

Britain's EV charging infrastructure – are we nearly there yet? Ask Robin Roberts...

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The electric avenue is not the fast way to Zero emissions, says



Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

Britain's electric charging network is shorting, slowing sales of the low emission vehicles and the Government's drive to a greener future, as well as frustrating drivers.

That's my opinion after testing one of the best new electric cars, the Genesis GV60, over two long trips in a few days.



With a range of over 230 miles approximately on a full charge that should be enough for most users, but the car and others are let down by the UK's charging networks and providers.



For short commutes – we are told the UK average is about 12 miles – the Genesis would have enough reserve for ten days, but look further afield and you might be struggling to keep going.

Two years ago I managed a successful 320 miles round trip using just two charging points on the outskirts of busy urban towns but the latest venture was into the unknown by comparison.

This time, starting in West Wales and heading to ultimately stop in Romsey, Hampshire we broke our journey at Hungerford, where there were supposed to be public charging points at a few locations, and we could avoid the busy A34 around Newbury. How wrong we were.

Hungerford is home to at least two ghost chargers, well we couldn't find them in the commuter train car park as suggested in our on-line search site, and the lamp-post chargers in the main street were out of commission due to roadworks.

So we reluctantly headed to Newbury Services and some Gridserve devices, nice reasonably powerful units inconspicuously placed in the main car park and next to the petrol and diesel filling station. The two devices, each with two types of connector, were occupied and the third low power lead trailed to another car between the main devices.

Plainly too few devices for a major north-south road and their design layout on site was very tight for modern cars. Cars were queuing to use them.

So we went on line again and the mapping system sent us through the back streets of Newbury to a charging station which did not exist at all but was a private house. How did that happen we wondered?

With the remaining distance dropping by the mile we decided to broaden our search area and found a newly built pub with a very large car park and four chargers, which were all vacant. Good or bad news?



We did wonder why they were empty but we hooked up and went through the registration by phone to use them and then waited, and waited, and waited. We called the Osprey help centre and they informed us the charge was being supplied although not indicated on the device.

A little light non-alcoholic refreshment and an hour later we checked and found it had indeed charged enough for about 50 miles and billed to our credit card.

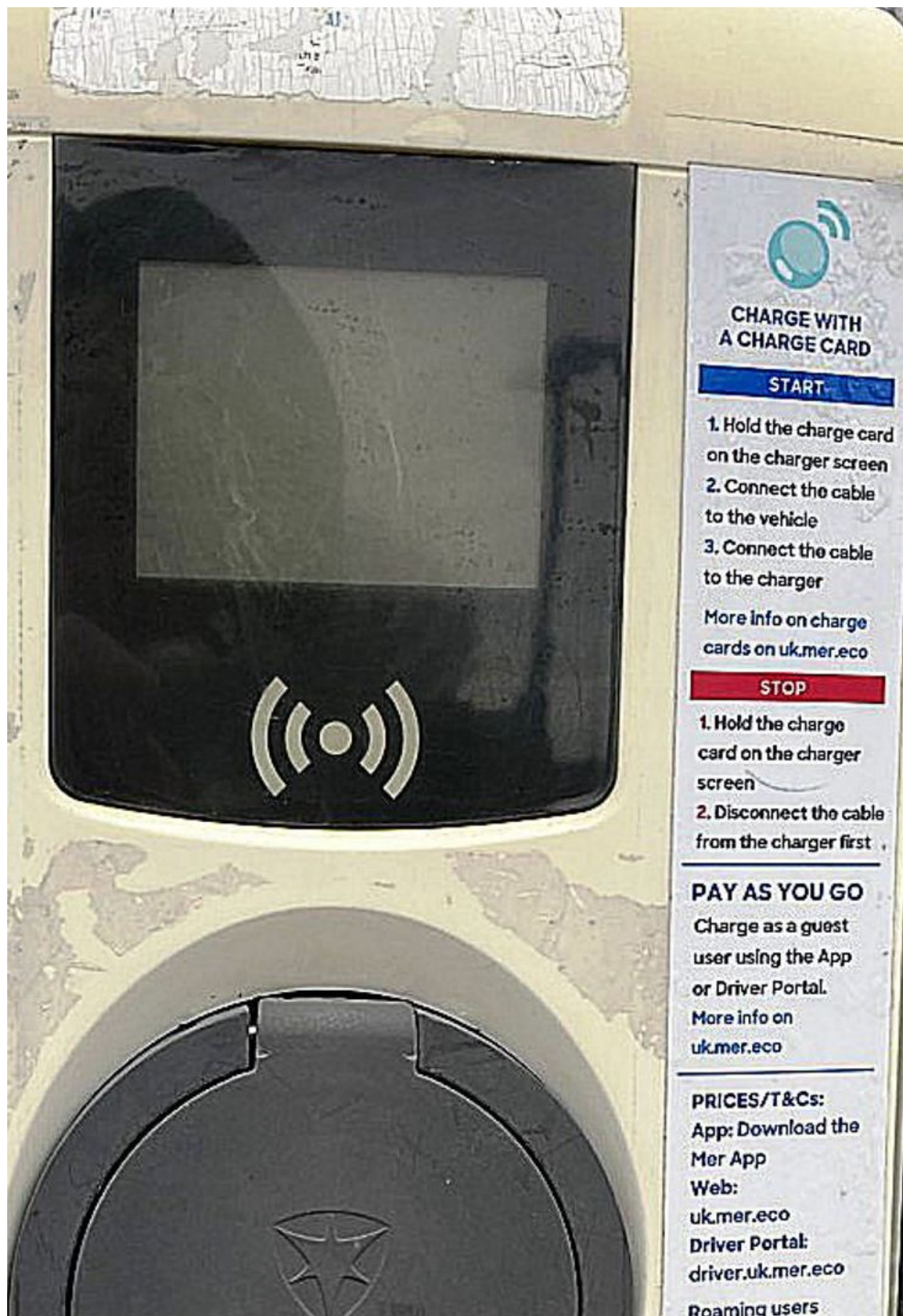
At least we were heading towards our destination. And more issues.

A check around Romsey revealed a number of charging points with MER network provision in public car parks, where you have to pay a standard parking fee and then connect to the devices. Following their on-box instructions we hooked up and waited, but again nothing happened.



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CHARGE WITH A CHARGE CARD

START

1. Hold the charge card on the charger screen
2. Connect the cable to the vehicle
3. Connect the cable to the charger

More info on charge cards on uk.mer.eco

STOP

1. Hold the charge card on the charger screen
2. Disconnect the cable from the charger first

PAY AS YOU GO

Charge as a guest user using the App or Driver Portal.

More info on uk.mer.eco

PRICES/T&Cs:

App: Download the Mer App

Web:

uk.mer.eco

Driver Portal:

driver.uk.mer.eco

Roaming users



[Mer EV charging point charge card instructions.](#)

A few attempts later and a call to the helpful assistance centre revealed the boxes' claim to be contactless to be correct. They did not work with a plastic contact card but you had to download an app over the air to use or buy a special RFi card. Except there was no signal in the immediate area to download the app.

Exit the car park and judge if we had enough battery power to return the following day to Newbury.

So we decided we could make Newbury with about 20 miles to spare. Reasonable as there were no other places showing up on our webguide.

Taking the A34 back to Newbury and I remembered Tot Hill Services so diverted and saw the vision of the future with a Shell Energy station. Clean, spacious, wi-fi enabled, well marked and across from a well stocked mini-supermarket. Ah the joy of ten points with two power outputs each and with some being used.

Drive in, hook up, follow the instructions. And wait for it all to click on. Except it didn't. One bay had a traffic cone to close it off, ours next to that was glowing green while I started turning a shade of red.

Another helpful but unclear assistant in the call centre usefully told me the device was down although it appeared to be working on site. Opposite, another motorist tried and failed to get a charge working and moved onto yet another vacant bay.

The travelling community certainly takes on a new meaning in today's world, from bay to bay, charger to charger. Seven out of the ten charge points in the Shell Energy station were not working, or as expected they should be.

At our second and now working charger we tried again and got so far as holding a credit



card to the reader on the device. Surprise, it didn't work.

Useful tip: Another motorist opposite us suggested we use a debit card and proffered the advice to always use a debit card because others rarely work. So liberating more moths from my wallet I cautiously swung my debit card in front of the reader as if a magic wand and, hey presto, it actually liked the fresh air feeling, switched on the charge and pumped in 150kw for about 40 minutes, enough to get us back to our destination.

The experience was not a good one overall and showed even a major household name can get it wrong even after spending tens of thousands of pounds on a charging station.

The smaller players also suffered outages and did not do what they said on their instructions.

VERDICT

There is a real need for an EV Czar to direct the network, its providers and standardisation of systems and services, based on layout design, good lighting, spacing of bays, power requirements and of course simple payment by debit card and not an app which may fail to kick in at a site.

How can a Government insist on going green when that clearly is a red light to transport and travel stopping?

If it was a question of life with an ev or death of the diesel and petrol engine, I will, for as long as possible, choose to go on ICE until the charging network is fit for purpose, which it clearly is not at this time.

The modern cars like the executive Genesis GV60 are very good, the network is not - still languishing in the starting handle early days of motoring.

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Kim (Wheels-Alive) adds:

Robin's experience is an all-too-common occurrence at the moment for motoring writers and owners of all-electric cars. Yes, in time, the infrastructure will improve, no doubt, but for now it leaves much to be desired.

I will also mention that, as covered in other articles on Wheels-Alive, if carbon-neutral liquid synthetic/Efuels were adopted widely and delivered via the existing storage and delivery hardware used for fossil fuels at the moment, it would enable existing and future internal combustion engine vehicles to carry on driving while doing away with fossil fuels, at the same time easing pressure on the already overloaded EV charging network.

As Robin points out, most current electric vehicles are good (and the Genesis GV60 is regarded as being very good) but the charging infrastructure needed for them is not. Is anybody actually listening?