



BRIAN HENDRICKSON/for The Oregonian

**The back of Mark Lindgren's Volkswagen Rabbit is filled with batteries, the power source for the electric car. Lindgren is trying to sell the vehicle.**

## The Oregonian

# Car for sale - you better charge it!

*Mark Lindgren's 1981 VW Rabbit turns buyers off so far: It's electric*

By NORM MAVES JR.  
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When he rolled his 1981 Volkswagen Rabbit out in front of his home and slapped a "For Sale" sign on it a couple of months ago, Mark Lindgren had almost everything working in his favor.

Lindgren lives on Southwest Vermont Street, right where 52nd avenue rolls down from the Maplewood neighborhood. That particular stretch of Vermont, running east and west between Hillsdale and Raleigh Hills, gets a ton of traffic, including Tri-Met's No. 1 bus.

The Rabbit is in terrific shape. Leather interior. Just 6,000 miles on its motor. Great tires. Unlimited gas mileage. Quiet ride. Doesn't use a drop of oil, and there isn't a rust spot anywhere on its white body.

You'd think with that kind of résumé a set of wheels would have a buyer in a matter of minutes. But, a few nibbles and a classified ad later, the car is still sitting there. That probably has everything to do with the other sign on the vehicle.

The one that says "Electric Car".

### Many Stop and Look

"Somebody stops by nearly every day," Lindgren says. "I take lots of people for a drive. Two guys drove it twice last week. But they took off and never came back."

In the green 1990s, nobody seems to want a car that uses no fossil fuels. We recycle almost everything, sweat about withering salmon on runs and clear-cutting, and fret over ozone depletion.

But nonpolluting cars?

Maybe if it can knock down a quarter-mile in 14 seconds, leave a 30-foot black patch at the light, pull a couple of G's on a curve and go about 300 miles on full tank.

Technology is closing in on some of that. The Solectria, for instance, can get from 0 to 50 mph in 18 seconds and can scoot along at 70 mph.

But back when Lindgren bought the Rabbit at a city auction 10 years ago nobody was at all close.

Not that it mattered to Lindgren. He was an energy conservation enthusiast long before then.

"When I was getting out of college" says Lindgren,

who did his schooling at the University of Oregon in the mid-1970s, "I was pretty interested in alternative energy sources.

I was curious about wind generators, lots of things. I just like to do my part."

So much so that he sunk all his money into a business that sold and maintained alternative power sources. It lasted six years.

### He's still a believer

Lindgren is still a believer, though. His riding lawn mower is electric, recharged by a wind generator, and he still has one of PGE's old electric trucks.

The city of Portland made a small pass at electric cars in the 1980s, then auctioned them off late in the decade. Lindgren bought a bunch of the cars, saved the Rabbit, and sold the rest to an enthusiast in Kansas.

"This was my favorite one," he says. "I just love the way it drives."

Unfortunately not everybody agrees with him. Especially when they're on the same road.

"It zips through first and second gear pretty well" Lindgren says, "but when you get to third and fourth, it gets a little sluggish."

On a straight and level highway, without a wind factor, it will do maybe 50 miles per hour. Uphill, well...

Drivers behind him are often unhappy, Lindgren says. "I wish I had a sign back there that said, 'This is an electric car, I'm doing the best I can.'"

That's not why he's selling it, though. Lindgren is now a house inspector, and he puts in about 75 road miles on an average day. The Rabbit, which costs about 30 cents to charge, goes about 35 miles on a full charge.

That's not the only thing about the car that people don't like. The batteries eliminated the back seat, so it's a two-seater. And it costs about \$900 every two years for a new set of batteries, Lindgren says.

Even if that weren't problem, the car's short legs seems to be.

"It just doesn't have the range I need," Lindgren says. "It would be perfect for somebody who lived close to town and did a small daily commute, but I don't do that."

So Lindgren's still looking for a buyer while the gas guzzlers zoom down Vermont without as much as a respectful nod.