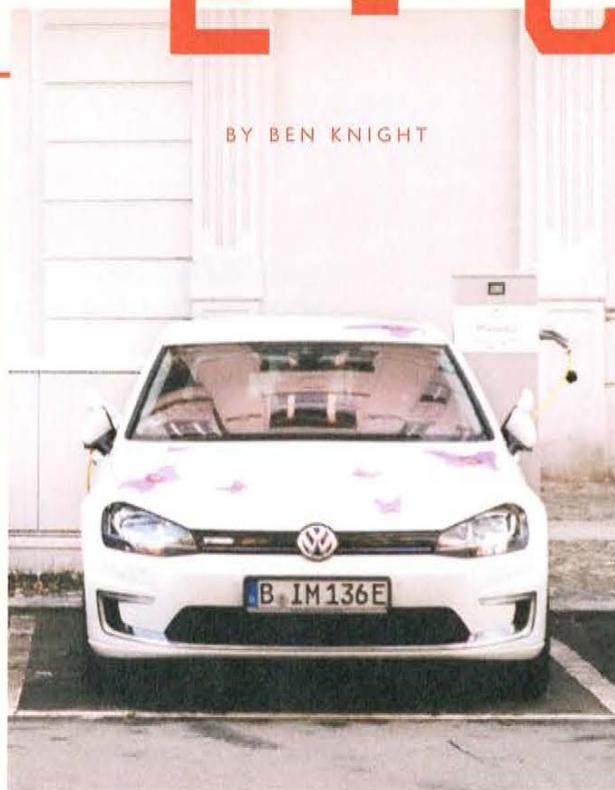


LEARNING TO DRIVE AN E-CAR

BY BEN KNIGHT



PHOTOGRAPHY:
FABIAN ZAPATKA



Stretched across the doors of Lothar Taubert's white VW e-Golf there's a picture of a green caterpillar formed out of a string of VW beetles. The hood and roof, meanwhile, are dotted with purple butterflies with an electric motor for a body. The image doesn't need much interpretation: electric vehicles are the next stage in the development of the automobile – an advance on petrol cars that will one day unfold new possibilities, like the wings of a butterfly.

Of course for now, most e-cars are little more than converted petrol cars. True, they offer a smoother ride and better acceleration, but essentially carmakers are still taking baby steps on the way to innovating mobility.

Lothar knows that only too well. But as the owner of "inno.M", Berlin's first e-mobility driving school, he is also a pioneer of the new technology. Four years ago, he became the first private citizen to be

granted an electro charging station by the state of Berlin and the company Allego. Today, the 65-year-old is driving round the affluent Charlottenburg district of Berlin along with his young pupil Jonas, who is tentatively guiding the e-Golf through the crowded morning traffic. "I got an e-Golf because it suits both driving lessons and driving tests, and it was in a better price class for me than other electric cars," Lothar explains on the way. "I talked to all the other companies – but I couldn't always do the tests in them."

What's immediately clear is that an e-car is virtually the same as driving an automatic diesel or petrol car, but it's appreciably smoother and quieter. Though that does make some things trickier: the VW glides around in near-silence, which means Lothar has to keep an eye out for inattentive pedestrians playing with their smartphones (a pet peeve of his): "That's one area where you have to teach students to look

a little bit more," he says. "But there are advantages too: you always have two hands on the wheel, because there's no changing gears."

Having been in the job for over thirty years, Lothar gives the lesson with practised ease, interspersing his instructions ("Right at the lights, please") and mild rebukes ("You're too close to the line again!") with philosophical questions about society ("I read a study that says Germans are one of the most travel-friendly people in the world. Doesn't that mean they're not happy where they are?").



gested, young people have less disposable income, and e-cars are more expensive than petrol cars – together, these three factors mean that young people are more likely to make use of car-sharing services than buy their own cars. Indeed, the 19-year-old Jonas confirms that even though he is keen to do his test, he wouldn't necessarily buy a car if he decided to stay in Berlin.

All this will, Taubert recognizes, be a significant cultural change for Germans of his generation. "My car is my castle – that used to be the German way of life," he says with a laugh.

“ YOU HAVE TO TEACH THE STUDENTS TO LOOK A LITTLE BIT MORE. ”

There's a good reason for Lothar's intellectual curiosity: he began his career as a sociologist before opening his first driving school in the early 1980s. As such, he sees the school as part of an attempt to innovate society itself – he also teaches students how to be CO₂ aware. "If you wait for politicians to get anything done we'd all be dead," he reasons.

An irrepressible optimist, Taubert thinks that modern driving habits will help push the popularity of e-mobility. "Street traffic isn't a technological system, it's a social system," the inno.M flyer reads, and Taubert encourages his students to think about why exactly they want to learn to drive, what their mobility needs are, and what vehicle would best meet those needs.

These are important questions. Cities like Berlin are getting more and more con-

Lothar Taubert, owner of Berlin's first e-mobility driving school, with his 19-year-old pupil, Jonas.

“ STREET TRAFFIC ISN'T A TECHNOLOGICAL SYSTEM, IT'S A SOCIAL SYSTEM. ”



Taubert opened inno.M four years ago, and now has some 150 students a year. He is one of only two teachers, and his pupils have a choice of learning in a zero-emission e-Golf, with its automatic gearbox, or a natural-gas-driven car, which produces up to 80 percent less emissions and up to 20 percent less greenhouse gases.

But there is also more to the school than that, he has partnered with local initiatives aimed at changing mobility habits: as of January, he has started to rent out electro-cargo bikes in cooperation with Berlin's Technical University.

This is because he thinks of inno.M as more than just a school for kids to learn about parallel parking and overtaking: "The name stands for innovative mobility. That's what we are: a mobility school."

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NO. 01 / 2018 FEBRUARY — JUNE

Learning to
drive an e-car:
some things
are tricky.

— PAGE 10

Care about the planet

The
Volkswagen
Group is
launching
Roadmap E,
the most
comprehen-
sive electri-
fication
initiative in
the global
automotive
industry.

— PAGE 6

Today's
electric cars
are faster
and more
affordable.

The Auto-
stadt is out to
showcase the
new trend's
leading edge.

— PAGE 12

Sophisti- cated, sensual and sharp

— PAGE 16

The 16th Movimentos Festival from 4 April to 6 May 2018:
contemporary dance, classical, jazz and pop concerts,
theatre, readings, and discussions.

— PAGE 20

Support for
fine artists,
musicians,
dancers and
digital
pioneers.

— PAGE 24

“The Porsche
Pavilion –
that dramatic
wave hanging
over a mini-
lake, makes
this the
most striking
pavilion in
my eyes.”

— PAGE 26

Placing indi- vidual blocks on a circuit.

— PAGE 28

Cut into
thick
slices and
spread
with butter
melting
into warm
softness
is how the

epicurean usually
enjoys the treat.

— PAGE 30

