

Rev up the green machines. California offering incentives to buy electric motorcycles

By Jim Guy

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Warmer weather in the central San Joaquin Valley means its motorcycle season, and state and federal agencies are offering cash to get riders off gas-burning engines and onto green machines.

The sound of a high-powered engine seems an intrinsic part of the riding experience for most motorcyclists. But several manufacturers are now offering powerful, attractive zero-emission bikes that make the switch tempting, especially in a time of sky-high gas prices.

The incentives, outlined by the California Air Resources Board, can add up to thousands of dollars in savings, including a 10% federal tax credit up to \$2,500, a clean fuel reward up to \$1,500, a clean vehicle rebate up to \$750, and a rebate of up to \$1,000 for those living in the San Joaquin Valley.

Here are some of the electric motorcycles available in California:

HARLEY-DAVIDSON LIVE WIRE

Harley-Davidson touts a 0-60 acceleration time of three seconds for the Livewire, almost twice as fast as the company's gas-powered Road King, according to the Zeroto60Times website. The list price is \$22,000, and the cruising range is up to 146 miles, with a fast-charge time of 40 minutes.

On the down side for Fresno buyers, neither Mathews Harley-Davidson, near downtown, nor Fresno Harley-Davidson, in northwest Fresno, have plans to sell the electric bike.

"The market isn't here," said a salesman at Fresno Harley, who would only provide his first name of Michael.

That would make the closest dealer in either San Jose or Sacramento.

ENERGICA EGO

With a price of about \$25,000, the Energica Ego boasts an acceleration of 0-60 in 2.6 seconds and a city-highway combined range of 261 miles. The Italian motorcycle maker claims the battery can be topped up to 80% in 40 minutes. The manufacturer brags that with a top speed of 150 mph, it is the fastest road bike on the market. Information: Energica Dealer and Service Center.

ZERO MOTORCYCLES

With a list price of about \$10,000, the Zero FX touts a top speed of 85 mph. The Scotts Valley-based manufacturer said it can be fast-charged in about an hour, at a claimed cost of about 40 cents. It comes with off-road tires and suspension. Dealer: Monterey Peninsula Motorsports.

LIVING WITH AN ELECTRIC MOTORCYCLE

The Clovis Police Department reports that it is one of the largest police forces in California to use electric motorcycles. While the agency also uses gas-powered BMWs for most duties, the electric bikes come in handy for special events such as the Clovis Rodeo.

Motorcycle officer A.J. Ferguson said the Zero motorcycles are nifty vehicles for patrolling near bike lanes and other off-road destinations because of their light weight. On hot days, it's a definite advantage to not experience the heat put out by the BMWs.

The downside is the limited range. Ferguson said it amounts to about 80 miles before a recharge is needed. If the Zero is used for traffic enforcement, rapid acceleration puts an extra drain on the battery. If the motorcycle is charged at a 110 home wall plug, a recharge will take several hours.

Another downfall for electric bikes, he noted, is service. With no dealer in the central San Joaquin Valley, Ferguson said the next best option is an automotive electrical shop. He said the dealer recommended Electric Lab.

Open burning halted in Kern County following relatively dry winter

By Sam Morgen
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After a relatively dry winter, the Kern County Fire Department has closed the open burning period for hazard-reduction fuels.

In an announcement on Monday, KCFD said vegetation has dried to a point where it has become more susceptible to igniting, and is therefore riskier to burn. During the open burning period, county residents can dispose of vegetation around their house by lighting it on fire. It is meant to help those residents who cannot otherwise transport their green waste to a facility for disposal.

Residents in areas susceptible to wildfires must maintain defensible spaces around their homes to prevent damage.

“The theory really is that people will spend the back half of fall trimming and acquiring all of their vegetation, allowing it to cure, and then ignite it in spring,” said KCFD Division Chief Andrew Kennison.

Most rural property owners are required to maintain a 30-foot buffer zone around their homes to limit the spread of any fires that reach the boundaries.

“It’s difficult to draw the line in the sand and say that if you don’t do it, your house is going to burn down,” Kennison said, “but generally speaking, it does make a significant impact.”

He added that firefighters have used the buffer zones as places of refuge when they attempt to fight wildfires.

“In the mountains where they don’t have safe options to go, we look for homes where people have done their clearances so it’s safe for us to work in there,” he said.

This year, the moisture content of vegetation was 5 percent below the 10-year average, a consequence of the dry winter that has hit Kern County. In Bakersfield, precipitation has reached 5.01 inches since October, around .6 inches below average, according to the National Weather service.

But the city has received only 1.46 inches of rain since Jan. 1, roughly 2.25 inches below average since the beginning of the year, the National Weather Service says.

“The last three months have been pretty darn dry,” said Jim Dudley, a National Weather Service meteorologist. “And moving ahead — we were looking ahead at the longer range temperature and Climate Prediction Center’s outlook for the months April, May and June — it looks like no more big extremes of temperature on average are expected. Of course, it is going to be just slightly above average, but not a whole lot.”

KCFD declined to predict whether the relatively dry winter would lead to a more severe fire season this summer. Kennison noted wildfires were unpredictable, with even wet winters preceding disastrous wildfires.

Nearly all of Kern County is now classified as being in extreme drought by the U.S. Drought Monitor. The classification is the second highest used by the agency and means fires can occur in typically wet parts of the state and fire season lasts the entire year.

Rural households in Kern County must still complete their hazard-reduction clearances by June 1 to meet a KCFD deadline. To meet the clearance, the households must mow and reduce vegetation in the buffer zones of their property to reduce fire spread.

'Inland port' would bring investment to Kern, but extent remains unclear

By John Cox
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A hybrid transportation project aimed at reducing the costs, pollution and uncertainties associated with goods movement across the Central Valley is expected to include a substantial Kern County component, though it’s unclear whether local benefits would equal what’s envisioned farther north as part of the same proposal.

The so-called “inland port” project now in early planning stages would haul containers by rail from seaports in Southern California northward to a series of logistics centers along the length of the valley. Each of these regional hubs would have electric recharging and other clean fueling stations for powering the tractor-trailers that would haul goods to or from their endpoints.

One version of the proposal calls for establishing just two intermodal facilities — places where containers would be taken off trucks and placed onto trains, or vice versa, depending on whether the goods are coming from a port or going to one. One would be in the central part of the valley and one in the northern part, but probably not in the south, such as Kern.

Under that scenario, the southern part of the valley could get a new distribution center with fueling facilities, such as battery-charging or hydrogen power, but not an intermodal facility.

“Kern would just be too close to the ports in order to make the switch to rail feasible,” partly because stopping trains in the county would reduce time efficiencies, said Braden Duran, associate regional planner and project manager at the Fresno Council of Governments. He added that Kern and Sacramento “just don’t have the output we would need in order to make the rail component feasible for those two locations.”

But others, including Executive Director Ahron Hakimi of the Kern Council of Governments, emphasize the project is still in formative stages and so it’s too early to rule out a more substantial investment in Kern.

“There will almost certainly be facilities in Kern County as part of what ultimately develops, if it develops,” Hakimi said, adding the project remains in its infancy.

The proposal has received some early planning money from government sources but is nowhere near raising the roughly \$250 million in taxpayer support Duran said the project would likely require, not including about three times that much private investment in the form of relocated manufacturing plants, food processing facilities and distribution centers.

While the inland port proposal would likely address many of the logistical problems that have frustrated Central Valley agricultural exporters since the start of the pandemic, the project actually predates the coronavirus by several years.

Proponents of the idea range from government agencies and elected officials to private companies. They say a main benefit would be a reduction in tailpipe emissions blamed for much of the Central Valley’s air pollution.

Transportation costs for businesses using the system would come down, as well as port and freeway congestion.

Earlier this month, an opinion piece by Reps. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, and David Valadao, R-Hanford, was published in The Fresno Bee expressing support for the project. It projected 100,000 new jobs valleywide and cited estimates that it would cut nitrogen dioxide pollution by 84 percent and greenhouse gas emissions by 93 percent.

Without mentioning specific areas where investments would take place, Costa and Valadao referred to four major inland port centers and six to eight “satellite ports” that would help consolidate goods movement and enhance the valley’s economic competitiveness.

They called for fast-tracking approval of two centers, one in the central part of the valley and another in the north, so that at least part of the system would become operational in 2024, with the rest built out later.

“Given the severe national supply-chain issues we are facing, the critical need to improve our air quality and reduce emissions, and the urgent need to expand economic opportunity for Valley residents, we support fast-tracking construction of the backbone of the system,” Costa and Valadao wrote. “We envision this as a system that would include two initial trade ports, one in the north and the other in the center of the Valley, to become operational in 2024, with the rest of the system to be built-out over the ensuing years.”