



Plugged In

Is an electric vehicle right for you?

BY CATHERINE WARMERDAM

Now that electric vehicles have moved from the fringes of the automotive industry into the mainstream, many drivers are considering turning in the keys to their old gas guzzlers. But is a plug-in car right for you?

John Grindrod, manager of SMUD's Drive Electric program, says there are plenty of reasons to consider buying an electric vehicle, whether it's a plug-in hybrid, like the Chevy Volt, or an all-electric vehicle, like a Tesla or Nissan Leaf. "They're much more environmentally friendly. Even though electricity is generated, they run much more cleanly—roughly 70 percent cleaner than gasoline," explains Grindrod. "They also have a lot less maintenance because there are a lot fewer moving parts. And there's a convenience factor, too: The garage is your gas station." There are also various financial incentives when you buy a plug-in vehicle, including a federal tax credit

up to \$7,500 and a \$599 rebate for SMUD customers.

For Granite Bay resident Guy Hall, an electric-vehicle enthusiast and past president of the Sacramento Electric Vehicle Association, it was the superior ride that first attracted him to EVs. "They're just so much more fun and a much better driving experience," says Hall, whose family drives a Tesla Model X, three Nissan Leafs and a Chevy Volt. "They're certainly a lot peppier than their gas counterparts."

Still, the environmental benefits are not lost on him. "I think there's no doubt that we have to move to electric vehicles to solve our air problems, to solve our national security problems," says Hall.

One sticking point with all-electric vehicles is their range. Although battery technology is improving every year, there are limitations to how far an all-electric vehicle can travel on one charge. In general, the more expensive the vehicle, the farther it can go. The 2017 Tesla Model S, for example, starts at \$68,000 and boasts a driving range of 335 miles, while the 2017 Kia

Soul EV has a range of 93 miles at a \$32,000 price tag.

But Hall and Grindrod both say range anxiety—the popular term for fear of running out of juice—is waning. The infrastructure for plug-in vehicles proves around the Sacramento region. These days there are charging stations, parking garages, public libraries and government agencies around the county.

Hall, who drove from California to Fairbanks, Alaska, in an electric vehicle, certainly has let range anxiety limit his travels. "I found electricity all the way, sometimes at a rest stop or an RV park."

SMUD offers a popular course covering the basics of electric vehicles for drivers who are considering making the switch. says that test driving the

and talking to current owners are helpful ways to learn about whether an electric vehicle is right for you.

As for Grindrod, who drives a Nissan Leaf that he can plug in at work or at home, the decision to go electric was the one for him. "I haven't been to a gas station in months."

CONSIDERING PLUGGING IN?

SMUD answers common questions about electric vehicle ownership at smud.org/driveelectric.

The Sacramento Electric Vehicle Association lists the dates of local test-drive events and more at saceva.org.

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