

Could the 2030 ban on new petrol and diesel cars kill off the British car industry?

Britain has the finest specialist car makers in the world, and they must evolve in different ways to thrive beyond the 2030 deadline

By Jeremy Taylor
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There are roughly 35 registered British car manufacturers, and 500 defunct ones. What will be left after Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced plans to [bring forward his ban on fossil fuel vehicles](#) by five years to 2030?

The shift to electric vehicles in nine years' time is part of a 10-point government plan to tackle the climate crisis. It will slash car emissions to the equivalent of 46 million tons of harmful carbon dioxide, down from today's 68 million tons. Nobody disputes that road transport's contribution to the UK's carbon emissions – but what impact will the 2030 ban have on the remnants of our automotive industry, which in the past has had to overcome many hurdles to survive?

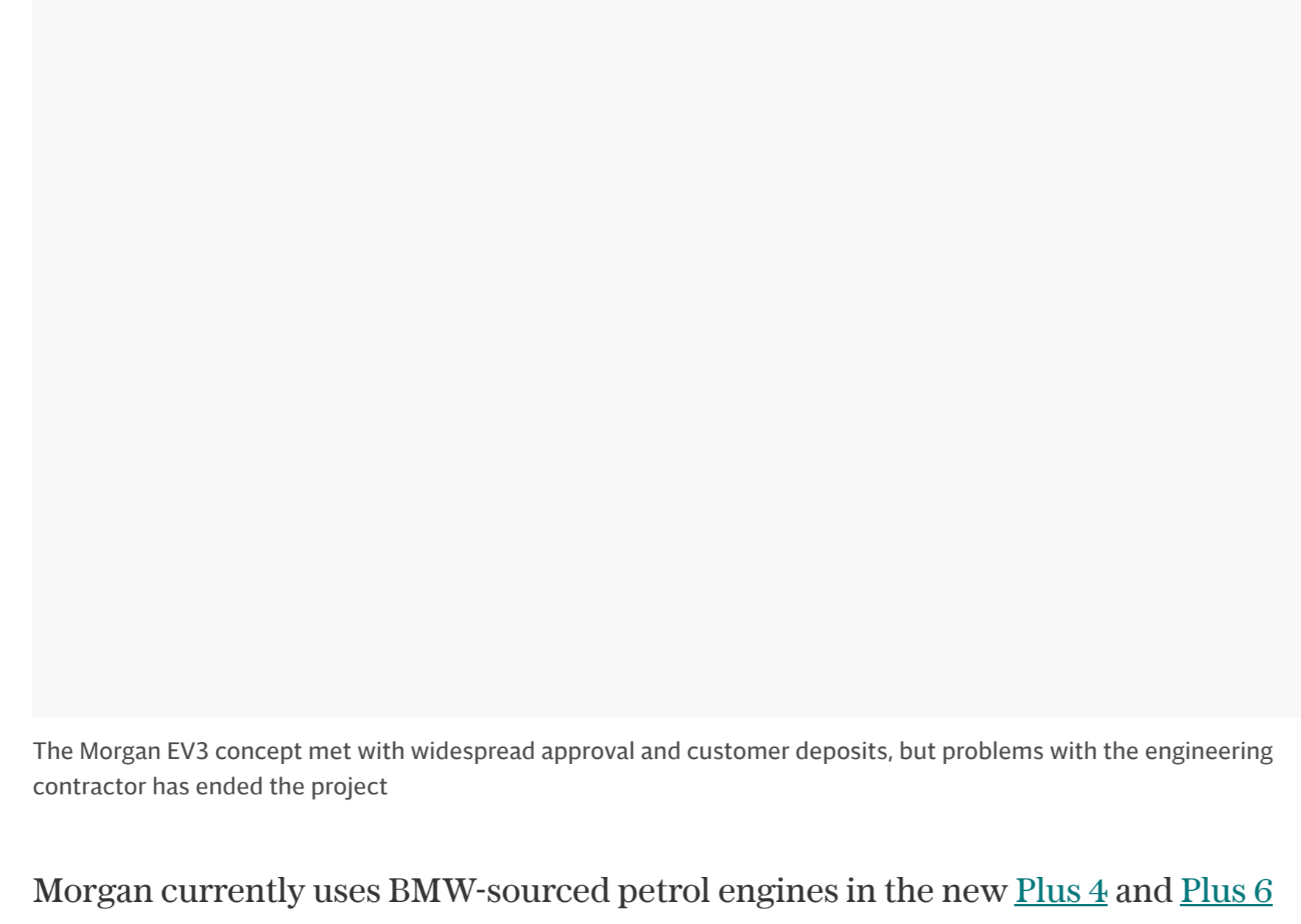
Somerset-based Ariel Motor Company builds only 100 vehicles a year, including the madcap [Atom 4](#) car and Ace motorbike. Managing director Tom Siebert says the low-volume manufacturer currently employs 32 staff, with a healthy order book stretching two-and-a-half years. "We are still waiting for some clarity on the 2030 announcement from the government because the detail is still a bit thin. I'm not a 'Boris basher' but there does need to be more guidance with so much at stake," he said.



Ariel is famous for its lightweight Atom track car, but it has plans for a 1,180bhp hyper car powered by a gas turbine

Ariel first revealed a four-wheel drive, electric two-seater in 2017. The 1,180bhp car was due to be launched last year before Covid struck. The [Hypercar](#) ingeniously uses a gas turbine to make electricity and rockets silently to 60mph in only 2.4 seconds. "We've always tried to be an innovative company, so the 2030 deadline is actually an exciting prospect. Ariel doesn't have limitless funding to pay for research but we are confident about the future."

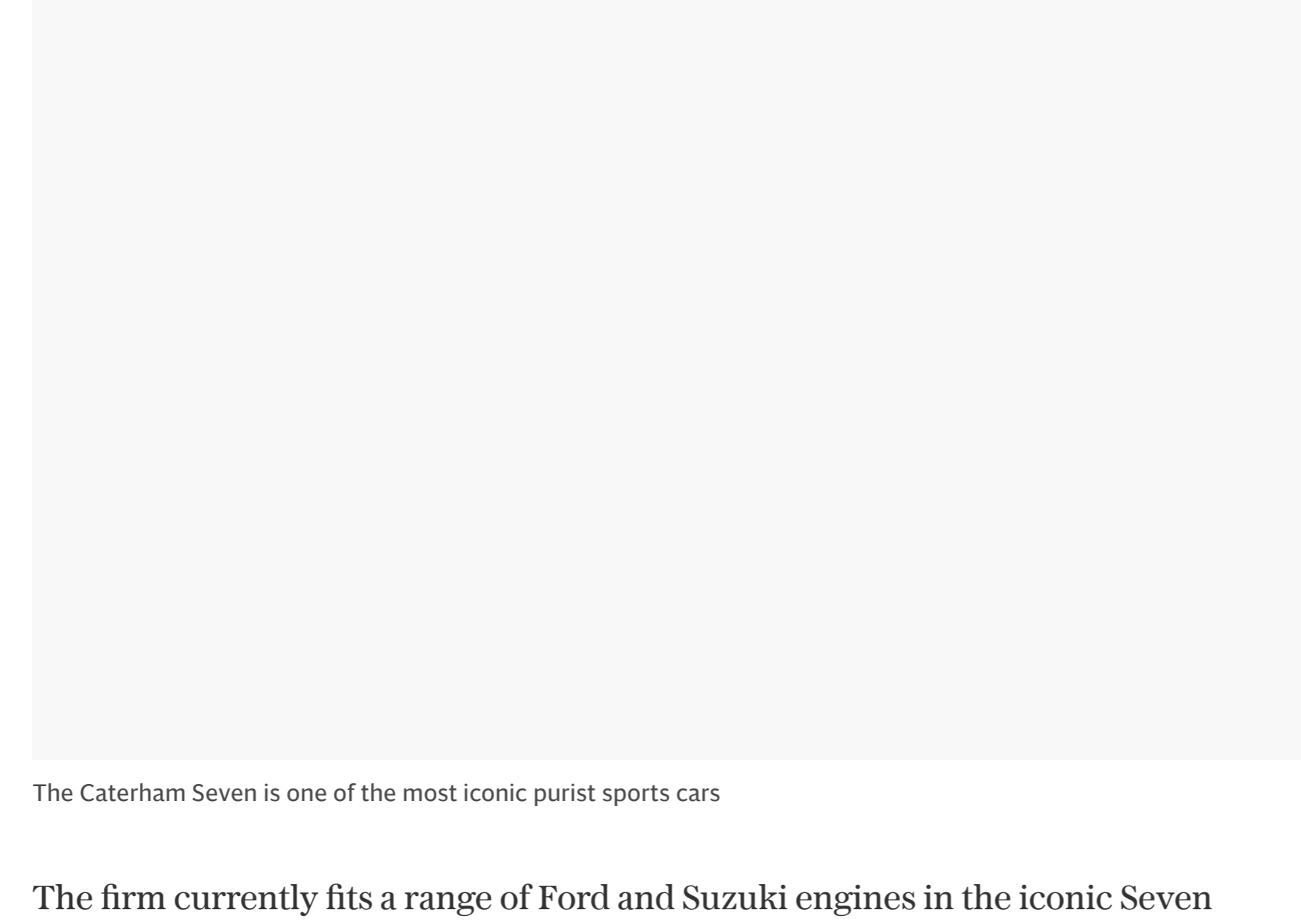
Likewise [Morgan](#), which pulled the plug on its [EV3 electric three-wheeler](#) project following four years of development. "We had orders and deposits but ultimately there were issues with our powertrain supplier," said the company's marketing boss Toby Blythe. "Despite the disappointment, the EV3 project taught us a huge amount about battery-powered vehicles. We know that a 2030 deadline is looming and we aim to be well ahead of schedule. There's every chance our next vehicle will be a BEV [battery electric vehicle]."



The Morgan EV3 concept met with widespread approval and customer deposits, but problems with the engineering contractor has ended the project

Morgan currently uses BMW-sourced petrol engines in the new [Plus 4](#) and [Plus 6](#) models but has yet to confirm whether it will use the German company's EV technology for future vehicles. "For us, it's not just a case of putting a Morgan shell on a BMW i8 platform," said Blythe. Despite the pandemic, Morgan sold 600 cars in 2020, just 100 down on the previous year. With new backers announced in 2019, the company has since revamped its ageing headquarters in Malvern – including a separate research and development plant. "That team is focussing heavily on future powertrains. We have also recruited electric vehicle specialists and now employ 200 people," said Blythe.

Last spring, Graham Macdonald, CEO of [Caterham Cars](#), said the British brand was waiting for "affordable technology" before developing an all-electric powertrain for its range of stripped-down sports cars. Caterham has distant roots in Lotus and follows that company's famous design mantra of "just add lightness", which is not conducive to battery technology as the cells are heavy.

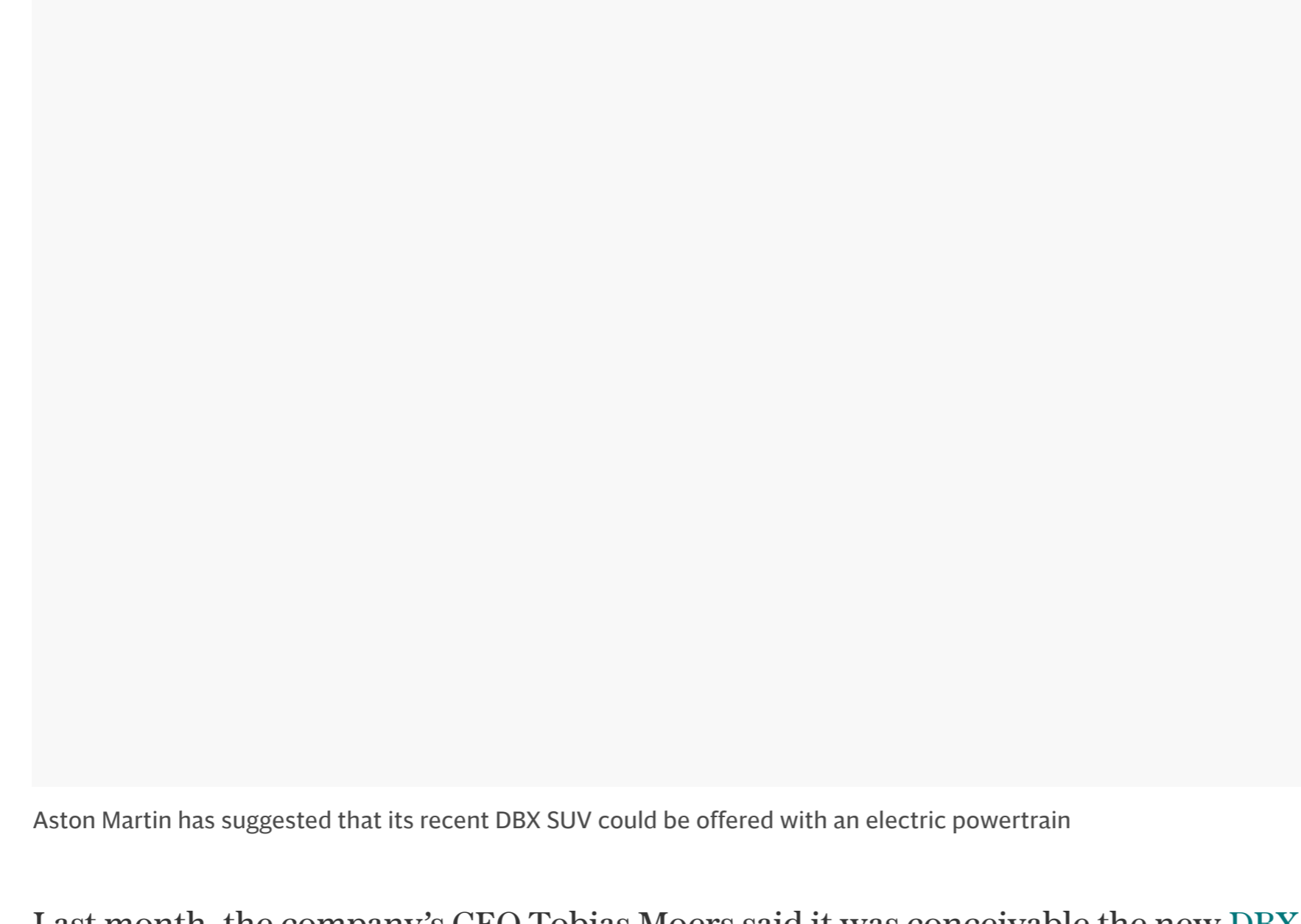


The Caterham Seven is one of the most iconic purist sports cars

The firm currently fits a range of Ford and Suzuki engines in the iconic Seven range, only manufacturing the chassis in-house itself. Macdonald told us: "We tested an all-electric prototype last summer [2020] which offered the same kind of performance and agility as our current, entry-level car, that costs around £27,000. In the current market, that BEV car would be £100,000 – which isn't feasible. "Once electric car technology has advanced, we are confident there will be a solution. I also feel that, depending on legislation, there would still be a market from enthusiasts to use our cars on a track-only basis."

Caterham has 125 employees and Macdonald says he knows all of them by name. "I can honestly say there has been no panic from the team. We've been through enough ups and downs in the past to know Caterham will survive."

A year ago, [Aston Martin](#) reportedly shelved plans for the Rapide E – the company's first all-electric car. The announcement was later denied and the model still appears on the company website. However, a spokesperson confirmed the saloon was now "permanently paused".



Aston Martin has suggested that its recent DBX SUV could be offered with an electric powertrain

Last month, the company's CEO Tobias Moers said it was conceivable the new [DEX SUV](#) could be offered in electric form. That would likely rely on a technology tie-up with Mercedes-Benz, which took a larger stake in the business in 2020. Lagonda is also being touted as the brand name for Aston's hybrid and all-electric range.

The spokesperson declined to comment on how well the company was prepared for the 2030 deadline but did confirm that Aston Martin would have a fully electric car by 2026. The new hybrid [Valhalla supercar](#) will appear in the new James Bond film, *No Time To Die*, now due to be released this October.



The hybrid McLaren Speedtail is the fastest road car that the Woking-based company has produced

At McLaren, director of product strategy Jamie Corstorphine said the Surrey-based manufacturer was also already well-advanced with plans for a range of hybrid and, ultimately, all-electric cars. The company launched its first hybrid car in 2012 with the blisteringly quick [P1](#). The Speedtail is the latest hybrid offering - with more than 1,000bhp, it is McLaren's fastest road car to date.

February will also see the launch of the [Artura hybrid](#), the first of a new generation of McLaren supercars. "We still need clarification from the government on electric car regulations but our current production plan allows for the first EV sometime between 2025 and 2028," said Corstorphine.

With commitment and innovation such as this, the low-volume British car industry shows that it's more than ready for the challenges ahead.

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