MAHINDRA ELECTRIC | **MAKING EVs ACCESSIBLE TO WIDER AUDIENCE**

In its bid to bolster the electric vehicle movement in the country, Bengaluru-based Mahindra Electric has in recent times collaborated with several ride-sharing players. Auto Tech Review caught up with **Mahesh Babu, CEO, Mahindra Electric** to know more about its strategy around ride-sharing as well as the overall EV landscape.

BEYOND MANUFACTURING EVS

Mahindra Electric is striving to go beyond just developing and manufacturing EVs. The pioneers of electric mobility in India, the company is aiming at making EVs more accessible as well as to develop an entire EV ecosystem. The company is pretty much convinced that the future is going to unveil a different pattern of vehicle ownership, wherein the industry will gradually move towards shared and connected mobility, backed by EVs.

And in line with its thought process, Mahindra Electric conducted various pilot programmes with Ola, Meru and Zoomcar that are seen as a precursor to the future of mobility that is going to be shared, connected and electric. These pilot programmes will prove the viability of EVs for new and unique business models built around shared mobility, thus encouraging more players to seriously consider adopting EVs, said a confident Babu.

And to make EVs more accessible to a wider audience, Babu revealed that the company will continue to promote EVs by forging unique partnerships in the shared mobility space, but will lay stress on developing vehicles and solutions aimed at addressing the mass movement. It will also engage in discussions with all important stakeholders – government bodies, charging infrastructure companies, regulatory organisations, etc, to expedite the process of developing an EV ecosystem.

Mahindra Electric believes that mass adoption of EVs will actually change the face of the transportation industry. The objective is to ensure that EVs are adopted by maximum population for their daily commute, Babu observed.

COMMITTED TO THE EV CAUSE

Needless to say, Mahindra Electric has been steadily leading the shift towards EVs in India for close to a decade now. The company's EVs have run close to 70 mn km on road – enough experience for the company to utilise and meticulously formulate its next steps. Mahindra Electric is riding high on the success of its e2o Plus and eVerito, which has been rapidly gaining popularity among fleet customers like Bhagirathi, Lithium Urban Technologies, Meru, etc and was also in the fray for the EESL tender.

The company is also going strong with its eSupro (cargo and passenger van) in the CV segment – it has been conducting pilot programmes across various locations such as Himachal Pradesh Road Transport Corporation and food retailer Big Basket as a last mile connectivity solution. These pilot programmes will pave the way for rapid adoption of EVs as commercial vehicles in future, Babu stated. Without divulging much, Babu dropped enough hints about electric three-wheelers and electric buses being the next to roll-off the production line. The company is also working on developing state-of the-art high performance products and will soon make an announcement in this regard, Babu revealed.

CHARGING AVENUES

Charging infrastructure is a vital part of developing the EV ecosystem. There is also some degree of confusion over what type of charging (fast and slow charging) will work in the Indian context. Babu drove home a crucial point that slow charging is more than adequate for daily city driving since a normal charging of two to three hours will suffice for those who drive within the city limits (driving between 40 and 100 km). Fast charging is a good option for those who want to travel 150 or 200 km a day, something most of us rarely do in our lifetime, Babu noted.

Typically, fast charging of 15 to 60 min is ideal for travelling 150 to 200 km a day. Fast charging is also viable for fleet operators, who typically drive 200 km a day or people who engage in city-to-city travel. Fleet operators, who travel 200 km a day, will be happy to embrace EVs, said Babu since the operating cost is much lesser and nullifies all the initial investment. On the contrary, Babu has no doubts that long distance buses and trucks will be the last segment to adopt EVs.

Underscoring the importance of creating adequate avenues for charging, Babu said that people in the country will have to focus on home charging but agreed that it will be a challenge to put up charging infrastructure at apartment complexes, malls, hospitals, etc. Battery swapping, on the other hand, is a good idea to run a pilot on, said the Mahindra Electric CEO, but deployment should happen only if the pilot programme pans out to be successful. He believes two- and three-wheelers will be the first ones to embrace battery swapping.

ROUND-UP

There is no denying the fact that the EV movement cannot be a success unless OEMs start indigenising battery making, something Babu is confident that it could happen over the next two to three years. There is a great deal of debate about whether the industry is ready to meet the government's 2030 target of electrifying 100 % of commercial vehicles (used for inter-city transport) and 40 % of personal mobility. Babu, while conceding that it is an ambitious goal, said that certain segments will attain the government target, while some will find it difficult. There is a high possibility of two-wheelers, three-wheelers, intra-city buses or shared mobility taking up EVs in a big way, Babu remarked.

The Power Ministry's recent announcement that no separate license will be needed for setting up charging stations, since service of charging vehicle does not mean sale of electricity, is good news for the industry. This move provides clarity on an important issue and will help new players foray into the charging infrastructure segment, thus shoring up the pace of EV adoption even further, Babu signed off.

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