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Article :**Honda Launches World's First Level-3 Self-driving Car**

Directions: Read the following article aloud.

Honda announced on March 4 that its luxury sedan “Legend” is the world’s first passenger vehicle to hit the market equipped with “level-3 autonomous driving technology.”

The company hopes that the cutting edge technology of the level-3 autonomous vehicle will enhance its presence in the auto world. Honda is promoting the Legend’s capability of booting up its self-driving system when the vehicle is in congested traffic on an expressway.

Overseas rivals are also wrestling with programs for upgrading autonomous driving technologies, and the competition is becoming increasingly fierce.

Honda is aware of the urgent need to accelerate its electric vehicle (EV) development, which has fallen behind overseas competitors. Of key significance to Honda’s survival will be its success or failure in establishing the image of “Honda worthiness.” It is a new goal that Toshihiro Mibe, the company’s executive managing director, has called for. Mibe is to be promoted to the position of the company’s president in April.

Honda has made a series of decisions on closure and consolidation of manufacturing plants at home and abroad under the leadership of current present Takahiro Hachigo, with the aim of resuscitating sapped profitability of the firm’s automobile business. This follows the failure of the expansion strategy pursued by former president Takanobu Ito, who is currently a senior adviser to the company.

Meanwhile, Honda has been investing ample resources in research and development, including next-generation technologies, increasing the budget for three years straight from March 2018. The R&D expenditures in March 2020 stood at ¥821.4 billion (\$7.58 billion USD), a 23% rise from March 2015, before Hachigo took over as company president.

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In April 2020, Honda released its humanoid robot “ASIMO” and reorganized its research and development subsidiary, headed by Mr. Mibe. Product development for leading-edge automobile technologies was brought under the direct supervision of the Honda head office.

Pride in the Safety of the New Legend

The launch of the Legend with the level-3 functions for control of acceleration, braking, and steering is a major achievement of these organizational reforms.

When it comes to a comparison of Honda with rival firms, Yoichi Sugimoto, executive chief engineer of Honda’s R&D Company, likens Honda to the tortoise in Aesop’s Fables, and competing companies to the hare.

“Honda has a corporate culture focused on safety with sincere and straightforward honesty. As a consequence, we have been able to overtake the hare,” he notes with confidence.

Kimiyoshi Teratani, an executive officer of Honda, echoes that pride, saying, “It is of great significance for us to be able to demonstrate the superior level of our technologies, which elevate the value of our brand.”

Be that as it may, Honda cannot be complacent. Mercedes-Benz of Germany is scheduled to release level-3 capable vehicles later in 2021. Moreover, Ford Motor Co. of the United States plans to bring its level-4 autonomous driving technology vehicles — capable of all driving tasks without human intervention within a limited area — onto the market by the end of 2021. China is also keen to put its autonomous driving technology to practical use by 2025.

Honda’s major challenges under Mibe’s presidency will be vehicle electrification, along with autonomous driving technology. Honda has set the goal of making electric cars account for two thirds of its four-wheeled vehicle sales by 2030, but envisions that most of the vehicles would be hybrid (HV) gas-and-electric-powered cars. However, the shift to EVs by China, the U.S., and European carmakers puts Honda at risk of being left behind by the global competition.

Source: Honda Launches World’s First Level-3 Self-driving Car
<https://japan-forward.com/honda-launches-worlds-first-level-3-self-driving-car/>

2 Key phrases and vocabulary

Directions: First repeat after your tutor and then read aloud by yourself.

1. hit the market 市場に出る

When the iPod first hit the market in 2001, it could only work with Mac computers.

2. fall behind 後れを取る、脱落する

If you don't stay ahead of your competition, you're invariably going to fall behind.

3. when it comes to ~のことになると

I am a radical in political and social ways, but I'm such a conservative when it comes to technology.

4. be that as it may たとえそれがそうだとしても、それはともかくとして、それはさておき、いずれにせよ

But be that as it may, it happened and it's the yesterday's affair.

5. be keen to ~したくてたまらない、~することを熱心に望む

He is keen to emphasize that karate is about far more than sport.

3 Questions

Directions: Read the questions aloud and answer them.

1. What technology makes "Legend" the first passenger vehicle that became available for purchase?

2. When is Honda aiming to achieve the goal of making electric cars account for two thirds of its for-wheeled vehicle sales?

3. Do you think Honda will fall behind if they don't shift their focus from Hybrid to EV more drastically?

4. Would you like to own a self-driving car? Why / Why not?

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日本語関連記事：

「ウサギ」を抜いた「カメ」世界初のレベル3 「ホンダらしさ」で生き残りへ

ホンダが3月4日、市販車では世界初となる「レベル3」の自動運転技術を搭載した高級セダン「レジェンド」の発売を発表した。高速道路での渋滞時にシステムが走行を担う機能で技術力をアピールし、自動車業界で存在感を高める起爆剤にしたい考えた。ただ、海外勢も自動運転技術の高度化に取り組み、競争は激しい。出遅れる電気自動車(EV)開発の加速も迫られる。4月に社長に昇格する三部(みべ)敏宏専務が目指す新たな「ホンダらしさ」の創出が生き残りの鍵を握る。

八郷隆弘社長体制下のホンダは、前社長の伊東孝紳相談役が進めた拡大路線の失敗で収益力が低下した四輪事業を立て直すため、国内外の工場の閉鎖や集約を決めた。

一方、次世代技術などの研究開発費は手厚く投じ、平成30年3月期から3年連続で増加。令和2年3月期は八郷氏の社長就任前の平成27年3月期比で23%増の8214億円に上った。

昨年4月には、ヒト型ロボット「ASIMO(アシモ)」などの製品を生み出し、三部氏が社長を兼務する研究子会社の本田技術研究所を再編。四輪の商品開発機能をホンダ本体に移管し、先端技術の研究開発に特化させた。

レベル3機能を搭載したレジェンドの発売は、こうした改革の大きな成果といえそうだ。

本田技術研究所の杉本洋一エグゼクティブチーフエンジニアはホンダを「カメ」に、競合他社を「ウサギ」にたとえ、「ホンダには安全については真摯、愚直に取り組む文化がある。結果的にウサギを追い越すことができた」と自信を示した。

ホンダの寺谷公良執行職も「優れた技術を示し、先進的なブランド価値を訴えるためにも意義は大きい」と述べた。

とはいえ、安穩とはしてられない。独メルセデス・ベンツも今年後半にレベル3対応車を発売する予定だ。走行エリアを限定するなど特定条件下で完全自動運転ができるレベル4についても、米フォード・モーターが年内の商用車展開を、中国も25(令和7)年までに実用化を目指す。

三部体制では、自動運転以外でも電動化が大きな課題となる。ホンダは30(令和12)年までに四輪販売の3分の2を電動車とする目標を掲げるが、主にハイブリッド車(HV)を想定してきた。中国、欧米勢がEVシフトにかじを切るなか、世界の潮流から取り残される懸念もある。

出典：<https://japan-forward.com/japanese/%e3%80%8c%e3%82%a6%e3%82%b5%e3%82%ae%e3%80%8d%e3%82%92%e6%8a%9c%e3%81%84%e3%81%9f%e3%80%8c%e3%82%ab%e3%83%a1%e3%80%8d%e4%b8%96%e7%95%8c%e5%88%9d%e3%81%ae%e3%83%ac%e3%83%99%e3%83%ab%ef%bc%93%e3%80%80/>

「ウサギ」を抜いた「カメ」世界初のレベル3 「ホンダらしさ」で生き残りへ