



# AutoWeek

This story comes from the 04/21/08 issue of AutoWeek magazine. Reading the magazine is the only way to make sure you don't miss anything. If you aren't getting the magazine, you can sign up today for just 58 cents an issue. **GET THE ONLY WEEKLY CAR MAG TODAY!**



**+ ZOOM**

By MARK VAUGHN

You can't approach a neighborhood electric vehicle the same way you'd approach a typical gasoline-powered, fully functioning car. NEVs are meant to fill a gap in the transportation chain for clean city vehicles. (NEV is a federal category for electric cars that don't exceed 25 mph. Big carmakers are likely to use them to help meet coming zero-emissions-vehicle requirements.) They are nowhere near as solid, sturdy or safe as even the flimsiest Fiat. However, they are—and this one, in particular, is—well north of the golf-cart category.

ZENN stands for "zero emission, no noise," and that's pretty much what you get, as long as you figure electricity off the grid as zero emissions. The ZENN EV seats two people and can haul 13 cubic feet of luggage in something that is far more substantial than the golf-cart-like GEM e4 we wrote about four years ago ("A Glimpse of Future Past," AW, June 28, 2004). The ZENN is a three-door



**+ ZOOM**

hatchback ("fully enclosed!") with an aluminum spaceframe covered in plastic body panels. An AC electric motor spins the front wheels. With all of its torque available at 0 rpm, the ZENN, like many electric

conveyances, launches from stops with squealing authority.

The problem after launch is that federally mandated 25-mph NEV speed limit. Most customers make the (technically illegal) software change to increase top speed to 35 mph and thus increase their chances of coping in urban traffic. Our test car had no such software assistance, and we found ourselves regularly ducking out of traffic and crawling along curbs to avoid everything else coming up behind us. Nothing goes 25 mph in Los Angeles, no matter what the posted speed limit says.

ZENN lists its range as either 35 miles or 30 to 50 miles, depending on where you read it. We found that to be a bit of a stretch. We traveled 11 miles from home to EV Motors in Glendale and used well more than half the indicated charge. Power comes from six 12-volt lead-acid glass-mat batteries. The brushless AC motor makes 7.5 hp, which, on paper, doesn't seem like enough to move the 1280-pound car around, but it behaved better than most gasoline-powered cars off the line and across the intersection. It was just after that where



**+ZOOM**

the ZENN faltered.

The car bounced and wallowed more than a typical Toyota Corolla or Honda Civic, and the very skinny 13-inch wheels and tires were easily overwhelmed. But you adapt your driving style accordingly. The four-wheel discs, along with regenerative braking, meant that slowing was a little choppy.

Inside, the ZENN is much more like a real car than the GEM. The doors, dash, seats and instrumentation were far better and more carlike than those in the GEM, which we described as being "like a really well-engineered" port-a-potty. Our test ZENN had the optional power cloth sunroof (\$1,195) and stereo (\$195) and the standard power windows, heater and defroster. We didn't have the \$2,200 electric air conditioning. Base price is \$15,995.

ZENN knows it can't market this car the same way you'd market a Pontiac or a BMW.

"This is a car for the urban pioneer," said ZENN regional sales director Bill Williams. "The urban pioneer is a young college grad with a job who needs to wear a suit to work yet lives in and around this downtown core center."

There are now 34 dealers in and around downtown core centers, including the pioneering guys at [www.environmentalmotors.com](http://www.environmentalmotors.com) in Glendale, California, where we got this car. To find your ZENN, visit [www.zenncars.com](http://www.zenncars.com).

*AutoWeek | Updated: 04/17/08, 3:46 pm et*

**Article URL:** <http://autoweek.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/200804220430/FREE/450200240>

Entire contents ©2008 Crain Communications, Inc.

## Missing Something?

If you are not getting *AutoWeek* magazine, you're not getting the whole story.

SUBSCRIBE NOW AT: <http://AutoWeek.com/Subscribe>  
Only 58¢ an issue!