

A lot is happening in the motor-ing world and the changes seem to be arriving much faster. Therefore, as Jerry Burley writes, Africa needs to get on the bandwagon.

Africa is not famous for pre-empting the inevitable, and the inevitable is soon coming. Certainly in the next 25 years or so. If you are reading this article, you must be aware that the world now has multiple manufacturers of electric-only or hybrid cars, that have a mix of small internal combustion backup engine supporting some form of electric primary drive.

Hydrogen power is another take on the "carbon-free" future of motoring and, though still rare, I have witnessed the first inward drift of electric and hybrid cars into Uganda.

Africa only assembles new vehicles, using outdated technology. This means we often end up with ostensibly new but "tail end Charlie" cars that the rest of the world no longer needs. We also import millions of used cars from Japan and Europe, thus helping them dispose their domestic rubbish.

Massive damage

Yes, it has helped Africa solve its transport issues but this often-near-worn-out garbage damages the environment, keeps us poor through spares demands and chokes us with emissions.

Noxious emissions certainly bring a tidal wave of cancers and respiratory problems. I am old so it doesn't matter so much to me but what about the children of today?

As a country, we should deal with this problem without leaving it entirely to new vehicle testing procedures.

The mooted new mega-city that will likely include a composite of Kampala, Mukono, Bombo, Mpigi and Entebbe, will have an estimated 20 million people by 2050.

So what happens when European regulations dictate that they can no longer drive IC-engine (internal combustion) vehicles? Simple, they will stop making them.

Inevitable trend

Volvo has announced they will no longer be making solely petrol or diesel engine cars after 2019. And I bet other car makers will follow suit because this is the inevitable trend.

Tesla and Elon Musk went straight to fully electric, bypassing the IC-learning curve. Germany is outlawing IC in its cities in the next decade.

Battery power is evolving rapidly to the point where it is soon going to be cheaper, cleaner, more powerful, quieter and all-round-better than IC.

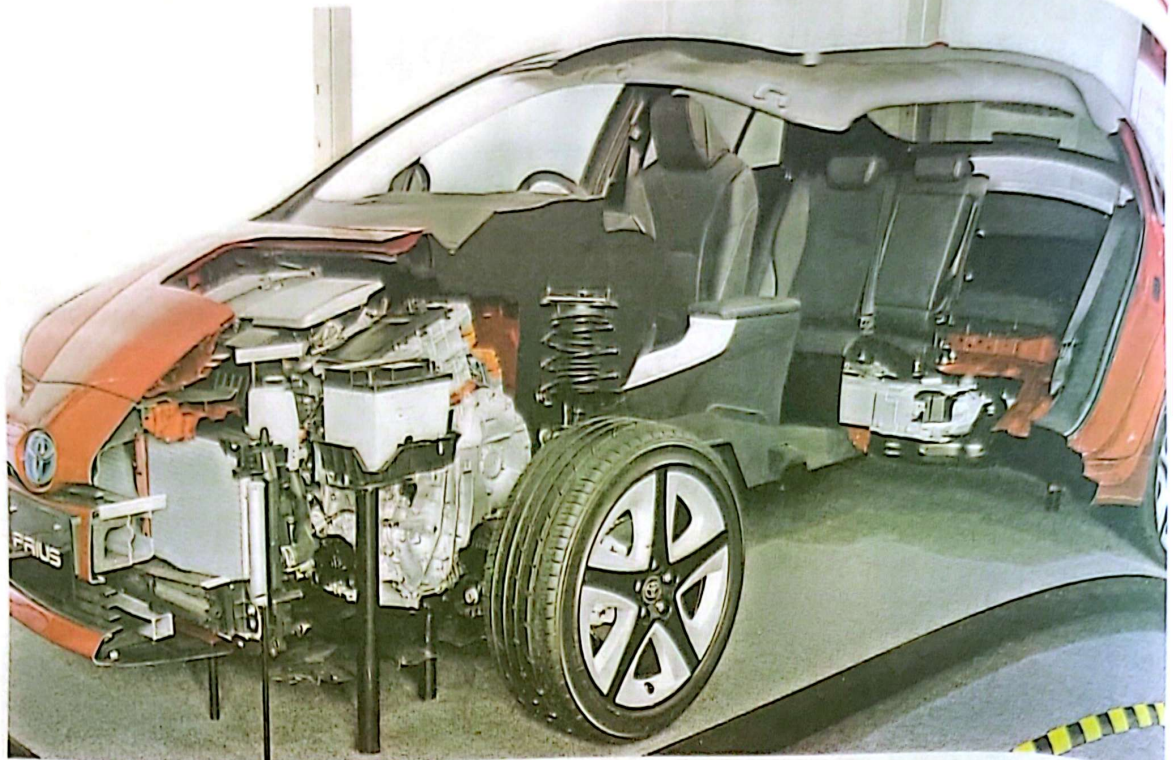
Forget the mumbo jumbo that electric cars just move the pollution problem further up the ladder.

Sure, any form of power generation has an environmental downside but if you have to pollute, put it somewhere and in a form that limits the damage to humans at the very least.

So, the first world used car dealers will soon have no carbon-powered rubbish to pass on to us. Then, millions of end-of-life lithium batteries will come into play, instead of the worn out diesel engines and these will continue to pollute Africa.

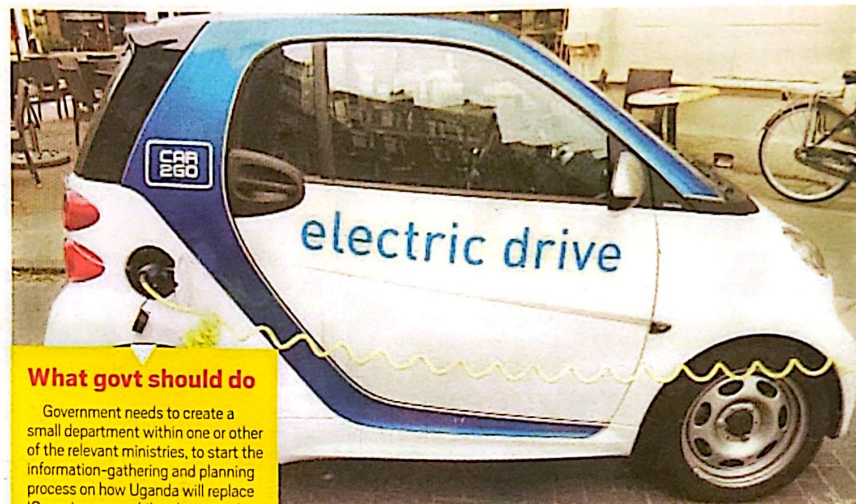
No suitable charging networks

However, we cannot currently



A Toyota Prius cut-away showing petrol and electric power. There are a few of such hybrid vehicles in Uganda already. INTERNET PHOTOS.

Uganda needs to get on electric car bandwagon



What govt should do

Government needs to create a small department within one or other of the relevant ministries, to start the information-gathering and planning process on how Uganda will replace IC-engine cars, whilst also attending relevant conferences and joining think tanks. We need to draw on those with the money and expertise, who are doing expensive research and development elsewhere, to plan how and where we will be as a country, post-carbon fuels usage in cars.

Whether we like it or not, a massive global motoring change is coming. For once, let's not miss the bus. Particularly as it's going to be an electric bus, so if we are not careful we won't even hear it coming. We will just watch it passing us by.

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THE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN MILLIONS THAT WILL BE LIVING IN THE KAMPALA METROPOLIS BY 2050.

An electric smart car recharging. The infrastructure to charge such cars will be the biggest challenge in Uganda when mass production begins.

charge batteries in large numbers. We have no suitable charging networks for electric vehicles.

Electronics will keep us guessing too and no US tech or IT firm will ever share that willingly.

Within the next 10 years, the current alpha-predator car companies are going to play second fiddle...

battery tech boys.

Silicon Valley tech geeks will be calling the shots, not Ford, BMW or any other car maker. Your encrypted car tech problem will only be fixable via the internet.

With virtually no moving, or service parts in an electric vehicle, manufacturers and dealers will have to find other ways to extract cash for "maintenance". Modern IC vehicles are almost at the point now where self-repair is largely a thing of the past.

As a small boy, I watched on TV Neil Armstrong became the first man to land on the moon, nearly 50 years ago. Thirty years later, the entire computing power of the Apollo space missions could almost be bought in a \$100 wrist watch.

If Africa is not careful the rest of the world will bomb us further into the motoring stone age, with tech we cannot cope with and a transportation power requirement that we either cannot access or harness.

And it will be how to recharge our cars that will be the major infrastructure issue. Two million cars in greater Kampala all simultaneously plugged into Umeme? I can just imagine how it will be. Can you?

Moral obligation

So, whereas it is likely not to bother me in 20-years' time, or most of our current government for that matter, we have a moral obligation to the next generation.

We have to start thinking about the future because cars, as we know them today, will not be around much longer.

We have almost unlimited, equatorial sunlight for most of the year and spare hydro-power expansion capacity. Someone must plan how to harness and connect them.

Jerry Burley is a Ugandan-British dual national who has lived in Uganda since 1987. He bought and sold his first car at 14 years...