Electric cars are running on empty promises

By David A. Ridenour

If government actually could mandate innovation, we could all fill up our cars with garden hoses.

But even Washington can't turn water into automotive fuel, and that's why federal subsidies premised upon technological breakthroughs — such as those for electric cars — are a waste of money.

What we drive says a lot about us.

What an electric car says about its owners is that they either don't have children or have no reasonable hope of ever having any.

Electric cars simply don't provide families with the right combination of price, size and range for their needs.

Children are very expensive, with the average cost of raising a child the first 18 years now over $240,000. Add college tuition and the cost of each child can easily exceed $340,000.

At the same time, the higher one's income — and the more likely one can afford higher-cost electric cars — the less likely one is to have children. The bottom fifth of wage-earners are nearly 50 percent more likely to have children than top fifth.

Electric cars don't deliver the value families need. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the lifetime cost of an electric hybrid car is $12,000 more than a conventional vehicle, so subsidies have to be at least 60 percent higher than the current maximum federal subsidy of $7,500 to overcome the cost disparity.

But no amount of federal action can resolve other problems.

◆ These cars are too small, as space is sacrificed for technological needs and to minimize vehicle weight to extend the range.

◆ The typical all-electric car has a range of less than 100 miles between charges.

◆ Charges can take hours and leave one vulnerable to the increasingly unreliable power grid.

Electric-gas hybrid cars are a better alternative, but are more expensive and less spacious.

Range is a huge issue for families. As the automotive evaluation firm J.D. Power and Associates notes, electric cars are best for "drivers with predictable, unwavering daily driving requirements."

Kids' schedules are many things, but reliable isn't one of them. As anyone who has children can attest, kids have unscheduled band, choir, soccer, football and dance practices. They occasionally get sick and need to be taken home. They even, from time to time, get detention and must stay late.

The $7.5 billion we'll spend over 10 years promoting electric cars will accomplish only one thing: propping up a niche product.

J.D. Power says electric car owners "most often cite environmental friendliness as the most important benefit" of such cars. But even here, electric vehicles fail.

A Journal of Industrial Ecology report found that manufacturing electric vehicles produces more than double the carbon dioxide emissions of building conventional automobiles. Furthermore, electric vehicles are charged with electricity generated from conventional fossil fuels and require batteries containing toxic chemicals. Environmental benefits are marginal at best.

It was 116 years ago that the first commercially-available electric car went on the market.

Electric cars have been running on empty promises ever since. When it comes to federal subsidies, it's time to pull the plug.

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Electric vehicles less costly to operate, better for environment

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The "con" article on electric cars by David A. Ridenour in the Oct. 25 Daily News leaves out some important considerations. He says that electric cars are not good family cars because they are small, have a limited range and take a long time to charge. He also says they are unreliable.

What he fails to say is that the vast majority of automobile trips in the United States are without a passenger or with one passenger. Furthermore, most families in this country have two cars, and they do not need both of them to carry multiple passengers or take long-distance trips.

My wife and I, for example, have an old minivan and an all-electric Nissan Leaf. We wouldn't trade the Leaf for anything. We use it for all our trips on Aquidneck Island and most of our trips off the island. When our children and grandchildren visit, and for longer out-of-town trips, we use the minivan.

The limited driving range and lengthy charging time are non-issues. We get

We never spend time in gas station lines, never have to worry about the price of gas and never have to check the oil.

80-100 miles on a charge, and when the meter shows less than 30 or so miles left, we just put the car in the garage and plug it into our charging unit. The next morning it is charged up and ready to go.

We never spend time in gas station lines, never have to worry about the price of gas and never have to check the oil.

Ah, but what about the cost of electricity to charge it? I checked our average monthly electricity bill for two years before we bought the Leaf and compared it with our monthly average for the first year after we got it. We're spending an average of $11.88 more per month now for electricity — about one-fifth the cost of one tankful of gas for our minivan.

As for reliability, our first trip to the dealer for service was not because we needed any, but because a one-year checkup was recommended. They kidded me about checking the oil, but really couldn't find anything to charge me for.

Finally, driving an electric car does make a difference in the amount of greenhouse gases we are spewing into the atmosphere. Mr. Ridenour notes that "manufacturing electric vehicles produces more than double the carbon dioxide emissions of building conventional vehicles." But, standing alone, that fact is meaningless. Just add the relatively high emissions involved in manufacturing electric vehicles to the zero emissions from driving electric vehicles, and compare that to the total harmful emissions from manufacturing and driving gas-powered cars. That will show that electric cars are much more beneficial to our environment.

In short, Mr. Ridenour's "con" column is a real con job on the truth of electric vs. gas-powered vehicles.

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