



**DRIVES**

# ZENN ELECTRIC

By Matt Davis

The challenge for electric city cars in saving mankind from its own exhaust fumes, especially in the big-sheetmetal traffic found across North America, has been their tininess, their lack of power, and their lack of crash safety should they ever meet up with a Cadillac Escalade. Our recent drive in a battery-powered ZENN (Zero Emission No Noise) did not wholly dispel these concerns, but we found that when driven in the proper environment, the ZENN can be a viable alternative to traditional compact cars.

France has been a key source of tiny errand cars such as this ZENN, so it's no surprise to learn that the ZENN is actually a heavily adapted version of France's Microcar MC-2 built in Montaigu. The original MC-2

comes with either a 505-cubic-centimeter Lombardini two-cylinder gas or 523-cc optional Yanmar diesel engine. ZENN imports MC-2s without drivetrain and gas tank via Saint-Jérôme, Quebec, and installs six maintenance-free lead-acid AGM (Absorbent Glass Mat) batteries. Two batteries under the front lid and four in the rear operate the drivetrain.

We turn the key to the first position, and all the on-board systems light up. Turn the key one click farther, and we're ready to go. The front-wheel-drive powertrain takes its commands from a simple D-N-R toggle switch on the center console. The three-phase brushless AC electric motor creates an effective 7.6 horsepower, and the seven kilowatt-hours of energy are good for a



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thirty- to fifty-mile cruise. Stay in the city, however, and regenerative braking will extend that range nicely. A full plug-in recharge via a household socket can be accomplished in eight hours.

The ZENN elevates itself above golf cart ridicule and even above the Gem car type of gated community shuttle bug. Though passing over a central California light-rail track exposed some of the structural realities of the lightweight aluminum

chassis and shell, cruising surface streets at the 25-mile-per-hour maximum legal speed was perfectly swell. States such as Washington and Montana are starting to approve a 35-mph limit for this car, so if this trend continues, someday we may get up to an actual 0-60-mph acceleration test with the ZENN.

Everything inside the ZENN is state-of-the-art comfortable, and there are thirteen cubic feet of cargo space behind

the two seats. The thirteen-inch Kléber Viaxer tires are specifically made for small city cars and provide good enough comfort. Steering is 3.5 turns lock-to-lock, and the ZENN can basically turn back on itself, so it's ideal for maneuvering under tight circumstances. The few times we entered a big-city left turn lane, the initial surge of power typical of electric motors really came in handy and kept bigger gas-gulping cars off our tail. (Avoiding road rage from fellow motorists in a hurry cannot be made light of when in a means of transport as defenseless and cute as a ZENN.) This felt like a real car by the end of our suburban foray.

Starting price for a 2008 model year ZENN is \$15,995, but you should add the retractable cloth sunroof (\$1195) for the full French countryside effect. Adding climate control is a whopping (and energy-sucking) \$2200 option, while a basic JVC stereo system adds \$295 to the emissions-free sticker. If you're impatient, you can spend \$8995 on a high-speed ETEC LSV-100 recharger, requiring the \$425 rapid-charge inlet.

Since 2006, ZENN has sold nearly 300 units in the U.S., and future plans include higher speeds as well as high-tech ultra-capacitor battery power for rapid recharging and a range of 300 miles.



The ZENN displays more panache than most small-volume city runabouts.

2008 ZENN ELECTRIC	
Motor	3-phase induction AC motor
Output	7.6 hp
0-25 MPH	9.0 sec (est.)
Top Speed	25 mph*
Weight	1360 lb
Price as Tested	\$19,600 (est.)

\*Electronically limited



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