



Image: RAC

Oct 08, 2021 00:01 BST

Number of battery-electric cars on the UK's roads overtakes plug-in hybrids for the first time

- *Clear momentum behind BEV sales, despite a depressed overall new car market*
- *28% of drivers surveyed say the fuel delivery crisis has increased their interest in getting an EV*

The UK's transition to zero-emission driving has reached a major milestone with the total number of battery-electric vehicles (BEVs) on the roads

overtaking the number of plug-in hybrid (PHEV) models for the first time, analysis of SMMT data conducted by the RAC has found.*

Following the highest ever single month of new BEV registrations in September – an extra 32,721 were sold, despite overall car sales figures being down significantly on recent years – the RAC estimates there are now 332,299 on the roads, compared to 327,183 plug-in hybrids. BEVs now represent 50.4% of all plug-in cars on the UK's roads since 2010, up from 46.3% at the same time last year.

Although BEVs still only represent just 1% of the total car parc in the UK, the rate of growth in the last few years is unprecedented. From 2018 to 2019, the numbers of new BEVs more than doubled to 37,850 and then nearly trebled to 108,205 a year later. By the end of this year, the total number of BEVs will likely hit a new record of at least 175,000 – a number that would likely be significantly higher had it not been for the international shortage of semiconductors affecting manufacturers' ability to roll more vehicles off production lines.

In sharp contrast, average monthly sales of new diesel cars have fallen from 48,481 in 2019 to 21,814 in 2020 and just 13,067 so far this year. Petrol sales have also declined significantly, from an average of 123,534 a month in 2019 to 75,265 in 2020 and 69,066 so far in 2021.

Despite the impact of the pandemic on both fleets' and private drivers' plans for buying new vehicles, and on manufacturers' production plans – thanks to a shortage of semiconductors, the figures clearly show the strong demand there is for new BEVs in the UK. But what perhaps is even more striking is that demand for PHEVs – which combine an electric motor and either a petrol or diesel tank – doesn't appear to be quite as strong – which suggests drivers looking to move away from petrol and diesel models may be leapfrogging PHEVs in favour of BEVs.

New RAC research also shows the extent to which the fuel delivery crisis has impacted on drivers' desire to switch to go electric. Nearly three-in-10 (28%) of 2,419 drivers surveyed** said that their interest in getting an electric car next time they change their vehicle had increased as a result of recent events, with 43% of this group saying they expect to make the switch within the next three years.

RAC director of EVs Sarah Winward-Kotecha said:

“Against a backdrop of generally poor new car sales, September was a milestone month when it came to battery-electric models. Nearly as many were sold in one month as were sold throughout the whole of 2019, and the figures suggest they are now a more common sight on the UK’s roads than plug-in hybrids.

“These figures show there’s clear momentum when it comes to electric car adoption in the UK, but had it not been for the chip shortage which is hampering new car production, the numbers may well have been even higher. What’s also interesting is that demand for BEVs appears to be outstripping PHEVs, with the latter often cited as a good ‘stepping stone’ between a petrol and diesel model and a full zero-emission battery model. Only time will tell whether it’s the case that drivers and fleets looking to upgrade their cars are choosing to leapfrog PHEVs and instead opt straight for BEVs.

“Sales of electric cars have also eclipsed diesel sales by a huge margin with three battery-electric cars sold for every one new diesel car that went onto the road. This now looks like the end of the road for diesel as nearly 67,000 fewer diesel cars were registered this September than was the case in September 2019, representing an astonishing 86% drop in just two years.

“Fortunately, when it comes to EVs there are a variety of ways drivers can now make the switch in a more affordable way, not least through [EV leasing schemes](#) and by taking advantage of [smart electricity tariffs](#) that offer cheap overnight charging, both of which are offered by the RAC.”

[View embedded content here](#)

* Based on SMMT new registration statistics since 2010. 2010 new registration figures were 167 BEVs and 21 PHEVs

** Source: RAC Driver Opinion Panel survey conducted w/c 27 September. 2,419 drivers responded

The press office email address is press.enquiries@rac.co.uk and media centre is at media.rac.co.uk. **Please note:** the press office is unable to help with individual customer enquiries - please visit the [RAC contacts page](#) to find the right contact.

About the RAC

The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to nearly 13 million UK private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. As well as its premium nationwide breakdown assistance service – with an expert branded patrol workforce attending more than two million breakdowns every year – it offers a wide range of market-leading products across insurance, legal services, vehicle inspections and service, maintenance

and repair. The RAC is also at the forefront in helping drivers make the switch to electric vehicles and leads in the development of new solutions for businesses and OEMs, partnering with the best in the motoring and mobility space.

Visit the [RAC website](#).

Contacts



RAC Press Office

Press Contact

press.office@rac.co.uk

Emails monitored during normal office hours. For breakdown queries, call 0330 159 0740

ISDN number on request