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I-Go to add all-electric cars in 2011



Sharon Feigon, chief executive officer of I-Go, test-drove an all-electric Mitsubishi i MIEV on Thursday. The battery-powered car may be added to I-Go's fleet next year. (Simon Brubaker, Chicago Tribune / July 26, 2010)

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The legroom is surprisingly adequate, and the acceleration isn't bad either for a battery-powered vehicle with a top speed of about 80 mph. There's even the obligatory cup-holder. Air bags too.

Overall, pretty good for a bare-bones car that leaves no carbon footprint.

That's your **Getting Around** reporter's knee-jerk assessment of the new all-electric **Mitsubishi i MIEV** after going for a test spin in one last week in the **Wicker Park** neighborhood with Sharon Feigon, chief executive officer of I-Go, the environmentally conscious car-sharing rental program.

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"Is it on?" Feigon asked after turning the key in the ignition. The only sound was two bells confirming the electric motor was working.

Because it was brutally hot outside and also to put a power drain on the electric motor, I immediately turned on the air conditioner to the

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maximum setting from the front passenger seat, which in this i MiEV prototype was on the left side. The four-seat hatchback, which is currently available only in Japan, has its steering wheel on the right side. A version of the i MiEV for the U.S. market is expected to be available next year.

The air conditioner blew cold, and Feigon pulled out of the parking spot and onto the street. The plug-in car performed very much like the gasoline-electric hybrids that I've driven. Unlike the underpowered neighborhood electric vehicles that I have previously tested and given a thumbs down for city driving (they lag behind traffic and are not highway legal), I wouldn't hesitate to use an i MiEV to run errands or take short trips.

The i MiEV, sporting a rounded, aerodynamic front end, can travel up to about 100 miles on a charge. After that, you must use a power cord to plug it into an electrical socket and wait four to six hours for the vehicle to fully recharge.

"This is a totally good urban solution car," said Feigon, who along with other I-Go officials will test-drive the i MiEV for about two weeks. I-Go won't have possession of the prototype long enough to see how the battery packs perform during winter.

Mitsubishi has not set a price for the U.S. i MiEV yet, but Feigon said it is expected to sell for about \$30,000 and include rebates and tax incentives.

"It's perfect for our members who take very short trips to the grocery or hardware stores or ride out to the suburbs to visit family or go to Ikea or Costco," Feigon said.

I-Go, which serves about 15,000 members who've chosen to eschew car ownership for riding mass transit, bicycling or walking, plans to expand its fleet of about 250 fuel-efficient and gasoline-electric hybrid vehicles to include about 30 all-electric cars by late 2011, Feigon said.

The plan fits neatly into I-Go's goal of reducing car ownership in the [Chicago](#) area. The organization estimates that each I-Go car can replace up to 20 privately owned cars because almost half of I-Go members sell their cars or postpone buying cars when they join.

"We plan to have the largest electric car fleet in the Chicago area," Feigon said.

The i MiEV is the first model being tested at I-Go, which was founded in 2002 and has about 35 locations around the city and the suburbs near [CTA](#) rail stations. Other all-electric cars under consideration by I-Go include the [Nissan Leaf](#) and the [Chevrolet Volt](#), which is equipped with a small, gas-powered engine that creates electricity when the battery charge runs out.

Mitsubishi's only factory in North America is in [Normal, Ill.](#), and I-Go officials are hoping the automaker builds all-electric vehicles there.

I-Go and its business partner, the [Center for Neighborhood Technology](#), have secured a federal stimulus grant of about \$700,000 from the [U.S. Department of Energy](#) to lease all-electric cars and install charging stations. The grant will pay for the incremental difference between the cost of a gasoline-powered car and a hybrid or all-electric vehicle, as well as the recharging facilities, Feigon said.

The project is designed to complement a city of Chicago plan to set up at least 50 charging stations citywide by next year. A small number of recharging points, both private and public, already exist in the city, including a solar-powered plug-in station that the city promoted to [International Olympic Committee](#) representatives during the Daley administration's unsuccessful bid to host the [2016 Olympics](#).

The U.S. may have up to 1 million charging stations by 2015, according to some industry estimates.

More information about I-Go is available at [igocars.org](#).

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