

Electric Cars: The Shocking Truth

The buzz of anticipation filled Haggard Library Community Room last month as North Texans gathered to consider how an electric car might one day fit into their lifestyle. Moderator Tony Han addressed social, economic, security, health and conservation concerns in setting the stage for considering the importance of moving beyond oil as a fuel source. The U.S. represents 4.5% of the world's population yet consumes 26% of the world's oil and produces only half of the oil Americans consume. DFW is ranked as the twelfth most polluted city in the U.S., primarily from vehicle emissions which in turn cause a variety of health problems. Panelists representing electric car owners and charging station companies took it from there.

Nissan LEAF owner, Joni Strobel-McLean, and Chevy Volt owner, Richard Alford, shared their reasons for selecting their vehicles and told about their year-long experience operating electric cars. Strobel-McLean admits to being more aware of the range of her electric vehicle than her previous car and recharges it as needed at home, but has not had to change her lifestyle driving in the DFW area in any way. The LEAF travels 100 miles per charge, has great pick-up and produces no carbon emissions. The optimum operating speed is 40-45 mph but the range is reduced at freeway speeds. Her family's second car is used for out of town trips.

The Chevy Volt travels 40 miles on a charge. Gasoline is used to extend the range as the car moves by powering a generator which provides the charge. Alford says his lifestyle has not changed driving the Volt. After one year, he reports: 13,000 miles driven, 11,600 miles driven on battery power, an average of 360 miles per gallon, 447 gallons of gasoline not purchased, 8,800 pounds of CO₂ emissions avoided. Both Alford and McLean agreed the change in their electric bills were negligible. A federal tax credit of \$7500 is available when purchasing an electric vehicle.

Representatives from Blink and EV explained charging stations are being installed at destination shopping and eating locations. A one hour charge currently adds a 12-15 mile range. Fast charging options are expected in the future. Charging stations must be ADA accessible and are usually located near handicapped parking spaces. Once a car has been charged, a text message is sent to the owner. Payment is made through a membership card similar to a credit card. Blink has a grant to install home charging stations through the end of this year.

The Union of Concerned Scientists calculates electric vehicles will provide a fuel savings of 6,100 gallons of gasoline and financial savings of \$13,000 (figured at \$3.50/gal.) over a fifteen year period.

In closing, Han reminded the audience to consider the available choices when purchasing their next vehicle. Watch for more electric vehicle options expected this year: Ford Fusion, Toyota Prius, Honda Fit, Ford Focus, Mitsubishi i, and Tesla. Do the research, take a test drive, consider switching to a cleaner way to get around town.