

Electric vehicles gain a foothold in the Valley

By Ben Keller, staff writer

The (Fresno) Business Journal, Monday, June 30, 2014

Sales of electric vehicles have revved up in the last few years, and the San Joaquin Valley is one region leading the charge.

Registrations of zero-emissions vehicles in the Valley totaled 1,300 in 2012, an increase of 30 percent from the year before, according to the 2014 California Green Innovation Index recently released by Next 10.

But perhaps more telling are statistics released by the California Air Resources Board on its Clean Vehicle Rebate Project that offers up to \$2,500 in rebates for the purchase or lease of new zero-emissions and plug-in hybrid light-duty vehicles.

Since the program launched in March 2010, more than 1,200 rebates totaling \$2.63 million have been issued for such vehicles within eight-county San Joaquin Valley, including 771 for electric vehicles and 429 for plug-in hybrid electric vehicles.

In the last 12 months alone, the program has extended 799 rebates to Valley drivers, including 521 for electric vehicles and 271 for plug-in hybrids.

"We attribute the growth to multiple things," said Jaime Holt, spokesperson with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "An increase in the number of electric vehicle options from recognized auto manufacturers, a jump in gas prices, an increase in visibility on the road, an increase in incentive dollars and increased mentions in the press."

Coupled with the state rebate and a \$7,500 federal tax credit, Holt said the air district's Drive Clean program has spurred much of the newfound interest in electric cars and other alternative vehicles.

Launched in March 2012, the program replaced a former incentive that was much more limited, extending a maximum \$3,000 rebate when residents buy electric or alternative fuel vehicles.

Going from 14 grants totaling \$42,000 for electric car purchases in 2011, the air district increased its rebates to 38 grants of \$114,000 in 2012 and 124 grants for \$369,027 last year.

That's certainly helped local car dealerships like Lithia Nissan of Fresno. Internet Sales Manager Abraham Santaollala said it used to be that one Nissan Leaf would sell every few months, but now he's seeing a lot more activity.

"People weren't that informed about the Leaf. Now they know it's been established a couple years," he said. "It's a great in-town car."

Besides rebates, Santaollala listed other benefits like an average of 114 miles driving range on a full charge and the lack of major maintenance common in gasoline powered cars like oil changes, new spark plugs, tune-ups or problems with fuel intake.

He added that newer Nissan electric cars can plug into a standard 120-volt outlet as opposed to before when customers had to wait four or five months until technicians with AeroVironment could install the more intensive 220-volt charger on their homes.

"That takes a little longer, about 12 hours, but at least you don't have to have someone come out to your home," Santaollala said.

In the future, he said, 440-volt quick charge stations will likely start popping up at supermarkets and gas stations, letting Leaf drivers charge to 80 percent in as little as 30 minutes.

Hedricks Chevrolet in Clovis got a boost with last year's announcement that the price of the 2014 Chevy Volt would be cut by \$5,000 compared to the 2013 model.

Marketing Manager Matt Geil said until recently, sales of the Volt have been helped by a state program that allows drivers of low emissions vehicles to speed past traffic in a special lane when they display a HOV (High-Occupancy Vehicle) decal.

Still very popular in cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles, Geil said the plug-in hybrid Chevy Volts are no longer coming with the green stickers from the California Air Resources Board as of this year due to a limited supply.

White stickers for all-electric vehicles like the Nissan Leaf, Tesla Model S, and others are unlimited through Jan. 1, 2019.

"Aside from the rebates, that was an obvious factor why people were buying those types of vehicles," Geil said. "You have the sticker because it's good throughout the whole state."

The last five months have been good for manufacturers of electric vehicles. According to InsideEVs, 42,570 plug-in electric vehicles sold in the United States from January to May, up 30.7 percent from 32,555 for the same period last year.

At 10,389 vehicles sold, the Nissan Leaf beat out Toyota's Prius Plug-In Hybrid year-to-date U.S. sales of 7,729, the Chevy's Volt with 6,838 sold and the Tesla's Model S with 5,600 sold.

Valley could see long spell of triple-digit days

By Carmen George, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Monday, June 30, 2014

Expect daytime temperatures to remain at 100 degrees or hotter in Fresno for at least eight days -- perhaps even two weeks.

The hottest foreseeable spike expected within that National Weather Service prediction is today, with a high of 108 degrees, said meteorologist Jeff Barlow.

On Monday, the Fresno high was 106 degrees.

The onset of sizzling sun has opened cooling centers and prompted public safety warnings throughout the region.

A high pressure system is to blame for the heat wave, which will also create a "very stagnant air mass -- expect air quality to decrease through time," Barlow said.

Generally, temperatures are in the upper 90s this time of the year, he said.

To break a hot streak record set in 2005, Fresno has to have more than 21 consecutive days with temperatures at 100 degrees or hotter, Barlow said.

So far in 2014, Fresno has had five 100-degree-or-hotter days, Barlow said Monday. The hottest of those five days was June 9, which reached 110 degrees.

The most 100-degree-or-hotter days Fresno ever experienced was 63 days in 1984. The average is 36, Barlow said.

Currently, the climate prediction center is showing "well above normal temperatures" through July 14, he said.

Triple-digit temperatures for much of week in Merced County

Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, June 29, 2014

Forecasters expect triple-digit temperatures through the Fourth of July weekend in Merced County.

"It's going to be a lot warmer (Monday) and then over 100 the rest of the week – until Friday," said Brian Ochs, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford.

The blistering heat wave is expected to peak Monday and Tuesday with temperatures spiking around 105 degrees, Ochs said.

Merced thermometers should report a slight dip Wednesday to 102 degrees and again Thursday, with temperatures topping out at about 100, forecasters said.

"We may see only about 99 (degrees) on Friday, perhaps," Ochs said.

Forecasters don't anticipate any rain and only slight breezes in the San Joaquin Valley throughout the week.

"We see about a 20 percent chance of showers in the high Sierra (Monday), but only about a 20 percent chance, and that's above 8,000 feet," Ochs said.

Top wind speeds should reach only about 15 mph Thursday in Merced County, according to the weather service.

Dry, slightly windy conditions could aggravate breathing conditions such as asthma, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Forecasters predict even higher temperatures farther south in the Valley, peaking around 108 this week.