

# “Revenge is a Dish Best Served... Without Emissions”

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By David Harris

In the 2006 documentary “Who Killed the Electric Car?” director Chris Paine went after his suspects like a hardboiled detective searching for answers in the wake of a murder.

Was it GM? Was it big oil? Was it the government? Or maybe it was us — American consumers choosing SUVs over the environment. In the end, Paine argued, everybody was a little guilty.

But 2006 was a long time ago, back when Hummers were humming along our highways at nine miles per gallon. With his follow-up “Revenge of the Electric Car,” opening October 21 in Los Angeles and New York, Paine is no longer peeking into this world through the looking glass. He’s

now the consummate insider, a keen observer of the larger-than-life players at the forefront of the great transportation debate.

“The first film was more of an argument, especially because the electric car got the big boot at the end,” explains Paine, fresh from a gathering of underground electric car conversion enthusiasts in Missouri. “This time around it’s nice to have a story that doesn’t end in disaster.”

That optimistic outlook seems fueled by the enthusiasm and competitive fire of the major characters in “Revenge.” There’s Bob Lutz, the gruff, cigar-chomping GM executive who oversaw the company’s destruction of the popular EV1, its beloved first generation electric experiment.



During one scene, as President Obama delivers a speech on the heels of the government bailout of GM, the camera glides through a beautifully-marbled — but very empty — company building. It almost feels like a eulogy for the old GM. The question is whether they can be reborn.

While no one can predict the price of oil, or the ongoing development of lighter, more powerful lithium-ion batteries, the film leaves us feeling sunny about the prospect of an electric tomorrow. In the end, all three moguls position themselves for success.

“I feel like they belong on Mt. Olympus,” says Paine. “They all share the ability to get through down times.”

But the happy ending wouldn’t be complete without another character we meet along the road — Greg “Gadget” Abbott, a backyard, do-it-

Lutz is now, apparently, a converted true believer.

There’s also dot-com billionaire Elon Musk, a.k.a. the “Rocket Man,” who poured his significant fortune as one of PayPal’s founder into Tesla Motors, the sexy new girl on the electric car block. Musk is convinced Silicon Valley can do things better than Detroit.

Rounding out these three big-pocketed visionaries is Carlos Ghosn, the no nonsense head of Nissan. He’s going all in with company chips to sell an affordable, mass-produced EV, the Nissan LEAF, to the world market.

The audience sits shotgun as the Leaf, the Chevy Volt, and the Tesla Roadster (their less expensive sedan is slated to launch in mid-2012) get worked and reworked for their big roll outs. It beomes not a question of if this will succeed, but when. And who.

The stakes are real. Tesla’s near bankruptcy and subsequent IPO launch on Wall Street almost feels like a horror film sequence, while GM’s campaign to convince skeptical consumers it can deliver a quality electric car delves into dark comedy.

“GM has huge obstacles to overcome, and the question is will people come back to the brand,” says Paine, who recently traded in his own Toyota Prius for a Volt.

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yourself electric car converter. Gadget’s pride and joy is a converted Porsche Speedster he’s hoping to mass produce.

When his prized shop goes up in flames from arson, the third act seems a little tragic. It’s only as Gadget sifts through the ashes car and rebuilds his shop that we’re reminded of what genre this movie is. It’s not a film noir mystery, a thriller, or even the monster flick Paine said he wanted to do. It’s a romance, with the entrepreneurial American spirit driving the story.

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