



What I learned from my Tesla roadtrip

Powerful, and easy to drive, this is no souped-up golf buggy

I f this doesn't hit you first, So you turn on the engine and... nothing. There's no shudder or moan as the car gears in to life. You simply move your foot from the brake to the accelerator and glide away. Not slowly.

I recently borrowed a fully electric car, a Tesla Model S, for a self-drive, three-day round trip to Victoria's Great Ocean Road and was invited to drive the landmark route without using a single drop of petrol. And with petrol biffs and jolts, going electric seems like a no-brainer. So quickly I've looked to places like Norway, where 95 per cent of all new cars sold in January 2012 were electric.

But what is it really like driving an EV? For me, it was a learning curve at first. The interior of the Model S seemed like it would make even Maria Kondo wonder if inhibition had gone to the hills – there's a steering wheel and large touch screen on the dash, but that's all.

The touch screen is your main portal – it displays the car's speed and where you control essential features like lights and temperature. And for the young (or young-at-heart), you can even choose a fast noise to sound each time you use the indicators – a very popular feature, I'm told.

This car is so hi-tech that you could be forgiven for thinking everything is controlled via the main screen. During my trip, I needed to use the window-wiper, but couldn't find any option on the touch screen. I pulled over in the terminal rain and made a justified call to Tesla. "Can I have the window-wiper option?" I pleaded. The woman replied: "Can you see the steering wheel? The wipers are on the indicator lever. Just like the same as a regular car."

One hitting my forehead with my palm. That was my first big lesson from driving an EV – don't assume the car is smarter than you. I also found out that "range anxiety" is a real thing. It's when you're worried about running out of battery power and not being able to find a charging point. I had visions of the car spluttering along a stop sign, a particularly windy section of the road, with no way of getting it going again, but I shouldn't have worried. The fully charged Model S has a range of more than 800km, so technically I would only need to charge it once during the journey.

The other positive is that Tesla has in-built trip planners that map out possible charging stops along the route. I'm someone who panics when my phone battery dips below 80 per cent, so I'd downloaded the PlugShare app as back-up. I didn't need to use it, but I felt more secure knowing where all the charging stations were.

Charging is remarkably easy and similar to filling up at a petrol station. I made use of Tesla Superchargers (fast chargers), which can add more than 300km in 15 minutes, but lots of chargers are "destination chargers", which take longer to top up. Happily, some of these were located right where I wanted to stop anyway – like The Great Ocean Road Brewsheds in Apollo Bay and Port Fairy's Drill House.

It didn't take long to adjust to driving an EV. I had expected it would be like driving a souped-up golf buggy, but the car was powerful, comfortable and (mostly) easy to use. There's a kinship, too, that you find with other people driving electric cars – a nod, a wave and a sense that you're all embarking on a lower-carbon and more-sustainable way of travelling. Ever since my trip, I've harboured after an EV and I'm noticing more electric cars on the road. And, unlike me, the drivers all look like they know how to work the window-wipers.



Cindy Alexander
has never resolved
anyowing requests
for a review from
family and friends
as she did when
she drove a Tesla.