

**AUTO BUZZ**

# Sheraton hotels unveil electric car chargers



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**S**heraton hotels in Toronto and Montreal will provide public electric vehicle charging stations, the hotel chain announced this week.

The two chargers at each hotel are equipped with connectors for electric cars such as the Smart, as well as buses, Segway scooters and electric bikes. The Charge-Point units are networked and GPS enabled, allowing EV drivers to automatically find them on their navi systems, or from their iPhone or BlackBerry.

Use of the charging stations will be free to hotel guests and the public for a year.

Last week, a Smart fortwo Electric Drive was presented to a Toronto resident as part of a pilot project between Toronto Hydro and Mercedes-Benz Canada that offers 17 consumers a four-year lease of the tiny and silent two-seater.

The electric Smart's \$545-a-month lease price factors in an Ontario rebate of \$8,231, even though the only vehicle that currently shows up on the provincial government's official list of eligible vehicles is the electric Tesla Roadster sports car. This rebate is just shy of the \$8,500 maximum rebate the province offers under its EV incentive program. That max figure is for vehicles with 17 kW batteries or larger, such as the Nissan Leaf. But the battery in the Smart is almost exactly the same size as the battery in the upcoming plug-in Chevrolet Volt, whose buyers are set to receive the same rebate.

Yet even with that rebate and the cost of four years of electric "fuel" included in the fortwo EV's all-in lease price, that's still an expensive Smart, said Paul Timoteo, president of Canadian

pricing site CarCostCanada.com and co-founder of Leasebusters.com.

"Considering you can lease a Smart for under \$300 a month, from a pure dollars and cents comparison, the normal gas model will still come out cheaper," he calculated, at a total cost of about \$450 a month over four years for a lease of the regular gas Smart fortwo, if you include fuel and assume 25,000 km of driving a year.

"But of course they need to sell a few thousand (EVs) first in order to improve upon the concept and eventually lower the price to make it more attractive."

Timoteo argues that pure battery EVs will have a tough time competing with the likes of the Chevrolet Volt and upcoming Toyota Prius plug-in hybrid, as well as current alternative fuel vehicles such as modern diesels. Then again, he just leased a 2011 Volkswagen Jetta TDI Highline for four years, and he says the numbers after paying for diesel fuel for 25,000 km of driving in his Jetta line up almost exactly with the cost of the heavily subsidized Smart.

"Which would you rather drive?" he asks rhetorically, citing the Smart's maximum 135 km range and 100 km/h top speed. "It's not a tough decision."

However, these rough calculations were done without factoring in the Smart EV's free maintenance over those four years, the unlimited number of allowable kilometres a year, or the set of winter tires that come with the car. Plus there are some time-saving perks like gaining legal access to HOV lanes when driving alone that come with the province's new green-lettered licence plate.

Timoteo's pessimism on EVs is understandable, and perhaps widely shared, but his calculations, like most cost comparisons, are based on fuel prices remaining stable the entire four years. Good luck finding anyone who expects that to happen.

## Seven Canadian cities to get Volt

Seven cities in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia will be the first to receive the Chevrolet Volt next summer, GM Canada confirmed recently, with the 2012 plug-in electric car to be available across the country within a year of that initial launch.

Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Quebec City, Vancouver, Victoria and GM Canada's home town of Oshawa will be the first to receive the widely praised electric vehicle.

Unlike pure battery electric vehicles like the Smart EV, which only run on electricity, the Volt runs on electricity either emanating from the grid if plugged in, or from an onboard 1.4-litre range-extending gas engine, though the engine can occasionally help power the wheels while passing on the highway.

This range-extending ability has vanquished what many see as the main drawback to battery electric vehicles (BEVs): the ability to only travel 100-130 km before needing a lengthy recharge. The Volt promises a total range of about 580 km, the first 40 to 80 strictly on electricity, although GM has acknowledged that the engine will start up on

cold mornings, and occasionally to cycle the fuel.

Pricing and warranty info have still not been released for Canada, but in the United States, where it launches in some cities this month, it's priced at \$41,000





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and offers an eight-year/100,000-mile (160,000 km) battery warranty. GM Canada corporate communications manager Jason P. Easton said this week that there is some normal battery degradation to be expected with use, but the battery pack is designed in such a way that the range should not be affected.

"The operating range of the vehicle should not diminish through normal use," and if battery issues arise, the driver will be notified, and normal warranty procedures will take over, he said.

So with its realistic range and practicality, the Volt very well

may be the bridge car that brings the real-world benefits of plug-in EVs to the mass market, while helping to get utilities, cities and consumers started on the proper upgrades (and mindsets) to a far-away but at least visible fossil fuel-less electric future.

**Elantra Touring to become hatchback, not wagon**

Look out Toyota Matrix, Mazda3 Sport and upcoming Ford Focus five-door: the soon-to-arrive 2011 Hyundai Elantra is coming out with a hatchback model, in an effort to take a bigger bite of this practical and hugely popular market in Canada.

John Krafcik, Hyundai of America CEO, told autoblog.com recently that the Elantra Touring would return to market in 2012, but instead of the wagon body style of the current Elantra Touring, this next-gen one would be shorter and more sculpted, to better compete with its more mainstream hatchback rivals.

The Matrix, Mazda3, Focus and current Elantra are among the Top 10 best-selling cars in Canada this year. The redesigned Elantra arrives here early next year, while the next Touring will likely be a 2013 model, Krafcik told the site.



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