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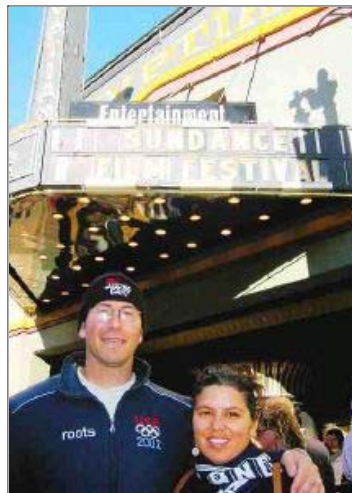
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Foothill Couple Part of Film Fest

Movie examining death of electric vehicles, with Catheys Valley case, showing at Sundance

By David Chircop



Catheys Valley electric vehicle advocates Dave Raboy, left and Heather Bernikoff, await the premiere showing of the documentary "Who Killed the Electric Car?" at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah, earlier this week.

DCHIRCOP@MERCEDSUN-STAR.COM

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A Catheys Valley couple that gained notoriety from a battle with Ford Motor Co. joined like-minded cheerleaders of the electric car this week at the Sundance Film Festival. Dave Raboy and Heather Bernikoff took an 800-mile trek from their sprawling Mariposa County ranch to Park City, Utah, for the premiere of "Who Killed the Electric Car?"


"It's been amazing to see the reactions of the audiences," said Raboy by telephone while waiting in line for the third screening of the documentary film Thursday afternoon. "They can't believe the car companies worked so hard to crush these electric vehicles."


Raboy and Bernikoff are featured in a snippet of the film touching on protests ignited after car companies pulled the plug on electric-vehicle lease programs.

The politically charged "whodunit" takes aim at car manufacturers that killed electric-powered programs in favor of pursuing hybrid gasoline and hydrogen technology.

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The electric car revolution in California was spurred by mandates passed down to automakers from the state Air Resources Board, which sought to cut down on car exhaust emissions.

The film follows the life and death of GM's EV-1 electric car, which required no gas, no oil, no muffler, no brake changes and produced no smog-forming emissions.

After spending \$1 billion on the EV-1 and building 1,000 cars, GM ended the program in 2000.

The filmmakers conclude the car model threatened the status quo and was killed by special interests that stood to lose.

Automakers, however, have largely written off electric vehicle programs, saying a lack of demand led to their demise.

Director Chris Paine leased an EV-1 in 1997 and drove it almost exclusively.

He said it was fast, quiet, tune-up free and fun.

When GM canceled the lease program, it refused to sell it to him or extend the lease, he said.

He considered stealing it, but the contract made that difficult.

"So when GM repossessed it and then reportedly destroyed it, there was only one thing left I could think to do -- make a film," he said.

Raboy had a similar tug-of-war with Ford when the lease on his zero-emissions electric Ford Ranger expired last year.

In January, Raboy, a rancher and software developer, and Bernikoff, a grant writer, camped outside a downtown Sacramento Ford dealership for several days in protest of the company's plan to scrap its truck.

Their protest, assisted by San Francisco-based Rainforest Action Network and Global Exchange, drew national media attention to their fight.

Ford eventually let them keep the truck, which ranges between 60 to 80 miles on a full charge.

Raboy and Bernikoff use solar energy for most of their electricity needs, including charging the truck, which they use for daily errands.

In addition to their electric car, they also have two converted Ford F250 4 x 4 diesel trucks that run on pure vegetable oil.

The veggie oil cars pollute less than regular diesel.

With escalating gasoline costs and political instability in oil rich nations of the Middle East, Raboy said finding alternatives to petroleum cuts across political lines.

"Everybody can understand getting off of foreign oil," he said.

Bernikoff said the Central Valley particularly stands to gain from more widespread use of cleaner vehicles.

Fueled by smog-making gas released from dairy cows and cars, the Central Valley has one of the dirtiest air basins in the country.

"Who Killed the Electric Car?" is being distributed by Sony Pictures Classics and is slated for wide release later this year.

For more online:

www.whokilledtheelectriccar.com

Reporter David Chircop can be reached at 385-2453 or dchircop@mercedsun-star.com.

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