

Big Valley Ford General Manager Steve Kubitz shows the charging port of an all-electric Ford Focus at dealership's Stockton Auto

By Reed Fujii, Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record, Mon., July 2, 2012

STOCKTON - Big Valley Ford in Stockton is among the first 67 dealers in the nation certified to offer Ford Motor Co.'s first all-electric car, the 2012 Focus Electric.

To earn that standing, the dealership had to agree to install charging stations and train service technicians and sales personnel on all the ins and outs of these electric vehicles.

But it's not all that unusual for the dealership, which previously made a major commitment to offering natural gas-fueled commercial trucks in this region.

"That's the direction you're going to see: alternative-fuel vehicles as a major part of the infrastructure of transportation," said Steve Kubitz, Big Valley's general manager.

Owner Paul J. Umdenstock said the addition of the Focus Electric is just part of larger alternative-fuel strategy for his dealership.

Last week, the dealer had two new electric sedans on display, appearing much like their gas-guzzling counterparts.

"This is not some slapped-together-so-you-can-feel-good-about-the-environment (vehicle). It's a nice car," Kubitz said.

Umdenstock said he'd taken the car around town, out to a restaurant and on other short trips. "It's just an absolute dream to drive," he said.

But the Focus, like other electric vehicles, is somewhat limited in range.

With its lithium-ion batteries fully charged, the car has a 76-mile range if all the accessories - such as air conditioning, heating and entertainment system - are switched off. Under more typical conditions, it can be expected to go 55 to 60 miles between charges.

So the electric Focus is most suitable as a second car to be used on short commutes and around-town trips.

However, that may change, as many major retailers have announced plans to install public charging stations, Kubitz said.

"You're going to be able to go to the mall and get it charged and do your shopping," Kubitz said.

And that's already true in Stockton, if your destination is the Walgreens at 7850 West Lane, which features a 24-hour public charging station.

The federal Alternative Fuels and Advanced Vehicles Data Center - afdc.energy.gov - lists that drugstore and Stockton Nissan, at 3077 E. Hammer Lane, as two of the more than 1,000 public charging stations now in California. Big Valley's chargers are for its customers.

Electric cars most usually tap home charging stations. Ford directs its customers to Best Buy, but other major retailers such as Home Depot, Lowe's and Amazon.com also offer the devices. Prices typically run from \$800 to \$1,000.

The electric Focus drives very much like a conventional vehicle.

"There's actually a lot more drivability and pickup than you'd expect in an electric vehicle," said Joseph Brightenstine, a Big Valley sales agent familiar with the car. "It has just as much pep as the gas Focus would have."

Most apparent for most motorists is the lack of engine noise. The air-conditioning fan and tire road noise were the loudest sounds evident on a recent demonstration drive.

The vehicle operating display constantly shows its remaining range, which may actually increase depending on how the car is driven. The display shows off small butterfly symbols if the driver's actions boost efficiency, thus increasing overall mileage.

The butterflies, which can be switched off if desired, were inspired by the so-called butterfly effect, Brightenstine explained. "One small change can come back tenfold in other ways."

The dealership's two display models last week both carried sticker prices of about \$41,000. Similarly equipped gasoline vehicles would probably be around \$24,000 to \$25,000, Brightenstine said.

There are government incentives to offset part of those costs. For individuals, there's a \$7,500 federal tax credit and a \$2,500 rebate from the Center for Sustainable Energy.

For public agencies, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is offering a \$20,000 incentive on up to five cars.

And, of course, electric vehicle owners save on their fuel bills.

According to the window sticker, the Focus will use about \$600 a year worth of electricity if driven 15,000 miles. Its EPA mileage rating is 110 mpg equivalent in the city and 105 mpg combined, based on the EPA formula in which 33.7 kilowatt-hours of electricity is equal to a gallon of gas.

Digging in on gravel mine near Newman

By Garth Stapley

Modesto Bee, Sun., July 1, 2012

If approved by Stanislaus County officials, Calaveras Materials Inc. would extract 62 million tons of sand and gravel over five decades from pit mines at two sites covering 436 acres near Newman.

Plans include a 28-acre plant to process concrete, asphalt and aggregate, or crushed rock, as well as asphalt and concrete recycling on the 315-acre northern site, southwest of Eastin and Sturh roads.

Crews later would move to the 121-acre southern site, southwest of Eastin and Orestimba roads. Both would be called the Riddle Surface Mine.

Trucks would haul road-building materials to job sites in Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Merced counties six days a week.

County planners say the project could significantly affect people and the environment and asked for feedback. Comments from neighbors, nearby businesses, Newman's city manager and a competing gravel miner suggest concerns over traffic, noise, air pollution and groundwater.

Calls to Calaveras Materials in Fresno were not returned.

County planners say a draft environmental impact report should be circulated in a few weeks.

Report on costs of California's greenhouse gas law debated

By Anne Gonzales

Sacramento Bee, Sat., June 30, 2012

Business and health groups sparred again this week over whether state-mandated greenhouse gas reductions will eliminate jobs and halt investment in the state, or create jobs, cut health care costs and fuel the economy.

The California Manufacturers and Technology Association released a report Thursday saying that California families would pay \$2,500 annually and lose \$900 in earnings per year by 2020 as a result of the state Global Warming Solutions Act. The act, also known as Assembly Bill 32, will also cause billions of dollars in losses to employers and the state economy, the report found.

AB 32, passed in 2006, requires the state to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. It survived a ballot initiative to repeal the act two years ago.

Other business groups, along with health and environmental agencies, said the CMTA study was flawed and that AB 32 will not only create green jobs, but will save the state more than \$4 billion in health care costs related to smog and air pollution.

The manufacturers' study, conducted by the economic research company Andrew Chang & Co. of Sacramento, concludes that by 2020, California will have 262,000 fewer jobs, 5.6 percent less gross state product and \$7.4 billion less in annual local and state tax revenues as a result of the law.

These figures were based on an optimistic scenario, in which costs for each policy are assumed to be at the low end of a range of expected costs and the environmental goals are achieved, the study noted.

When less optimistic projections are used, families are saddled with \$4,500 in annual costs and California would capture \$38.8 billion less in local and state tax revenues by 2020, the report said.

"These policies will create a large but hidden tax on families and will add new burdens to a fragile state economy," said Jack Stewart, president of CMTA. "This new tax is not what we need while Californians struggle to find jobs, meet mortgage payments and maintain a reasonable quality of life."

David Clegern, a spokesman at the California Air Resources Board, said AB 32 promotes economic growth with reduced pollution, lower fuel spending and cleaner air.

He said one big flaw in the study is that it assumes companies will have to pay for the right to emit greenhouse gases under the state's new cap-and-trade system. In fact, he said, covered businesses will get 90 percent of their pollution allowances for free in the first year of the program.

Clegern said that public health benefits from cleaner air will save the state about \$4.3 billion in health care costs in 2020 when AB 32 is implemented. Regulations requiring cleaner running cars will save Californians \$5 billion in gasoline in 2025 and \$10 billion on 2030.

Susan Frank, director of the California Business Alliance for a Green Economy, also refuted the study and the economic model it used.

Frank said California attracted \$3.5 billion in clean-tech investment in 2011, representing 25 percent of the total venture capital investment in the nation.

New rebates for hybrid and zero-emission vehicles

Central Valley Business Times, Fri., June 29, 2012

Rebates ranging from a low of \$900 to a maximum of \$2,500 have been approved for buyers of certain hybrid, all-electric and hydrogen-fueled cars and light trucks by the California Air Resources Board.

The rebates are being made available on a first-come, first-paid basis.

"This unique incentive program makes ultra-clean cars affordable for more Californians, helps slash smog-forming pollution and cuts greenhouse gas emissions," says CARB Chairman Mary Nichols.

The program is designed to accelerate the number of ultra-clean vehicles sold in California and help establish a sustainable market.

Information on the rebate project, including an application and required documents, list of eligible vehicles, and real-time funding status is available at: www.cvrp.energycenter.org.

[Bakersfield Californian Commentary, Sun., July 1, 2012:](#)

When it comes to fireworks, I'm still a hater

By Lois Henry, Californian Columnist

Well here we are again, just a hop, skip away from another 4th of July celebration.

And after all these years of being ignored in my quest to have personal fireworks banned, I've decided...I'M STILL RIGHT!

We absolutely must ban personal fireworks.

What? You thought I'd gone soft in my old age? Pshaw!

Personal fireworks, and the absolute insanity they engender, have created a hazard that is so out of control they need to be banned.

Potential fire damage is just one issue. (Considering our tinder dry conditions this year, though, that is a huge issue.)

They also cause injuries, terrorize animals and push our pollution levels into the stratosphere.

More importantly, personal fireworks create an increasingly dangerous atmosphere that now requires fire fighters patrolling for illegal fireworks to wear flak jackets and bring cops along for protection.

Go on a ride-along. It's eye-opening.

Every year, perfectly nice people in perfectly nice neighborhoods temporarily lose their minds in the name of celebrating our nation's freedom.

And I'm not just talking about otherwise well-respected community members condoning and even seeking out illegal fireworks, which happens.

Oh no. Adults allow kids (or even do it themselves) to throw the "safe and sane" stuff at targets or each other. People modify legal fireworks to get a bigger bang. And one year I saw legal fireworks strapped to a giant wheel so when they were lit, they made a sparky, smokey whirl.

None of the above is legal, by the way, so don't get any ideas.

Legal fireworks are not allowed to leave the ground under any circumstances.

That's how the police and firefighters find the illegal stuff. They see something shoot into the air and then trace it back to the likely launch site.

Somehow the culprits always seem to be in the midst of launching more, or have a bucket full of illegal junk sitting right on their front porches. Hmmm. Alcohol mixed with explosives, not real bright.

This year there will be more patrols and the consequences will be steeper.

"Last year the fine was \$400," Bakersfield Fire Chief Doug Greener told me. "We've upped the ante and this year it'll be \$1,500."

And it's a misdemeanor in the city. A citation by the county will cost \$500 to \$1,500, and is an administrative fine.

Greener agreed with me that the 4th has become "absolute chaos."

"I would like to see us line up with the majority of other major cities and counties in California and ban fireworks," he said. "It's a public safety issue."

He doesn't know if a ban would slow things down. But we certainly know that without a ban the chaos will only continue to increase.

What Greener, and I, would rather see is public fireworks shows.

The charity arm of the city Fire Department put on a great show for many years at Bakersfield College. But it's expensive and got to the point it couldn't break even.

Now the city is trying to work something out where it would provide a venue (Park at River Walk, perhaps?) in hopes a corporate sponsor would step up and provide the show.

Come on corporate sponsors, show yourselves!

A tough issue for Greener was how many charities rely on the sales of personal fireworks to raise funds. I agree it would be difficult for them to lose that money. In other towns that have banned personal fireworks, charities have been given other opportunities such as running the concession stands at public fireworks shows to help make up the loss.

But frankly, that issue is losing its pull on my heartstrings.

First, the system for issuing permits to charities is inherently unfair because there are only so many permits to go around so someone always loses out.

Second, it seems incongruous to raise money to help others by selling the public items that will endanger them and their neighbors.

As someone recently pointed out to me, you could use the proceeds from selling heroin to do good deeds, but you'd still be a drug dealer.

Don't get all nuttid up, it's just an analogy. I'm not saying charities that sell fireworks are drug dealers.

Of course, there are other, more emotional arguments such as "it's just one day," or "it's tradition," or "children love it," and "don't step on my freedom, lady!"

To which I say:

"Just one day" of utter recklessness can, and has, resulted in death and massive fire damage to people's homes.

It used to be "tradition" to fire guns in the air until we figured out that was pretty dumb.

Children would love a public fireworks display and wouldn't risk losing an eye.

And finally, freedom comes with responsibility.

That part of the equation went out the window long ago.

[Fresno Bee Blog, Fri., Jun. 29, 2012:](#)

Is it time to study air pollution danger on the Fourth?

By Mark Grossi

Fourth of July five years ago had the highest particle pollution readings I've ever seen in the San Joaquin Valley -- beyond any reasonable doubt of a crisis for the breathing public.

Clovis had one hourly reading that was 11 times higher than the average threshold for a daily federal violation. Bakersfield and Turlock were 15 times higher.

I haven't seen numbers spike that high since then, but there's almost always high particle pollution or PM-2.5 from fireworks somewhere in the Valley on the Fourth.

With the holiday approaching, isn't it time to get scientific analysis of the short-term danger on the Fourth?

I'm not suggesting any kind of ban on fireworks. This is about raising awareness and helping protect people who suffer lung and heart problems.

Fireworks spew dangerous particles of soot, ash, droplets of liquid and other debris -- tiny toxic metals for coloring.

This kind of pollution penetrates deeply into the lungs, passes to the blood and goes throughout the body. Medical science has linked these specks to lung and heart disease as well as early death.

In Bakersfield during the 2007 spike, high readings occurred between 9 and 11 p.m., following fireworks displays that showered the sky with smoke and metals, such as magnesium, copper and barium.

Such metals can cause health effects ranging from skin irritation to muscle weakness and confusion in people with kidney problems. But the particles, known as PM-10 and PM-2.5, clear in a matter of hours.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District began gently warning people about the dangers a few years ago. It might be helpful to know if there are really health problems, so people can make plans to stay indoors or leave the area.