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BG pharmacist breaking addiction to oil

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In a local driveway sits a small, bright blue two-passenger car. A cord stretches from what appears to be the car's gas tank and is plugged into an outdoor lamppost outlet.

The car belongs to Bowling Green pharmacist Dan Higgins - it's the second electric vehicle for Higgins, who bought his first one in the 1980s.

"I have people follow me home all the time; I have people follow me to work," he said. "They get behind me and see how fast it will go."

Higgins' car is a Canadian-made ZENN, which stands for "Zero Emissions, No Noise." He bought the car in April from Bob Hook Chevrolet Buick Pontiac GMC in Louisville after waiting years to get another one.

The Louisville lot has about four electric vehicles with a price tag around \$15,900. Higgins received rebates, including a federal tax credit, which lowered his car's price to around \$12,700. In fact, he was the first to buy an electric car from the dealership, said co-owner Bob Hook III.

"The biggest motivation for us was the gas prices of last summer," Hook said. "We have traditionally been a truck and SUV store ... all of a sudden, we were selling a lot more cars than trucks."

Hook researched the ZENN and decided to partner with the company; so far, the vehicles have drawn a lot of attention.

"I think it's pretty amazing the number of folks who just want to walk over and take a look," Hook said. "It definitely grabs attention."

Higgins is a high-tech enthusiast, keeping up with the latest technologies. He drove his first electric vehicle for two years before donating it to a trade school.

"I've been dying to get one ever since, especially when gas went up," he said. "It's one-tenth the price to run this car than to run a normal car."

Higgins also practices energy efficiency - he owns an electric scooter and he uses an electric lawn mower and fluorescent light bulbs. Electric cars are praised by "green" enthusiasts for eliminating fuel emissions, and the ZENN was another staple in Higgins' conservation efforts.

"Seeing gas prices go up and up and having a helpless victim mindset," he said, "that we just had to sit there and take it. We are at the mercy of OPEC. The more independent you can be, the better off you are."

Higgins also bought the car to show people that it can be done and "it's not that hard," he said. He drives his

electric car to most destinations around town, venturing to work, church and the grocery store in his ZENN.

Electric cars have been criticized for taking too long to charge, then going but a relatively short distance before needing a recharge. Higgins' car travels under 35 mph and can travel up to 50 miles per charge - it takes about four hours to charge his car to an 80 percent capacity if its nearly dead.

But for Higgins, the car's speed and charge time is not inconvenient, and owning the car has been an overall positive experience.

"I never have to change oil," he said. "In five years, I can have this thing paid for."

So far, the car has not lost power on the road, he said; besides, it can be plugged into any outlet.

"Anybody in town is a gas station for me," he said.

Electric cars have been at the forefront of local news this year as California-based electric car maker ZAP announced plans to build a plant in Franklin. The project, however, has been plagued by poor market conditions, delays and management issues.

Higgins considered purchasing a ZAP vehicle, but preferred the ZENN design. Still, "hopefully ZAP will get on board," he said. "If they don't, they'll be missing out on a great opportunity."

Hook expects electric car sales to pick up over the next few years. In fact, dealers were working this week on two more electric car sales, he said.

"More people can see themselves driving a vehicle like that for all their in-town driving," he said. "As early as two years from now, but definitely in five and 10 years, I think that will become a bigger percentage of our sales."