



by Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

IS AN ELECTRIC VEHICLE RIGHT FOR YOU?



The economics of electric vehicles are affected by geography, climate, and how your electricity is generated.

Should your next car be an electric vehicle? Electric vehicles account for less than 2 percent of the U.S. vehicle market, but sales are booming. And they're becoming more reliable and cost effective as researchers improve the batteries that power them. Here's a guide to help you decide if an electric car is for you—or if you just want to learn more about one of the next big things in energy.

The first thing to realize about electric cars is they can drive more than enough miles for you on a single charge, even if you live in rural areas.

Issue #1: The Distance Myth

Try keeping track of your actual daily use. If your job takes you on the road for many hours a day and you're logging a lot of miles, an electric car may not be for you. A typical range for an electric car today is over 100 miles, and ranges of 150 to 250 miles are becoming common. But if you look at how many miles you drive in a day, for most people, even in rural areas, that number is under 40 miles per day. So if your car has a range of 120 miles, that's a lot of wiggle room.

According to the Federal Highway Administration, the average American drives 25 miles a day, and for rural areas, that average is 34 miles a day.

The reason to look at daily mileage is the way an electric car is refueled. When an electric car is done driving for the day, you can plug it in to recharge overnight. Essentially, you're topping off the gas tank while you sleep, giving you a fully charged battery every morning.

There are three ways to charge an electric car:

Level 1—The simplest charging technique is to plug the car into a standard home outlet. This charging method will charge the battery at a rate that will add from two to five miles to its range each hour. That's pretty slow, but the battery might start the charging session already partly charged, depending on how far it's driven that day.

Level 2—Faster charging will require an electrician to add a 240-volt circuit in the garage (or wherever you plan to park your electric vehicle) and will add between 10 and 25 miles of range for each hour of charging—a rate that would fully

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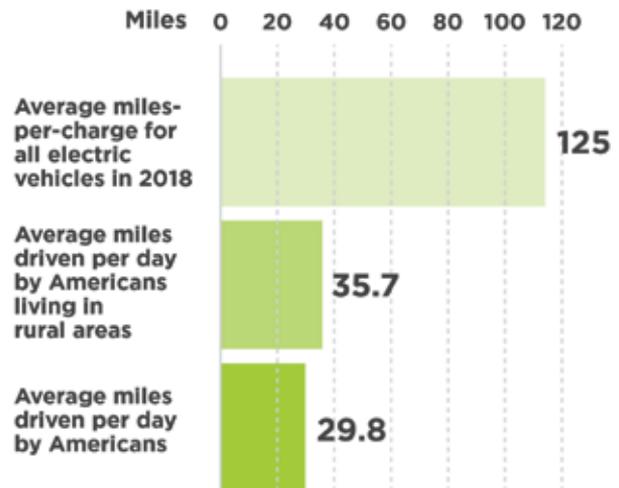
MY CO-OP

Easing Electric Vehicle Range Anxiety

Range anxiety—fear of the battery running out before you're able to recharge—is a roadblock to wider use of electric vehicles. But statistics show this fear is overblown, even if you live in a rural area. While extra planning may be needed for vacations or longer trips, nearly everyone's daily driving needs can be met with one charge.



AVERAGE MILE COMPARISON



And when you're done driving your electric vehicle for the day, you can plug it in to recharge overnight, "topping off the tank" while you sleep

Sources: Dept. of Energy, Energy Information Administration, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety



POTATO KING

La Crosse-based wholesaler transports a whole lot of produce

By Leah Call

What's a holiday meal without potatoes? Whether roasted, mashed, or scalloped, spuds rule the table. This venerable vegetable was the impetus behind La Crosse-based Potato King, launched in 1958. Today, this Vernon Electric Cooperative member has expanded its domain well beyond just potatoes.

“Now we offer anything you'd find in the produce department. We inventory between 250 and 300 items with the option to get anything beyond that by pre-order,” said Kevin Herlitzke, Potato King's vice president and the third generation of Herlitzkes to work for this family-owned business.

Herlitzke's grandparents, Joyce and Paul Herlitzke, founded Potato King after bringing back potatoes from a farm near their cabin in northern Wisconsin. Each time they went north, they brought back more and more potatoes to fill orders from friends and neighbors. As the orders grew, the couple saw an opportunity to launch a business.

With a humble start in a root cellar, Potato King today employs 160 people and distributes produce to over 80 grocery stores. It runs its own fleet of 90 semi-tractors and 235 semi-trailers year-round, sourcing veggies from growers in the United States and beyond. Running its own fleet allows greater control over cost and delivery time.



Kevin Herlitzke, vice president of Potato King

“We keep our inventory so close—we call it just-in-time delivery. If we load a truck in California on Monday, that product arrives back at Potato King on Thursday, and it's in stores on Friday,” explained Herlitzke. “It is very important to have reliable delivery, and by us owning our own trucks, we make that happen.”

Potato King operates its wholesale business out of a 50,000 sq. ft. facility south of La Crosse, with 15 semi-docks, storage and packaging areas, and a specially designed room where they ripen bananas—the business's number one seller. “When bananas come here from Costa Rica or Guatemala or wherever they might come from, we gas them with ethylene so they ripen,” said Herlitzke.

After the ethylene is flushed out of the room, the bananas remain inside at a temperature between 55 and 65 degrees and about 90% humidity. The process takes about five days before the bananas are ready to ship to stores.

In addition to bananas, other top-selling items include grapes, apples, broccoli, cauliflower, avocados, lettuce, and clementine. While Potato King does not grow any of the produce it distributes,

“It is very important to have reliable delivery, and by us owning our OWN trucks, we make that happen.”

—Kevin Herlitzke

it does purchase potatoes, oranges, and onions in bulk and packages them at the La Crosse facility.

“We don’t grow anything; we are a wholesaler,” confirmed Herlitzke. “We do have great relationships with growers throughout Wisconsin.”

Interesting times

When COVID-19 first hit in March and April, the increased demand for food items resulted in shortages nationwide. According to Herlitzke, growers who typically grow only enough to satisfy historical demand were unable to meet the pandemic-induced demand. If he was able to find a high-demand product

from a grower, it would immediately sell out. Some growers wrongly predicted a reduction in sales due to COVID, and planted less than historical averages, creating additional challenges.

While it has leveled off some, demand remains high and will likely remain high as people avoid restaurants and continue to prepare meals at home.

The Perfect Location

Potato King operates a transportation hub out of Green Bay but does not store any produce there. Herlitzke said the company has no current plans to expand beyond its La Crosse facility, calling La Crosse “the perfect place

geographically” because of its distance from suppliers.

The Herlitzke family is still very much involved with the business. Paul Herlitzke started more than 60 years ago. Paul’s sons Todd, Keith, and Scott [Kevin’s father] now run the business, while Kevin, his brother, and cousins hold key roles within the company.

For Kevin Herlitzke, there’s satisfaction in not just continuing the family legacy, but also contributing to the region he loves. “We are very proud of the work that we do, and we take pride in offering good jobs for people in our community.”





Electric Vehicles (Continued from page 15)

charge the battery overnight. A faster charging time allows for timers or a built-in delay to charge the vehicle in the middle of the night when electric consumption and rates are typically low.

Level 3—DC fast charge requires specialized equipment more suited to public charging stations, and will bring a car battery up to 80 percent of capacity in 30 minutes. This high-speed technique is typically used for long-distance driving.

Issue #2: Off-peak Electric Rates and Economics

Vernon Electric Co-op offers an off-peak electric rate for charging electric vehicles on a separate, controlled meter. The EV Charging Rate is almost half the regular electric rate because the electric vehicle will only be allowed to charge when power demand, and cost, is low—in the middle of the night. Typical charging hours are from approximately 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., allowing plenty of energy to be stored by morning.

Vernon Electric also offers an incentive of \$400 for new level 2 chargers installed under this program. Details are available on our website or by calling our office.

Another factor affecting the economics of an electric car is, of course, the cost of the vehicle. Many of these cars are currently in the luxury and performance car categories; however, projections show that their cost will continue to drop and match conventional vehicles by about the year 2025. But today, the average electric car costs close to \$40,000, compared with less than \$30,000 for an internal combustion engine.

Issues #3 and #4: Environment and Geography

For many people, one of the biggest selling points for electric cars is their effect on the environment. We are fortunate to live in an area with a growing supply of renewable energy. With many large and small solar arrays in our service area, along with a large renewable energy portfolio from Dairyland Power (our supplier), much of the energy your electric car will use will be offset by green production. Electric vehicles have much less of an effect on the environment than conventional vehicles. A study by the Union of Concerned Scientists shows that driving an electric vehicle has the equivalent environmental benefits of driving a gasoline-powered car that gets 41–50 miles per gallon.

Other local factors that will affect an electric car’s performance include climate and geography. The range of the

vehicle will be affected by the terrain and use of the heater or air conditioner.

Electric vehicles are not for everybody—yet. One thing that will expand their growth is the introduction of the pickup truck and other models, by major auto manufactures.

There’s no technological barrier to making an electric pickup. Possible advantages: a heavy battery in the bottom would lower the center of gravity for better handling, and at a remote worksite the battery could run power tools.

As part of our commitment to innovation, Vernon Electric has installed a level 2 charger in our parking lot at our Westby office. This charger can be used by the public at no cost. There is also a level 2 charger in the garage to charge our electric van. Plans are in the works for more electric vehicle chargers in our service area. We are in the process of installing a level 2 and level 3 charger in Readstown at the Kickapoo Creekside Restaurant.

I wish you all a safe and merry holiday season! Especially if a new electric vehicle is on your wish list.

VEC NOW OFFERS AMERICAN EXPRESS AS A PAYMENT OPTION

Along with VISA, Mastercard, and Discover cards, members can use American Express to pay their Vernon Electric bill each month. Credit cards can be used to set up automatic payments, pay online, or pay over the phone.

Keep in mind that starting January 1, all over-the-phone payments to our office will be directed to our call center. Vernon Electric’s professional call center has the PCI (Payment Card Industry) security in place to safely make a payment by phone.

To get more details on all payment options, including automatic withdrawal and online, visit the “My Account” tab on the main menu of our website at www.vernonelectric.org, or give our office a call.



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