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Seen a Tesla today? Electric cars turn up fast in Washington

Posted by Monica Guzman



Tesla S. The car gets 94 city/97 highway mpg, features a 17-inch touchscreen control panel, and is one of more than 500 Teslas in Washington state. (LINDSEY WASSON / SEATTLE TIMES) It was one of those everyday showdowns.

David Eaton, dean of the Graduate School at the University of Washington, commutes from Mukilteo in his fully electric 2012

I turned my Honda Civic onto Keystone Place North. At the far end of the short residential street,

another car turned in to face me. With cars parked on both sides, one of us would have to pull over and let the other go. Something about the other car looked familiar. Sleek headlights. A silver body. Then I saw it: that

signature letter T. The car was a Tesla Model S. Without thinking, I ducked out of its way and watched it pass.

If you've never seen a Tesla before, try to spot one now. The pricey, game-changing electric cars are peeking into view faster in Washington state than anywhere else in the country.

As of November, 42 out of every 10,000 passenger cars registered in Washington were

analyst Hedges & Company. That's good for third place behind California, where 67 out of every 10,000 passenger cars are made by the renegade Bay Area automaker, and the District of Columbia. But look at cars registered just last year and Washington comes out ahead. The numbers show 8.3 out of every 10,000 passenger cars

Teslas, according to data from auto industry

registered here in 2013, through November, were Teslas, compared with 7.9 out of every 10,000 in California. In fact, Washington leads the nation in recent per-capita sales of all electric passenger cars, including more-affordable models like the Nissan Leaf: 293 of every 10,000 cars registered here in 2013, through November, will never need a drop of gas.

King County was home to 3,048 electric vehicles in July 2013, according to WSDOT figures. (CLICK TO ZOOM)

preliminary year-end figures from Tonia Buell at the Washington State Department of Transportation. But they signal what could be a substantial electric-vehicle edge. Tesla cars are selling better everywhere as enthusiasm for the Model S, with its 300-mile range per

charge (in its \$80,000 version) and host of digital features, persuades wealthy car enthusiasts to give them a try. Tesla sold 6,900 of the sedans in the fourth quarter of 2013, beating the previous

These are tiny numbers; there are only north of 500 Teslas in the whole state, according to

quarter's sales by 25 percent. "This is the first electric vehicle for which there are no compromises," said University of Washington graduate school dean David Eaton. He and his wife, Kathleen, drive the 346th Model S to come off the line — a limited edition in smooth cabernet red — and store two car seats for their grandkids in the big space under the hood Tesla insiders call the "frunk."

Three Tesla Model S battery fires (including one in Kent) are under investigation by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and Tesla's stock plummeted, but was boosted by NHTSA's reaffirmed five-star safety rating. But why are Washingtonians buying more Teslas than anyone else in the country? Incentives help. In addition to a federal tax credit up to \$7,500, buying an electric vehicle in Washington means you

The company's innovations have drawn praise from the tech world, but it hasn't been a smooth ride.

don't pay sales tax on the car or the charging equipment you need to fuel it — a significant savings. You also are exempt from state emissions inspections and motor vehicle sales and use taxes (though you are subject to one new one — a \$100 annual tax). Then there's electricity. At 8.7 cents per kilowatt-hour, we have the cheapest residential prices in the nation — half what they pay in California. Electric vehicle enthusiast Tom Saxton, who parks a

on any of them for about \$1. And get this: 73 percent of Washington's electricity is generated by hydropower or other renewable <u>sources,</u> making the state — in true Northwest nature-loving fashion — one of the greenest places to drive an electric car. We're actually considered early adopters of the whole electric-vehicle concept.

Tesla Roadster, a Nissan Leaf and a Toyota RAV in his Sammamish garage, can go 30 to 35 miles

Tack on the West Coast Electric Highway, a network of fast-charging stations located every 25 to 50 miles along I-5, I-90 and Highway 2, and even though our state's electric-vehicle drivers can't get on the HOV lane riding solo (Californians can!), it's a pretty good deal.

who own Teslas own them, and why I pulled to the side of the road when a luxury vehicle turned up at the end of it. That Tesla didn't feel like a car, but a cause. And the people who can afford to support it in its early years could bring it closer to the rest of us who believe in it.

None of this, though, gets to the early adopter geekiness at the heart of why many Washingtonians

"We're subsidizing the future car," said Shewetak Patel, a Seattle entrepreneur and friend who got his and his wife's Model S eight months ago. He never thought he'd spend so much on a car, but

I think that inspires an interesting kind of respect.

that was never the only thing they were buying. Tesla plans to release a \$35,000 electric model by 2017.

Eaton, a scientist, almost canceled his pre-order of the Model S to get a Prius. When he considered which car was more likely to disrupt the way we drive for good, he stuck with Tesla.

"I'm very concerned for my kids and grandkids," Eaton told me after we'd taken a ride through the U

"The world has to change. There have to be better ways to move people about."

Mónica Guzmán's column appears in Sunday's Seattle Times. Got a story about living with

technology in the Northwest — or know someone she should meet? Send her an email, follow her on Twitter @moniguzman or send her a message on Facebook.