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A Toronto company has zapped your gas problems with an electric car. But the politicians have to say yes



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By **JOE WARMINGTON**

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No poison spewing out of the engine.

No sound. No smog. No part-time job necessary to fill up its tank. No need for any more emissions tests.

Are you allowed to drive it? No way! In fact, if you do, you are breaking the law.

They call it ZENN -- Zero Emissions, No Noise. Maybe one day they'll look back on this tiny electric car like people do on the early days of the Beatles or the Apple computer. There's no question that as far as cars go, a Toronto company has one of the more exciting stories going on right now.

"Thanks," says ZENN Motor Car's president and founder, Ian Clifford. "We are trying to do something different."

Anything other than more than \$1 a litre for the regular gas guzzlers is good.

"The ZENN operates for about 2 cents a kilometre," Clifford says with a laugh. "But we can't sell it here."

Now how can this be? Oh yeah, it's the oil companies who make the rules. I forgot. Fresh off the news Exxon Mobil made record profits of \$40 billion in 2007, I suddenly remembered why

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they don't want such competition.

GET RICHER

So much for tough times with hurricanes, storms and wars. It doesn't matter what goes on, the gas prices go up and you pay. And they get richer. In the meantime, we huff and puff. And then pay. And nobody ever does anything about it.

ZENN is trying to do something about it. Creating jobs and creating a solution and creating a kick-ass little car too. And our reward to them? Block 'em. Or at least slow them down with lots of red tape.

So maybe it's time to change the rules -- as 45 of the 50 U.S. states have and where these cars are not only for sale, but are starting to catch on with more than 250 already on the road.

Toronto can have them too, if we can get a couple of little laws changed. I mean, we change laws here -- you know, for things like new vehicle registration taxes or land-transfer taxes. They call that out-of-the-box-thinking, when everyone knows it's a tax grab by some politicians who talk ideas but rarely support someone who has one.

ZENN has a good one with this new electric car. And how's this for another one? How about Toronto pass a bylaw that would allow ZENN, and any competitors, to not only sell cars here but to allow you to drive them on certain city roads and in certain neighbourhoods. Hell, give it to the parking assassins and let them boot around in this as they stiff the taxpayer for more parking revenue!

Better yet, this could get Mayor David Miller on the cover of another green magazine.

A low-speed, battery-operated environmentally friendly car made in Canada and designed in Toronto? Are you kidding me!

Clifford, who has not received a government grant to help grow this idea, really believes his car has a whole world of potential ahead. This petite, compact car is priced between \$12,000 and \$15,000 and can actually be plugged in next to your cellphone. Check out torontosun.com for a video on it or go to ZENNcars.com to see funnyman Rick Mercer do a hilarious test drive of one.

No one is saying the ZENN is the solution to all environmental problems or that it's for everybody. If every car driven in Ontario was electric, the coal-fire plants would become the biggest tail pipes in the world. However, it is a start in the direction of doing our little part of trying to do something positive about this global warming threat.

It's also a start in trying to break the addiction of big oil and get on to the next technology, which is cleaner and greener and not just for Exxon. So far the federal government has not ruled anything out but has cited safety concerns.

However, it must be noted scooters, bikes, skateboards and in-line skates seem to be okay on the roads. The province has the jurisdiction to alter the Highway Traffic Act to allow slower vehicles like ZENN and is believed to be excited about the prospect. No announcement yet.

Meanwhile, Clifford is still waiting for his phone to ring. Of course, I teased him that perhaps whoever it is who would make that decision needs to check in with the Exxon guys first? Of course I'm just kidding. There's no oil interest lobby and they are not worried about being wiped off the map?

Hopefully government will get behind this initiative because it has to start somewhere if it's going to grow. Clifford is working with partners on new battery technology that will allow such a car to not only go faster than its current 40 km/h, but last on a charge for much longer than the 60-km distance the 2008 ZENN car can now travel.

An electric car travelling 100 km/h and able to run all day and night without a new charge is not that far off, he says. Maybe Exxon can invest? They have the money.

ONE MORE BARRIER

This kind of barrier has been put in front of the electric car before. If you watched Who Killed The Electric Car? it's all about how more than 1,000 sleek electric vehicles were put on the road by GM on leases but later called back and then shredded in the desert.

The people who owned them, including celebrities like Tom Hanks, were devastated. And, of course, they believed it to be a conspiracy -- namely the big auto giants didn't want this thing to work too well and become too popular. What I always wonder about is

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when will the public have had enough of the gouging and obscene treatment by the oil companies, and the even more despicable lack of protection from governments of all stripes?

It probably won't happen until every ounce of oil is burned, but what I suggest is for some of these so-called green politicians to use their regional powers to allow ZENN to have a shot at competing against the big boys.

The little guy can win sometimes if it's an equal playing field.

Remember, the New York Giants won the Super Bowl against the favourite New England Patriots.

So heads up, oil companies!

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