



A ZENN CALCULATION...



By Richard Roch,
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Right now, as I watch oil prices soar to new highs, I'm really upset. And I have to admit that everything that's going on in some oil-importing countries is quite worrying. Obviously, the recent hikes are good news for the environment, as no sensible driver will want to burn more fuel.

In theory, when oil prices rise, people tend to become less mobile. For average Joes who try to make ends meet (I'm one of them), this is bad. That's why I'll be on the lookout for every hybrid or fully-electric vehicle that hits the market in the next four years.



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Personally, I've just traded my vehicle for a new Nissan Altima 2.5 S with a 4-cylinder engine averaging 8.5 L/100 km. I might not drive really fast, but at least I'm not polluting a lot. Yet, if it was possible, I'd like to improve my fuel economy by 80 or 90 percent. How? I could search my brains out forever, as the only realistic solution seems to be a low-speed vehicle (LSV) like the [Zenn](#) or something like that. However, the Zenn won't become available as long as the law regulating this type of vehicle in Quebec is not amended (only [two Canadian provinces](#) authorize LSVs on byroads: British Columbia and Ontario).

A profitable investment?

For the sake of this article, let's imagine that the government of Quebec actually listens to the needs of consumers and decides to amend the law. I could buy a Zenn car and use it on any byroad or city street. My annual mileage is about 20,000 kilometers (not including a few [long trips](#)) or about 55 kilometers a day. The Zenn would be perfect for me as it offers a range of 60 to 80 kilometers with a full battery charge.

And I'm willing to bet that the majority of drivers are covering roughly the same distance as I am.

With a liter of gasoline at \$1.34, the annual costs of running my current vehicle amount to \$2,278. If I bought a Zenn, I wouldn't have to pay a single penny on gas; it would only cost me about \$160 of electricity to recharge the batteries. As a result, I would save \$2,118 a year or \$176.50 a month. I'll factor in the various costs to maintain my Nissan (check-ups, oil changes, etc.) and put it at an even \$200.

I also have to consider the fact that I wouldn't be driving more than 4,000 or 5,000 kilometers a year with my Nissan, meaning I could keep it for 15 years, maybe 20. Do you see where I'm getting at?



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The perfect second car?

In the United States, as specified on the company's website, the Zenn retails for \$12,600 US. With the current exchange rate (calculated on May 26, 2008), that's \$11,877 CA -- or \$13,406 including taxes. Let's say I give \$906 in cash upon purchasing the vehicle and I use financing for \$12,500 at a 9.98-percent rate over 5 years (as verified on the website of Desjardins). It would then cost me exactly \$265.45 a month to drive the Zenn. But wait a minute: I need to subtract the \$200 a month I currently spend on gasoline and maintenance for my Nissan. So, in reality, I would only have to pay \$45.65 a month.



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On the other hand, let's not forget about insurance and registration fees. In the end, my low-speed vehicle would realistically cost me about \$100 a month. At the conclusion of my 60-month loan contract, I would start saving over \$200 a month. Should gas prices rise to \$1.50 a liter, I would save an additional \$40.

Count me in!

I know, that's a lot of numbers, but I see clearly enough to be convinced. Sometimes, all you need to do is to take a piece of paper and a pen, and start calculating. Not only would I pay \$100 a month for a Zenn, but I would have the privilege of owning the two same vehicles for almost two decades, which would dramatically reduce my fuel consumption and [carbon footprint](#). Isn't that extraordinary?

If I can do it, you can do it -- everybody can do it. I already have my own garden, make my own compost and recycle everything that's recyclable; with a low-speed electric car on top of that, I guess I'd be totally Zenn!

Photos: ZENN