AutoMedia.com

**2014 Cadillac ELR**

*Great luxo-green fun*

by Gary Witzenburg

 "The 2014 Cadillac ELR is a very nice Chevy Volt," sneered a know-it-all colleague when we asked his opinion. Had he driven one? "I've driven it," he responded with a yawn.

 We'll bet he hadn't yet driven one like we have: from Santa Monica, CA up the Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) past Malibu, then hard up a twisty two-lane canyon road, then harder still along the spine of a mountain on Mulholland Highway and adjoining grin-inducing curvy roads. If he had, he might have had a different perspective.

 Yes, Cadillac's ELR extended range electric vehicle (EREV) is based on GM's Chevy Volt architecture and propulsion system. But it distances itself a long way ahead of the Volt through its sexy- coupe styling, its luxotech interior, its surprisingly good driving dynamics and its cornucopia of unique and useful features -- plus a sticker twice as high starting at $76K.

 Its mission is not volume sales (the 2014 target is just 3,000 units) but to further image boost an American luxury brand striving to earn perception parity with the likes of BMW, Mercedes and Audi. The compact ATS (2013 North American Car of the Year), mid-size CTS (2014 *Motor Trend* Car of the Year) and full-size XTS have raised Cadillac's image and sales in recent years, and the ELR's job is mostly to dot the "i" on that image. It's sort of Cadillac's Corvette, a "halo" car that helps elevate the brand appeal of its conventional stablemates.

**Powertrain and technology**

 Like Volt, its 1.4-liter range-extending four-cylinder engine drives a 5.5-kW generator to power its drive motor once its 16.5-kWh lithium-ion battery pack runs down. Unlike Volt, it boasts ride-smoothing, handling enhancing Continuous Damping Control with selectable driving modes, "Regen on Demand" steering wheel paddles that slow it when you want to, while pumping energy back to its battery, multi-configurable displays, aero-slickening active air-intake shutters, front and rear LED blade lighting, a leather-lined Cadillac cabin, BOSE premium audio, big 20-inch all-season tires on chromed alloy wheels and a bunch more.

 Its drive motor spins out a healthy 295 lb.-ft. of torque, while its propulsion system lets it dig deeper (than Volt) into its battery voltage for stronger performance when you want it. Its athletic suspension is GM hi-per struts front and multi-link rear. And those on-demand regenerative-braking paddles are a wonderful idea that just won a *Green Car Journal* award.

 It also offers four driving modes: Tour (the default, for best efficiency), Sport (stronger torque, crisper steering and suspension), Mountain (saves some battery energy for long, steep grades) and Hold (saves charge for later usage). Its only options are 20-way adjustable seats in semi-aniline leather ($2,450), full-speed-range Adaptive Cruise Control ($1,995), Crystal Red Tintcoat paint ($995) and a Luxury Package of driver assistance features ($1,695).

**Driving impressions**

 The power button brings up a multifaceted display with a battery state-of-charge (SOC) curve and EV range on the left and a matching fuel-level curve and fuel range on the right. At the start of that spirited drive, our California test car's projected EV range was 33 miles (at ~90% SOC) and its fuel range was 256 miles (total 289 miles).

 We drove about 18 miles up the PCH in Tour mode, then switched to Hold with 15 miles of EV range remaining, which imperceptibly fired up the engine to keep us going. We went to Sport for the delightfully fast, aggressive charge up the canyon road to Mulholland Highway, arriving with zero EV range (no surprise) and 232 miles of gas range left after 30.9 total miles.

 Then we made good use of those innovative Regen on Demand paddles (instead of friction brakes) to slow for curves during our spirited mountaintop romp. That 18.2-mile run left 177 miles of gas in the tank and 16.2 mpg indicated fuel economy on the A trip odometer; but our composite gas/electric economy (counting our earlier EV-only driving) on the B Trip odo was a more respectable 31.9 mpg.

**Cold weather**

 Much later we borrowed another ELR for a week-long test. We picked it up at the Detroit airport and drove it 86 miles home in single-digit temperatures, thankful that its remote-start feature had warmed the cabin a bit before departing, but wishing for a stronger heater.

 We left with 32 miles EV range and 244 miles gasoline range (full battery and tank) and arrived home with the battery down and 161 miles of gas range remaining. Partly because we used the Hold (gas only) mode for the first 56 miles of mostly freeway driving, then switched to Tour about 30 miles from home, we averaged a respectable 37.4 mpg composite economy. When we plugged it into 120V in our garage (a quick, easy process), the ELR said its battery would be fully charged in 16.5 hours (yes, conventional house power is cheap but slow).

 We drove it locally in Tour mode for the next few days and plugged it in at night to start each day with a full battery...though that's unnecessary with plenty of gas left in the tank. On the morning it was picked up, it offered 33 miles of EV range and 129 miles of remaining gas range. We had driven a total of 142 miles at nearly 40 mpg composite fuel economy, and our last stop-and-go trip showed more than 45 mpg on the central display's energy usage screen, and a "lifetime" fuel economy for that nearly-new ELR of 52.7 mpg.

**Checkered flag**

 That California run established the ELR as the best-looking, best-handling, most fun-to-drive EV in our experience, though we still haven't driven a big-battery Tesla Model S (Tesla won't provide one.) We loved the ELR's informative customizable displays (choice of "Classic" circular speedometer or "Modern" digital speed, with or without energy usage data) and mostly liked its Cadillac CUE navigation/infotainment system, though some don't. Our only major gripe was its weak heating system, a problem owners in moderate climes won't encounter.

 We've long enjoyed electric vehicles but not their typically limited range. Extended-range EVs, which run on grid power most of the time but have a fuel-efficient engine to generate electricity to keep them going when needed, are the perfect solution...except for their high cost. Despite that, owners and lessees of Chevrolet Volts continue to report extremely high satisfaction with them, and those who want and can afford an ELR likely will as well.

# # #