

A Volt from the Blue from Chevrolet

WHO would have ever thought that the Americans would buy and drive such cars as the Toyota Prius and the Chevrolet Volt? Oh how times have changed, with the big bangers falling out of favour, new technology is at last catching on in the USA.



The Chevy Volt will be coming to our shores midway through 2012. Using a unique Voltec propulsion system, it is an electric vehicle suitable for everyday use, offering drivers all the benefits of electric driving without any of the associated range anxiety.

What is the secret? It is electrically driven at all times, a 16kWh lithium-ion battery pack feeds an advanced, 150PS electric drive unit which delivers between 25 and 50 miles of pure electric driving with zero tail pipe emissions.

Independent research has been carried out and the results show that this pure

battery driving range is sufficient to meet the daily needs of 85 per cent of UK commuters. I have no doubt that a lot of people in Northern Ireland could benefit by owning such a car.

When the need is to take longer journeys the system seamlessly engages a range extender, a small 1.4 litre petrol-fuelled engine/generator which operates at optimum efficiency to generate electricity to power the electric motor, extending the Volt's range to well over 300 miles.

The electric propulsion system performs very well, with electricity driving the wheels at all times and 370Nm of torque is available from zero revs as I discovered when I test drove the Volt over a variety of roads in Switzerland.

Performance is certainly not disappointing with rest to 62mph in nine seconds and the limited top speed of 100mph.

Charging is not a problem, nothing could be simpler as you can plug in to your 13 amp system at home, work or where ever and in four hours the battery is charged ready for the next journey and the fact that it has the back up of a petrol engine means you need never worry about range, this is a concern with some other electric vehicles which have come on to the market recently.

A charge could cost as little as one pound; now compare that with the price at the pumps for petrol or diesel and owners will also be able to take advantage of lower, off-peak electricity rates by pre-programming the vehicle to start charging overnight when electricity is cheaper.

The styling is wedgy with a low wide stance, distinctive headlamps and prominent grille aid the new Chevy in standing out from the crowd.

The interior is almost space age like; high-definition colour displays and touch-screen functionality replace conventional instrument panel dials and controls.

Futuristic and intelligent, the driver interface of the Volt combines stylish execution with innovative functionality.

Comfort and convenience are those of a premium compact car: five-door flexibility, comfortable accommodation for four adults, and a load carrying capacity of more than 300 litres.

Fold the rear seats and you can extend carrying capacity to over 1,000 litres. Handling and road holding is precise and sharp; in fact the Volt delivers a very satisfying drive experience.

Stopping ability and the advanced friction brake blending system maximises the energy generated allowing regenerative braking through the electric motor which recharges the battery, while also seamlessly engaging the friction brakes when more braking pressure is required.

With a price tag of £28,545 (including the government plug-in car grant), the Volt can not really be described as cheap, but it has many benefits, re economy and tax and it does transmit a premium feel. Worth noting it has a higher spec than its GM sister the Vauxhall Ampera and will cost around £500 pounds less. Does this mean that the Vauxhall badge is regarded as premium by some?

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