

Drag racing goes green as US electric cars shine

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A photo illustration of a drag race at a motor speedway in Texas. Far from the fury of traditional race-tracks, spectators have been getting a glimpse of the future as they watched electric cars rev up, and silently bomb off around the Mason-Dixon Dragway.

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Reaching speeds of more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) an hour, the cars, motorcycles and tricycles provided an eye-opener for bemused crowds at the Maryland track, more used to the dust, dirt and smells of gas-fueled dragsters.

"Seeing them run for the first time today definitely scared me because their times are kinda close to some of my times," said drag racer Travis

Beall. "Every year they are getting faster and faster."

Such meets are helping electric cars shed their old-fashioned, stuffy image as the preferred vehicle for those who don't mind moving at a snail's pace.

At one recent weekend meet about 20 enthusiasts tried out their electric vehicles, [racing](#) them furiously, but silently, around the quarter-mile asphalt track.

Over in a grassy field, tech geeks and speed freaks alike checked out the electric vehicles, from sports cars to three-wheelers that more resembled UFOs than serious [speed](#) machines.

"People laugh at electric cars and say they are golf carts, but they're not," said Jo Reyes, 43, from Maryland, a former Ferrari mechanic who now builds electric vehicles.

"We've come a long way. Look at these Teslas here, they will spank Ferraris."

The National Electric Drag Racing Association sponsors contests like these across the United States, and according to non-profit organization Plug-in-America which promotes [electric cars](#), there are roughly 5,350 highway-capable vehicles on the road.

These electric drag racers hope to gain more fans by showcasing the latest models, like the Tesla Roadster, a 109,000-dollar sports car which can go over 100 miles per hour. A dark red model won the all-electric competition here, clocking it at 103.9 miles per hour.

[Electric vehicles](#) race under three categories. "Production EVs," cars originally manufactured with electric power systems; "Conversion EVs,"

internal combustion engine cars converted to electric; and electric motorcycles.

Dressed in a black helmet decorated with dreadlocks made out of electric cord, Jeff Disinger pushed his purple flame-painted electric motorcycle to 88.9 miles an hour, winning second place in the competition.

The 45-year-old tattoo artist from New York used to drag race gasoline-powered motorcycles, but hopes his switch to electric will help him stand out on the racing circuit and win sponsors.

"I've dragged raced a lot of normally aspirated engines and just thought this would be a different avenue. Nobody else had been doing it and I'm trying to be the first to make it look good," he said.

Most electric vehicle owners drive them for their low fuel costs. Joseph Lado, 47, is a program specialist at the National Science Foundation from Virginia. His bright yellow 1985 Pontiac Fiero was converted to an electric system 16 years ago.

The car now costs 12 dollars a month to charge. But Lado said the real advantage is the quiet ride.

"The car is completely silent. I could hear the wind blowing and the birds chirping in the trees," he said. "You know you're not using any energy at that point and you shouldn't be."

But there are drawbacks. On the open road, electric car drivers can't just pull over to a gas station for an electricity refill.

Driving distance is limited to a few hundred miles. And racers here had to use a diesel generator to charge their cars for the track.

Specialized lithium ion batteries to power a car engine can cost up to 30,000 dollars.

"The battery technology is a challenge right now," said Chip Gribben, president of the national association.

"As soon as we can get more production of batteries the price will go lower and then more people will be able to afford them."

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