

EV Showcase at 2019 STEAMFest

The EV Club staged a small showcase at a well-attended event called STEAMFest, presented by Sustainne with (and at) Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport. This event covered numerous topics related to energy efficiency, zero-waste, raising organic food, ecology, as well as speakers who gave advice to students about environmentally-related careers (of which there is a wide variety).

The time of year is past, for the most part, for outdoor showcases, but we braved the somewhat cold November weather and had a great response. We find that there is still a pretty low baseline level among the general public about what EVs are about and what incentives may be available. It reminds us that the commitment to doing these will be worth it over time.

EV Club at Maker Faire Westport

The glimmer of blue sky in the photo was a brief break in the otherwise cloudy, cold, and windy spring day on which the 8th annual Westport Maker Faire was held.

The EV club was there in force with a Tesla Model S, Tesla Model X, Tesla Model 3, BMW i3s, BMW i8, Jaguar I-Pace, and Chevrolet Volt in a joint exhibit with TecKnow Smart Home Automation and Ross Solar – smart homes, smart cars, and renewable energy.

Visitor traffic from attendees was steady throughout the day. Club members were on hand to provide information about the vehicles and what it is like to drive electric. The number of EV options is proliferating, and these showcases are a good way for people who are pressed for time to gain an understanding of the types of cars that are available and what driving electric is all about.



Young “driver” in a Tesla

The Tesla “summon” feature was a big hit with visitors and allowed some youngsters to get their first taste of “driving” electric (safely and legally, of course – part of our nefarious long-term plan for all 6-year olds to demand to drive EVs when they get their license in 10 years.)

A few specifics about the vehicles present at the showcase:

Tesla Model S – 370 miles of range with long-range option.

Tesla Model X – 325 miles of range with long-range option.

Tesla Model 3 – 310 miles with long-range option.

(Note: these are current ranges – Tesla has improved the maximum range over time.)

BMW i3s – 153 miles of range (plus another 47 on gasoline with the optional range extender gasoline engine).

BMW i8 – This is a plug-in hybrid which gets 18 miles of electric range before the gasoline power kicks in and extends the range for another 312 miles at 38 MPG.

Jaguar I-Pace – A battery electric vehicle like the Teslas

with a range of 234 miles.

Chevrolet Volt – A plug-in hybrid with 53 miles of electric range and another 370 miles on gas at 42 MPG. This vehicle has been discontinued by GM as of last month. The final model year is 2019 and there are is still some availability.

R.I.P. Volt

Goodbye, Volt

There are lots of sad (and angry) looking emojis in the very active Facebook community of Chevrolet Volt owners. It's official: the Volt will soon pass into history. General Motors announced a round of cuts this week that will result in approximately 14,000 lost jobs and the closure of 5 manufacturing plants in North America. The Volt is assembled in the Detroit-Hamtramck plant and production will cease in March 2019. There are no plans to move Volt production to another facility.

Volt History

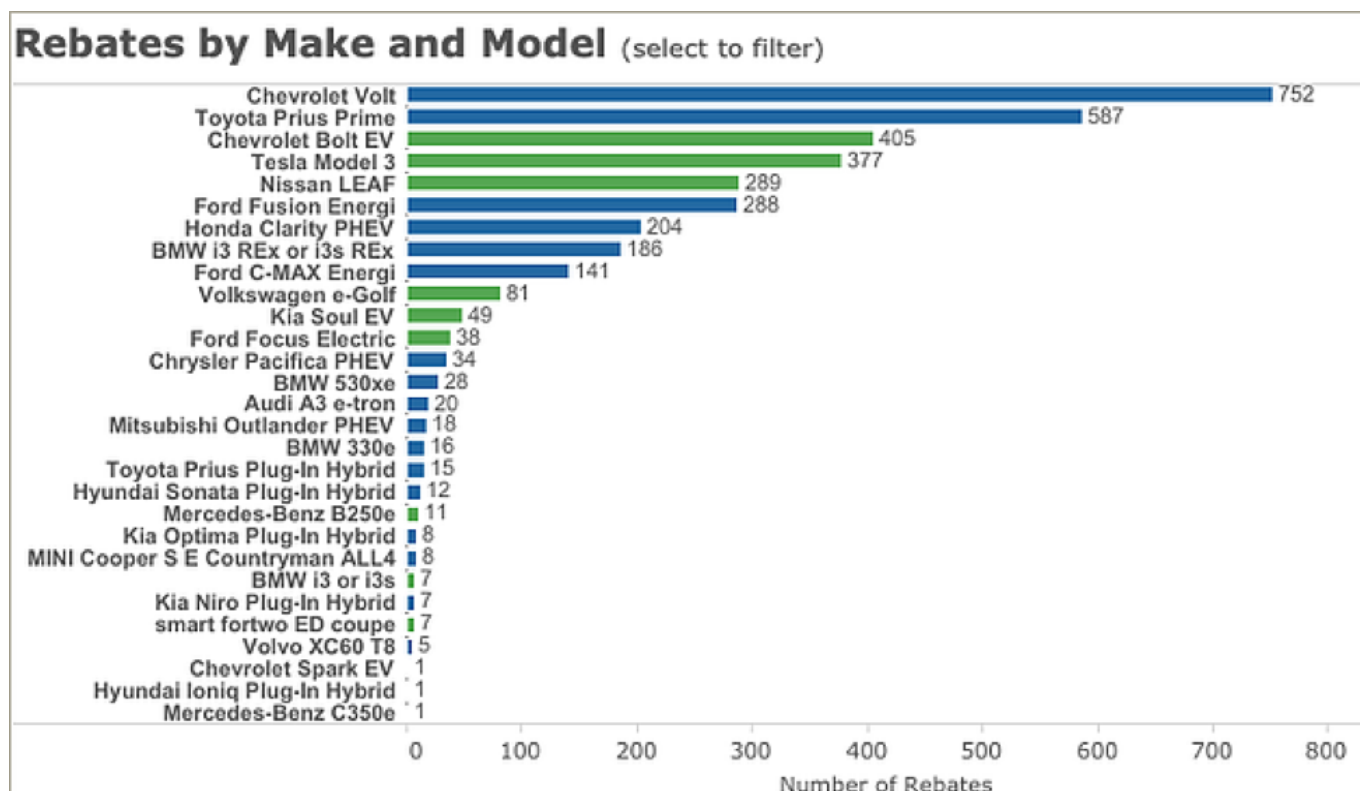
Launched in 2010, the Volt was a path-breaking plug-in hybrid design with category-leading electric range and a back-up gasoline engine which acts as a generator to power the electric drivetrain. It was named North American Car of the Year in 2011. It boasts high user ratings and, presumably important, was one of GMs more effective "conquest vehicles," meaning that Volt purchasers were less likely to have been previous GM customers than purchasers of other models.

Given a range-improving refresh with the 2016 model-year, the Volt is rated for 53 miles of battery range, plus another 370 miles at 42 MPG on gas. The average interval between gasoline fill-ups has been reported to be about 2 months, meaning this vehicle racks up a lot of electric miles while avoiding range anxiety.

Volt Sales

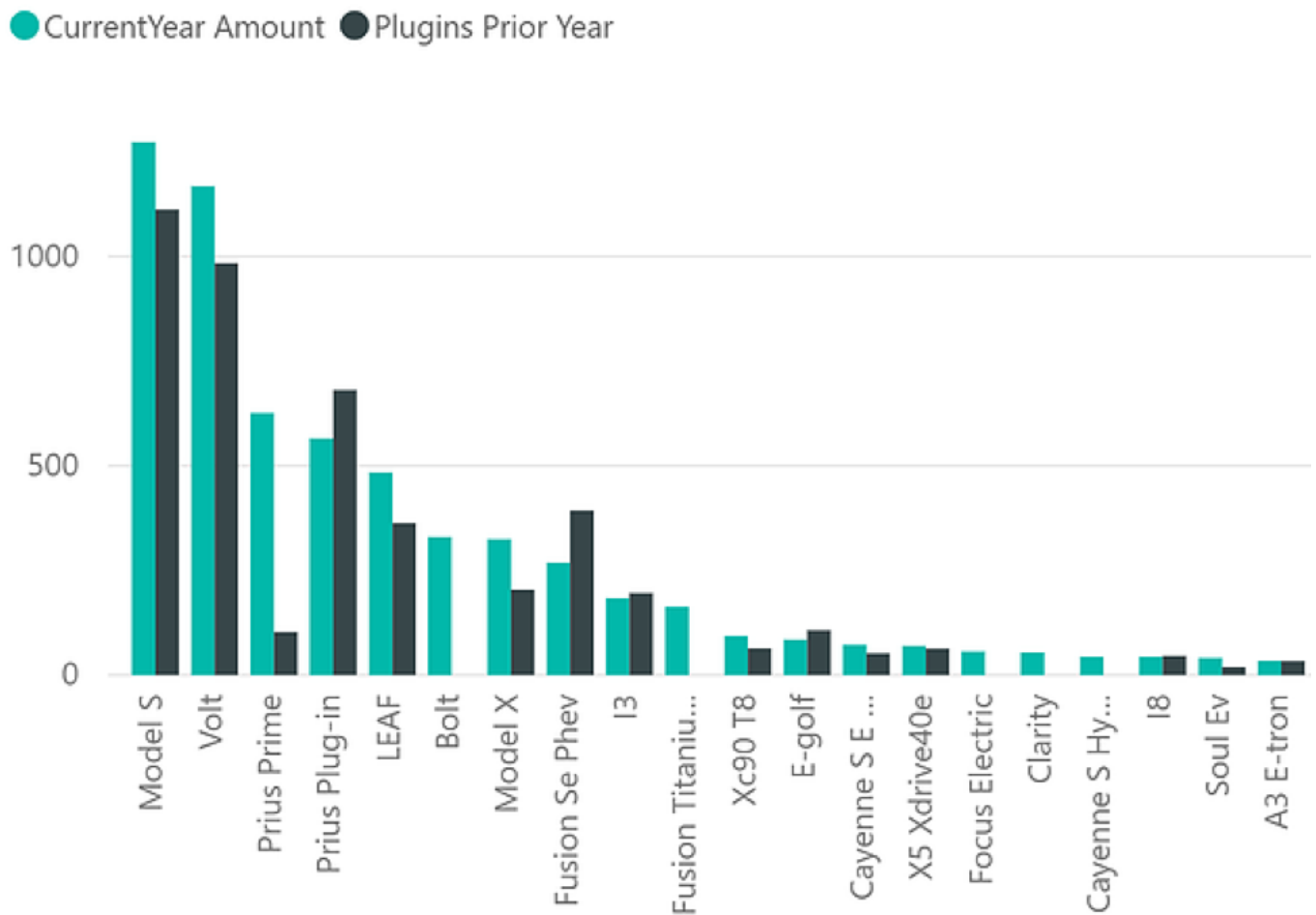
The car has had respectable sales in the context of what EV models normally get, though after GM introduced the BEV Bolt, sales have slid. The Volt and Bolt have comparable sales at this point. According to Inside EVs, the Volt is the 5th highest selling EV over the first 10 months of 2018. (The Bolt is number 6). It averages roughly 1400 units per month, down considerably from its high-water mark in December of 2016 when it moved 3691 units.

The vehicle has a presence here in Connecticut as well. It accounts for 21% of all of the rebates handed out as part of the CHEAPR program (through Sept 30, 2018).



As of March 2018, the data point used in the most recent EV Dashboard published by the club, the Volt represents the second most widely registered EV in the state after the Tesla Model S, accounting for about 19% of all EVs in CT. (Deliveries of the Tesla Model 3 had barely commenced as of March.)

Number EVs by Model 2018 vs. 2017



GM's Decision

An important question is what can be read into this action by General Motors beyond cost-cutting, and the signals are not altogether clear. A sentence from reporting done by the NY Times reads that GM "said the move would ease the burden of spending billions of dollars to develop the battery-powered vehicles of the future."

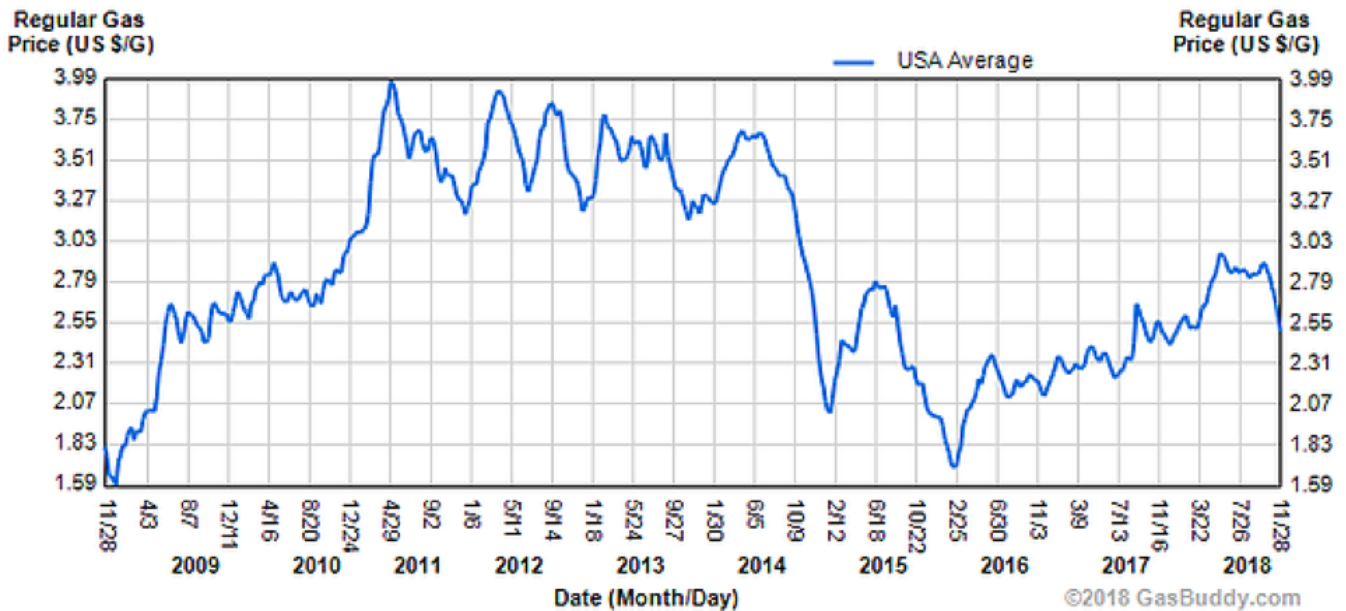
GM has always talked a good game about vehicle

electrification, and they've developed some great technology. On the other hand, many in the Volt community feel that the company's support of the Volt was tepid at best. And GM was one of the automakers that lobbied the Trump Administration to back away from the second phase of the CAFE mileage requirements that the industry had agreed to during the Obama Administration.

There is also the matter of the tax credit. GM is poised to cross the 200,000 EV unit sales threshold this quarter, becoming the second EV manufacturer after Tesla to do so, and faces having to sell electric vehicles absent the Federal Tax Credit once the phase-out period is over. There is a proposed bill in Congress that would extend the credit and remove the manufacturer cap. There is also a competing bill that would eliminate it altogether. It could arguably help Tesla and GM (or at least avoid them being competitively disadvantaged) if it were killed, though those of us in the EV community are hoping for the removal of the cap.

Gas Prices/Business Context

We have been in a prolonged period of relatively low gasoline prices. The chart below from Gas Buddy shows that while they are not at their lowest point in recent memory, they are still low and generally stable.



As we have seen in the past, low gas prices (ahem) fuel the consumer preference for SUVs and crossovers. And with these cuts, GM is following recent actions by Ford and greatly diminishing its passenger car offerings. This may have consequences down the road when prices inevitably spike at some point and consumer demand shifts to more fuel-efficient vehicles.

Business Insider published an article about the Volt in May of 2016, after the release of the Gen 2, which had great things to say about the car. To quote one sentence, "If you think it through, the Volt is...perfect!"

And yet here we are, arguably in a perfect storm of softening vehicle sales, a policy vacuum at the Federal level, tariffs raising the cost of production, a disappearing tax credit, and a manufacturer with a seemingly hedged strategy when it comes to EVs.

For now, all we can do is wait for the movie: Who Killed The Volt.