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Prices at the pump are driving more car buyers to look into electricity as an alternative fuel source.

This summer, oil and gas prices surged to new highs. Oil reached $70 per barrel for the first time in history in August, boosting prices at the gas pump to $3 per gallon in many parts of the country.

The rising prices have sparked a high interest in electric cars, scooters, bicycles and all-terrain vehicles, said Alex Campbell, spokesman for Zap, a company that makes battery-powered vehicles.

"We have had thousands of people calling and e-mailing us in the past few months," Campbell said. "The economics of oil are becoming an issue for average consumers. And when you look at the cost of plugging in versus pumping gas, it makes a lot of sense."

Gas cars use about 12 cents' worth of fuel for every mile, whereas electric cars use only 3 cents' worth. That means an electric car can travel four times as far as a gasoline car for the same money. Other vehicles, like electric bicycles, use about a penny's worth of energy for every five miles and achieve an average fuel efficiency of more than 1,000 miles per gallon.

Driving an electric car is not only good for your pocketbook, it's good for the environment. Electric cars emit 98 percent less pollution than gas cars, even after accounting for power plant emissions. This can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which scientists say contribute to global warming and climate change.

"Driving an electric car is a new experience that you have to try to understand," Campbell said. "Once people add an electric car to their family, most people prefer to use the electric car over the gas car."

A Green Car Institute study of electric car use in California shows that when given the choice between an electric car and a conventional one, owners chose the electric 90 percent of the time. The cars can be plugged into a regular 110-volt outlet to be recharged.

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