
Electric car charging etiquette

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A few years ago, you could venture into some beneficent municipality and find — in the public garage, or the library car lot, or right in the middle of Main Street — a couple of plug-in electric vehicle (PEV) charging stations. These cities, along with college and corporate campuses, were demonstrating their commitment to preserving the environment, offering free power and prime parking to those citizens who were willing to spend a lot of extra money for a low-range, underpowered, unsexy vehicle. Those charger-augmented spots were often empty, simply because there weren't enough PEVs on the road to fill them.

Today, there's likely to be a flock of passive-aggressive drivers circling for a spot. And the problem isn't just that PEVs are more popular because they have longer ranges, ludicrous power, and (in some executions) some serious sexiness. It's that these spots provide free power and prime parking. The legacy of that eco-conscious carrot has lingered a little too long.

To avoid a modern-day tragedy of the commons (a metaphor that is perhaps too on-point if you think of its origin), there are a few rules we all need to abide by.

Look to the future. Realise that the technology and the social environment are changing, and that more PEVs will mean more charging spots — but they are unlikely to be free, and less likely to be in prime locations. Plan now for the coming eco-utopia, perhaps by buying comfortable shoes.

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