

---

## *Editorial*

---

### **Ecologically Friendly Transport**

Heavy traffic on our island is contributing, among other factors, to the poor air quality in Malta. The news of the battery-operated car built and introduced in Malta (refer to p22) spells hope for our air-pollution problem. Statistics have shown that there are far too many cars on our roads, and the situation seems to be getting worse annually. To counteract this ever-increasing problem, it is a culture change that is required first and foremost, especially our lifestyle by which we expect to travel a few yards by private car. For many people the car is the status symbol and it is hard to imagine where the battery-operated car will fit into all this. Consumers will not necessarily take to the battery-operated car seeing that it lacks the power, speed and class of other cars.

The environmentally - conscious amongst us are very few and far between. Even our youngsters seem to be ignoring the problems with air pollution. In a recent report on the Environment in Malta, it has been reported that levels of nitrogen dioxide, ozone, benzene and benzopyrene are very high especially in areas where traffic is heavy. All these emissions are toxic and affect our health in several ways. Benzene is known to be a carcinogen, and benzene pollution in Malta is amongst the highest in Europe.

Battery-operated cars would reduce air pollution drastically. This could bring a healthy respite to the many asthma sufferers and people with respiratory problems. Research has shown that the number of people, especially children, with respiratory problems seems to be on the increase due to the poor air quality. The direct effect of air pollutants on the incidence of cancer is as yet unknown.

Another advantage of the electric car is reduction in noise pollution, so much a requirement on our island. Perhaps some might argue that the electric car is too silent, presenting a danger on the road to children, the elderly or people with hearing impairment. However, the electric car might not be as dangerous as conventional cars since it lacks the high speed.

One of the major problems associated with the electric car is the charging of the battery every 80 kilometres or so. In Malta, this problem is minimised since distances travelled are relatively short, making the electric car quite feasible as a means of transport.

The Government has introduced incentives to change to battery-operated cars (the reduction in registration tax is a step in the right direction) for privately - owned cars. Probably as a start the most viable use of electric cars is in carrying out services in different localities in Malta, as has been done in Italy, for example in post collection, public transport, rubbish collection etc.

The Maltese Government should encourage the use of electric cars as part of a programme to safeguard the environment, by setting an example and giving more incentives to people who use electric vehicles.

**Angela Xuereb**  
*Editor*