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The Man Who Made Driving a Chevrolet Volt His Life's Work

By [Chevrolet](#) June 10, 2016


Richard “Buzz” Smith is fascinated by new technology. The Texas native and father of three has been driven to explore new and emerging technology since the 1980s. An engineer by training, Buzz calls himself an “early adopter” of audio and video technology.


When Smith’s vehicle was totaled in an accident in 2012, he found himself trying to make the most of his insurance payout. And with gas prices above \$4.00 per gallon, he was drawn to investigate the new hybrid and electric cars, including the first-generation Chevrolet Volt.


Smith didn’t care for the gas–electric hybrids he test drove, such as the Toyota Prius, feeling they lacked a sporty drive. The range of the all–electric cars, such as the Nissan Leaf and Ford Focus Electric, was insufficient for Texas–sized roadtrips¹. “But the Volt had it all,” recalls Smith. “An all–electric range that takes me back and forth to work, tremendous acceleration and an extended range² because of the gas tank backup.”


In September 2012, Smith contacted his dealership in efforts to learn what they had planned for National Plug-in Day. He wanted to celebrate with other Chevrolet Volt owners. Instead, the general manager invited Smith to talk to his sales staff about his experience with the Volt. Smith was animated with his enthusiasm about maximizing his electric driving, and it was infectious with the sales team. Then an unexpected thing happened: The sales manager made Smith an offer to join his team as a sales consultant, specializing in the Volt.


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"It was an interesting conversation with my wife," recalls Smith. "I felt, and feel, really passionate about this technology and what it could mean to the planet, so I said 'yes.'"

Today, Buzz takes up his position each morning at his dealership, which is in the heart of Texas truck country, surrounded by full size pick ups and utilities. Many customers who drive away in a Volt often are not shopping for one. He has had plenty of customers who come in looking for a traditional car, or even a truck, and leave with a Volt. "If I can get someone in a Volt and they experience an electric drive for the first time, the rest of it is easy."



With the new Volt, which has an improved all-electric range of up to 53 miles on a full charge, and a total range of up to 420 miles¹ on a full charge and a full tank of gas, Smith says he encounters a lot of people who expect the car to be slow and sluggish. "Then I put the car into Sport mode, which is my favorite way to drive, and then the grins come." Sport mode in Volt increases response and acceleration from the footpedal.

Customers often do not understand how Volt operates. After the battery power is depleted, the Volt 1.5-liter 4-cylinder backup gas-powered generator kicks in to keep powering the battery until it can be recharged. "Range anxiety" is not a factor as long as gas is available, and that surprises many who come in to Smith's dealership shopping for a new vehicle.

Before they purchased their first Volt, the Smiths owned a combination of SUVs and

luxury sedans. Having owned a total of five Volts thus far, though, the family is all-in on living electric.

"I've had people ask me: 'Isn't it inconvenient to plug your car in every day?'" says Smith. "It's actually the exact opposite," he says. "I get home. The charge cord is right there, so I just reach over, plug it in, I'm done." It's easier than stopping for gas, he says.



The Volt changed the driving lifestyle of Smith and his family before it changed his livelihood. For example, Chevrolet expects owners to drive over 1,000 miles between fill-ups with regular charging¹. Smith, though, says he only needs to fill up every three to four months. When he takes a long road trip, as he did from Dallas to Chicago not long ago, he tries to book hotels with available charging stations. "And if I don't book, I let them know it's because they don't have a charger," says Smith. He's on a mission wherever he goes to promote the ease and benefits of electric driving. In fact, his business card says: "EVangelist."

Smith says he is looking forward to adding the upcoming Chevrolet Bolt EV to the lineup he sells. The Bolt EV is an all-new, all-electric crossover that Chevrolet expects to offer over an estimated 200 miles on a full charge³. Being fully electric, the Bolt EV is a different car and selling proposition. Smith is ready and just as enthusiastic about getting started as he was when he began selling the Volt. "I tell my Volt story to everybody I can because I think it's the most important car this country has ever made."



1. EPA-estimated EV range for 2016 Nissan Leaf SL: 107 miles; 2016 Ford Focus Electric: 76 miles.
2. EPA-estimated 53-mile range based on 106 MPGe combined city/highway (electric); 367-mile extended range based on 42 MPG combined city/highway (gas). Actual range varies with conditions.
3. Based on GM testing. EPA estimates not yet available. Actual range varies with conditions.



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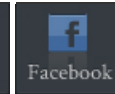
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