

## The ideal time not to buy an electric car

For me, it's worse than getting a new iPhone: you just know there will be a better one within 10 months

**ROBERT SHRIMSLEY**



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**Robert Shrimsley** YESTERDAY

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This is not, I now realise, an ideal time to have to replace your car. In fact, it is rotten timing since the entire auto industry is at one of those inflection points where almost any purchase is going to be a mistake.

Petrol, hybrid, electric: each is replete with pitfalls. These are dilemmas not seen since the late 1880s, when people sat around trying to decide between a Benz Patent-Motorwagen and a new horse. (The consumer affairs magazine *Which Nag?* was still recommending horses well into the 1900s as a natural alternative to the Ford Model T, leaving many riders frustrated as the number of charging points for horses dwindled.)

The obvious solution would seem to be to buy an [electric car](#) — but the even more obvious solution is to buy an electric car in five years' time. Electric is the clear way to go, but buy too early and I'm stuck with a car I daren't drive distances, that takes too long to recharge and with an early version of something that will improve significantly in cost, range and quality over the next few years. In five years, this would be a no-brainer — but in five years I'll be five years too late to wherever I've got to get to next weekend.

People keep telling me how quickly you can recharge a car these days. Apparently, it can take as little as 30 minutes with the superfast equipment (and a mere three to four hours with more

ordinary kit). That's great if you are shopping and have found one of the two charging points on the high street but you wouldn't want to spend that kind of time at a petrol station. Half an hour at a petrol station is almost a death sentence. Do you have any idea how many Mars bars I can get through in that time?

So the smart move would be to sit tight. My car is still running tolerably well and I quite like the fact that it already has enough dents to make me less stressed about driving in London. The problem is that it is a diesel car and, from next year, the Mayor of London is going to [start taxing](#) me just to move it out of the driveway.

I could allow myself to be persuaded into investing early in the government's promise to supercharge the electric-car infrastructure. But then I bought the diesel because I was persuaded by an earlier government policy that favoured them as more environmentally friendly on the grounds of their greater fuel efficiency.

No wonder the auto industry is struggling. No sane person would buy a new or newish car now. Consider the options. I could go for another petrol engine but the green agenda means that they will soon be facing the same sort of punitive [penalties](#) as the diesels. I could be an early adopter of an electric car but it will be a monumental nuisance for a while and then, in three years' time, I'll watch all the newly improved models which I won't be driving myself. It is worse than getting a new iPhone: you just know there will be a better one within 10 months.

I am fortunate enough to have the option of fitting a [charging station](#) outside the house but that's at least another £500 and my wife may not look kindly upon being made to relinquish the driveway.

As for hybrids, they feel like the PalmPilot of motoring, a short-term fix to get you from Filofaxes to smartphones. You cannot convert a hybrid to a full electric so, in the end, you are still stuck with what is a petrol car once the highways go fully electric. If you were guaranteed to enjoy 20 years unimpeded motoring without some new fossil-fuel charge for those wishing to refuel at London's one remaining gas station, they might be an option. But right now they look too much like a temporary solution.

Which leaves only one option: a cheap, second-hand petrol car, clean enough to avoid the [Ultra Low Emission Zone](#) pollution charge for a couple of years but cheap enough for me not to have to worry about ditching it as soon as the electric infrastructure is in place.

So it's going to have to be a new, old, not-too-green-but-not-too-not-green car and, ideally, not too soon but soon enough. This is the problem with the almost tangible future; the lead-in times are a killer.

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