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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

50,000 Pre-Order Yo-Mobile

By Roland Oliphant

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Prokhorov's hybrid car is seen as an example of successful innovation. **Sergei Nikolayev**

More than 50,000 potential customers submitted advanced orders for Mikhail Prokhorov's Yo-Mobile hybrid in the first 24 hours after Yo-Auto, the joint venture developing the car, started accepting requests on its web site, the company said Tuesday.

By 3 p.m. Tuesday, 24 hours after ordering began, Yo-Auto had received 51,188 applications for the first Russian hybrids, the company said in a statement.

The Yo-Mobile, a joint project of Prokhorov's Onexim Group and Yarovit Motors, has benefited from a richly backed PR campaign, including an endorsement from Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who last month drove a prototype to a meeting with President Dmitry Medvedev.

The interest does not necessarily reflect future sales, however. A pre-order does not amount to a commitment to buy a Yo-Mobile, but prospective customers who register will be given priority if they want to sign a contract to purchase at a later date.

The electric hybrid is advertised with a maximum speed of 120 kilometers per hour and the ability to go 100 kilometers on 3.5 liters of fuel.

More expensive versions are dual-fuel, allowing drivers to fill up on either gasoline or natural gas.

The Yo-Mobile is offered on the company's web site as a five-door hatchback, a "crossover" and a minivan, all of which retail starting from 360,000 rubles ($12,800).

The most expensive version — a dual-fuel vehicle with four-wheel drive and a portable power plant for powering external devices — will cost 490,000 rubles.

Eighty-two percent of orders received in the first 24 hours were for the crossover version, the company said in a statement Tuesday afternoon. Fifteen percent were for the hatchback, and only 3 percent for the minivan.

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The foundation stone for the new Yo-Mobile factory will be laid in St. Petersburg next month, and cars are expected to roll off the production line in the first half of 2012.

The Yo-Mobile, which was unveiled to great fanfare in December, will be Russia's first hybrid. It has been lauded as an example of Russia's much-discussed innovative future.

Drivers interested in placing an advance order for a Yo-Mobile can do so at the car's official web site.

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