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Making it easy to Own an EV

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WHEN I first joined the "electric" revolution nine years ago (I bought a hybrid car), electric vehicle (EV) adoption in Malaysia was in its infancy.

Some four years ago, as many of the major car manufacturers scrambled to join the green bandwagon and with battery technology improving and prices plunging, I decided to go full electric.

Fast forward to the present, and the consumer is spoilt for choice. The sheer number of models, variations and features is mind boggling.

As of April 2026, there are approximately 91 EV models available in Malaysia. This diverse lineup spans over 36 brands, ranging from affordable entry-level hatchbacks to high-performance luxury SUVs.

And now, the longer the Middle East conflict drags on, and fuel prices continue to inch higher, the likelihood of Malaysian consumers buying an EV increases.

In this current climate, even with the government maintaining the subsidised RON95 pump price of RM1.99 for eligible drivers, running a petrol or diesel car is getting painfully expensive – and there's no end in sight.

EVs are suddenly looking less like a novelty buy and more like a financial necessity.

Last year Malaysia achieved a historic milestone by becoming the largest automotive market in South-East Asia in terms of annual sales volume, officially surpass-

With the conflict in the Middle East prolonged, it is time to encourage more EVs on the road but one of the things that must be improved is the infrastructure.

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ing Indonesia for the first time, reaching an all-time record of 820,752.

Our national makes – Perodua and Proton – maintained a commanding 62% market share, but EV adoption accelerated significantly, with Battery Electric Vehicle (BEV) registrations rising 109% year-on-year to 30,848 units.

This trend is set to continue. EV registrations in the first quarter of 2026 hit 14,591 units – more than double the same period last year.

Many China-made EVs still come in cheaper than comparable internal combustion engine (ICE) models.

Add in CKD incentives and five years of road tax exemption for qualifying new EVs registered in 2026 and these numbers start to make sense.

But even though the arguments

are compelling and the temptation of getting an EV is great (especially if you are a first-time car owner), a note of caution is necessary.

Malaysia's EV infrastructure is lagging. There are only 5,600 public charging bays nationwide, barely half the 10,000 target set for the end of 2025. Most chargers are clustered in urban areas; long-haul highway routes and rural regions are still woefully underserved.

Consumer complaints are consistent with my own grouses – sluggish apps, chargers that don't work, poor connectivity and non-EVs hogging charging space.

It is different if you have a charger at home, but relying on commercial chargers puts you at the mercy of a less than optimum network. I used to have a fast charger at my previous place of residence.

But having moved to a new apartment last year that does not have this facility has forced me to rely on commercial chargers. Ironically, the price to use one (RM1.30 per KW) puts it on par with what you pay for subsidised fuel at the petrol pump.

The body responsible for approving the installation of fast chargers is the Energy Commission or Suruhanjaya Tenaga. And it is

far from easy trying to get approval from the Commission.

Applying for an EV charger in a Malaysian condominium involves navigating the Strata Management Act 2013. Chargers can only be installed with formal approval from your Joint Management Body or Management Corporation (MC).

The next step involves hiring a Licensed Electrical Worker registered with the Commission. They must conduct a site assessment to check if the building's electrical capacity can support the additional load and to design a cable routing plan.

Only then do you apply to Tenaga Nasional Bhd to install the charger. But even then, no electricity can be supplied without approval from the Commission.

My MC applied almost five months ago – the charger has been installed, but we are unable to use it because the Commission is "bogged down" by too many applications and is unable to process ours.

Bureaucratic red tape like this creates a classic catch-22. Higher fuel prices push more buyers toward EVs, but without reliable charging, range anxiety will keep many middle-income Malaysians – particularly those outside the cities or with only one car – firmly

in the ICE camp.

Analysts are already warning that the transition will be gradual, not explosive, precisely because infrastructure gaps and targeted fuel subsidies blunt the urgency for lower-income drivers.

The government deserves credit for jump-starting the market with tax breaks and pushing local assembly. But the next phase must be infrastructure. We need faster grid upgrades, more highway DC fast-chargers every 100km, better app integration, and enforcement against misuse of bays.

Without these, the EV boom risks fizzling into urban second-car territory rather than becoming the mass-market shift Malaysia needs for energy security and cleaner air.

The Middle East crisis may be the jolt that accelerates EV adoption among cost-conscious Malaysians. Cheap, feature-packed EVs from China and our national marques make the switch tempting. But unless charging infrastructure catches up – and quickly – many will hesitate, watching fuel prices rise while stuck in the slow lane of an incomplete revolution.

The opportunity is there. The question is whether our roads are ready for it.