

EV report turns into PR disaster for Aston Martin

Aston Martin CEO Tobias Moers has said the firm will investigate how a report was published that said EVs needed to be driven 48,000 miles to repay their embodied carbon footprint – a figure that has been debunked by other studies.

Temps de lecture : minute

7 December 2020

The report, which Aston Martin contributed to alongside Honda, Bosch and McLaren, was covered by national newspapers but then heavily criticised by EV researchers. It subsequently emerged the PR company that produced the report, Clarendon Communications, is registered to the home of Aston Martin's government affairs director.

Why does this matter?

The story, which has been playing out this week following some weekend super sleuthing (see below), highlights the potential dangers of attempting to obfuscate the picture on new emissions-saving technologies and, as BusinessGreen's James Murray points out, "tilts the risk equation for firms seeking to spin contested studies".

It began last weekend following The Times' and others' coverage of the report which said EVs needed to be driven for nearly 50,000 miles to pay back their carbon costs in relation to ICE vehicles. EV experts were quick to point out the figures in the "misleading brochure" were incorrect and the real distance was more like 16,000 miles.

EV manufacturer Polestar, which has distanced itself from the

controversy, said the report ignored key data that would have reduced the number of miles quoted, while others highlighted the methodology behind the data used itself was also flawed.

The story then took another more interesting turn when founder of BloombergNEF Michael Liebreich decided to pay £3 to ask HMLR who owned the address of the PR company Clarendon Communications, which was behind the report. It transpired it was registered to Aston's Director of Government and External Affairs. Liebreich's summary of the events and the "sock puppet" PR company is here, in which he calls for transparency around the report's production.

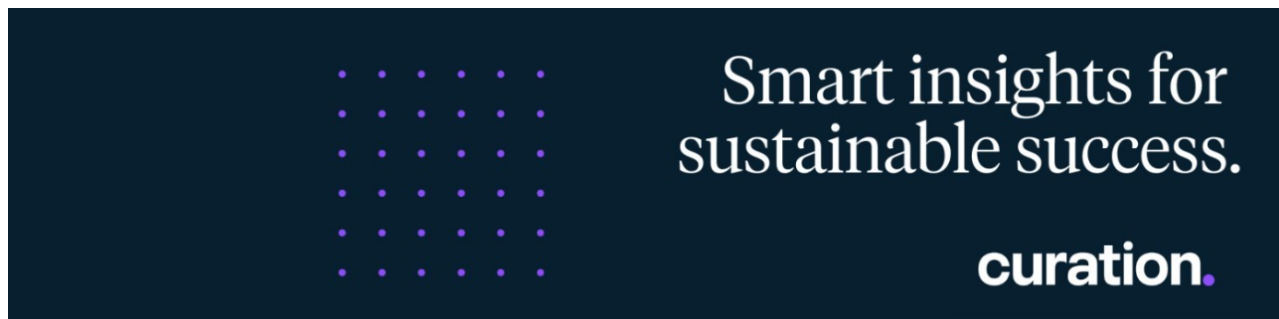
In response Aston Martin, which has been slow on the electrification front and now faces a 2030 ICE vehicle sales ban in the UK, initially said it did not contact the communications firm to distribute the report and that it had "no formal links" to it. Moers then released a statement saying the firm is committed to developing hybrid and battery EVs and that it was "conducting a review into the circumstances surrounding the commissioning and publication of the report".

While more details may emerge, the story highlights the trend of stakeholders having increasing power to quickly question and force about-turns from firms relating to questionable lobbying or greenwashing activity, that can then result in front page news stories. In the face of a galvanised and well-informed climate Twitter community, pooled knowledge and some internet investigatory work has resulted in significant PR damage for one of the UK's most well-known luxury car companies.

Lateral thought from Curation

As the Guardian highlights, some of Aston Martin's investors are behind a letter outlining expectations from firms on climate lobbying, stating

activities in this area should be in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement, otherwise they will be subject to reputational, among other, risks. Will we now see action from them on the back of what has been trending on Twitter as #Astongate?



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