

sketches

Catch the bug?

Maybe you've caught a glimpse of this cute-as-a-bug, three-wheeled runabout in town. Don't be deceived by its cuddly appearance. It's on a dead-serious mission — to help save the planet from global warming and free our gas-addicted selves from dependency on foreign oil. That's a tall order for such short stuff, but it doesn't have to do it alone.

"The Zap (that's the manufacturer) Xebra Sedan and Xebra PK (those are the models) are the only mass-produced electric cars and trucks available in the U.S. that go over 30 mph," says F. Steven Isom, the only Xebra dealer in South Carolina. At that speed — on a fairly flat road with minimum passengers and cargo — the Xebra will hum along for about 25 miles on one battery charge, which can take up to eight hours.

Isom has only one Xebra to show customers right now. As orders for the car increase, he says, he'll build a facility at 1201 State Street in Cayce. "Right now, I'll meet you there, show you the car and you can order it. It should only take four to six weeks." You can access his online dealership at EVCarolina.com.

A Ph.D. computer engineer wanting to do his share for the environment, Isom and his efforts to bring electric cars to the state have been applauded by Gov. Mark Sanford, U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson and U.S. Sen. Lindsay Graham. "The goal is to get electric cars into the hands of the average person in our state," Isom says. And for about \$10,000.

The car, currently DMV-classified as a motorcycle, is designed as an in-town commuter. It prefers short hops on flat terrain with a minimum of inclines. It charges from a 110-volt outlet and tops out at about 40 mph. Don't



Top: Jimmy Murphy of West Columbia, left, and David Pitcher of Leesville check out the China-made ZAP Xebra electric car in a Cayce parking lot.

Above: Steve Isom of EVCarolina.com, the online dealership until a facility is built, scoots into a drive-through with ease.



Top: The dash of the Zap Xebra car, with speedometer and battery-charge indicator in circular dials.

Above: EVCarolina.com owner Steve Isom.

Right: At 6 feet 5 inches tall, Isom has no trouble driving his Zap Xebra, which is 10 feet long, 5 feet tall and 5 feet wide. The car weighs 1,503 pounds with the batteries. Though the car is classified as a motorcycle, you don't need a helmet to drive it.

count on air conditioning, but a fan and heater are included.

You can plug it in overnight and get on your way for two to three cents per mile of electricity, depending on rates.

But if it's true that you can go a long way on your looks, these little traffic-stoppers are in it for the long haul.

— SUE DUFFY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANNE McQUARY, HEY BABY SMILE

