

Love that (electric) car

- Words: Johnny von Einem
- Pictures: Lauren Bezzina

Meet three Adelaide motorists for whom the future is now.

The South Australian government has stated its intent to make Adelaide the world's first carbon neutral city by 2050.

Even within that generous timeframe, it's a lofty aim, but for some Adelaide residents the wheels are already in motion, and they're electric powered.

John Lindsay – the Tesla Model S

"I LIKE COOL ELECTRONIC GADGETS AND THIS IS ABOUT AS COOL AN ELECTRONIC GADGET AS YOU CAN GET."



It was only Christmas time last year that John Lindsay made a surreptitiously planned visit to the Tesla Showroom in Sydney with his family.

Three months later, with full approval from the wife and kids, the sleek black Tesla Model S was sitting in his driveway.

The wait, though, was really a lot longer.

"I like cool electronic gadgets and this is about as cool an electronic gadget as you can get," he says.

"It's what a car should be, and in all seriousness, it's the car that I envisaged when I was a kid. You know, you're nine years old and making stuff from Lego..."

"What should a car be? It should drive itself and it should be electric, and all those things."



CityMag is gleefully shown the auto-steer function (“If things do get twisty enough it will tell you to put your hands on the wheel and slow down,” we’re assured), the surprisingly immense power that follows putting your foot to the floor (hands firmly on wheel), and all the otherBatmobile-esque features.

With around 300 kilometres of range on a full charge, it’s miles ahead of John’s first electric vehicle (EV), a converted Hyundai Getz, so even leaving the CBD isn’t a problem.

“If you drive to Murray Bridge, which [I did] first weekend... went up to Murray Bridge and back, and that 180 kilometre round-trip took six or so hours to recharge,” John says.

John also hopes the car will soon be running completely off grid.

“I have a reasonable sized solar system at home, and Base64 (the heritage-listed shared workspace John runs his business from) is in the process of getting an even bigger solar system,” he says.

“When all of that’s done I’ll be able to charge it at Base64 [and] be completely off-the-sun.”



Given the driving range he's afforded, availability of charging stations around the city is not such an issue, but it is something that concerns the broader EV community.

"People who are coming from further away, they're looking for some infrastructure. Today they can go to Burnside Village and there's two reasonable capacity Tesla chargers in the car park there," John says.

"The Adelaide City Council have provided the Charge Point charging stations in the Central Market car park, and just some power points in the Grote Street car park..."

"If you've driven in from Gawler in the morning, you can plug in in the parking station in the morning and by the end of the day you're mostly full."

For John though, the next step is converting his wife.

"[She] has an enormous diesel Audi Q7... and she is very attached to that car," John says.

"But I must admit that she does find this car very pleasant to drive and she quite likes the crazy performance. I suspect that when the Q7 wears out... she might very well be seduced."





Eric Rodda – the Conversion Car

"I GOT THIS ONE IN 2008, STARTED CONVERTING IT THE SAME YEAR, AND FINISHED CONVERTING IT IN 2010. SO I'VE BEEN DRIVING IT FOR SIX YEARS FULLY ELECTRIC."



"I've tinkered with all my cars. I started with a 1962 Mini, that was my first car... after that I had an EH Holden, then an LJ Torana. I've worked on all of them, serviced them myself," Eric Rodda says.

As the secretary of the South Australian chapter of the Australian Electric Vehicle Association, Eric knows that just because you've decided to move to electric, doesn't mean you stop tinkering. If anything, tinkering just gets cleaner.

The project he's driven into the city to show us was once a 1985 Holden Barina in a pale green that feels very-of-its-time, but is now something a little more new age.

"The petrol engine was taken out and the engine bay cleaned – no more grease, no more oil," Eric says with a relieved grin.

"I got this one in 2008, started converting it the same year, and finished converting it in 2010. So I've been driving it for six years fully electric.

"You can do them quicker. We've done conversions on cars within the club for various people over a weekend, but you've gotta be prepared."



There are 40 batteries sitting in the back of the cabin (in six years Eric still hasn't needed to change one), and they'll last around 80 kilometres on a full charge.

Living in Marion, that gets Eric into the city easily, but as yet he hasn't pushed its limits.

"Probably the furthest I've been is Gawler. That's about just over 50kms and I got there without any problems and charged it up while I was there and drove back," he says.

"I'd like to test it one day to see if it does get 100kms, but I haven't. Just theoretically it's 80kms."

Eric has, however, been testing the public's reaction to his conversion.



"So petrol heads like to have lots of noise, well I've got a sound maker on that to give a V8 sound, and that's linked up with the motor revs. I've got a little speaker at the back where the muffler used to be," Eric smiles.

At home Eric also has a Prius hybrid that he's converted with more battery power, upgrading it from 5 litres per 100 kilometres to 2.5 litres per 100 kilometres, but his next project will be something with a bit more style.

"I'd love to do another one. I'd love to get rid of that one and do, like, a sports car-type conversion," he says.

CityMag will be keeping an eye out on Gumtree.





David Cann – the Nissan Leaf

"IT IS FAST, IT IS SILENT, IT IS, YOU KNOW, JUST WONDERFUL."



It's in the parking lot of his CBD apartment that we're shown David Cann's pride and joy.

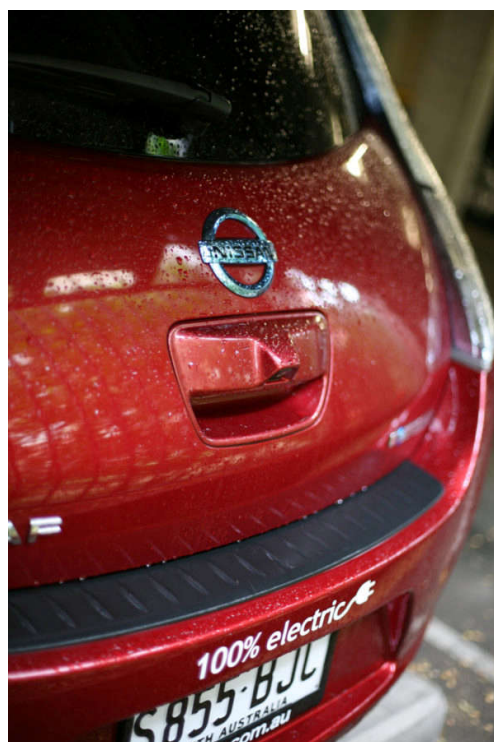
"So this is what some would see as a lowly Nissan Leaf. It's no Tesla but it is an amazing car!" David beams.

"It is fast, it is silent, it is, you know, just wonderful."

David has been following the electric car market since the inception of Tesla a little over 10 years ago, but it wasn't until he saw this Nissan Leaf online with a good chunk of the price removed that he decided to plunge into ownership.

"I bought it sight unseen, I paid for it, I bought it privately, I did all of the wrong things," he says enthusiastically.

"These things have a sad story; Nissan brought them here expecting to sell squillions of them – they are still selling 2012 models from the first shipment. So Australians have not taken to them."



It's not only the take-up of his beloved Nissan Leaf, but of electric cars generally, that David struggles to understand.

"I don't think people realise how good they are. I seriously think that's the problem. Australians haven't gotten it yet, but they will," David says.

"I've got a 2012 Honda Odyssey, which I thought was a beautiful car; I've got a 2014 Honda Jazz, which I thought was a fantastic car; and if I get in them now, they just feel like ancient technology. The rattle, they vibrate, they lurch forward when you put your foot on [the pedal]."

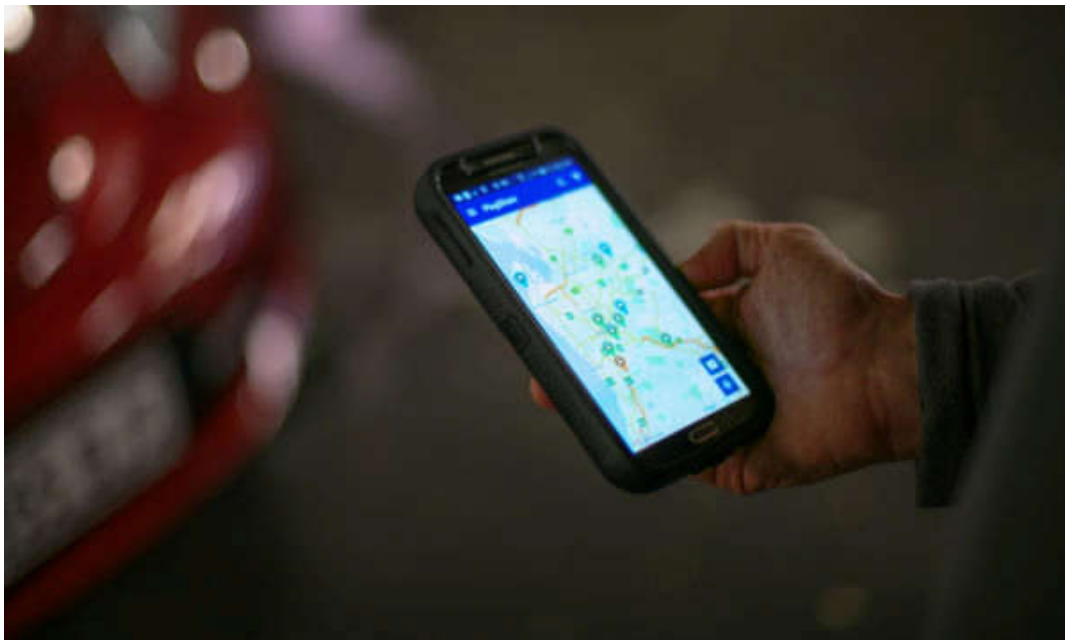
The range of David's Leaf is around 120 kilometres, but that hasn't stopped he and his wife from venturing out into wine country.

"We always hunt out people who are willing to help, so we've gone to Seppeltsfield – I just emailed them and said 'can we park our car and charge while we have lunch?'"

"The Current Shed at McLaren Vale... Shottesbrook Winery... so what we can do is if we go to Shottesbrook for lunch and we can charge for two or three hours while we have lunch, then we've got more options. We can go further and we can come back."

Even in the situation where a winery is not available, the electric car community is always willing to help out.

"We went out to Williamstown, Gawler, out that way, and we were coming back and we... had 19 kilometres left on the clock and 19 kilometres left to go, so we thought we'll try PlugShare," David explains.



PlugShare is an app that places pins on a map showing locations of official electronic car charging points, as well as the homes of owners who are willing to let you visit for a recharge.

"We're coming back and there's one guy there with his house and I thought 'I'll send him a message.'"

"So we dropped in, had a cup of coffee with him, plugged my car in [and] charged it up. While we were there he said 'take my BMW i3 for a drive,' so you know, never met the guy, throws me the keys to his \$80,000 car."

In David's eyes, the slow take up of electric cars in Adelaide could come down to the lack of infrastructure, but he acknowledges that developments are also slowly coming led by a mix of private companies like Tesla, local government, and the electric vehicle community itself.

His case for making the change, though, is simple.

"You sit in traffic and there's no noise, and there's no smoke, and there's no vibration, and [it's] just quiet. You go when you need to go and use the power when you need the power," David says.

"I sit in a traffic jam now and think 'God, there's... millions of cars just sitting there going nowhere, blowing smoke in the air. It is madness.'"

