

Jay Leno on Electric Cars, Hydrogen Fuel, Space Travel—and His Recent Accident

Two years ago, we invited Jay Leno to write about his love of cars, and his thoughts about driving during the pandemic. In that article, he also talked about his fondness for electric cars.

A lot has happened in those two years, with technology companies, auto makers and governments betting a lot of money on electric vehicles as the transportation of the near future. So we thought it was

time to check in with Mr. Leno, who is back performing at comedy clubs after his accident in which he suffered severe burns while working on one of his cars. He has new material from the accident, he says.

Here is what Mr. Leno had to say, as told to The Wall Street Journal.

Out with the old, in with the old

They had electric cars before they had gas cars back in the early 1900s. But at the time, what they didn't have was electricity, at least in homes. I mean wealthy people had it, which is why wealthy Wall Street types bought electric cars for their wives, because they could

putt around town and not get on your hands and knees and crank it and get dirty and set the choke and get gasoline on your hands and that kind of thing.

So electric vehicles were always quite popular for that reason. I've said this before, but for new technologies to succeed, it can't be equal. It has to be superior on every level and to other forms.

I've got a 1909 Baker Electric and I've got a 1914 Detroit Electric that we've converted to modern electrics. We put air conditioning and Bluetooth and all kinds of things in the Detroit Electric. My 1909 Baker Electric has not needed any

service in the 30 years that I've had it. I've replaced the batteries because they're basically like golf-cart batteries, deep cycle six volts. And they last about 12 years. They're not lithium ion. You could change to lithium ion if you wanted to, but it's an antique vehicle.

Powering your car and home

I'm quite proud of American manufacturing.

The new electric [Ford](#) F-150 is unbelievable. I drove it as a work vehicle. It is eminently practical. You can you go 240 miles on it, and you can power your house for three days with it if you lose power.

When they had the big freeze down there in Houston last year and people had no electricity for days, dealers, in one of the most brilliant public-relations moves, just gave the trucks to people, and people powered their houses for days—making them, if not customers, certainly fans.

Affordable options

I thought a car that was just brilliant was the Chevy Volt. I had one for seven years. It's a hybrid and you got 40 miles electric free without using any gas. It didn't seem like much, but I put 90,000 miles on that car, only 3,800 of it was gasoline-powered. I used it at my shop: We'd plug it in, then we'd go to lunch in it, go run an

errand and do some chores, which is 25 to 30 miles around Los Angeles. We'd come back, plug it in, and you go back to work for a couple of hours.

I was never having to switch over to the gas part of it. Once a year, every Dec. 7, not for any particular political reason, just every Dec. 7, I'd fill up the tank.

When the Volt stopped that they went to the Bolt, which is pure electric because in a lot of states now you can't get the tax break or anything with a hybrid.

I think it makes perfect sense that you use your electric car during the week. To sit in traffic on the 405 freeway in bumper to bumper, in

something that gets 7 to 9 miles a gallon, really doesn't make a lot of sense. I used to have a Jaguar; it had a big V-8 engine that was supercharged, and that was \$125 a week in gas. And I didn't feel like I was going anywhere. I switched to the [Tesla](#), and now it costs about the same as a cooking a turkey.

I think the electric car will be the great savior of the classic-car industry and gasoline cars. Remember, in the early 1900s, 500 tons of horse manure were dumped into the streets of New York City every day. Suddenly, the car comes along, and a puff of blue smoke in your face wasn't so bad. Horses became something people

loved, and used for show and racing.

That's what will happen with the gas car. Sitting in L.A. traffic with a Ferrari going 8 miles an hour is nobody's idea of fun. So you use an electric car during the week, and on the weekend you drive up in the mountains and use the Ferrari for what it was made for. Or maybe you have a '65 Mustang. Now it is something to be restored and treasured.

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Hydrogen fuel is a sleeper

I love reading future stuff. You look at the year 1900, and they said by the year 1950, women would be sitting in bars, smoking and drinking

just like men. It showed women in hoop skirts with one leg in the air and they're smoking cigarettes and they have a bottle of whiskey in the hand. They never even foresaw women having voting rights, women becoming senators, women having equality with men. They only saw it as they would pick up the bad habits of men.

Nobody ever thinks that far ahead.

Everybody predicted flying cars. But that never happened.

Nobody predicted when I was a kid that we'd be carrying a phone. When I was in the fifth grade, a guy from a Bell phone company came to our classroom, and he

said by the time we were grown up, no American would be further than one mile from a phone, no matter where they were in the United States. And we just thought that was unbelievable. The idea of carrying a phone with you never ever occurred to anybody. A Star Trek communicator? That was hundreds of years in the future. But it has happened already.

The other great one for cars is hydrogen. Hydrogen can be a real player in the future and I would not rule it out.

I like hydrogen because the more alternatives you have, the better. During World War II, when there was a

gasoline shortage, a lot of people pulled out their old Stanley Steamer cars. And people converted their cars. There used to be a thing called a gasifier. They would put it so it looks like a big stove in the back seat of the car and they would burn wood or coal, they would run a tube to the carburetor and the car would run on the methane from the burning of the wood or coal just like with gas. It was inconvenient, yes. It was messy, it was dirty, but it did provide transportation when gasoline was not available.

In case of some sort of natural disaster where, oh, our lines of fuel are shut off, we have electricity,

we have hydrogen,
we even have steam
if necessary.

I demonstrated a
hydrogen car back
onstage in 2001. I
said, "Give me a
glass." So I took a
glass and I started up
the hydrogen car on
the stage, and I put
the glass under the
tailpipe and I went
back to the talk. The
byproduct of
hydrogen is water.
After 20 minutes, the
glass filled up with
water, and I drank it
and people were
astounded. It wasn't
the best-tasting
water, but there was
nothing harmful
about it. Hydrogen is
a viable fuel because
the only byproduct is
water. I think
hydrogen is a
sleeper.

Bullish on Tesla

Last year, I sold my old Tesla and bought a new one, the Tesla Plaid. That's the latest version, and at least as of this date, it's the fastest-accelerating car you could buy with the exception of the \$2.5 million Rimac. If you're looking for performance at a reasonable price, it's a pretty good deal. My other Tesla was seven years old. I got \$95,000 for it. It held its value. The battery dropped maybe 3% to 5%. As a first-generation Tesla, you got about 228 miles on a charge. When I sold it, it was 223, maybe. I never went to the Tesla shop for anything other than a flat tire.

Space travel

I realized I am not an out-of-the-box

thinker. I remember talking to [Elon Musk](#) years ago about his high-speed train. And I asked, "You're building this high-speed train to go like 200 mph." He said, "Oh no, 800." How can it be? He told me something like 800 mph, because it's not a train, it's a vacuum tube. And I realized he's thinking on a level I'm not.

I have no interest in going into space. I see why he's fascinated with it. But there's nothing there. Imagine, you're now on Mars. Todd? Susan? Anybody here? I don't get it. I have no desire to perform in an empty auditorium. I gravitate toward cities. I don't go to a mountain for three weeks by myself.

The recent accident

Eight days later, I had a brand new face. And it's better than what was there before.

But really, it was an accident, that's all. Anybody who works with their hands on a regular basis is going to have an accident at some point. If you play football, you get a concussion or a broken leg. Anything you do, there's a risk factor.

You have to joke about it. There's nothing worse than whiny celebrities. If you joke about it, people laugh along with you.

Mr. Leno is the host of "Jay Leno's Garage" and "You Bet Your Life With Jay Leno," and former

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