

## Hitting the road? Just plug in and drive

BY CLIFF NEWELL

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**Whenever Brian Foye surveys his new Zenn electric car, he is filled with gratitude.**

After all, the only things he has to do is maintain the washer fluid, make sure the batteries are sealed and top off the brake fluid.

But best of all, beyond the fact that the car is new and nifty and virtually maintenance free, Foye and his wife Julie Pacheco-Foye are saving lots of money on gas.

While virtually every other driver in Lake Oswego is gnashing their teeth as the price of gas soars toward the \$4 mark, the Foyes have already saved \$300 after only two months of owning their electric car, called a Zenn.

They just plug it in and then let it roll.

“What made us invest in this car was that the price of gas just kept going up and up and up,” Foye said. “I just snapped. I did some checking and found there were five or six bonafide electric cars, not just glorified golf carts.

“There are 101 excuses for why people can’t buy an electric car. We said, ‘How do we make it work for us?’ It works beautifully. It does what we want it to do.”

So, the Foyes got rid of their BMW. Now they merely plug in the Zenn to an outlet in their garage for about eight hours, and they have enough juice to last them 35 miles.

And that certainly is enough to take care of most of their business in the Lake Oswego area.

One time Julie was out driving their sons Corbin and Dominic on an errand when she got down to “just one bar of energy. I was a little worried.”

That could have been a problem to be stranded in an electric car. But the vehicle had enough of a charge to get back home and get plugged in again.

True, the electric Zenn has its drawbacks.

Pacheco-Foye can’t drive it to her teaching job at Lakeridge High School because that would stress the 35-mile capacity. Foye, of course, will not take it out on the freeway. It’s not a regular car like your normal good-old gas-guzzler.

But within its limits, the Foyes have found the Zenn to be an excellent choice.

“People drive cars that are so overly qualified for what they need to do,” Foye said. “This is a small, nice car that can do things in an economical way.”

“Brian charted all of the routes we take and we decided it was worth it,” Pacheco-Foye said. “We can’t go downtown, but we can go to Oregon City, Tigard, Bridgeport (shopping center), Trader Joe’s, Orowheat



Brian Foye demonstrates how easy it is to recharge his new electric car. You simply plug it in.

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Bread Store and Robinwood Pet Hospital.

“We just had to get creative.”

“Most of the adjustment comes from adjusting to the speed,” Foye said. “It’s virtually impossible to get a speeding ticket.”

Pacheco-Foye added: “That means it would be a good car for teenagers. How much trouble can you get into at 30 miles per hour?”

However, for all of its virtues, the electric car in the U.S. has had a controversial career, epitomized by the noted documentary “Who Killed The Electric Car?” A decade ago General Motors decided to put out a line of electric cars, which drew a hugely enthusiastic response.

However, the auto giant literally pulled the plug on the project just three years after it was started, recalling all of their leases on the cars and shipping them out to the California desert for destruction.

The image that sticks with viewers of this film are stacks of squashed electric cars. Oblivion personified.

Of course, conspiracy theory buffs have been over heating about this ever since. But in this case, paranoia may be a reasonable response. However, the film didn’t have the same affect on everyone.

“That movie was one of the things that made us make the decision to buy an electric car,” Pacheco-Foye said.

“This is a much happier story,” Foye said.

Certainly, the Foyes are happy. But they’re feeling rather alone, too.

“We think we may have the only electric car in Lake Oswego,” Pacheco-Foye said.

However, the Foyes feel the advantages are so great that people will eventually see the desirability of making end runs around big three automakers, conspiracies or any other roadblocks popping up in the way of electric cars.

Saving \$300 over two months has proven to be a great motivator.

“Brian only started looking into our car a month before we bought it,” Pacheco-Foye said. “It really lit a fire in him. He’s really gung ho. If you want to know anything about the electric car, ask Brian.”

Foye has not only become a great source of knowledge about the electric car, he has become its defender. He recently wrote a response to a critical piece on the electric car in a major Northwest newspaper.

“You can see the future,” he said. “Gas now costs \$8 a gallon in England. Gas prices in the U.S.A. have more than doubled since 2003.

“Also, by having our car on the road we aren’t putting six tons of CO<sub>2</sub> in the air in a year, which you do in an average car.”

It may be true that the Foyes have the only electric car in Lake Oswego, but they are still having an impact.

“It’s incredible the number of people who come up to me in my car and ask, ‘What is this? I didn’t know it was here?’” Foye said. “When people see this car actually working, that’s the selling point. I tell them it’s saving me a lot of money, it’s saving the planet, we don’t have to fight wars.

“Sometimes I’m driving around, and I have to do sign language with people wanting to know about the car. They love the idea of such a car.”

Julie said: “One time a lady saw our car and started clapping and jumping up and down.”

That lady wasn't Lake Oswego Mayor Judie Hammerstad, but the sustainability-minded mayor is enthusiastic about Brian's proposal to put an electric charging station in downtown Lake Oswego as a way to boost electric car ownership.

"I think that would be a great idea," Hammerstad said.

"People would say, 'Thank you for saving the planet,'" Foye said.

Not to mention saying "thank you" for saving hundreds of dollars on gas bills. Electric cars still just might end up being a switch in time.

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