



From left: Mark Gemmell, chief executive, Electric GT Holdings Inc; Andy Eastlake, managing director, Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership, UK; Victoria Pelka, senior policy researcher, Citizens Advice, UK; Kevin Brady, principal officer, Heat & Transport Energy Policy Division, Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment; Marguerite Sayers, executive director, Customer Solutions, ESB; and Paul Girr, chief engineer, Jaguar Land Rover

Pictures: Maura Hickey

# Shock tactics: motor industry rises to the electric challenge

Spurred by yet another damning climate change report earlier this month, the third annual EV summit showed how cars are adapting to survive in an emission-free environment, writes **Róisín Kiberd**

In February this year the Irish government committed to an ambitious plan, promising that by the year 2030 only zero emission cars would be sold in this country. It also plans to bring half a million electric vehicles onto the road by the same year. For anyone driving right now, that means the next car you buy might well be a hybrid, or fully electric.

Gathering at Croke Park on Wednesday, October 24, the Electric Vehicle Summit addressed the questions, challenges and opportunities which will arise from the 2030 plan. The third such event in as many years, the summit hosted speakers from organisations whose use of 'EVs' (Electric Vehicles) serves as case studies for environmentally friendly business transformation.

There were also talks from, and expert panels of, business leaders, researchers and advocates for the cause of electric vehicles.

Delivering the event's opening address, ESB's executive director of customer solutions Marguerite Sayers discussed updates being made to the infrastructure supporting electric vehicles in Ireland, including more efficient charge points which will take only six minutes per 100km, 'superhubs' capable of accommodating eight cars at a time on motorways, and smaller, three-car hubs dotted all over the country.

The ESB is considering introducing fees for these services, wagering that the improvements will make them worth the cost. Some 2,300 home chargers have also been

installed across the country as part of a pilot scheme: the government currently offers a grant of up to €600 for their installation.

"I think we can all agree that the car industry is an essential part of the picture," said Gareth Davis, head of E-Cars at ESB. "If it doesn't deliver, then a lot of what the policymakers envision won't be able to happen." Fittingly, Croke Park's Cusack suite was filled with gleaming new electric vehicles for the occasion, indicating that car manufacturers are more than prepared to rise to the challenge.

Paddy Magee, manager of Renault Ireland, David Thomas, managing director of Volvo Car Ireland and James McCarthy, chief executive of Nissan Ireland all took part in a panel discussion on 'What Ireland's car industry needs in terms of policy changes in order to expand the market for EVs'.

All said their companies were well prepared for the electric switchover, driving a cultural shift by producing appealing and affordable hybrid and 'pure' electric cars and identifying potential market segments, such as van and taxi drivers, where early adoption should be incentivised further. Most speakers agreed that Ireland's electric vehicle infrastructure will need improvement in the coming years, but EV sales are rising exponentially, indicating that change is already under way.

Paul Girr, chief engineer at Jaguar Land Rover, delivered a talk on the future of electric vehicles accompanied by pictures of its covetable, luxurious cars (start saving now, and perhaps one will be yours by 2030...), discussing how



From left: Turlough Kinane, managing director, Thermalmod; Gareth Davis, head of eCars, ESB; Dr Francesco Pilla, lecturer in smart cities and geographic information systems, Dept of Planning and Environmental Policy, UCD; Marcella Murphy, senior engineer, Dún Laoghaire Co Council and Europcar Mobility Group Ireland



Marie O'Donnell, marketing & communications, ESB eCars; Aisling Donagh, ESB and Jamie McGovern, ESB eCars

the firm envisions becoming a software company, as well as a vehicle manufacturer. Its EVs are capable of self-steering, have an inbuilt navigation system and a battery manager (designed to overcome the 'range anxiety' many electric vehicle drivers experience), and can handle off-road driving and steep inclines with 400 brake horsepower, going from zero to sixty in 4.5 seconds.

The event also featured several case studies demonstrating the successful adoption of electrical vehicles. Colm Brady, managing director of GoCar and Europcar Mobility Group Ireland, revealed how

the electric vehicle sharing scheme has grown and developed over the last decade, with GoCar's users typically showing a dramatically reduced rate of car ownership and an increased rate of cycling, walking and use of public transport.

Electric Ireland's Power Off & Save Project demonstrated a willingness among users to moderate their power consumption, using 'smarter home' technology to reduce electricity usage at certain times. Meanwhile, Marcella Murphy, senior engineer at Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, talked about how she updated the council's

operations with electric vans, transforming a tired fleet which was costing the council large amounts to operate, hire and repair. The new Citroen Berlingo vans have reduced nitrogen dioxide in local air and dramatically reduced fuel and maintenance costs, and the council is planning to invest in more EVs in the near future.

"It was a risk, but there's a risk to doing nothing as well," Murphy said. "We thought going electric would be worth that risk, and it has certainly turned out to be true."

The final talk of the day was given by Dr Francesco Pilla, lecturer in smart cities



From left: Gareth Davis, head of eCars, ESB; David Thomas, managing director, Volvo Car Ireland; Paddy Magee, country manager, Renault Ireland and James McCarthy, chief executive, Nissan Ireland



Michelle Whelan, marketing, Zurich; Colm Cooper (former Kerry footballer) and Deirdre Leacy, head of Direct & Partnerships, Zurich Insurance

and geographic information systems at the Department of Planning and Environmental Policy, University College Dublin. Dr Pilla's work involves tackling air pollution with a combination of tactics, finding ways to move the pollution away from a city's inhabitants while also devising ways for them to produce less of it in the first place.

His scheme, 'Iscape', is currently being piloted in several cities around the world, including Dublin. Its experiments combine the surreal with the practical; one effort to 'hack the air' in the German city of Bottrop involved passers-by being asked to move a

tree around a city centre on wheels, as an interactive, educational 'intervention'. Another 'living lab' experiment saw children in Dublin tasked with building a low boundary wall from Lego.

While charming and unusual, these experiments address a sobering question: how can we ensure that the cities of the near future have safe and breathable air? Worldwide, air pollution is linked to over 5.5 million premature deaths every year, including those of roughly 1,200 people in Ireland. That's before we even begin to consider the more widespread cost to the environment of carbon emis-

sion. Urgent calls to reduce emissions are heard every year, including an especially worrying one earlier this month.

Published by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, it stressed that every year, month and day we continue without changing is creating irreversible damage to our planet, and that a steep decline in carbon emissions will be critical to our survival. In light of such reports, the Irish government's goal of electric-only vehicles by 2030 might seem ambitious, difficult and perhaps unrealistic, but it might be the only choice we have.