

# Electric cars slow and cold, but very quiet

By Suzie Rollins Singer  
staff writer

**T**HE CONVENTIONAL noises are missing — the revving motor, the loud muffler, the shifting gears.

Instead, a new driver wants to turn the key and restart the engine, when sitting behind the wheel of an electric vehicle for the first time. The quiet is worrisome.

Electric cars won't win a race, aren't quick off a start and have to be plugged in at night.

"They're warm-weather cars, because the heaters don't work too well," said Ken Ball, an Oakland County engineering technician.

tration during the energy crisis," he explained.

Mallinowski said the county is happy to participate in the project and would have had to purchase the 10 vehicles anyway, so they aren't an added expense. They are used for routine delivery operations around the service center complex and to inspect nearby building sites.

"They really can't go too far because they run out of charge, but they're good around the complex," Mallinowski said.

Hilly terrain and cold temperatures tax the vehicles' 22 batteries much more than flat ground and warm weather. Because only one battery charges the lights, radio and heater, driving time at night is limited to one hour, Ball said.

**BALL AND NINE** other Oakland employees are participants in a four-year U.S. Department of Energy experiment testing the effectiveness of electric vehicles in the county service complex in Pontiac.

"The range of the vehicles is short. The maximum you can drive in nice weather is 32 miles," he added.

The county has five mini-buses (Subarus), two Ford Lynxes, two General Motors vans and one GM pickup truck, all of which are electric powered.

The \$380,000 project, which began in 1981, includes \$140,000 in federal money (40 percent). It was used to purchase the vehicles and maintenance equipment. They cost about \$10,000 each.

Oakland's share of \$232,000 pays employees to maintain the vehicles, and to monitor their performance.

"WE'RE REQUIRED to submit daily reports on each vehicle, along with operating maintenance reports," said Donald Mallinowski, manager of the facilities engineering division, which operates the vehicles.

"It's part of a demonstration program developed during the Carter Adminis-

**THE LIGHTWEIGHT** mini-van costs about \$11.11 a mile to drive, compared to 40 cents a mile for a conventional car, explained Edward Green, project engineer.

"They cost more to maintain because they are gas vehicles converted to accommodate electric batteries," he said.

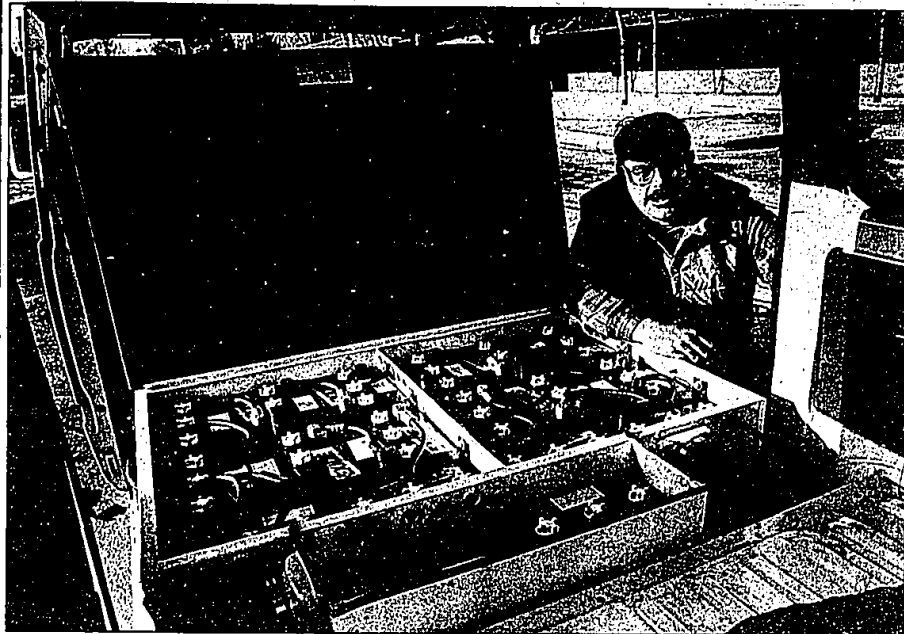
"They'll be a lot more cost-effective when they are produced on a grand scale," he added.

Green said while the county's gasoline bills have gone down, its electric bills have increased somewhat, because an eight-hour battery charge is required to get a "full tank."

**INEXPERIENCED** drivers can't just pop into a battery-charged vehicle and drive away without a lesson.

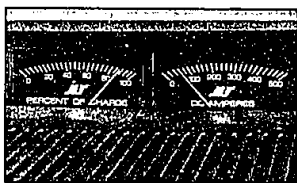
"You have to know how to operate them or you could have some costly troubles. You have to allow more time to accelerate and more room for breaking," Green said.

Ball added, "If you over-rev the engine without having it in gear, it will go faster until it blows up. You can't down-shift."



MINDY SAUNDERS/staff photographer

Steve Stanford, a maintenance planner, uncovers the batteries needed to power this small Subaru van.



The percentage of charge is indicated by a gauge that replaces the fuel gauge in the dash board (above). The county is testing the electric power system in five mini-buses, two Ford Lynxes, two General Motors vans and one GM pickup. The vehicles (right) all carry Oakland County seals on the doors.



# Couple can't wait open on the holiday

By Tom Henderson  
staff writer

This New Year's Day, the Walnut Lake Animal Hospital was not open.

If you don't think that's news, maybe you don't know Dr. Gary Ray and Dr. Donna Ankus, the husband-and-wife veterinarian team that built and runs the hospital on Walnut Lake Road in West Bloomfield.

New Year's Day marked the third anniversary of the ultra-modern clinic, which opened for business Jan. 1, 1980. "We were so excited, we couldn't wait," explains Ankus, "even though we knew no one would come in."

Enough customers have come in since then that the hospital is ahead of all projections. "Things have worked out well for us," says Ray. "You have everything on the line and more before you ever open the door."

Everything and more includes an investment of \$200,000 to get the hospital started — \$100,000 of that in savings and help from the family, \$100,000 more in mortgage money at a time when interest rates were soaring and loan money was nearly nonexistent.

"The second year, business was up 150 percent over the first year, and this year it's up another 30 percent," says Ray. "So we've doubled our business. It's hard for me to feel the recession because we're growing."

**THE HOSPITAL** is a labor of love for the couple. They designed the building, hired the contractors, oversaw the construction and do everything from making appointments to major surgery, to washing the floors. It is literally a two-person operation — they don't have a receptionist, they don't bother hiring a janitorial service. It's their baby, one that will be joined by a flesh-and-blood infant when the expecting Ankus, a 1972 graduate of Farmington Hills Our Lady of Mercy, has their first child in May or June.

The first thing you notice in the hospital is it that nothing is out of place. The floor sparkles and the counters glisten. It is functional and sparse, yet attractive, too.

The tiny waiting room — a misnomer, really, because there is rarely waiting in the clinic; they try to have every animal in an examination room within seconds of admittance — is tasteful, with nifty high-tech chrome chairs, a big, healthy jade and several lush, potted plants. It is the only thing in the hospital that isn't completely utilitarian.

Inside, where the work is done, it is state-of-the-art. Each exam room can be sealed off to prevent the spread of odor and disease, and the air in each can be changed every four minutes. There is a computer testing device known as the serometer that can run 24 different tests quickly, thanks to pre-measured, pre-packaged tubes of chemicals; a high-speed X-ray machine that shoots at one-one-hundred-thirtieth of a second and uses a \$5,000 tube to run the flash (Ankus and Ray even installed the heavy X-ray machine themselves, bolting it to the ceiling and walls); and a ward room for boarded animals where the air never recirculates, but is

changed completely six times an hour every day of the year.

**JUST WHEN** you begin to think the place is a bit too clinical, a little too planned and packaged and cold, there's always Lynx running around to prove what animal people these doctors really are.

Lynx is a 2½-year-old, blue-eyed Siamese cat that is the hospital mascot. Usually she can be found beneath the tiny animal bathtub. She knows how to open the door to the cabinet beneath the tub, where the towels are stored, which is a fine place for a catnap. Lynx wears a ribbon and bow around her neck and rides to the clinic daily from their home three miles away, either in the car, or, in nicer weather, in the saddlebag on Ray's 10-speed.

"She's a real people cat," says Ankus. "Sometimes we'll have a child in here who's upset about his pet and we'll just give him Lynx to hold. Calms them right down."

Ankus and Ray have been a team since they found themselves partners at Michigan State University in the organic chemistry lab. She was a sophomore and he was a senior. He was on his way to a secondary teaching certificate with a minor in math; she was a microbiology major in pre-med.

If it sounds like love at first sight, it wasn't. "We were too busy with school," says Ray. "I don't think we went out till the end of that term, did we?"

He graduated and went on to the MSU vet school, one of the finest in the nation. She married him while she was an undergrad, then joined him in vet school when she graduated. He became a vet in 1977, she in 1978.

"Some people have always liked animals," says Ankus. "Me, I have gained more of an appreciation now that I'm working on them. I never used to like cats; now that I have Lynx."

**ANKUS AND RAY** knew from the start what they wanted: a modern hospital. And that's what they set out to have. They scouted Livonia, Novi, Avon Township, among other spots, looking for an acre of land at the right price at a spot that needed two more veterinarians.

"We plotted it out on a map," says Ray. "We needed a two-mile radius where there weren't any veterinarians. This was the hole in the middle of the other practices."

They found a vacuum and began to fill it. "We schedule 53 hours a week," says Ray of their budding practice. "But before you're through, it's an easy 60, what with the emergency work and stuff like that."

Clients aren't the only ones who appreciate their work. Some of the patients do, too. Ankus and Ray tell of one dog they had treated in the past who showed up on their doorstep one day and refused to leave. They kept shooing her off but she would only move from one door to the other. Finally, they let her in.

Once in, she went straight to the examination room of her last visit, where they took a look at her and discovered a severe, painful external ear infection. She had known she was sick, that there was a place to have it taken care of, and how to get there. The only thing she couldn't do was sign the check.