

## It's electrifying! : 'If the maintenance supports the consumers, it will be viable'

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September 24, 2012 12:38 AM

Electric vehicle lovers are a small but enthusiastic group. And they're growing enough to get an annual event just for them and their cars, a gathering that was celebrated Sunday at the annual National Plug-In Day.

"One day, we'll have so many of what we call 'special' cars, that we won't need a festival," said Rep. Lois Capps, D-Santa Barbara, at the event, which was held by the Los Banos swimming pools. Roughly 40 EVs — cars and one motorcycle — and their owners showed off the latest in energy efficiency and clean fuels with hybrids and electrics, not too far from the same shores off which some of the country's first offshore oil rigs were constructed about a century ago.

At National Plug-In Day, one of 60 such celebrations in cities across the country, the environment is a key focus. For the growing number of EV enthusiasts, electricity is replacing fossil fuels, which in turn lightens up on the dependence on petroleum, and the emissions spewed out by tailpipes everywhere.

"I'm driving on daylight," said Jay Hennigan, one of the early adopters of the Chevy Volt, a GM vehicle released late in 2010. Along with the Volt, he also purchased solar panels for his home, which essentially means that outside of his initial financial investment for the car and the photovoltaics, he's driving for free and has fuel to spare and energy to sell back. It's such cool technology, he said, he got into it independent of the social value.

"I never even considered myself an environmentalist," said the accidental earth-saver, who says he fills his tank every other month or so and hasn't had to worry about oil changes.

However, those who are concerned about environmental pollution will find that electric vehicles produce virtually no pollution and that their energy comes from a clean source, a situation, said Michael Chiacos of the Community Environmental Council, that goes far toward goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce dependency on oil from other countries.

The number of people jumping on the EV bandwagon is growing, he said, with total sales for 2012 that are double last year's numbers, and an average of 1,000 electric vehicles purchased every month.

Sunday afternoon also saw the unveiling of the city of Santa Barbara's newest EV charging stations, located at the parking lot behind the Los Banos pools, and the result, according to Santa Barbara Mayor Helene Schneider, of consensus, collaboration and federal funding.

"No local tax dollars were spent," she said, of the charging stations, which were funded in part by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The two new stations bring the total number in the city to eight, and they are part of a recently adopted climate action plan that will steer policies and infrastructure work toward less fossil fuel consumption and lower greenhouse gas generation.

"We're getting the work done here," she said.

The new charging stations cost a dollar per hour to charge electric vehicles, and allow for a variety of payment options for the EV owners' convenience.

For Hap DeSimone, an electrical engineer and inventor, who has been on the EV bandwagon before there even was a bandwagon, the increasing move toward electric and hybrid vehicles is more than just about today's environmentalism and economy.

"We are not geared to be a maintenance society," he commented, referring to the typical urge to discard and buy new. The success of the electric vehicle, in his opinion, will balance on whether there is enough infrastructure and expertise to maintain these vehicles, which are still relatively more costly to build and purchase.

"If the maintenance supports the consumers, it will be viable," he said.

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Cutting the ribbon of the new Electric Vehicle Charging Station are, from left, City Council Member Frank Hotchkiss, Congresswoman Lois Capps, SB County Director of Air Pollution Control Dave Van Mullem, SB Mayor Helene Schneider and CEC Transportation Manager Michael Chiacos.

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A ribbon-cutting ceremony for a newly installed Electric Vehicle Charging Station was held at the Harbor parking lot adjacent to the Los Banos del Mar pool.



Aaron Lockett of CA Solar Electrical tries out the feel of an electric Brammo Enertial motorcycle owned by Kail Wathne, left.