

Are Electric Vehicle Subsidies the Way to Go?

In remarkable technological revolution, the gasoline powered automobile is going down like a dinosaur, to paraphrase an old Bob Dylan song. Virtually every car company has announced that they will soon be out of the business of producing gasoline power internal combustion engines, and instead will join the parade to electric vehicles.

The enormous swiftness with which transition to electric powered vehicles is occurring, has everything to do with government regulation. Governments around the world are imposing standards to reduce the carbon footprint of vehicles so dramatically, that petroleum-based technology is not able to compete at all. Even though the internal combustion engine has managed to morph and change, to become far more efficient and less polluting, it appears that the old-fashioned technology is dead.

The first vehicles on the road were either battery or steam powered. However, battery technology did not advance because there were not enough places to charge the battery-driven vehicles, it took so long to charge them and it became necessary to find ways of disposing of the old lead acid monsters. Of course, we have not figured out just what to do with the Lithium batteries, currently in use, when they expire. While Lithium batteries may last longer than the old lead acid variety, they will become useless far more quickly than the average internal combustion engine.

The fire and explosion risks of Lithium-ion batteries, together with their disposal, has yet to be addressed. The Lithium powered vehicles have the same issues that existed more than 100 years ago when battery-driven vehicles were first attempted with respect to how far they can propel the car and how quickly they can be recharged.

So dramatic is the drive, the pun is intended, to replace internal combustion engines with electric, that even current driver magazines are endorsing the electric powered vehicle. Hagerty recently pitted the most powerful Cadillac and BMW against a Tesla in a 0-125mph race. Of course, we all test our cars that way, don't we? This absurd, but exciting video, shows the Tesla far out-performing either the Cadillac or the BMW. If speed and torque are all we care about, then the battery propelled car is the clear winner.

The real issue is whether the marketplace, left to its own devices, and with proper regulatory oversight, would produce a better, more utilitarian product with a lower carbon footprint and with greater efficiency? We do not know the answer to that because the marketplace has been preempted by government mandates and handouts which are mostly devoted to electric vehicles.

Never mind that airplanes, ships, and factories have enormous carbon footprints that are also contributing to manmade environmental change. The focus is on the consumer paying more money for electric vehicles of dubious value, when the entirety of the carbon emission problem is examined. Other technologies, while of interest to the government, have essentially been abandoned.

Vehicles with turbo power linked to their internal combustion engines have proven to be powerful, exciting to drive and extremely fuel efficient. However, the government is not putting its bet on internal combustion technology, regardless of the problems that exist with the building, use and disposal of Lithium-ion batteries, not to mention recycling the electric motors which are utilized for propulsion.

Make no mistake about it, it would be a grievous error to be anti-electric vehicle. However, one has to question whether government policy should put all its bets on one particular, still questionable technology, when other solutions to the carbon footprint problem may exist. The government has given short shrift to alternatives, so long as the industry is willing to jump onboard with electric. Asking questions of government bureaucrats, has never been popular with those we elect to serve us. However, the questions must be asked concerning the wastefulness of mining, building, using and disposing of Lithium-ion batteries and electric motors, as opposed to improving the internal combustion engine or developing other technologies.

Reducing the emissions of carbon into the environment, an important goal, is not a one-size-fits-all solution. There are compelling reasons to consider reduction of carbon monoxide from the tailpipe, along with, for example, the use of modern nuclear power and electric generating plants. In this country, we have completely abandoned the promise of safe nuclear power, because of several near meltdowns that have occurred with the old out-of-date technology. In this field, we are being quickly outpaced by the Europeans and the Chinese. We have put all of our eggs into the electric car basket, failing to look at the entirety of carbon emissions and how they may be reduced in our civilization as a whole.

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