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Diehard Tesla Owners Are in a Heated Race—With No End in Sight

Fans compete to visit the most company fast-charging stations, but new ones keep coming; ‘there’s no sanity involved here’

By [Rebecca Elliott](#) [Follow](#)

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Andy Hall recently drove his Tesla Model 3 from his home in Big Horn, Wyo., to Washington, D.C., for his daughter’s graduate-school commencement ceremony. He turned what is normally an 1,800-mile affair into a 10,000-mile, 15-day odyssey with more than 80 stops in places such as Miami Beach and Quebec City.

Dr. Hall, a retired ophthalmologist, is part of a cadre of die-hard Tesla owners who are racing to visit as many of the company’s fast-charging stations, called Superchargers, as possible. It’s a competition without a prize or even a finish line.

Participants track their progress on a shared Google spreadsheet. A car must draw electricity from a charger for a site to count; if the device is broken, it’s tough luck. A few years ago, there was a debate over whether it was fair game to fly to Europe, rent a Tesla and hit Superchargers there. Players decided it was, to the chagrin of Dr. Hall.

Dr. Hall, known to his competitors as Bighorn, is in either first or second place, depending on the metric used, out of around a dozen die-hards and many more regular participants. He entered the race around 2014 after buying his first Tesla, a Model S. He has since powered up at 1,504 fast-charging stations in the U.S. and Canada, nearly all of the estimated 1,515 open sites in those countries.

His chief rival is George Abel of Seattle. He has visited 1,620 Superchargers globally, 1,493 of them in North America. Mr. Abel, also known as PLUS EV, didn’t learn about the game until 2017, making him a relative latecomer.



“I knew immediately: This could get ugly, but in a good way,” recalls Mr. Abel, a serial bucket-lister who also has seen a game at every Major League Baseball stadium in the U.S.

He charged into first place—undisputed at the time—in a matter of months, thanks to a roughly 40-day, 26,000-mile charging spree in his Model S. Mr. Abel has been dueling ever since with Dr. Hall, who has never quite forgiven him for going overseas. “We have different denominators—not that I’m bitter,” Dr. Hall says.

Tesla’s network of fast-chargers serves only Tesla cars in most of the world, although the company has begun opening it to other car makes in parts of Europe. As of this spring, Tesla had built more than 3,700 stations globally, about 1,000 of which had opened in the prior year.



Hitting them all is a Sisyphean challenge. On two occasions several years ago, Dr. Hall checked off all but one of the fast-charging stations in the U.S. Then Tesla opened new ones. None of today's top-ranked players has ever managed a clean sweep of the U.S.

Both Mr. Abel and Dr. Hall told themselves they would quit once they hit 1,000, only to blow past that milestone. "It takes two to not tango," says Dr. Hall, who took the long way home from D.C. in hopes of holding on to the top spot in the U.S. and Canada. Mr. Abel, meanwhile, headed east on his own charging spree.

Strategies vary. Dr. Hall tries to knock out chargers as quickly as possible, surviving on catnaps he takes on a cushion he keeps in the back of his Tesla. Mr. Abel often improvises his routes and finds himself calling around to hotels at the last minute.

On a recent 17-hour driving day through California, Dr. Hall subsisted on smoked turkey, Ritz crackers and Brie. He made it to his 11th new charger of the day just before midnight. "You're only winning temporarily," Dr. Hall says. "When you stop, you're gonna lose."



John Harris, currently in fifth place, schedules his longer journeys with the help of a route-planner that optimizes his path to new chargers. "There's no sanity involved here," says Mr. Harris, aka Tdreamer, who works for a software company and has visited 977 fast-chargers.

Fewer than 100 of the charging stations were open in March 2014, when Butch Weaver, a former Qualcomm Inc. engineering executive, posted on the Tesla Motors Club forum proposing "a little contest for the most Superchargers used."

Mr. Weaver, who owned a Roadster, Tesla's first production car, and a Model S, had spent years obsessively plotting his routes between conventional chargers to avoid running out of juice. Tesla's fast-chargers changed that, Mr. Weaver says, enabling cars to get enough juice in about 20 minutes to drive 100 miles. It used to take several hours.

Using them was free, and still is, for many of those who bought Teslas early on. That helped foster the competition, which doesn't have a formal name. Mr. Abel calls it the Crazy Roadtrippers Club. Lawson Earl, currently in fourth place with 1,147 chargers, describes it as Pokémon Go for cars.



Mr. Earl—Big Earl to other players—is among those who share their locations with other Supercharger hunters when they are out on the road. Using what Mr. Earl affectionately calls the "stalk-my-friends app" can cost drivers a competitive edge, making it easier for players to spot when a rival is on a big charging spree. But it comes with a benefit: meetups.

Players often head to their local Supercharger when they see another competitor is passing through town. Many also meet annually in Custer, S.D., where Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk stayed in 2014 after he was said to have nearly run out of juice on a cross-country road trip. The local chamber of commerce now holds an annual Tesla rally where Supercharger-hunters recognize the person in first place. It happened last weekend. Dr. Hall took the title.

Many players concede they are unlikely to catch Mr. Abel and Dr. Hall. To keep things interesting, they have concocted side contests, such as most new chargers visited in a day or a year. Players also get kudos for being the first in the game to visit a newly opened charging site.

The two leaders, for their part, aren't letting up. Jeannie Hall, Dr. Hall's wife, says she doesn't much like spending her days on the road, but the competition has sucked her in, too.

Last year, after Mr. Abel passed Dr. Hall on the U.S. and Canada count, Ms. Hall helped her husband plan a comeback trip to Florida. "I was like, yeah, no, we're not going to let that happen," she says. "You have invested way too much time in this situation."



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