

Havana electric vehicle adoption

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"Electric motorcycles are solving a lot of problems in Cuba, they are already used for almost everything," explains Omar Cortina, a Cuban hotel worker who recently purchased his first electric vehicle - a lime-green scooter powered by a lithium battery.

Until recently, Cuba's roads had changed little in the six decades since former leader Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution: the old cars puffing sooty exhaust, rutted pavement, light traffic.

Between 2020 and 2022, the last year for which figures are available, Cuba-based companies produced more than 23,000 electric vehicles, according to official data. Since then, demand has grown, alongside an economic crisis that has slashed both fuel supply and public transportation.

Fuel for combustion-powered engines has for years been scarce in Cuba - prompting hours-long or sometimes days-long queues. And a five-fold price hike earlier this year means a typical 40-liter tank of gas costs more than a state-worker's average monthly wage, far out of reach for most.

Buses in the Havana area are far fewer - and more crowded and uncomfortable - than in previous years. And half the routes to points outside the capital have been eliminated this year, according to state-run media, as fuel and spare parts dwindle.

Those dire circumstances have helped drive demand for the products of newly formed companies like Caribbean Electric Vehicles (Vedca), said company director Julio Oscar Perez.

The firm, a joint venture between Chinese investor Tianjin Dongxing Industrial and Cuban state bicycle manufacturer Minerva, has produced more than 2,000 scooters, bikes and mini-tricycle trucks in Cuba with Chinese parts.

On a recent weekday visit to the company's plant outside Havana, some of Vedca's 64 employees assembled plastic parts, soldered wires, and tightened bolts in an orderly assembly line, while others greeted customers arriving for pick-up.

Other small domestic companies sell electric bikes, ranging from makeshift to upscale. And the government recently authorized imports of far pricier electric vehicles - including Teslas - though few in Cuba can afford such luxuries.

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