

Eicher truck doubles as electricity point to counter India's erratic power supplies

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India's Eicher Motors is launching a cheap, diesel-powered pick-up truck aimed at small-business owners that doubles as a miniature power station, capable of lighting up a home during the country's frequent electricity cuts.

The Multix, revealed by Eicher yesterday, is the latest of a wave of initiatives by auto groups to create vehicles suitable for thriftier consumers in emerging markets.

Erratic power supplies are one of most urgent problems India faces. More than 300m Indians have no reliable access to electricity, according to the International Energy Agency.

Although Prime Minister Narendra

Modi has pledged to bring round-the-clock power to every village in the nation by 2022, many energy experts doubt that the country's creaking energy grid can be quickly expanded into rural areas, leaving thousands of villages reliant on distributed technologies such as solar lanterns to light their homes at night.

Retailing at Rs232,850 (\$3,645), the Multix, which Eicher developed with US-based all-terrain vehicle maker Polaris Industries, converts between a passenger car, with space for a family of five, and a commercial vehicle.

But it also includes a "power-take-off point" capable of generating up to 3kW from its diesel engine — enough to power lighting in a home or office, or

run a drilling machine or an agricultural water pump.

When used as a generator, the Multix's 12-litre fuel tank can power a small house for about 10 hours, the vehicle's developer said.

"We have found this enormous unmet need, which is that so many people in India have terrible access to power," said Siddhartha Lal, Eicher's chief executive. "So this provides a back-up for your business, or even if your family is watching a Bollywood movie, which is the kind of electric car India needs."

Eicher has invested Rs3.5bn (\$55m) to develop the model, which will be built in a new plant in the northern state of Rajasthan, with annual capacity for 60,000 vehicles.