Electric Vehicle Technology

■ In the first article of the series (Aug. 8-10) on electric vehicle technology, Donald Nauss observes that "never before has a government agency mandated production of a vehicle using a specific technology and set a strict deadline to accomplish the task." Untrue. The Soviet Union tried this approach and failed.

Are we to believe that the California Air Resources Board is sufficiently well-informed with respect to the future states of battery and production technology, consumer tastes and incomes, and market conditions to prescribe that, by the year 2001, 5% of the automobiles produced for sale here shall be zero-emission vehicles?

These edicts for technological innovation are being issued by bureaucrats who, for the most part, do not know which end of a screwdriver to hold. Innovation flows from self-interest disciplined by competition in the marketplace. It cannot be scheduled. Your series describes a pork-barrel initiative pointing to a large publicly supported jobs program dedicated to the production of expensive vehicles no one but public authorities will buy.

JAMES E. MOORE II
Associate Professor
Urban and Regional Planning
and Civil Engineering, USC

■ If reduction of urban air pollution is the whole point of mandating the sale of EVs, why are people making such a fuss about the 100-mile range? For most of us, there are only two reasons for having a gas tank big enough to go over 400 miles. It allows you to drive long distances a couple of times a year on vacation and it lets you drive several days before stopping for gas. Being in one of the many households with two cars, I would reserve my EV for commuting and drive the conventional family car for trips away from the city. Gas stations will be irrelevant if I can recharge my EV at home.

ICHIRO SUGIOKA
Newbury Park

■ The government can help Californians by helping U.S. auto makers. Instead of ordering them to produce pollution-free cars before the end of the century, the government (state and federal) should help U.S. auto manufacturers financially and technically to produce electric cars.

By giving manufacturers incentives and by rewarding them for their efforts, they will produce better electric cars at reasonable prices, which will attract buyers. When auto makers sell more cars, they will produce more and more and they will beat competitors like Japan and Germany. In turn, California will benefit by creating more jobs and reducing pollution.

DANUTA IMTANES
West Hollywood

■ We would like to draw your attention to an error in a chart, "The Electric Lineup," Aug. 8. The Solectria Force, with nickel-cadmium batteries, has a top speed of 75 m.p.h. and a range of 120 miles, significantly better than the specifications cited in the chart.

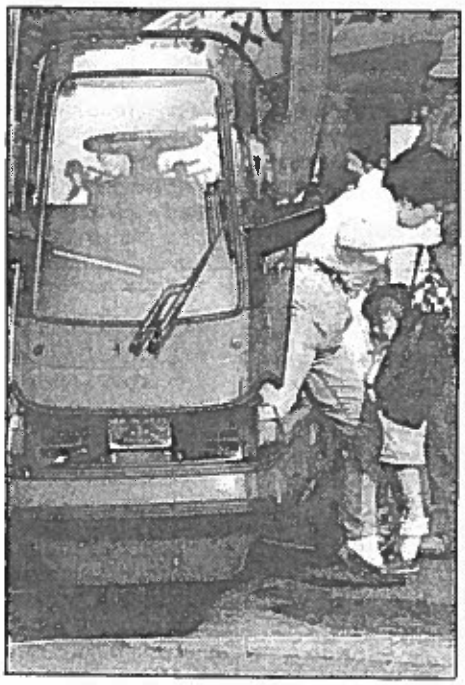
Solectria's vehicles have dominated solar and electric racing in the United States, winning both the APS Solar and Electric 500 and the American Tour de Sol in 1993. Models of the Force are now on the road in 15 states and four countries. The Force is the most efficient EV tested in California Air Resources Board. Prices range from $20,000 to $60,000, making it one of the most affordable EVs now on the market.

ARVIND V. RAJAN
Vice President, Solectria
Arlington, Mass.

■ The Times' series on electric cars omitted several problems at least as serious as having your batteries go dead driving home from a Lakers game.

Although any battery would be subject to similar hazards, the forced march of the 1998 California deadline for zero-emission cars guarantees that lead-acid batteries, the most hazardous of all, will be used, which, every time they are charged, generate considerable quantities of hydrogen sulfide gas. Hydrogen sulfide is extremely explosive (hence the battery explosions referred to in the German experiment), and when mixed with the water vapor in the atmosphere, produces acid rain.

Given the amount of electrical current that the car's battery pack will be capable of supplying, a short anywhere in the car's propulsion system would result in complete incineration of the car and its occupants in less than 60 seconds. In addition to electrical or mechanical faults in the car itself, an accident could also cause shorting and electrical fire or explosion, as well as the spillage of the 15 gallons of sulfuric acid



A solar car at a Tokyo clear air fair.

contained in the battery pack, most likely upon the vehicle occupants.

Although the high cost and frequency of battery replacement was mentioned, nothing was said about disposing of the old batteries, which may occur as often as every 10,000 miles. With all the fuss over the microscopic amounts of lead in gasoline, what about the mountain of lead that will result from all those batteries, not to mention the acid?

PAUL E. LIGHTHILL
Palm Springs

Marines

■ No gays. No lesbians. No married people (Aug. 12). The Marines are looking for a few good eunuchs.

MITCH LANE
Los Angeles

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