The Electric Car How're We Doing

by Kate McLeod

Not to put a damper on the growth of EV sales, but there has been an inordinate amount of attention paid to them in the past couple of years. Yes, they have been steady.. In 2010-2011, just over 17,000 EVs were sold. It was the Chevy Volt, the Nissan Leaf and the Mitsubishi iMIEV.

In 2015, 115,000 were sold but now there are 26 models to choose from. So yes, the sales of EVs are growing and more companies are offering them.

Part of the impetus for companies to offer them is the U.S. government mandate to reach a corporate average fuel economy of 54.4 mpg by 2025. That may seem far off but in terms of automotive development it's about two model changes away.

But the sales from 2014 to 2015 declined 6.5 percent because of cheap oil and they are still a minuscule proportion of what we buy. In 2015 we sold over 17.5 million new cars and trucks in the U.S. Electric plug-ins were 0.75 percent of those vehicles.

Remember that electric cars aren't new. They were first developed in practical terms in the second half of the 19th Century. In the U.S., a Des Moines chemist named William Morrison debuted the first successful electric car around 1890. It held six-passengers and had a top speed of 14 miles per hour. Over the next few years, more electric vehicles from different automakers were on the road across the U.S. New York City even had a fleet of more than 60 electric taxis. By 1900, electric cars were at their heyday, accounting for around a third of all vehicles on the road. During the next 10 years, they continued to show strong sales.

Electric cars along with hybrids and gasoline powered cars grew in popularity with the increasing interest in personal vehicles. But it was Henry Ford who basically made the electric car a thing of the past (And he had even worked on an electric car with his friend, Thomas Edison.) His gasoline powered car, the Ford Model T, was mass produced and affordable. That helped to end the competition along with improved roads and cheap oil.

Some might recall the EV1 produced by General Motors almost two decades ago. I remember listening to then chairman of GM, Bob Stemple, talking about the future being here. It wasn't the future and even non-car enthusiasts can tell you that GM crushed every EV1 and sent them to the junkyard.

The top sellers in 2015 were the Tesla S (25,000), the Nissan Leaf (17,000) and the Chevrolet Volt (15,000) and the BMW i3 (11,000). General Motors is expecting the the Chevrolet Bolt to change the landscape of who can buy and afford an electric vehicle and I expect that they are on to something. The Bolt is a compact car that has a200 mile range on a full electric charge, will be priced at around $30,000 and will be 80 percent charged in 30 minutes.

“The Bolt is more than just a car,” said Mary Barra, G.M.'s chief executive. “It’s an upgradeable platform for new technologies.

Today we’re talking about a number of technologies to power our vehicles. It is becoming more mainstream to believe that fossil fuels are not the future. Hydrogen, natural gas, batteries and plug-in electric vehicles are coming to market—slowly, but they are coming. And Barra’s comment about the car becoming a platform for new technologies is where the discussion is sure to lead.