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The Electric Highway

A road to the future, or maybe not yet

Back in July 2024 I wrote an article on eScooters and eBikes outlining a few of the associated problems, including some real dangers. It could be argued that other electric vehicles (EVs) are much safer. To date, that is probably true and I only recall one reported incident when the battery of an electric bus blew up. So, it would seem anyway, that safety issues relating to EVs have been addressed, to a point. Therefore, one would think that the push to phase out fossil-fuel-driven vehicles in favour of the electric variety is both sensible and beneficial, certainly with respect to the environment. I don't have a problem with that; except...

At the time of writing I understand there are somewhere in the region of 180,000 EV's in Australia, 100,000 of which are Teslas. No doubt other countries may have more on their roads, but I will focus on where I live. The highest density of our population is centred in and around the major cities, and I would imagine a good portion of drivers with EVs tootling around the business districts and suburbs find their new, quiet, environmentally-friendly vehicles convenient. I guess there ought to be sufficient charging stations to keep them mobile; and, of course, the batteries can be re-charged at home, although that may take longer than plugging in to a supercharger. Those living in high-rise apartment blocks, however, would find home-charging somewhat difficult.

Presumably there should be enough chargers to be convenient for all EV drivers. I understand at present there are 2000 public charging stations dotted around the country, plus nearly 1000 Tesla units; many of which are most likely in the cities. And should a public charger not be available, the Tesla company is now allowing other brands of EVs to use their superchargers; provided they are connected to the Tesla App. There might be a waiting period before plugging in, though. Even the superchargers take 15 minutes to top up a battery giving an extra 282kms range; not long really, except if there's a queue. Then there is the problem of non-EV vehicles using the space in front of the charger as a parking spot. Why would they do this? Why indeed?

The adventurous might decide to take a break from the smoke and drive to the country; and here it can be problematic. Up to now, charging stations in rural areas are few and far between; but provided the distance being travelled isn't too long, starting out from home with a full battery should get drivers to their destinations where, hopefully anyway, there will be facilities to re-charge before the return journey. What if the distance is much greater and the EV needs a re-charge part way? Apparently, Tesla has the answer.

This particular company, regarded as the "gold standard" of the EV industry, has not only set up a network of charging stations throughout most Australian states; their EVs have a navigation system which plots the route to a destination and indicates charging units along the way. Additionally, Tesla owners can connect to the App which will tell them

whether or not a charging station is available for use. And why wouldn't they be? I have already mentioned some of the hassles; but there are others, I'm afraid.

Two old ladies decided to drive their EV to a country town which was holding an annual festival. The event being very popular, out-of-towners flooded to the venue. Most were driving petrol and diesel vehicles and there was a queue of them waiting to fill up at the servo. This didn't worry the ladies in the EV; not until they were informed that the battery charging station wasn't working and wouldn't be fixed until the following day. Because of the festival, all hotels and motels were full; so, with no available accommodation, the ladies had to sleep in the car. Perhaps this was an isolated incident; but it exemplifies a major problem that needs fixing before EV travel in country and remote areas is worth contemplating.

Distances in our country are often quoted, not in kilometres or miles, but time taken to drive them. Even on the longer journeys of six or eight hours, sometimes more, there will be a service station or two at convenient intervals where fossil-fuel drivers can top up. I daresay some may have EV chargers too; or maybe not yet. Perhaps there will be sufficient units strategically placed in the future. Like the distances between them, time will tell.

Winding up, I should mention the financial aspect of EVs. One source suggested price differences for charging per kilowatt may be worth consideration. To fully re-charge a very low battery, plugging in at home was around 35 cents per kw; public chargers cost 60 cents; while Tesla's superchargers for EV drivers who didn't have a Tesla subscription was up to 85 cents per kilowatt. That equates to \$30 for 50 kilowatts at a public charging unit; whereas the equivalent for plugging into a Tesla was \$42.50, a considerable increase in running costs. Another disadvantage is the depreciation in value of EV vehicles. I am told that presently the second-hand re-sale value drops about 57% if two to five years old; shifting to 75% when older than five years. Petrol and diesel vehicles, however, *retained* 86% of their value if four years or less, and 69% for those five to seven years old.

With the price of fossil fuels on the increase, running costs of EVs, it would seem, are the better option; but as a long term investment they fall considerably short when compared to petrol and diesel vehicles. And, although perhaps an unlikely risk, should the battery happen to blow up, just imagine how much that EV owner would be out of pocket. Maybe now might not be the best time to go electric...?

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