss
Heinz-
Jakob
Neusser
with
the
35g/km
Passat
plug-
in



by **Hilton Holloway**
2 October 2014

[Follow @autocar](#)

[Volkswagen](#)'s 'group nights' have become a fixed point on the global motor show circuit.

The night before a big motor show opens, VW commandeers the biggest exhibition hall in town (one year, converting Beijing's Olympic swimming pool) and rolls out never fewer than eight or nine concepts or new models from its 12-brand line-up.

The night before this week's [Paris motor show](#) was no different. I watched from the stands as cutting-edge concepts such as the [VW XL Sport](#) and [Lamborghini Asterion](#) were driven up the ramp.

But perhaps the production-destined new [Volkswagen Passat plug-in hybrid](#) was the most important car at the exposition.

This – rather beautifully built – machine is just the sort of car that will become a much more familiar site on our roads by the end of the decade.

As the factory cost of hybrid transmissions falls and the cost of building 'clean' diesel engines increases (as well as the potential backlash against diesel pollution), mid-range hybrids such as this will help VW meet the EU CO2 'fleet' target of 95g/km by 2020.

But once the razzle-dazzle was over, VW boss Martin Winterkom stepped forward to deliver to EU legislators and politicians the most nuanced and diplomatic warning you are ever likely to hear.

The edited version was quite simple: before you set fleet CO2 targets for beyond 2020, give the industry a two or three-year breathing space.

Winterkom pointed out that unless real consumers start to buy hybrid and battery electric vehicles in numbers, improving on the 95g/km Co2 average would be commercially impossible.

"Climate protection doesn't come free," as he put it. The upshot, is that the plug-in Passat – and cars like it – might yet mark the technical peak for the mass-market car.

You can't, as Winterkom didn't quite say, force people to buy these low CO2 models. While he repeatedly stressed that VW was 'rigorously' in favour of the 2020 95g/km target and the 'greening' of its factories, his killer fact was that reducing CO2 output by 1g/km required VW to invest of "100 million euros every year".

Winterkom hinted that tougher EU targets could prevent the auto industry from "competing" globally if it was flattened in its home market by selling very expensive technology that it could not get consumers to pay for.

"We fully back the 95g/km target, but European carmakers must not be stopped from competing," Winterkom said. "It took a huge effort to get to the 95g/km target and Volkswagen is spending 10 billion euros in Europe on research and development every year.

"I am making these objective and calm points. We can only have environmental sustainability if we can afford it. Otherwise we are calling industry into question. VW is doing its utmost to future-proof."

Volkswagen can expect a tomado of criticism from environmental activists once his speech has seeped across social media. It will, no doubt, be portrayed as a typical 'profit-hungry' company trying to 'hold up environmental progress'.

You can also guarantee that there will be absolutely no discussion about how you force car buyers to pay enough for super-low CO2 to make them commercially viable.



Promoted stories





Simple But Powerful 2 Step Method Eliminates Credit...

LendingTree

49 Powerful Pictures In American History

22 Words



25 Times Target

Completely Missed the Mark

Was \$129 Save \$30
Russell Hobbs multi processor
RHMP750

22 Words



18 Most Dangerous Roads in The World Worth Avoiding

LifeDaily



Python Eats A Porcupine Whole, Then The Unexpected...

LolBoom



The 10 Best Cars Coming in 2017

RM AutoBuzz



The 10 Ugliest Cars Of All Time

RM AutoBuzz



Why Guys Are Loving This 100-Year-Old Razor

Harry's



The Fastest Way To Pay Off \$10,000 In Credit Card Debt

LendingTree

Recommended by Outbrain

JOIN THE DEBATE

Comments 13

art ill

Unless fuel gets hugely more

2 October 2014

Unless fuel gets hugely more expensive, or tax on theoretical emissions gets far more draconian the benefit to the user of a car gets less for each small reduction in CO2, so i am sure he is correct. The public just wont stump up extra cash to buy even more eco cars..... And of course the true cost of the extra technology isnt yet known (how reliable will it be) afterall more modern diesels havent been as good as the users of more old fashioned diesels might have expected.... We also have the growing issue of other dangerous emissions (which we get more of from diesel) which might lead people to choose more petrol powered cars in the future increasing the average CO2 further.

[Log In](#) Or [Register](#) To Post Comments

ordinary bloke

artily - Unless fuel gets hugely more expensive ...

2 October 2014

I quite agree, the incentive for buying an all-electric or plug-in hybrid needs

to improve to encourage ordinary people to buy them. By incentive, I don't mean a bigger grant from the government (i.e. all of us), I mean the cost of buying and running it. The only really affordable all electric car as far as I can see, is the Renault Zoe; now, I'd like one of these, it would suit my sort of use admirably as I do mainly journeys of 30-40 mile round trips, don't use it to go shopping much as the local supermarket is only yards from my front door, and only occasionally need a car for trips of more than 70-80 miles and these normally involve a stop-over so could re-charge over night. The Zoe would be great, except that Renault charge a monthly fee for the battery that makes it roughly the same cost as I would spend on petrol, which rather negates the whole point of buying one, in my view. More to your point, artily, there seems to be a danger that the EU unintentionally makes European car makers uncompetitive by enforcing ever stricter emissions regulations that apply only to Europe, and make their cars too expensive.

Enjoying a Fabia VRs - affordable performance

[Log In](#) Or [Register](#) To Post Comments

Maxecat

[H.H, fadyady and artill diesel haters out in force again.](#)

2 October 2014

The new VW Passat model, according to an earlier Autocar report, will not be sold in the UK in petrol form only diesel engined models. Whether VW's no petrol models for the UK will apply to this petrol/electric hybrid remains to be seen. As the previous article stated, sales of petrol engined Passats in the UK were non existant for the current model, nobody wanted to buy them. I would love to know what exactly H.H., fadyady and artill think are the "dangerous" emissions produced by diesel cars with Euro6 engines. The maximum permitted particulates are identical for petrol and diesel under Euro6. Diesels do indeed produce more Nox than petrol cars but far less of the deadly CO, carbon monoxide the silent killer gas. Much of London's pollution comes from the burning of natural gas in homes and offices with sunlight turning the emissions into smog. As during the Beijing Olympic games it was determined that most particulate matter came from construction, car and train brake pads and discs, tyre wear, etc, as Beijing has virtually no diesel cars they can hardly blame diesel. Although some do not like or want to buy a diesel car the European sales figures tell us those views are in the minority, indeed petrol engined cars of over 1400cc are becoming rare in the UK and unsaleable used.

maxecat

[Log In](#) Or [Register](#) To Post Comments

Smilerforce

[think of better targets](#)

2 October 2014

The whole fun has been taken out of a lot of new cars. They should really come with the energy efficiency rating like a fridge, as they become more complex with emission reduction chasing they become ever more boring and consumable. What is annoying is larger more exciting engines are disappearing so we are now stuck with highly strung turbos that are getting closer to the CC equivalent of a scooter.

[Log In](#) Or [Register](#) To Post Comments

kcrally	<p>Most greenhouse gases are 2 October 2014 Most greenhouse gases are from buildings. (ie heating / air conditioning)</p> <p>www.KOOOLcr.com</p> <p>Log In Or Register To Post Comments</p>
fadyady	<p>Good to hear car industry speak 2 October 2014 Winterkorn makes a good point and since it's coming from the representative of such an immense conglomerate, the Eurocrats should lend him a sympathetic ear. I would say there's little point spending €100 million on dropping 1g/km since it has little or no relevance in real life driving. On a separate note, love the way Mr Holloway surrounded the phrase 'clean' diesel with quotation marks! It is imperative that other journalists stop touting diesel as 'clean' unless it is for high-miling, extra urban travel or in large cars / SUVs.</p> <p>Log In Or Register To Post Comments</p>
LP in Brighton	<p>It's funny but I don't hear other maker's complaining 2 October 2014 Maybe VW's "green technology" isn't quite as clever as it is supposed to be? Or maybe other manufacturers know that this is the way governments work - setting impossible targets that cannot be achieved on the basis that it will force progress and the industry will respond better than it would if more realistic goals had been set.</p> <p>Log In Or Register To Post Comments</p>
Oilburner	<p>VW complaining too much? 3 October 2014 In the year 2000, the average fleet emissions in the EU was 181 g/km. In 2013 it was down to 128 g/km. If VW's claims are true, then each manufacturer has (on average) invested 5.3 billion over 13 years on CO2 reduction. That's 400m euros a year. Is that really a big deal for a company as big as VW? In addition, what they don't make clear is if that cost is really an *extra* cost on top of the huge amounts they invest in developing their products annually. Or if that cost is part of their normal investment in improving their product line to remain competitive. e.g. Jaguar spent £1.5bn in bringing the new XE to market. Hmmm. I do have some sympathy, as the easy gains have been made and it must be getting harder (and therefore more expensive) to keep getting CO2 output lower and lower each year. But I suspect VWs iffy financial situation is the real problem, not EU targets.</p> <p>Log In Or Register To Post Comments</p>
Will86	<p>Difficult 3 October 2014 Winterkorn makes a perfectly reasonable point, but equally, the concerns of environmentalists are not based on fiction, but accepted scientific data. Doing nothing is simply not an option. Unfortunately I believe the government will have to step in to change people's buying habits. They have already done so with diesel cars, most people don't drive diesels out of choice but for financial reasons. The same will have to be done with</p>

electric cars. However, a word of caution, provide incentives and disincentives to steer new car purchases, but be careful not to penalise owners of older cars. It's far better for an older car to stay on the road than be scrapped and a new one made. Cars made 10-15 years ago are not significantly worse than cars made today.

[Log In](#) Or [Register](#) To Post Comments

minus28

How to really encourage "green" car use

3 October 2014

I'm sitting writing this in Norway and think Britain could learn a thing or two from what is happening here. In Norway, an electric car is not subject to VAT. You don't pay any of the road tolls or ferries (which for my daily commute are about £4 a day). You get to drive in the bus lane. These are real incentives which when considered along with the cost savings on fuel add up to thousands of pounds a year (in my case it would be about £5000 equivalent). The result of this is that there are thousands of Nissan Leafs on the road. Teslas are commonplace (a decent model S costs about the same as diesel engined Audi A5 but has no associated fuel costs). The new e-golf will probably be the best selling car in Norway in 2015. This perspective shift has made regular cars all but obsolete overnight - most people buying a new car in Norway now would at least be considering an electric car. Volkswagen has a valid point - it doesn't matter how green their cars are if there is no government incentive to buy one instead of a regular car. In response to the comment on NOX emissions - Norway has had predominantly diesel driven cars for many years up to now and our smog problems in the valleys in winter are caused almost exclusively by NOX emissions from diesel engines. Diesel efficiency is great, but NOX is a problem. Most people are also unaware that a particle filter is largely ineffective until it is hot, and that most short commuting journeys are therefore actually producing a lot of particulates, especially in wintertime. Norway is a member of the EEA and subject to EU laws and regulations, so I guess it is up to individual countries to step up the incentives for clean car use, and come up with an energy plan that doesn't involve burning more coal and gas which would be no better than diesel or petrol!

[Log In](#) Or [Register](#) To Post Comments

NEXT >>




Add your comment

[Log in](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Find an Autocar car review

Choose a make 

Then a model 

Driven this week

[Audi R8](#)

CAR REVIEW

9 January 2016

Audi sends its mid-engined flagship in search of supercar scalps

[Volkswagen Caravelle](#)

CAR REVIEW

8 January 2016

Is there a place for the new iteration of this van-based MPV in 2015?



[2016 Volkswagen Beetle Dune 1.8 TSI Cabriolet prototype review](#)

FIRST DRIVE

8 January 2016

Volkswagen's new soft-roader retains the visual charm of the Beetle while also being fun to drive on or off the tarmac



[2016 Mercedes C220d AMG Line Coupé review](#)

FIRST DRIVE

7 January 2016

The new Mercedes C-Class Coupé cuts the mustard looks-wise, and this is our first opportunity to see how it drives on challenging UK roads



[2016 Lexus RX450h Premier review](#)

FIRST DRIVE

5 January 2016

First UK drive of latest RX reveals it's strong on performance, outstandingly refined with improved on usability – but still not our cup of tea to drive

TOP 5s

[Not fit to wear the badge](#)
[Seven seats for £2k](#)
[150mph for £2k](#)
[Bargain barges](#)
[Race-inspired hot hatches](#)
[Sub-£30k Ferraris](#)

LATEST CAR REVIEWS

[Range Rover Sport SVR](#)
[Ariel Nomad](#)
[Porsche Macan](#)
[Jaguar XE](#)
[Fiat 500X](#)
[Mercedes AMG GT S](#)

TOP MANUFACTURERS

[Audi](#)
[Jaguar](#)
[Hyundai](#)

[Honda](#)
[Mercedes-Benz](#)
[Renault](#)

WE RECOMMEND

[Frankfurt motor show](#)
[What Car?](#)
[Autosport](#)
[Classic and Sports Car](#)
[PistonHeads](#)
[Practical Caravan](#)

ABOUT AUTOCAR

[Terms and conditions](#)
[Privacy notice](#)
[Cookie Policy](#)
[Get in touch](#)
[Editorial Complaint?](#)
[Sitemap](#)
[RSS feed](#)

AUTOCAR MAGAZINE

[Subscribe now](#)
[The Autocar Road Test](#)
[Digital edition](#)
[Autocar on Facebook](#)
[Autocar on Twitter](#)
[iPad apps](#)

© 2015 Haymarket Media Group

The Haymarket logo consists of a red square followed by the word "haymarket" in white lowercase letters on a dark blue background.

We use cookies to improve your experience. By using our site you are accepting our [Cookie Policy](#).

OK, I agree