Miscellany31: Who Killed the Electric Car?

© 2006 Joseph George Caldwell. All rights reserved. Posted at Internet web sites http://www.foundation.bw and http://www.foundationwebsite.org . May be copied or reposted for non-commercial use, with attribution. (13 December 2006)

Commentary on recent news, reading and events of personal interest.

Contents

Who Killed the Electric Car? 1

Who Killed the Electric Car?

A few weeks ago, my wife and I saw a very interesting documentary film at The Showcase theater here in Spartanburg, SC. The film was entitled, *Who Killed the Electric Car?* It described the rise and fall of the electric car in the United States. I found the film to be fascinating, and recommend it highly. It is now available as a DVD.

The electric car got a big boost in 1990, when the California Air Resources Board (CARB) passed regulations requiring that 2 percent of all new vehicles sold in California be emission free by 1998, and ten percent by 2003. In response, General Motors introduced the EV1 electric vehicle in 1996, and the EV2, with improved batteries, a little later. About a thousand of the vehicles were produced, and leased to people in California.

The cars were fabulous. They used no gas or oil, and required much less maintenance than a car powered by an internal-combustion motor. With the batteries of the time, the EV1 had a range of about 100 miles, and the EV2 about 130 miles, before requiring a charge. With that range, the cars could accommodate about 80-90 percent of all driving (as a percentage of trips or total mileage). Charging could be done at home or at various charging stations set up around California. The cost of the electricity required was equivalent to a gasoline price of about 80 cents per gallon.

Although the cars performed very well, after six years GM recalled all of the cars and had them destroyed. A few were disabled and given to museums and universities. General Motors claimed that the cars were destroyed because there was insufficient demand for them to justify their large-scale production.

In fact, the cars were all destroyed because they performed too well, and they posed a serious threat to the petroleum and automotive parts industries. The CARB was sued to drop its zero-emissions mandate by a number of parties, including the US government.

The electric car has fuel sources – electrical outlets – in virtually every home in the US. All of the energy required can be produced in low-emission electric generating stations. Whereas the electric car is now a demonstrated reality, alternative technologies, such as fuel cell or hydrogen vehicles, remain pipe dreams, with intractable problems (e.g., storage of hydrogen) and impractical prototypes costing about a million dollars apiece.

Electric vehicles are a good solution to the vehicle emission problem, and it is just a matter of time until they are reintroduced. At the present time, the Tesla Motors in San Carlos, California is manufacturing a high-powered electric sports car, the Tesla Roadster. It can accelerate from zero to sixty miles per hour in four seconds, has a top speed of about 130 miles per hour, gets about 250 miles per charge, and has an efficiency equivalent to about 135 miles per gallon of gasoline, for a fuel operating cost of about one cent per mile. See Tesla Motors' website at http://www.teslamotors.com for more information on the Tesla Roadster.