

Make your green car or bike feel right at home

By Tom Watson / Special to NWhomes

No matter how often you drive or ride your “green” vehicle, it still hangs out at home much of the time.

If you’re considering investing in an ultra-eco vehicle such as an electric car, electric bike or cargo bike, you should also think about how you can make that green machine fit right in on your home turf. Fortunately, upkeep and storage for your green vehicle can be surprisingly easy.

Even with the recent lower gas prices, energy-efficient cars are the future — and the present. More than half a million electric-drive vehicles (including plug-ins and hybrids) were sold in the U.S. in 2014.

Plug-in hybrids or electric vehicles (EVs) especially make sense environmentally in the Seattle region, since much of our electricity comes from cleaner sources such as hydropower, rather than fossil fuels.

Vehicles with plugs increasingly appeal to Seattle-area residents because drivers can now find more charging stations at workplaces and when on the road. But you’ll always need a dependable charger at home.

Charging up

A Level 1 charger, which comes with the vehicle and plugs into a standard 120-volt outlet, will often meet drivers’ needs.

You won’t always need a full

recharge. But because it takes up to 17 hours to completely charge an electric car such as a Nissan Leaf or Ford Focus with a Level 1 charger, many folks want a faster option. That’s the Level 2 (240-volt) charger, which charges a Leaf or Focus from empty in 5 to 7 hours.

Total costs for buying and installing a Level 2 charger (possibly including installation of a 240-volt outlet) typically range from \$800–\$3,000. You can save money by using an existing 240-volt out-

let, commonly used for a clothes dryer.

EV Support (evsupport.com) in Seattle, a division of Puget Sound Solar, sells and installs electric-vehicle chargers for homes. Many other electricians also offer installation.

You can find chargers online and at local retailers from more than a dozen manufacturers, including Bosch, ClipperCreek, GE, Leviton and Siemens.

If you’re a Puget Sound Energy electric customer, you may qualify for the utility’s \$500 rebate for a Level 2 electric-vehicle charger (smartenergy-zone.com/PSE).

See **EcoConsumer** on page D9

ECOCONSUMER

Continued from page D2

EV chargers and batteries are exempted from Washington state sales tax. In addition, you may qualify for a federal tax credit up to \$7,500 when you buy an electric vehicle.

Keep in mind that you don't need a garage to own an EV. Some local residents

simply run the cord out to their car to charge it.

Although the ultimate green machine may be the human-powered bicycle, electric-assist bikes and electric-powered scooters and motorcycles have quietly gained popularity. They require little special care at home.

An electric motorcycle can use a Level 1 or Level 2

home charger, while an electric bicycle or scooter uses a smaller charger costing \$30–\$150.

Electric-assist bike

Clean Republic (electric-bike-kit.com) in Seattle, among other companies, offers kits to turn any bicycle into an electric-assist bike. Their kit, including a charger, costs \$500–\$1,000,

depending on battery size.

With a storage bed or containers on the back or front, cargo bikes allow you to carry all kinds of items, including kids. But storing it at home can pose a challenge, especially if you live in an apartment or a small house without a garage.

If you need to keep your cargo bike outside, protect it from the elements. Buy or

make a cover, hide the bike as much as possible (under a deck in the backyard for example) and use a heavy chain lock.

As a space-saving alternative to a cargo bike, consider a folding bike trailer for hauling big stuff. They are available online and at Gregg's Cycle (greggscycles.com) and other retailers, and usually cost \$100–\$300.

With our recent spring-like weather, thoughts are turning to the outdoors. And at the end of the day, our green vehicles need a welcoming home, just like us.

Tom Watson is project manager for King County's Recycling and Environmental Services, and Eco-Consumer is his biweekly column. He can be reached at tom.watson@kingcounty.gov, 206-477-4481 or via KCecoconsumer.com.