Tesla – a silent roadster making noise in the car world

By Susan Wood

INCLINE VILLAGE – The wind in my hair, a tight grip on the steering wheel and the cozy comfort of being framed into my seat – the feeling was electrifying.

My first adventure behind the wheel of the new Tesla Roadster Sport electric car on a recent summer night seemed so natural.



Susan Wood takes a Tesla for a spin. Photos/Kathryn Reed

For one thing, I've had muscle cars before. At 16, I owned a 1968 California Special Mustang. They only made them one year. Then, I moved over to a Chevy Camaro of the same year. This car bared a 327 V8 engine with dual exhaust. Responsiveness is something I'm accustomed to.

There's a lot that's different about this latest car made by Tesla of Palo Alto, the quasi darling of green technology, which went public this summer. Shares are expected to trade at about $14.

A low-maintenance engine plugs into a charging station,

turning 240 volts over a 3.5 hour-period into 245 miles of driving luxury. This vehicle is anything but business as usual. (For gearheads, the electric, rear-wheel drive car is powered with a liquid-cooled battery pack consisting of 6,831 lithium ion cells.)

Its sexiness lies with its look and its feel. It has a body of a roadster (mine, a color called “very orange”) that appears to belong on a racetrack. Its light carbon fiber frame floats between zero and 60mph in three seconds. My racing bicycle made of the car frame’s same material would be hard-pressed to produce such a smooth and fast ride.

With the top off while pulling out of the Hyatt Regency parking lot onto Lakeshore Boulevard, I tried to see what this expensive toy could do. I was not disappointed.

First, I didn’t know the car was turned on because it’s so quiet. I pushed a button and suddenly I’m in drive. Other buttons include park and reverse. (If you’re backing up, a handy visual screen provides the view from the back end.) Needless to say, I kept reaching for a stick shift.

As with most vehicles in this price range, there is something for the cold of Tahoe: warmers on executive leather seats are included on the sport model. For the musically inclined, it also comes equipped with a special slot for iPods.

Then I noticed no power steering – something to be thankful for when I pressed on the accelerator. “Wow,” I thought as the car took off like a dart. I soon found the brake, as I headed for the loop from Lakeshore to Highway 28 and back.

“Tesla wanted to prove electric vehicles are not dinky golf carts. They can be sexy and practical for everyday use,” said Miki Sofer, Tesla’s client advisor and my passenger for the joyride.

Joy it was.

The stares from people are worth capturing.

It was unfortunate Incline Village was busy on this Friday night. Otherwise, I would have tested that zero to 60 claim.

The 7-year-old company brought the vehicle to Tahoe for a demonstration weekend designed to get people who can afford it (not the media) to see what the vehicle is all about. They say the rear-wheel drive works in snowy Canada.

The name comes from Nikola Tesla, a mechanical engineer who discovered the alternative car.

Indeed, I would consider this car to be the alternative – in price tag as well. The roadster starts at $101,500 after a $7,500 federal tax credit, so it's hardly affordable for every motorist.

When asked, Tesla executives said the car is so pricey because it is hand built. They also cited the cutting-edge technology. When further developed, the price should come down.

The ideal market, according to the company, consists of people looking for high performance vehicles like those driving Ferraris, Mustangs and Priuses.

"We see owners who love the car for its performance and design and also owners who are proud to drive the cleanest car on the road right now," spokeswoman Khobi Brooklyn said of the 1,000 bought in 25 countries.

The thought is, electric vehicles' time has come.

The California Energy Commission is funding 4,047 more chargers in the state to add to the existing 1,271. The one I drove stopped in Davis to get charged along its drive from the Bay Area to Lake Tahoe. UC Davis is considered the hub of research on the plug-in hybrid electric vehicle in the state.

Reducing greenhouse gases is all the rage now, especially

prompted by the major oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Tesla officials provided no comment on that subject. But the energy commission suggests “EV” technology benefits the state “economically and environmentally” by putting employees to work and clearing the air. And although electric vehicles run on a grid fueled by nuclear and coal, energy analysts believe “de-carbonizing” the power line they run on would be easier to change than attempting to reduce carbon emissions from gas guzzlers.

The commission has figured the nearly 26 million registered vehicles operating in California produce about 40 percent of the state’s greenhouse gas emissions. In 2007, Californians consumed an estimated 20 billion gallons of gas and diesel fuel on the state’s roadways.

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Plumas fire closes traffic at Hwys. 70-89

By Reno Gazette-Journal

Plumas National Forest fire crews were dispatched to the Bar Fire in the western Sierra today where at least 100 acres was burning in steep terrain, about 80 miles northwest of Reno.

The U.S. Forest Service says the fire in the Feather River Canyon, near Rich Bar, approximately 4 miles east of the town of Belden.

Multiple resources have been assigned to the fire including nine engines, 10 smoke jumpers and multiple aircraft.

Highway 70 from the junction of Highway 89 (Greenville “Wye”) has been closed to non-emergency traffic.

The cause of the fire is unknown and is currently under investigation.

State Fair proves gardens don’t need a ton of water

By Debbie Arrington, Sacramento Bee

This summer, a golden garden greets visitors to the State Fair Farm. Hundreds of bees buzz from bed to bed, collecting pollen from sunburst-bright gloriosa daisies and honey-hued coreopsis. Hummingbirds dart among the fuzzy kangaroo paws and pretty penstemons, giving fairgoers an extra thrill.

But unlike previous floral displays at the fair, this new permanent garden demonstrates an important point: Saving water can be beautiful.

“We went for a lot of color,” explained landscape expert Julie Saare- Edmonds of the state Department of Water Resources. “We wanted to show how beautiful a water-efficient garden can be. It’s not sticks and rocks.”

Read the whole story

Legendary Burgett returns to Tahoe for reunion tour



Jim Burgett returns to Lake Tahoe for a night of good old, roof poppin' rock in the South Shore Room at Harrah's Lake Tahoe on Aug. 14.

"Jim Burgett's Legendary Rock 'n' Roll Reunion" brings together a host of musicians and singers, many of whom were mainstays in the lounges and showrooms of Reno and Lake Tahoe during the past five decades.

On the bill with musical pioneer Burgett will be special guest star Marlene Ricci, a pop singer who was a protégé of and opener for Frank Sinatra. There will be special appearances from original Burgett band member J.B. Estes, on bass and vocals, and others including Mike Coulter, on tenor sax and vocals, and Fred Gallant on drums.

The "Rock 'n' Roll Reunion" features another legendary Nevada act – Sidro's Armada – who will be backing up Burgett, with Sidro on guitar, Ward Wallace on bass, Mark Adams on drums, Rick Bisbee on keyboards, Steve Sand on keyboards and horns, and Mary Ball on vocals and keyboards. Burgett and the band will be performing some of the great rock 'n' roll hits from the '50s, '60s and '70's, some of which were penned by Burgett. Ms. Ricci and Sidro's Armada will also perform solo segments.

It has been 50 years since Burgett and his band first played the hotel, turning the lounge into a party for those who loved the rock music of the day. When Burgett initially visited Tahoe in 1958, there was no rock 'n roll being played live anywhere in the city. He took it upon himself to rent the South Shore American Legion Hall three miles down the road from Harrah's and transform it into a venue in which his band

could play and locals could dance. Thus began the legendary Tahoe local teen dances that built a new community around which youth could rally.

Buoyed by the hall's success, in 1960, Burgett approached Harrah's about a gig in the lounge. Accepting the only shift available – 6am-noon – he offered not to be paid if he couldn't fill the room during those hours. But the band's infectious music and Harrah's employees who got off their shift and wanted to party turned the gig into a standing-room-only success. By 1962, Burgett and his band were popular headliners at Harrah's both in Lake Tahoe and Reno, playing various shifts, 26-30 weeks a year.

He began promoting artists while he was working at Harrah's, booking acts into a space formerly occupied by a Safeway market in South Lake Tahoe. First called the Sanctuary and then The Fun House, Burgett booked nascent headliners including Steppenwolf, whose record "Born to Be Wild" hit No. 1 just as the group came to town. Other acts Burgett brought in included The Grateful Dead, Santana, Tower of Power, the Guess Who, Chuck Berry, John Lee Hooker, Wayne Cochran and the CC Riders, none of whom had yet experienced their major recording successes.

In the '70s, he started managing Marlene Ricci and was responsible for introducing her to Sinatra, helping establish her success.

Last year on Burgett's 74th birthday, a surprise party for him was held on the beach at Tahoe, at which his former band member, J.B. Estes and his wife entertained. Burgett was asked to get up and sing and when he did, a large crowd gathered. That got such a buzz going about Burgett, both on the Internet and elsewhere, that he decided to call Harrah's Lake Tahoe and see about a reunion gig at the hotel.

Back in the Legion Hall days, a Tahoe newspaper reporter wrote

about Burgett: “The singer is Jim Burgett, high priest of the new music, Spanish-booted velvet-lapel’d, velveteen-cuffed Big Daddy of the new cult whose psychoanalysis has been breaking down inhibitions since somebody named Elvis first discovered the Hallelujah Trail.”

Find out what that last sentence means on Aug. 14 at “Jim Burgett’s Legendary Rock ‘n’ Roll Reunion.” Tickets are $25, plus fees, and are available by calling 800.786.8208 or online at www.SouthShoreRoom.com.

Old cars turn grown men into kids during Hot August Nights

By Guy Clifton, Reno Gazette-Journal

Reno’s Russ Sheltra has participated in every Hot August Nights for one simple reason.

“For one week out of the year, we get to be kids again,” said Sheltra, 68, who will be entering his prized 1963 Corvette and 1957 Chevy in this year’s Hot August Nights, which starts today at South Lake Tahoe and moves to Reno on Sunday with a pre-kickoff show-n-shine at Sheltra’s Bonanza Casino.

Since Hot August Nights debuted in Reno in 1986, Sheltra has been taking the week off from work to enjoy the event, which celebrates the classic cars and music of the 1950s and ’60s. For Sheltra, both the cars and the music remind him of his high school days in Southern California. He graduated from Canoga Park High School in 1959.

Read the whole story

Firefighters gaining control on S. Calif. wildfires

By Ann M. Simmons, Los Angeles Times

By late Friday, firefighters appeared to be gaining control of the Crown fire near Palmdale.

Authorities did not issue any further updates on the fire's status, leaving the total acreage burned so far at 13,000 acres, but the day's aggressive aerial assault appears to have been successful.

Several spot fires continued to burn throughout the area, however, including near the backyards of some homes. About 300 homes were still under evacuation orders.

Several structures have been damaged or destroyed since the fire began Thursday afternoon, including some homes, but officials have yet to determine the total number.

Read the whole story

Click here to read about the fires near Tehachapi.

Official: Climate changes create more intense wildfires



By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

With a warming climate making for longer fire seasons and more intense wildfires, an ongoing effort to revamp the nation's firefighting strategy is gaining increasing importance, the chief of the U.S. Forest Service said.

Tom Tidwell, in Reno last week as part of a coalition of officials discussing fire policy, said a changing climate is adding urgency to an already extensive danger posed by fire.

"Fires are burning hotter, and they are more intense," Tidwell said. "We see it both in the forests and on the rangeland habitat."

Mountain snowpacks are melting earlier, and fire seasons are lasting 30 to 45 days longer across many areas of the West, Tidwell said.

"The type of fire behavior is very different from what we had even 10 years ago," Tidwell said.

Read the whole story

Gaming – an intriguing study for academia

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

When gambling went from being a pastime largely offered by organized crime to a leading entertainment industry, academia took notice and wanted to study it.

Thus began the University of Nevada, Reno's Institute for the Study of Gambling and Commercial Gaming in 1989.

Its leader is William Eadington, an economics professor with an interest in the study of addictive behavior. He had already organized the International Conferences on Gambling and Risk Taking at Lake Tahoe every three years since 1974 and, over time, built a reputation as an expert on the gaming industry.

The UNR institute encourages and promotes research and learning on gambling, and Eadington is internationally recognized as an authority on the legalization and regulation of the industry. He has written and edited several books on the economic and social effects of commercial gaming.

Read the whole story

Art of fruit pie worth the drive in summer



By Noelle Carter, Los Angeles Times

A couple of weeks ago, I was out on the road in Northern California, heading southeast from Sacramento on Highway 16

toward the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. It’s a beautiful drive, and on that blistering summer day I might have noticed the massive old oaks dotting the rolling hills or the occasional solitary weathered barn as the highway shimmered in the heat up ahead. But I was on a mission.

I hung a right onto Highway 49, heading toward the heart of California’s Gold Country. “Historic 49,” as it’s often called, meanders through scenic little Gold Rush towns with names like Drytown and Sutter Creek before continuing on toward Jackson and Angels Camp, where one Samuel Clemens originally made a name for himself under the pen name Mark Twain, writing about a jumping frog. But I wasn’t out for the scenery, or a history lesson.

I wanted pie.

Fresh blackberry pie, to be exact. I stopped in Amador City and walked down the wooden plank sidewalk to Buffalo Chips Emporium, a tiny storefront diner complete with an old-fashioned soda fountain, and ordered a slice of pie from owner Ashley Putz as she worked the griddle behind the counter.

It came still warm, its sugar-dusted crust glittering in the sunlight through the front window, the light, flaky exterior quietly shattering under the fork with each bite. Underneath, the rich berry filling oozed slightly – the thick, sweet glaze cradling tender, slightly tart berries that seemed to pop with every mouthful. It was magical.

Read the whole story

Classic wooden boats bring history to Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Shimmering mahogany and sparkling chrome bob on the tranquil waters at Tahoe Keys Marina. At the far end of the pier, 69 wooden classics are docked, many with the owner inside.

This is Day 2 of the South Tahoe Wooden Boat Classic, which features woodies form 1929-73.

“Most have been restored back to their original condition,” said Sandy Chase, who was working the event Friday.



"Saga" is one of 69 woodies at Tahoe Keys Marina with a story to tell. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Her husband, Lee, spent 11 years restoring their boat, including the Lycoming V-12 engine. There are only two of these engines on the West Coast, and only four in the United States.

Chase said she lost her garage so her husband could have a boathouse.

It’s a mix of locals, second homeowners and those who love Tahoe who have brought their vessels to South Lake Tahoe for the public to view.

Rich Christopher of Morgan Hill brought “Clinker Toy” to Tahoe on July 29 for the show. She is a 1959 22-foot Chris Craft Sea Skiff with a 353 Chevy engine.

“I have had her for seven years. Last year was the first year she was in the water,” Christopher said while sitting in his boat.

He can’t even count the hours it took to fully restore the boat, including engine.

This is the first show he has come to that includes judging. Twenty-three awards will be given out, with the ceremony on Sunday at Sugar Pine Point on the West Shore. That event is from 11am-2pm.

Members of the local Boys & Girls Club cruised around as judges, too. Horns were going off, interior inspected and finish analyzed to determine the number of points each particular boat should be awarded.

A lot of money is tied up in these boats. Chase said a couple Rivas are scheduled to be auctioned at Pebble Beach in August with asking prices of $260,000 and $320,000.

“These boats become a member of the family,” Chase said. “The value depends on the rarity of the boat and if the restoration brings it back to the original or not.”

Mahogany is the dominant wood. It used to come from Africa, but that is hard to get now. Much of today’s wood hails form Honduras.

As part of the Antique & Classic Boat Society, the local chapter is supposed to have an educational component – the boat show fits that criteria.

Tickets are $20, though Raley’s has them for $15. Proceeds benefit Thunderbird Lodge Preservation Society, Boys & Girls Club of Lake Tahoe, the three Kiwanis Clubs on the South Shore, and the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department. The event is from 9am-5pm today at Tahoe Keys Marina on Venice Drive off Tahoe Keys Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe.

Now in its third year, the boat show is growing – 10 more boats this year, and a couple thousand people expected to weave among the docks these two days.

The Tahoe Maritime Museum has a booth. Membership is available, with certain categories coming with a ride on a woodie.

New this year is three racing boats. All on trailers – not in the water – because it is too rough for them.

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