

Who Killed the Electric Car?

Written by Administrator

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Chris Paine (2006) *Who Killed the Electric Car?* (DVD)

It begins with a solemn funeral...for a car. By the end of Chris Paine's lively and informative documentary, the idea doesn't seem quite so strange. As narrator Martin Sheen notes, "They were quiet and fast, produced no exhaust and ran without gasoline." Paine proceeds to show how this unique vehicle came into being and why General Motors ended up reclaiming its once-prized creation less than a decade later. He begins 100 years ago with the original electric car. By the 1920s, the internal-combustion engine had rendered it obsolete. By the 1980s, however, car companies started exploring alternative energy sources, like solar power. This, in turn, led to the late, great battery-powered EV1. Throughout, Paine deftly translates hard science and complex politics, such as California's Zero-Emission Vehicle Mandate, into lay person's terms (director Alex Gibney, Oscar-nominated for *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*, served as consulting producer). And everyone gets the chance to have their say: engineers, politicians, protesters, and petroleum spokespeople--even celebrity drivers, like Peter Horton, Alexandra Paul, and a wild man beard-sporting Mel Gibson. But the most persuasive participant is former Saturn employee Chelsea Sexton. Promoting the benefits of the EV1 was more than a job to her, and she continues to lobby for more environmentally friendly options. Sexton provides the small ray of hope Paine's film so desperately needs. *Who Killed the Electric Car?* is, otherwise, a tremendously sobering experience. --Kathleen C. Fennessy