

Red tape stalls the car that uses no fuel

Reva 'arrested'

EXCLUSIVE

Kevin Naughton

DESPITE record high petrol prices, the world's cheapest, all-electric, commercially available car is sitting in a Customs warehouse while bureaucrats decide how to classify it for on-road use.

The Reva, a fully automatic two-door hatchback, has attracted government subsidies in Japan and the UK. But its Australian importer is locked in a certification struggle with the Department of Transport and Regional Services, which refuses to approve the car.

Adrian Ferraretto, who also runs the Adelaide-based Solar Shop, secured national distribution rights several months ago.

"There's actually been a Reva here for 18 months, but the argument is whether it should be registered as a quadbike or as a standard passenger vehicle, and it doesn't quite fit into either category," he said.

"In other countries they have just declared the car is in its own category. In London they've gone so far as exempting it from road tax and parking fees."

Ranked by India's *Overdrive Magazine* as Europe's most energy-efficient car, it has been sold around the world since early 2002 and

One of the versions available overseas



THE REVA

DEVELOPED in the late 1990s by Indian engineer Chetan Maini and launched in June 2001. It is sold in many countries, including Japan, the UK, Malta, Romania, Sri Lanka, Israel and Ireland.

DESIGN: Two-door hatchback

LOAD: Four (two adults, two children - 227 Kg)

CHARGE TIME: 80 per cent in 2½ hours; 100 per cent in six hours

TOP SPEED: 65 km/h

LENGTH: 2.638m

HEIGHT: 1.510m

WHEEL BASE: 1.710m

UNLADEN WEIGHT: 750kg

RANGE: Up to 100km

WIDTH: 1.324m

GROUND CLEARANCE: 15cm

TURNING RADIUS: 3.505m

COST: About \$15,000

received its European Economic Community Certificate in December 2003.

But a spokeswoman for Federal Transport and Regional Services Minister Jim Lloyd said the car had a long

way to go to meet standards and the appropriate paperwork was yet to be supplied.

"This vehicle does not currently meet Australian crash standards and as such cannot be complied as it does

not meet Australian Design Rules," she said.

The department also had sought UK advice on whether restrictions applied on those vehicles in Europe.

The *Sunday Mail* dis-

covered the car had been driven around London since early 2004 by former MP and Conservative Party chairman, Archie Norman.

"It is a no-brainer to drive and has everything a commuter could ask for," Mr Norman said.

"Although it does not quite have the looks of a Jaguar or Aston Martin, it is striking and attracts attention - particularly from the ladies."

The all-electric Reva is battery-operated and can be recharged at any 15-amp power point. It cruises at 50-65km/h with a faster version available as a convertible roadster. Fully charged, it has a range of 80-100km.

Mr Ferraretto estimated 60c of electricity would give enough charge for 100km.

Maintenance costs reflect the absence of normal moving parts associated with internal combustion engines.

"Despite its cheap price tag (\$15,000), it still boasts the luxury of remote controlled airconditioning, climate control seats and two onboard computers," he said.

Mr Ferraretto said he also intended to market the car with an additional \$10,000 option for solar electricity panels to be installed at the owners' house.

Meanwhile, he waits for departmental approval and then has to deal with various state departments.