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## Electric cars – fad or future?

Vikki Knowles (https://collectively.org/en/contributor/vikki-knowles/)

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### With clean energy poised to take back the streets, our cities could sound and smell a whole lot sweeter

If you've ever found yourself stepping out into the road to be nearly squashed by a car you didn't realise was there, chances are you were greeted by a (notoriously quiet) electric vehicle. But besides a few near misses with innocent pedestrians (NB: legislation is on the way in the US to make them louder (http://www.engadget.com/2015/11/25/electric-cars-audible-alert/)) electric cars are the so-called future. Well, kinda.

There's been a little debate around these alleged greener vehicles. The good news is that – yes, they're pricey and dwarfed in range by their gas-guzzling counterparts – but give it a few years and boom! The new techie developments will explode and they'll be king of the err... road. Besides, keeping within the old 2-degrees plan is assuming electrification of transport on a mahoosive scale. So it's all a matter of time.

Don your best future-gazing goggles; we're going in.

## Give me the brief

Electric vehicles (abbreviated to EVs by those-in-the-know) are kind of what they say on the tin – they run on electricity. Just plug ‘em in, and off you go.

Rechargeable battery packs power one or more electric motors.

They’re economic to run (since electricity is cheaper to get your mitts on than petroleum), and produce no tailpipe emissions, so the streets just got a whole lot cleaner.

## Why should I care?

Well since we’ve got a bit of a slippery climate change issue on our hands (swot up here (<http://>)), it would be super handy if we could lessen our dependence on those all those fossil fuels. And going electric is one of the best ways of doing just that. If just half of the vehicles in the US were electrified, greenhouse gases would drop 77% (<http://www.sgvtribune.com/environment-and-nature/20150929/how-much-can-electric-cars-impact-climate-change-new-report-says-a-lot>) by 2050.

## Who has them?

Well hey, look at that; just under a quarter (<http://cleantechnica.com/2015/07/16/23-of-new-cars-in-norway-now-electric-cars/>) (23%) of all new cars in Norway are electric. Sadly, that’s only 2.4% of the 2.6m four wheelers in the country’s roads. Humm. Since that area of the world is generally at the forefront of all things green, it’ll be no surprise that elsewhere that statistic is lower; it’s 1% in the UK (<http://www.nextgreencar.com/electric-cars/statistics/>) and the same in the US ([http://www.ucsusa.org/clean\\_vehicles/smart-transportation-solutions/advanced-vehicle-technologies/electric-cars/bev-phev-range-electric-car.html#.Vmmoj4tyzds](http://www.ucsusa.org/clean_vehicles/smart-transportation-solutions/advanced-vehicle-technologies/electric-cars/bev-phev-range-electric-car.html#.Vmmoj4tyzds)).

Public transport offers more of a cause for optimism, however. Amsterdam’s buses will all be leckies by 2025. America’s iconic yellow school bus went electric for the first time last year in (no surprise) California, while the Philippines capital of Manila is giving its 100,000-strong network of trikes an electric upgrade. (<http://www.fastcoexist.com/3033666/manila-is-building-out-a-100000-strong-network-of-electric-trikes>)

Sun salutation: Chevrolet Volts being charged in Frankfort, Illinois

## If EVs are so great, why doesn’t everyone have one?

Well, they’re still a bit pricey to buy to be frank with you. Also – goodbye fiddly oil changes, but hello replacing the (costly) battery in about a decade. Ay caramba. But this levels out over time; a recent report (<http://www.epri.com/Pages/Lifetime-Cost-of-Electric-Vehicle-Comparable-to-Conventional-Vehicle.aspx>) found that the lifetime costs of EVs are not only competitive with their gassy predecessors, but in some cases actually leave you better off.

Of course, the greener image of the EV goes a bit grubby if the electricity used to power it comes from fossil fuels rather than renewables. If you live somewhere like California, cleaner recharging is easier to come by thanks to the greener energy mix. Nevertheless, even in the ‘dirtier’ case EVs are still said to be more saintly (<http://www.electroauto.com/info/pollmyth.shtml>) than their conventional cousins. And recharging’s poised to get a whole lot cleaner, too. You just need to stick ‘em under these neat solar canopies, for example – just park up in your local, future-gazing leisure centre (<http://www.businessgreen.com/bg/feature/2423547/nottingham-sports-village-harnesses-car-park-power-with-new-solar-canopy>) and return to a sunnier battery life!

## I prefer my gasoline guzzler, thanks.

It’s understandable; the electric car has an antsy reputation for mile range (about a third of its gasoline powered cousin). It’s still an issue for many in the affordable end of the spectrum, but the sexy Tesla Model S 70D boasts (<http://www.cheatsheet.com/automobiles/top-10-electric-vehicles-with-the-longest-driving-range.html?a=viewall>) a jaw-dropping 240-mile range. Believe it, my friend! As long as you have a cool \$75,000 lying around. Oh.

And yes, you’re right; it takes just a sec to refuel your petrol or diesel car, and EVs will always take longer to recharge than dispensing a tank full of gas. But ultra fast charging is here, which’ll get you up and running again in the time it takes to grab a latte and a chat in a busy coffee shop (I’m talking 80% capacity in half an hour (<http://www.cnet.com/news/slow-fast-and-faster-where-to-charge-electric-cars/>)).

There’s also a lot more choice when it comes to buying one. But, the wallet-friendly EV costs just a couple of cents per mile, while the gas is more like 12 or more cents for the same distance. Oh, and you eliminate all that pollution when you’re idling in traffic.

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## I don’t want a car, thanks.

Then you’re not alone. Car ownership is going down on the aspirational agenda, especially for the youth. Owning is a drag, but it’s useful to be able to drive one now and again. And that’s where EVs meet the whole sharing economy thing and find that they quite like each other really. Car clubs are cool for short, city trips, and it’ll save you the whole buying-upfrontery. The aim in London at least is to get one million car club members (<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/1a6b3ca8-7f02-11e5-a1fe-567b37f80b64.html#axzz3u0WNFDIx>) within 10 years, and 62% ([http://www.carplus.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/London-report\\_Final-with-cover\\_2.pdf](http://www.carplus.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/London-report_Final-with-cover_2.pdf)) of Londoners would pick electric cars if they had a choice. Over in Stuttgart (<http://>), car sharing is seen as cooler and more fun than using public transport. And – woah there – self-driving EVs are firmly on the horizon, with concepts like the Nissan IDS. (<https://www.zap-map.com/nissan-unveils-new-self-driving-ev-concept-in-japan/>) So you sit back and Netflix chill while the road rolls away beneath you.

But let’s say you don’t have a license and don’t plan to get one anytime soon. Do you take the bus? Knowing that you’re riding on renewables will make the ride all the sweeter. And what if you knew that the stuff you bought found its way to you without any transport emissions? What a world.

## What if I run out of battery in the middle of nowhere! Ahhh!

You can charge up at home. As you sleep. So the electricity is even cheaper. Imagine never setting foot in a gas station again. If you're planning a longer voyage however, you don't want to be caught short. OMG, range anxiety!

Since even the cheapest EVs have a range of 80-100 miles, that means you only need to find a charging point *every 80 miles or so*. And in the US, there's more charging stations (<http://ecomento.com/2014/07/10/chargepoint-electric-car-stations-now-outnumber-macdonalds/>) than there are Starbucks. Besides – 95% of car trips ([http://www.greencarreports.com/news/1071688\\_95-of-all-trips-could-be-made-in-electric-cars-says-study](http://www.greencarreports.com/news/1071688_95-of-all-trips-could-be-made-in-electric-cars-says-study)) fall within that range.

Luckily there are apps (<http://www.earth911.com/eco-tech/transportation/3-must-have-apps-for-locating-electric-vehicle-charging-stations/>) to put your mind at ease, and Ecotricity and Nissan are calling for charging station signage (<http://www.ecotricity.co.uk/news/news-archive/2015/put-evs-on-the-map-nissan-and-ecotricity-call-for-charging-point-road-signs>) (in the UK at least) to point the 9,000 EVs around the country in the right direction. You can already find them in some interesting places, for example IKEA's car park, or this Scottish whiskey distillery ([http://www.greencarreports.com/news/1064718\\_single-malt-powered-electric-car-offers-travel-sans-hangover](http://www.greencarreports.com/news/1064718_single-malt-powered-electric-car-offers-travel-sans-hangover)).

Mission E: Porsche with attitude / Photo: YouKeys / Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/54817657@N00/21358906680>)

## Aren't EVs ugly, though? Or like, a bit sensible? \*Shivers\*

Hello? Have you *seen* Porsche's Mission E concept? And we've mentioned Tesla... At least we can say that EVs are pretty cool now. Phew.

## What does the future hold?

A lot of exciting techie breakthroughs are on the horizon, including batteries that allow a 500-mile range and even charging on the road (<https://collectively.org/en/article/the-futures-bright-the-dazzling-new-wave-of-solar-tech/>) (give that one 15-20 years, but it's on its way.) So even if you don't fancy owning an electric car – and who can blame you? – chances are you'll be driving or riding in one sooner than you imagine...

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