

## Former race car driver building electric cars

Written by By ANGELA D. SYKORA  
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They might resemble a golf cart, but the low-speed battery electric vehicles being built by former race car driver Morris Clement are geared toward a greener purpose than cruising the fairway.

The idea is to have a vehicle that will save you money and be fun to drive," said Clement, owner of Fastlane Lube Masters at 6280 Grand Ave., at Gurnee Mills.



**Gurnee Fastlane Lube Masters owner, Morris Clement, stands next to one of his low-speed, electric vehicles.** (Photo By Brian O'Mahoney/Staff Photographer)

Clement was recently approved for a special use permit from the village to allow for the sale and service of low-speed vehicles, also known as neighborhood electric vehicles, or NEVs.

Because the vehicles are battery-operated, said Clement, owners can save big compared to what they spend on their gas-guzzlers.

"If you spend \$100 on gas in a month, you would spend \$10 for this vehicle."

The eco-friendly NEVs, which received their classification from the National Traffic Safety Administration in 1998, are perfect for running errands, picking up groceries or even the kids from school, said Clement's wife, Mary.

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"In my mind, it's ideal for short trips when you're just going a few miles."

With speeds of up to 25 mph, the 4-wheel NEVs are not for driving on highways, but streets where the posted speed limit is 35 mph or less.

States including Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Texas and Wisconsin allow them on their roads. As of Jan. 1, 2010, so will Illinois.

However, the Illinois Department of Transportation, a municipality, township or county may prohibit by resolution or ordinance the operation of NEVs on streets in their jurisdiction if it is determined public safety would be jeopardized.

State law will require operators to be licensed and insured and possess a certificate of title and proper registration plates and stickers for their vehicle.

At Fastlane, Clement is fabricating his first prototype, called the "Orange Crate Special" for its back-end storage compartment.

He's using his own parts, including race car components, and an E-Z GO frame by the Textron Company, the world's largest manufacturer of golf carts and utility vehicles.

Clement said the vehicles can go for 40 miles before the battery needs recharged, and the battery only needs to be replaced every five or six years.

The vehicles can be operated in the snow and "even drive up a mountain," he said.

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Coverings are also available for inclement weather.

The cost of these hybrid vehicles can range from \$3,500 used to \$20,000 new, said Clement, but even the more expensive models can be affordable.

Owners may qualify for a federal tax rebate up to several thousand dollars, the result of the economic stimulus bill passed in February.

Though big auto companies sell NEVs, "I'm one of only three or four people in the country doing this," said Clement, who insists his fabricated vehicles are sturdier and have better quality parts than others on the market.

Part of the reason for that, said Clement, is that he uses race car components, which he knows from experience to be superior in quality and safety.

"I'm very picky because I've built my own race cars.

In May 2008, Clement, a national championship race car driver with the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA), was featured in Kit Car magazine for building a Cobra sports car that can go 200 mph, the fastest ever made.

Clement is optimistic he can make a go of his new business venture and hopes to attract buyers from across the Midwest.