**Driving an Electric Vehicle: My Experience**
**By Alexander Everard / August 2021**

I have a very big interest in electric vehicles. This stems from a personal love for new technologies and the latest gadgets, as well as a growing concern for the environment and my affect upon it. I have spent weeks researching the topic of electrification, not only in terms of technologies and readiness for the individual driver, but for business's and company car fleets. I have attended workshops and seminars in recent weeks and learnt a great deal about what electric vehicles are, how they work and how ready some European markets are to implement dynamic strategies to encourage EV uptake. However, what was missing for me was the tactile understanding of what an electric vehicle was like to drive, to experience, to live with. What is the best way to understand electric vehicles? The answer was clear, drive one – which I did, over the course of 5 days earlier this month.


Thanks go to Key Account Manager Loopy Davis and the very helpful delivery team at Barons BMW & MINI Farnborough, for providing the EV demo vehicle and for my overall positive experience. The vehicle was a BMW i3s, in beautiful imperial blue with frozen grey highlight, with the BMW i Suite interior world, comprising luxurious Vernasca Dark Truffle leather seats and Dark Oak fine wood interior trim, as well as a myriad of other premium touches. My initial thoughts were how modern the interior looked, almost futuristic, with the fluid lines and minimalist approach to button configuration, all appealing to that personal love I have for new technologies. The smaller half-console to the driver's left is only as deep as the seating, meaning that the driver and passenger sections are no longer separated and flow the full width of the car, providing extra space for storage if required. These aspects, along with the very modern looking 5.7" colour TFT Instrument cluster display behind the steering wheel and 10.25" LCD navigation screen, really make you feel like you are driving something different. Something akin to what you would expect from an electric car.

The driving experience was just as pleasurable to see and to feel. From the silent start-up of the vehicle, hearing only the crisp sounds of the tyres on tarmac as I slowly reverse off of my drive, to the raw power I soon discovered at my fingertips. Whether true to all electric vehicles, the BMW i3s was extremely quick and very responsive, even on the ECOPlus setting, which deploys greater regenerative braking and is therefore a technically less comfortable drive, though the difference between the ECOPlus and Comfort settings were negligible considering the advantages of the eco setting. I found myself simply driving in ECOPlus mode most of the time. As you can imagine, the Sport setting was sublime. Fast acceleration is an understatement!

I won't talk too much more about the vehicle itself, as there are a range of electric vehicles now available in the market, each with their pros and cons when compared to each other. I will talk more about the general electric experience. What was it like to live with an electric vehicle? What change in mind-set did I need, so I wasn't caught out by a low battery? What were my experiences like

charging the vehicle both away and at home? To answer these questions (and a few others), I planned ahead; I would spend half of the demo time as a home-charger, charging only at home and half as an on-the-road-charger, charging at public stations.

As a home-user, the i3s was a breeze to use and to manage. I spent Thursday and Friday working from home, only going out to deliver and collect my son from Nursery. On Saturday, the family went to do our usual weekly shop a few miles down the road, as well as visit family in two locations; 14-mile and 28-mile round-trips. It was very easy to simply leave the vehicle plugged into the standard 3-pin wall socket whenever not in use and unplugging to go out. Leaving the car plugged in as much as I did here wasn't even necessary, as there was plenty of range on the vehicle – I just wanted to see how long it took to charge. The answer: a good while. In a 4-hour period using a standard 3-pin plug, I added around 25-30 miles of range to the battery. This means to charge from flat to full on the BMW i3s, which has a maximum range of around 162 miles, it would take 20-25 hours. However, at a cost of around £8 to do so, it is hard not to see the benefits of electric fuelling versus combustion.

In a day-to-day scenario, based on a home-charger lifestyle and driving around 100 miles a week, I would see myself charging the vehicle overnight at the weekend once and then using the vehicle for the week before charging again the following weekend. Extremely easy, without the inconvenience of having to go to the pump to fuel up while paying such a small amount for the privilege.

My experiences as an on-the-road charger were not so easy. On Sunday, the family went for a day-trip out to Cannock Chase; a 40 mile round-trip. On Monday, I journeyed into the Fleet Logistics office, a 30-mile round trip. To ensure there was enough range for both trips and as appropriate to hand the vehicle back over to Barons, I needed to use a public charging station. Finding one was easy – I was recommended to download the Zap-Map app, which I promptly did and sure enough found it very straightforward to use and to locate a public station in my vicinity. The app enables you to search by brand, by plug type, plus many other settings. I was able to quickly identify the best-suited location for me, where the app also very helpfully tells you if it is free or in use.

I had chosen a GeniePoint charging station at a local Morrison's supermarket. Before making the journey to the station, I created an account on their website, where you are required to pay £10 up front to your balance. Going forward, you would then top up your account as you would do a mobile phone SIM before going to charge up. You are then required to plug your car in, select the station in your account and hit the "Charge Now" button, where it then communicates with the station itself to start charging your vehicle. Signing up for an account was very easy to do and should I own an electric vehicle in future and need to fuel up at GeniePoint, I would simply need to top up, attend my nearest station and plug in. I can also skip signing into my account via my phone and clicking the "Charge Now" button every time by ordering an RFID card, which I can just scan at the station itself.

My experience of charging at this GeniePoint station was an interesting one. I checked ahead via Zap-Map if the station was being used, to which it said it was. I decided to go along anyway and wait. To my surprise, the bays were empty! I parked in one of the bays and checked Zap-Map again and still, the app said "in use". I double-checked this on GeniePoint's site, which also stated the charger was in use. I tried plugging the i3s in, to see if it would reset the system, but no luck. I had no choice but to ring GeniePoint via the number on the station notice, where a very friendly and helpful young man went through a flurry of quick checks. A few moments later, he advised me to press some of the buttons on the screen and hold my charge-card up, which clearly had me worried I was going to be paying for the charging session again, having already topped up £10 to my account. The young man advised that the cost of the charge would either come from the £10 on my account or it would be a free vend! I continued to do as he instructed and the station soon whirred into life

and the screen on the i3s dashboard indicated charging had begun. Very helpfully, the indicator told me the time that the vehicle would be fully charged – just over an hour, so I was able to go into Morrison's and enjoy a coffee and snack.

An hour later, I returned to the car to see charging was almost complete. It then occurred to me something I had read previously, where electric vehicles charge from 0-80% very quickly, it is the last 20% that takes the most time. I'd read that I shouldn't worry too much about getting to 100%, so with that I hit the "stop" button on the screen and the charging station powered down. After removing the plug, there was no indication I had been charged any funds, though there was a very helpful readout on the screen showing just how much energy I had used. It turns out that it was indeed a free vend, because of whatever the issue was that had caused the station to lock in use. I wonder just how many stations that kind of issue affects and how many drivers are able to get free charges.

With that, I had enough range for the family day trip out, my journey to the office and to be able to hand back the vehicle with an appropriate mileage left. Though I had the initial inconvenience with charging at a public station, for me public charging here was no real issue. I imagine it would be if there were no free bays, or there was a technical fault with the station that could not be fixed remotely. Nonetheless, if I were to continue to have the same general experience with every public charge, I would be quite happy.

Though my demo was only short, I feel I had a good experience with it, using it with the mind-set of two types of charger-requirements. I feel enlightened by the experience and loved almost everything about driving the electric car and adapting to the electric lifestyle. The advantages I believe far outweigh the negatives when compared to a conventional ICE vehicle; smoother ride, quick response, ease and cost of fuelling (unless your local charging station has phantom users). For me, the idea of never needing to go to a petrol station again is a dream. I love electric so much, I think I'll go and look at the cost to buy one now… oh… how much?!

A week later, I did in fact order a new BMW i3s.