

Toyota seeks to shed light on future in car-light towns

Borneo Motors launches the brand's first EV in Singapore, but wants to collect data instead of sales

By Leow Ju-Len

What role will cars play in tomorrow's eco-friendly towns? Borneo Motors and Singapore Power Group have agreed to find out together, after the 2 companies inked a deal on Thursday (Jun 30) to partner up on a car sharing scheme in Tengah, the Housing and Development Board's (HDB) 24th town project.

Planners are building eco-friendly features into the 42,000-home town, such as rainwater harvesting, a centralised cooling system that will cut energy used for air-conditioning and a car-free town centre.

To determine how residents in such a town will take to car sharing, Borneo, the authorised dealer for Toyota and Lexus in Singapore, will supply 8 cars - 7 hybrid and 1 full electric - to the venture, while SP Group will install the charging infrastructure.

From June 2023, Tengah residents will be able to use SP Group's phone app to locate, book and rent the Toyotas on a per-hour or daily basis. The partnership is exclusive

within the town for 5 years.

"Tengah will be Singapore's first low-carbon, smart energy town, and will become a blueprint for HDB towns of tomorrow," S Harsha, managing director of sustainable energy solutions at SP Group said at the signing ceremony.

He added that teaming up with Borneo Motors is part of SP Group's intention to work with a "curated list of partners" that will help residents to live a more sustainable lifestyle.

Users will get to use the Toyotas at a discounted rate, and will have early access to the bZ4X, Toyota's first mainstream electric car. Sold in relatively few markets as Toyota warms up for the global EV race, the bZ4X is a 5-seat crossover with enough battery capacity to comfortably exceed 400 km on a single charge.

At current Certificate Of Entitlement prices, it could cost around S\$280,000. Jasmmine Wong, the chief executive of Borneo parent Inchcape Singapore and Greater China, said she could not comment on when the company will launch the EV to the public here because of the



Inchcape Singapore and Greater China CEO Jasmmine Wong with the Toyota bZ4X, one of the cars that will be used for the car-sharing scheme at Tengah. PHOTO: INCHCAPE SINGAPORE

limited supply.

Borneo, however, wants the bZ4X to deliver data instead of sales.

"We want to find out whether people in Singapore like car sharing. We want to see the acceptability and whether this really works for their last mile journey, and also the usage: how often will they use it, when will they use it, under what circumstances do they use it?" Wong told *The Business Times*. "These are very important data to us. If we can have all this information, it will allow us to tailor a more specific solution that could be a future business model for us."

Whether car sharing will add materially to Inchcape's coffers remains to be seen. The 8 Toyotas involved in the car sharing project amount to roughly half-a-day's sales for Borneo.

"Definitely, we plan to scale up," said Wong. "First, we need to understand whether residents welcome this idea or not. If the usage is high, we'll add to the business."

The wheels have come off electric vehicles, Page 16