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California's Electric Car Future to Nowhere

BY KERRY JACKSON

California lawmakers won't give up on their crusade to force everyone in the state into electric cars (before eventually removing us out of our cars altogether). That electric vehicles neither sell nor perform up to reasonable expectations is irrelevant to the anti-car movement in Sacramento.

It's almost a given that Sacramento will eventually ban automobiles that run on internal-combustion engines, if not by 2040, then not long after. Legislative gears sometimes turn slowly, though, so in the interim lawmakers desperate to force battery-operated vehicles on consumers introduced this year a bill to "restructure" the state's incentive program for boosting "green" car sales. It would increase the payout to as much as \$7,500 for buyers of the misleadingly named zero-emissions vehicles, three times the current government bribe.

Assembly Bill 1046 won't get a floor vote this year. But before lawmakers consider raising the handout the next time the idea comes around, before they vote to outlaw conventional automobiles, they should be reminded of the Los Angeles Police Department's experience to green its fleet. It would be instructive.

In 2016, the Los Angeles Police Department announced it was leasing a stable of plug-in BMW i3s, eventually as many as 300 at a cost of \$10.2 million, including charging stations, according to the local media. The public was told these EVs were to be the department's "patrol cars of the future." Deputy Police Chief Jorge Villegas said the program was "all a part of saving the Earth, going green," a statement bound to confuse to those who thought law enforcement's duty was to protect and serve the citizenry.

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Despite the promises of a greener blue, Los Angeles CBS affiliate reporter David Goldstein found the EVs were being “unused or misused.”

“Our investigation of department records found some electric cars are sitting unused with only a few hundred miles on them, and with hidden cameras, we found others are allegedly being misused,” said Goldstein.

“Misuse” is apparently interchangeable with “personal use.” In his first report, Goldstein told the story of finding a “commander driving one of the department’s fleet of electric BMWs to a nail salon.” A year later, in February 2019, Goldstein caught a police psychologist “using one of the department’s fleet of electric BMW’s to commute to and from work.”

In that same follow-up, Goldstein reported the department had postponed the delivery of the final batch of i3s. They obviously weren’t meeting the department’s expectations.

”Updated figures obtained from the department through November (2018) show the cars are still underused, some with just a few thousand miles on them,” said Goldstein, “even though some are almost three years old.”

No one should be surprised the “patrol cars of the future” haven’t been out on patrol. Goldstein says some in the department are reluctant to take them out “because they can only go 80-100 miles on a charge.”

“And the mileage logs we obtained seem to back that up.”

Maybe one day EVs will have batteries that will triple or even quadruple their range, turning them into practical automobiles. But today is not that day. Neither is tomorrow.

Though more electric vehicles are sold in California than in all other states combined, only a shallow analysis could conclude that’s evidence of a wild popularity. Fewer than eight of every 100 new cars sold in this state is an electric vehicle or plug-in hybrid, and that’s even with the government using taxpayers’ money to reward consumers who buy them. That lawmakers are considering tripling the subsidy is evidence of how unpopular they are.

But increasing the largess is no guarantee that consumers will start buying EVs in large enough quantities to reach the state’s goal of 5 million zero-emissions vehicles on the road by 2030. Sales are in fact “slipping below sales in the prior four years,” says the California Center For Jobs & The Economy.

Meanwhile, after being flat for three quarters, then falling slightly in the first quarter of 2019, sales of gasoline-powered cars and trucks picked up sharply in the second quarter. It’s part of a long-term growth trend in which consumers still eagerly buy conventional automobiles despite the fact Sacramento disapproves of them. California’s political class should read this as a repudiation of the plans it expects everyone to follow without question or resistance.

But they won’t. Consumers’ defiance is likely just to make lawmakers double their efforts, since they’re convinced they know what’s best.