

FOR SHIFT! 3 December 2009

My name is Tessa Laws and I have been an electric car driver for four years!

I bought my Gwizz via the web in 2005 and was smitten for the first two years - £7500 well spent – no petrol, electricity at 48p per day. Hand on heart I could not say I bought it for the “right” reasons however. I was a serial offender – congestion charge violations/parking tickets amounting to over £1000, clamps, speeding tickets – single handedly I kept Westminster council afloat and suddenly I didn’t have to worry about breaking the rules – mainly because it was impossible – I couldn’t speed with a car too slow to go fast and I couldn’t incur congestion charges.

And then...I was hooked. I spread the mantra – electric cars rule – people stopped me in the street to ask me questions and I was happy to share the love. The car is better for the environment (not perfect but certainly an improvement); the car is far less intimidating than a gas guzzling 4x4; my kids, once ridiculed for turning up at school in a Noddy car are now lauded as paragons of virtue/eco warriors by their classmates and teachers, cries of “Mummy cant we get one” ring out across West London. Yes, people stared – and they still do – they point too and I am amazed that my house with the flex to the electric car trailing through the letterbox is not on the London Tour Bus route as a result.

The car and I spent two blissful years enjoying each other and then disaster struck – I did not clap eyes on a better younger model...No, far worse, my car let me down – its battery failed. Its warranty had lapsed, just. I had to spend around another £2000 replacing the battery and somehow our relationship was never the same again. I became resentful and bitter and I spent the next twelve months accounting for every penny spent on the car in an attempt to ascertain whether I had fallen prey to a false economy. I questioned my continuing fidelity after such betrayal – why did I not just sell it??

I reasoned and rationalised...the new battery had a twelve month warranty so I decided to revel in the security and rest back on my laurels. I made a big mistake by becoming complacent again. I did not learn my lesson and you guessed it month 13 just out of warranty and my battery failed again!

Going Green took a corporate-wide sharp intake of breath; I ranted; they apologised but they couldn’t help. Despite my protestations about their battery problems, which were well known, both in terms of supply and efficiency, they were unwilling to help. The car was off the road and I was suffering withdrawal while I pleaded with Going Green.

I realised how dependent I had become and regretted how offhand I had been for the preceding 12 months with the car which was now enjoying its revenge – callously running out of steam just out of warranty.

Desperate I agreed that GG could simply replace the failed cells as opposed to the entire battery pack and £650 and a couple of weeks later I was again reunited with my car. This

time I was careful, respectful and I treated it right. I charged it correctly, regularly checked its water levels and we returned to calm and contentment for a further 6 months when one morning as I drove silently around Regents Park to a meeting in the City, in full regalia, the car simply stopped. Without warning. I narrowly avoided disaster by turning the wheel leftwards thereby managing to escape being rearended by a black cab. I got out and managed effortlessly to push the car into a parking bay – it is almost weightless (something I try not to dwell on seeing as it often houses myself and 3 kids). The car was collected by the AA and on my instructions dumped on the forecourt at GG. Weeks of discussion ensued and I finally persuaded them, in my technical scientific way, that the old cells had infected the new cells and that was clearly why the battery had failed, again. My best lawyer skills came out and I told them they owed me a duty of care and had breached this by not advising me this was a possibility. I did also manage to mention that I was speaking at SHIFT about my electric car experiences and lo and behold I was given a courtesy car before my car was returned to me fully functioning for free, albeit 4 weeks later. Thank you SHIFT!

I love the car. I missed it dreadfully when I could not use it. My kids and I very merrily drive effortlessly around London in it; we park without issue and often forget how small it is – loading it up with shopping until it groans all the way home. Despite the ups and downs and expense of the past few years I remain loyal to my Gwizz and reluctant to criticise it for events clearly beyond its control – if we all had one there would be economies of scale and maybe just maybe the investment required to increase battery efficiency and reliability would be forthcoming.

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