

Don't toss your batteries in a pile!

by BRIAN LOCKHART

At one time when your flashlight gave its last flash, you took out the DD batteries, tossed them in the garbage and picked up a new set the next time you were at the local Piggly Wiggly or whatever store you do your battery shopping at.

After years of polluting the ground water, it was decided that tossing batteries in the garbage was not the way to go. We now have special battery pick-up days and disposal places where you are supposed to retire your spent charges.

Car batteries can be broken down and recycled. So can the batteries you use at home. They are crushed and various processes are used to vaporize some elements which are then condensed and re-used.

Battery power is an amazing thing when you think about it. You have this power stored in this small unit that can be used to operate all sorts of devices and you don't even have to flip a switch to turn them on. The power is there, ready to be used.

Now that we are apparently seriously entering the age of the electric vehicle, battery power is taking on an entirely new role in the world.

I was at an event a few weeks ago at Honda in Alliston where Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Ontario Premier Doug Ford arrived with their entourage to announce they would be pouring a lot of money into the company in support of Honda's plan to electrify their manufacturing future.

Honda said they are planning to make electric vehicles represent 100 per cent of vehicle sales by 2040.

Apparently the federal and provincial governments support this and think it's a good idea.

Estimates indicate that there will be 138 to 230 million battery power vehicles on the road world-wide by the end of this decade.

I've tried driving a couple of electric vehicles. There were both the small compact car variety.

One was a hybrid, the other was fully electric.

I was impressed by a few things. They are very quiet, there is really no noise at all.

I liked how the hybrid made the decision when electric power was appropriate and when the gasoline engine would kick in.

Most of all, I was impressed by the immediate torque of electric power. When you step on the accelerator, there is no hesitation at all ? you take right off.

Both cars had a nice smooth drive, handled well, and were actually a lot of fun to drive.

As for fuel savings, with the current price gas, electric power is becoming very attractive.

Legend has it, as told to me by a local car dealer, that one of his customers managed to drive to Florida on a single tank of gas using a hybrid vehicle. The customer apparently monitored very closely the performance of the vehicle and the combined use of electric power and gas for the entire trip just to see if he could do it.

Currently, electric car batteries are generally considered to last for 10 years, or 100,000 miles before they start wearing out. That's a

pretty good length of time considering with a battery powered car you won't have to replace the radiator, fuel pump, water pump, alternator, spark plug, timing belt, or any of the other parts that make a gasoline engine operate.

The problem is, at the end of your car's battery life, there is a 1,000 lb battery that must be disposed of.

There are already some companies looking to the future and have started recycling operations, but the industry is not keeping up with what will be future demand to get rid of or recycle these giant lithium-based batteries.

It took a fire at a tire dump in Hagersville a few years ago to jolt that industry, and the public into the realization they had not been prepared to deal with the millions of car tires that are tossed away every year.

That fire made the public aware that used tires were simply carted off and tossed in a pile. Prior to that, few people really considered what was happening to their old rubber.

If the plan is to go ahead with the electrification of vehicles on a mass scale is going to happen, there must also be a plan on how to deal with the end result.

We can't wait until there is another disaster because a million lithium batteries in a pile caught fire because there was no place to recycle them.