Asian views of alternatively fuelled 'green' machines

Contributed by Synovate
Wednesday, 16 May 2007

Asian views of alternatively fuelled 'green' machinesÂ

HONG KONG â€” Over 80% of Asian car consumers are aware of some form of alternatively fuelled vehicle, with Toyota and Honda the brands most associated with alternative vehicle development according to the Synovate Motoresearch Alternative Fuels consumer study released today.

In the first syndicated study of its kind, Synovate Motoresearch surveyed more than 3,000 consumers who presently own a new vehicle or intend to purchase one in the next year in China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand to determine their familiarity with alternative fuel technologies, their perceptions of alternative fuel vehicles and their likely purchasing behaviour.

Synovate Motoresearch Global Director, Jon O'Loughlin, said the study revealed a high level of awareness among consumers in Asia regarding alternative fuel vehicles but also highlighted negative perceptions regarding costs of ownership, the availability of the fuels themselves and the reliability of such vehicles.

"Consumers across Asia are generally quite aware of developments in the alternative fuel vehicle market, as well as the factors motivating the development of such technology," he said.

"However, the survey also reveals a need for governments and companies to familiarise respondents with details about alternative fuels, including the positive aspects of these vehicles' performance and reliability."

Overall familiarity across Asia is relatively high for many types of alternative fuel technology vehicles, including hybrid electric, battery electric and direct-injection diesel.

Consumers in Indonesia and the Philippines had the highest levels of awareness of direct-injection diesel vehicles, with 91% of respondents in each country having at least heard of the technology, while consumers in Taiwan (86%) and Thailand (84%) had the highest levels of awareness of battery electric vehicles.

Mr O'Loughlin said despite the strong findings on consumer awareness, there was an urgent need for global consolidation of alternative fuel technology before this would develop into purchase behaviour.

"Car manufacturers are working with alternative fuel companies to develop different vehicle prototypes, but all parties are hesitant to put too much effort into promoting such products until a leading alternative fuel technology is identified globally," Mr O'Loughlin said.

"A little like the competition between VHS and Betamax video recorder technology 25 years ago, until a leading technology emerges, in-depth knowledge and purchases of alternative fuel cars is likely to remain relatively limited for at least the next three to five years as no company wants to promote a technology that may end up redundant," he added.

However, it is not all bad news for global manufacturers of such 'green', alternative fuel vehicles, with some brands already established as green market leaders in Asian car consumer's minds.

"Across Asia, Toyota is the brand considered to be doing the most to bring new technologies and alternatively fuelled vehicles to the market, with Honda a close second," Mr O'Loughlin said.

"Toyota presently dominates all markets except Indonesia, while Honda is the first choice for Indonesian consumers, the second choice for consumers in Malaysia and the Philippines and the third choice for Thai consumers."

Volkswagen, Ford and Mitsubishi were other brands associated with alternative fuel technology by Asian consumers.

"The short term outlook for green vehicles in Asia may not be particularly upbeat, especially with oil remaining relatively plentiful, making the cost of alternatively fuelled vehicles appear higher.

"But as concerns regarding global warming and oil prices continue to strengthen, and as alternative fuel technologies mature globally, demand for such vehicles is likely to be strong in the longer term, especially among Asian consumers who are already open to such products," Mr O'Loughlin said.

Â