

» motoring «

Traveling the Electric Highway A Burger Quest

How far would you travel for a good hamburger? More than likely, it would depend on your available time and how you'd get there. For me, the choice was clear—unplug the car and head for Redamak's.

This particular Sunday is the closest I've been to being a "time traveler." My time machine is the electric powered 2010 Tesla Roadster Sport. The destination? Redamak's: since 1946—"the hamburger that made New Buffalo, Michigan, famous." Add the garnish of historic Red Arrow Highway and I have the makings of a classic day-long road trip.

My co-driver Rick Cotta, managing editor for *Consumer Guide Automotive*, and I arranged to drive the two-seat Tesla sports car from Tesla Motors at 1053 West Grand Avenue in Chicago's West Loop to our eastern terminus in New Buffalo, 76 miles away.

As Redamak's is unique in the burger world, Tesla is separated from other car companies with its pure-electric approach to personal transportation. With Tesla, there is no engine, no exhaust, no emissions and no trips to the gas station—ever.

Tesla is not a hybrid, but a plug-in electric car with energy gathered from common household 120 or 240 volt current. A 24-hour charge is required with 120 volt use for a "full tank." The recharge period is one-third that time with 240 volt access. Travel range tops out at 244 miles with either application.

Tesla Roadster Sport's energy is stored in a lithium-ion battery pack housed in the trunk that generates an electrical output that builds 288 horsepower—capable of eclipsing 0-60 miles per hour in 3.7 seconds. By comparison, the 638-hp 2009 Corvette ZR1 makes the trip from 0-60 mph in 3.4 seconds. Equally surprising, Tesla's trunk also has room for a set of clubs.

Our hamburger quest takes us across real-world driving scenarios from pounding big city streets to smooth rural hamlet blacktop—connected by the fast pace of the interstate, where we whisk the Tesla along the Borman Expressway to our first stop at Rag Tops Auto Museum in Michigan City. There, owner Dennis Moran gives us a tour of the sheet metal emporium. "We've got a little bit of everything in this convertible collection," he says. "However, there's a certain sentiment toward Mopar (Chrysler, Dodge and Plymouth) brands."

A short trip up U.S. Highway 12 ushers us to Red Arrow Highway, where the hands of time turn back to a homespun era left behind by fast-paced interstate travel. Here, family-owned businesses still exist in the shadows of prosperity that once lit neon signs to beckon travelers off the then bustling highway. Ahead in the distance is Redamak's.

Our hosts, the Maroney family, invite us to "bite into a legend" as Cotta and I order a Redamak's double cheeseburger and side of onion rings. But don't expect lettuce or tomato

on that burger. None is offered. The only green allowed is cash—no credit cards are accepted. A steady ebb of patrons flows through this nostalgic family-oriented eatery during our lunchtime visit. Priced for family budgets, we rate Redamak's ambience and burgers "exceptional."

A side trip to the dunes in New Buffalo draws a handful of curious onlookers interested in seeing the electric car. With the exception of a faint whine of the electric motor, Tesla operates in absolute silence, with only rolling tire noise and the wind slap on the car's canvas targa top to stir the silence under full operation.

With 65 percent of charge left, we turn our attention to the return trip to Chicago. The Tesla performs remarkably well with regenerative braking helping to recharge the batteries when the accelerator is lifted or when the brake is applied. Acceleration is instantaneous and seat-pinning at any speed. Our 176.5-mile round trip averages over 100 miles per gallon with a 10 percent charge left in the battery pack when we hand the key back to Tesla sales advisor, Seneca Giese.

The bottom line for America's only production-built electric car is pricey. Base cost for the California-made Tesla Roadster is \$109,000. Add \$19,500 for the Sport options that include a larger electric motor, adjustable suspension, forged alloy wheels and competition tires. A federal tax credit of \$7,500 is applicable to reduce the base price to \$101,500. —JIM JACKSON

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Note: Redamak's is closed for the winter season and reopens March 1.

