

Tesla roadster cruises into Lincoln to recharge at LES wind turbine site

By ALGIS J. LAUKAITIS / Lincoln Journal Star | Posted: Friday, July 24, 2009 12:45 am



Tim Reece (left), **Steve Wignall** and **Nick Reding** from the UNL physics department check out a Tesla Motors Roadster at the LES wind turbine site while it recharges, Thursday, July 23, 2009. Renew America Roadtrip is driving the plug-in, electric car cross country promoting greener alternatives to gas dependant transportation. (William Lauer)

A \$135,000 Tesla roadster, the world's first all-electric production car, made a pit stop in Lincoln Thursday to promote green technology and charities.

The sleek white car drove up the gravel road to Lincoln Electric System's Wind Turbine No. 2 north of Interstate 80 and plugged in to recharge its batteries along with a gray Nissan Altima.

"I felt like Lightning Steve McQueen in 'Cars' when he hit Route 66," Michael Craner said of his turn from 70th Street onto the gravel road leading to the turbine.

Craner and Maddy

Gunawardana, co-founders of the Renew America Roadtrip, are driving across America in the all-electric, production vehicle. Working with green charities and sponsors, they hope to raise money for infrastructure, renewability/sustainability projects and green charities, including the Autism Society of America and the American Lung Association.

They started in New York last week and expect to end in San Francisco July 31.

Following the road trip, the roadster will be sold at public auction, with the net profit going to eco-friendly charities.

The roadster was scheduled to arrive in Lincoln at 12:30 p.m. but didn't get here until about 2:45 p.m. because it made a brief pit stop in Omaha to recharge.

The Renew America Roadtrip crew contacted LES about using the wind turbines as a backdrop for the recharging because they thought that would fit nicely with the purpose of the trip.

And LES seized the opportunity to roll out a 2009 Chevy Malibu hybrid, the first such vehicle in its fleet. The city-owned utility plans to add two or three more in the next year as part of its hybrid car program, said Steve Adams, vice president of corporate services. The reduction of greenhouse gases and other emissions is one of the key reasons for the change.

"We believe embracing hybrid technology at LES is the right thing to do, but we are determined to do it the right way," Adams said.

He said it could take as long as eight years to convert all of LES's car fleet to hybrid technology. The utility is also considering buying a hybrid aerial truck.

LES recently announced it is ordering a Toyota Prius and is one of 40 utilities that will get a Chevy Volt as part of a nationwide test program. The Volt can run all-electric for about 40 miles, which is greater than the average commute of 78 percent of Americans.

Like the Tesla, the Volt can be plugged into any standard household outlet. The annual electricity consumption for charging a Volt is similar to the amount required to run a home refrigerator, according to the Electric Power Research Institute.

Milo Mumgaard, senior policy aide to Mayor Chris Beutler, said the city has its own green plans, which include converting more StarTran buses to bio-diesel fuel.

"We want to see more hybrid vehicles as well," said Mumgaard. "We're committed to having our city fleet going to hybrid as well."

Before the Tesla's arrival, Jerry Asher and his "Spirit of DC" arrived at the wind turbine site. Asher is making the cross-country trek in his Prius plastered in solar panels that heat the oil pan and reduce emissions from the catalytic converter. The car has a separate battery compartment in the rear for recharging and storing electricity and a plug on the rear bumper.

But the Tesla drew the most attention as people snapped photos and sat in its snug interior.

Gunawardana said they are trying to get the word out that all-electric cars like the Tesla are in production and will become more economical. She said she and Craner are not associated with Tesla Motors. They just bought the car and thought it would be neat to take it cross country.

Although the Tesla roadster can go 244 miles on a single charge, Craner said they've only gone that far once and have averaged about 190 miles.

Top speed is 125 mph, and the car can go from 0 to 60 in 3.9 seconds.

"It can beat any muscle car, Lamborghini or Porsche ... off the mark," Gunawardana said.

She and Craner take turns driving and say the Tesla has a top speed of 150 mph.

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Tesla roadster

What is it? America's first mass-produced, highway capable, all-electric sports car.

Who makes it? Tesla Motors of San Carlos, Calif.

How fast can it go? Zero to 60 mph in 3.9 seconds.

How many miles on a single charge? 244; takes about 3.5 hours to recharge.

How many have been sold? Tesla said in March it has delivered nearly 300 roadsters and has nearly 1,000 customers on a waiting list.

How much? Base price of \$109,000.

Source: Tesla Motors