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NOTES FROM HOME - 6/12

ARE FRIENDS ELECTRIC?

It was with great pleasure that I saw in this year's Queen's Birthday Honours the name of Jeff Lynne. Co-founder of probably my favourite group of the 1980's, **Electric Light Orchestra**, listening again on YouTube to his magical music helped me relive those golden moments of my youth through this pandemic period. Songs like "Strange Magic", "Evil Woman", "Shangri-La" and "Mr Blue Sky" were the musical backdrop to my University days and to hear them again during this period of pandemic pandemonium really did lift the spirits. An enchanting mix of rock, classical and electronic music, he deserves his place in the pantheon of musical greats.

Another inspirational presence at the time was an innovative musician who developed a distinctive electronic sound. **Gary Numan and The Tubeway Army.** Songs like "Are friends electric?" became smash hits and strangely, and most opportunely, this very song happened to be playing on the radio as my wife and I drove our first electric vehicle out of the garage forecourt, just a couple of months ago.

Why did we part exchange our petrol car for an EV? Why do I now believe that so many people are going to do the same? Do we have any regrets? Is it as good and as easy as we were advised? Are we on the brink of an EV revolution?

In this my next article in the series "Notes from Home", I look at the Electric Vehicle Market, and present some compelling reasons why the EV industry is about to step up a gear...and ensure that all our friends will be "going electric".

OK, so let's start with the issues. And there are a few that need ironing out. Firstly, and very importantly, there is the cost of an EV. Currently, prices of electric cars sit some way above petrol and diesel cars. There are obvious reasons, as new technology always comes with a higher price, at least initially. However, I can allay fears. These prices will start to come down as production increases, and because the resale value of used non-electric vehicles will start to fall off a cliff, the investment into an EV will actually hold its value in comparison. And entry levels for new

EVs are starting to become affordable, as per my below table of cars currently on the market. In some jurisdictions there will also be financial incentives for owning an EV, including grants, part-exchange subsidies and free city parking.

Second big issue, which terrifies my wife, is that of “Range Anxiety”. A petrol/diesel car with a full tank of fuel can drive you usually for at least 300 kms, before having to refuel. Some can go considerably further on that one tankful. Unfortunately, the more basic EVs are currently struggling to get to the 200 kms per charge. If you live in an island community (like I do) or in a large metropolis, then this does not really present any major issues. I rarely drive for journeys of more than 20 Kms per day. The issue is with the longer drive. I used to live in Exeter as a student, and would regularly drive 450 kms at weekends to see my parents. Today, that could make life a little more complicated as I would need to plan carefully my route and charging stations - instead of just jumping spontaneously into the car, filling up the tank at the service station and then driving up the A303. This fear of ‘running out of juice’ is an important aspect of the industry - people need to have this worry removed from their minds. Which leads me to my next key point, pivotal to removing the anxiety - which I believe is the game changer. Charging points.

For the EV revolution to take effect, there has to be a widespread national network of charging stations and points located in convenient places. An extensive grid of reliable and numerous charging points that can be found easily and, more importantly, are actually working. A driver cannot afford to drive into a charging point half way through his 600 km journey to Scotland, say, with the battery charge on low, with a carful of children and a fretting wife, plus hard rain falling outside, only to find that the charge point he has got to is either not available or not working. Then what? Scream time.

Supermarkets. Railway Stations. Car parks. City centres. Motorway services. Government offices. Post offices. Schools. Large corporate buildings. McDonalds. Hospitals. Charging points need to be absolutely everywhere, and lots of them…

Anyway, that’s enough of the tough stuff. The fact that the UK Government has just announced that the banning of all combustion engine vehicles on UK roads has been advanced by 10 years to 2030 would indicate some seriousness of intent that all the above issues will be resolved as a matter of urgency.

And now to the good news, and there is plenty of that. First and foremost, with my new EV Smart Car, I am no longer pumping out noxious fumes into my community on a regular basis. Fumes that have been proven to contribute to

the ill health and premature death of thousands of city dwellers. These issues include respiratory problems, onset of early dementia and lung cancer. Some commentators talk about the contamination caused in the actual production of these vehicles, and I understand the point - but science will resolve this issue too. In the same way that the human brain has found a way to overcome the Covid conundrum.

Secondly, there is the noise factor. Or lack of noise. Again, a possible danger to pedestrians who do not hear the vehicle approaching as they suddenly jump onto a road without looking, but what a joy not to hear the dull (and not so dull) throbbing sound of engines...constantly, the ever-present background noise of humanity. To date.

Thirdly is cost. Currently, I am recharging my Smart EV with the charging facility provided by our island supplier, **Plug-N-Go**. Instead of approximately £55 to fill up my previous petrol Smart car, it now costs me about £4 to recharge fully. Over several years, I make that a fair amount of “spondoolies” that I’m not having to dig out of the pocket. Very quick, very easy, and all done while my wife and I nip into town to attend to chores.

My final point is my own personal reason, and why I will upgrade to the next level as soon as I can, when the range just nudges up a bit and the price also goes downwards. The acceleration and power. I was taken for a test ride two years ago in central Madrid - the famous Castellana Avenue, in fact. It was a brand new bright cherry red showroom Jaguar Land Rover iPace (how appropriate!). With all the bells and whistles. We drove out of the showroom and onto the avenue - my host told me to hold tight as he floored the accelerator, just momentarily. It went like the veritable bat out of hell! Felt like a rocket taking off...Wow! So electric cars are not just milk floats, they actually can have tremendous speed and acceleration, if required. And style. And I am told that Lewis Hamilton is already looking at the electric motor racing car options…

Perhaps this is my opportunity to get into the game, before he does and conquers all, again? “Dream on”, I can hear my wife say.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES - a selection of cars currently available:

SMART EV - 2 and 4 door versions, starting from around £25,000

NISSAN LEAF - Popular model with prices from £27,000

RENAULT ZOE - A best seller, from £26,000