

EU electric car adventurers should plan carefully

June 5 2022



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With summer holidays looming, Europe's electric car owners may be wondering whether to risk taking their vehicles for long journeys. AFP investigates the pitfalls and joys of long-distance emissions-free

motoring.

While fully electric cars have proved themselves in [urban areas](#), winning fans for their ease of use and low emissions, many owners still suffer from "range anxiety" when it comes to long trips cross-country or on motorways.

The latest batteries, even on new models, still require regular recharges and the infrastructure remains patchy in many areas.

An AFP team set out to travel from Paris to Namur, south of the Belgian capital Brussels, and back, a distance of 900 kilometers (550 miles), in a Citroen e-C4, a mid-range compact car with SUV styling that advertises a fully charged range of 350 kilometers.

Armed with the ChargeMap app for locating charging stations—other options include A Better Route Planner—the team set off from central Paris in typically heavy traffic.

Reduced range, slow charging

At slow speeds and in stop-start movements, most [electric cars](#) can drive for hours without difficulty and the e-C4 was no different.

But once out on the motorway, the battery dipped quickly. Its displayed range of 250 kilometers fell to less than 100 kilometers in far less time than it would take to cover such a distance.

Just how far the range stretches can depend on the model of vehicle and the outside temperature, meaning careful planning is needed for winter trips.

And the e-C4 does not feature the fast charging of more expensive

models, meaning longer stops can be required.

But topping up the battery to 80 percent—the final 20 percent take longer—cost only around 10 euros (\$11) on a stop at the service station near Verdun, near the borders with Belgian and Luxembourg.

The European carmakers' association ACEA says around 6.8 million chargers will be needed across the European Union—or 14,000 installations per week—for the bloc to achieve its 2030 climate goal of reducing CO₂ emissions from cars by 55 percent.

In 2021, just 300,000 slow chargers and 50,000 fast ones were installed.

Apps tested by AFP were mostly up to date with charger locations and any charger will accept payments by bank card—although subscribers to a particular charging network can score better rates.

'Just like a smartphone'

Dropping off the motorway onto regional routes around the Belgian border, the car's thirst for power fell off and the many chargers on offer at town halls, car dealerships and supermarkets soothed range anxiety.

At one Lidl supermarket, 52-year-old Emmanuel Verpoort was filling up his large Polestar car.

"I've already been to the Alps and at the end of June we're heading to the Cote d'Azur" in southern France, he said, predicting the trip would cost just 22 euros in power.

"There'll probably be a lot of people on the roads in the summertime but I'm not worried," he added.

As a buyer, "you have to pick a car with adequate range and that recharges quickly. It's just like a smartphone."

On the approach to Brussels, it was time to find somewhere to stay that offered recharging so as to set off at 100 percent the next day.

For now, that's restricted to higher-end hotels, many with Tesla stations, or a few Airbnb listings.

On the way back, Dutch travelers could be found topping up before entering France, which has a reputation as backward compared to the Netherlands' dense charging network.

"The problem is that between Belgium and Spain, there's France," said 55-year-old Frank Berg, who was heading south with his wife Olga.

But Cecile Goubet of French electric motoring organization Avere said "our efforts are starting to pay off". She noted that under a government decree, all motorway rest stops must offer recharging by the end of this year.

For now, long trips can still be hobbled by technical problems. Some chargers visited by AFP on the approach to Paris were closed for repairs or unable to offer fast charging, leaving disgruntled motorists queueing for a drip feed of power.

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