Greener Cars in Our Garages

By Dr. Richard Kelley

There is a lot going on in Waikiki that will give our visitors an opportunity to drive more fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly automobiles. It is a work in progress and the details will change, but here is a brief update on where we are heading.

First of all, what exactly is an “environmentally friendly” car? Most would agree the term refers to vehicles that use less hydrocarbon fuel and generate lower carbon emissions. It’s relative. For example:

A small, lightweight Ford Fiesta, rated at a combined (city and highway travel) 32 miles per gallon (mpg) is environmentally friendly when compared with a Cadillac SUV, which gets 16 mpg.

Hybrid vehicles, which combine an internal combustion engine and an electrical propulsion system, use much less gasoline. For example, Toyota reports that the Prius, which sold over 2 million units in 2011, enjoys a combined 50 mpg rating.

An all-electric vehicle uses no gasoline and emits no carbon dioxide. However, generating the electricity used to charge its battery does emit carbon dioxide and other pollutants, unless the power is derived from nuclear, geothermal, solar, wind or hydroelectric sources.

All Outrigger and OHANA hotels on O‘ahu whose parking facilities are large enough to meet the threshold of a new Hawai‘i law have now designated at least two parking spaces for use by electric vehicles (EVs). Each space has charging equipment that allows drivers to easily connect their vehicles to O‘ahu’s electrical grid and “fill up” or “top off” their batteries with power while parked. The equipment was paid for by federal and state grants; our company paid for the installation and does not currently charge for the electricity.

Right now, these EV parking spaces are only rarely used. That’s not surprising because, as of January 2012, there were fewer than 500 EVs registered on O‘ahu.

When the number of EVs does increase, there will be many issues to resolve. Will there be EV spaces also designated for handicapped-accessible parking? How do we allocate EV spaces between registered guests, visitors shopping or dining, concessionaires, employees, etc.? What about liability issues? Where should the EV spaces

Continued on page 2
Greener Cars in Our Garages
Continued from page 1

be located? There will also be different procedures for self-parking vs. valet parking.

With Hawai‘i’s electricity rates almost three times higher than the national average, when EV use increases, we will have to start charging for plugging in a vehicle, but that is likely to get complicated too. We’ll keep you posted.

In the meantime, two kama‘aina (Hawai‘i resident) entrepreneurs, Warren Doi and Justin MacNaughton, have started GreenCar Hawaii, the state’s first car-share service. Their goal is to have environmentally friendly vehicles available in every hotel that guests can reserve in advance and rent by the hour through kiosks in the lobby. Vehicles, which are delivered to the guest by the hotel’s valet service, include hybrid and all-electric models. GreenCar Hawaii is currently operating on O‘ahu and Kaua‘i, but not yet in Outrigger or OHANA properties.

On O‘ahu, electric vehicles don’t generally have enough charge in their batteries for a circle-island trip, but that should be mitigated as more electric charging stations spring up along the North Shore.

I told Justin that GreenCar Hawaii’s operations remind me of how we handled car rentals at the REEF Hotel in 1957, over half a century ago. Hertz, Budget, Avis and Alamo had not yet come to Hawai‘i. In fact, there were really no reliable car rental companies. Joining forces with tour operator Bob MacGregor, we formed Trade Wind Rent A Car, Inc., purchased six vehicles and had them available in the basement parking lot for rental by hotel guests. A school classmate of mine manned the car rental booth as a summer job. He kept the cars 100 percent rented but also found time to romance and eventually marry the young lady selling luaus and circle-island tours at the nearby Trade Wind Tours desk. But that’s a story for another day.

Good luck to Warren and Justin and everyone in our ‘ohana who is working hard to keep Hawai‘i green.

GreenCar co-founders Justin MacNaughton and Warren Doi stand next to a Ford hybrid-electric SUV