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## 'This Is Our Future ...'

April 22, 1996 | By RANDI F. KLEIN and Special to the Sun-Sentinel

A year ago this month, Randi Klein, an artist for the Gold Coast Shopper, received a letter from Florida Power & Light. It said General Motors and FPL were working together to test the feasibility of electric cars and needed drivers to participate in their PreView Drive Program. Klein called, received a questionnaire and finally, last September, was contacted by FPL.

After checking the wiring that would be needed for the charger in her house and ensuring that she could use another charger at work, FPL officially welcomed Klein into the program in October. Following are highlights of her diary.

Saturday, Oct. 7, 1995: My daughter, Jana, and I drive to FPL in Plantation to see The Car. It's sporty, sleek and really neat looking - with what looks like the back end of a Jag and the front end of a Mitsubishi GT 3000.

I'm told it can go from 0 to 60 mph in 8 seconds and has a top speed of 80 mph. Plus, it has all the features you'd expect of a new car: ABS brakes, power steering, electric windows, AM/FM radio/cassette/CD player, air bags and a cell phone.

They tell us they spent five years perfecting the design of the Impact. There are 60 drivers, and each of us will have two weeks of driving, with nine cars on the road between now and March. My turn will be Feb. 5-19. Just in time for my birthday on the 12th.

Monday, Jan. 29, 1996: For the next seven days, I'm to write down when I use my regular car, what the road conditions, traffic patterns, etc., are. Every night I will mail out that day's report.

I've started the countdown to Monday, Feb. 5, when GM and FPL will deliver my car. I can't wait!

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Wednesday, Jan. 31, 1996: The power has been installed and I'm ready to drive! Both my home and my office in Deerfield have been wired. I'm still completing my Pre-Drive Diary as I wait for Monday to come and the delivery of the Impact. Only four days to go!

Friday, Feb. 2, 1996: I received a call from FPL reminding me that my car will be delivered on Monday, Feb. 5, at 9 a.m. sharp. I can't wait to drive this car! History in the making and I'm a part of it. This is our future, mine and my daughter's. She most likely will own an electric car someday - or maybe I will. Time will tell. Let the test drive begin!

Monday, Feb. 5, 1996: Right on time at 9 a.m., Earl Heron, a field service engineer from GM, and an FPL technician arrive at my home with my Impact.

It is so cold this morning - one of the coldest days yet this year. There I am with Earl on the driveway for more than 1 1/2 hours, going over the car step by step before my test drive can begin. Earl explains everything from the daily logs I am to fill out to the tire gauge in the trunk. The car uses a key only to open the doors and trunk. I am asked to pick a five-digit code that will be used to start the car. How cool!

After Earl leaves, I'm free to drive. My first trip: getting my daughter Jana from school.

This car handles like a dream. It's responsive, yet feels solid on the road. But I also experience my first problem right away. Since it's cold, the car's range (the estimated miles you can travel on a charge) has been reduced by 40 percent. I run out of electricity right in front of my daughter's school. Driving down Oakland, I noticed first the "battery damage" light came on, then the "reduced performance" light, then "service soon" - and by time I got to school the "service now" light was on and I was dead as a doornail in the parking lot. How embarrassing.

I call Earl on the cell phone and ask him what I should do. He comes with the van and trailer in case he

has to tow me home. He gets the car started and follows me home to Lauderhill so I can charge the car and he can plug in his laptop to see what the problem is. He finds it is indeed the cold, as he suspected - a problem GM is working on, along with different batteries to increase the driving range of the car.

Tuesday, Feb. 6, 1996: All of my friends have been stopping by to check out the car. Everyone agrees that this is one cool car, but we all wish it could travel farther on a charge.

Wednesday, Feb. 7, 1996: My first trip on the Sawgrass today, driving to the office. This car handles well at all speeds and keeps up with traffic with no problems. The man at the toll plaza asks, "What kind of car is that?" I say, "Electric," and he gives me the thumbs-up sign.

My parking spot is waiting for me by the loading dock [her company gave her the spot so she could be near the charger during this test). I could get spoiled from this treatment.

At lunch a few of my co-workers stop to check out the car. We go for a test drive, and then I plug the Impact in to charge while I go back to work. Charging is easy: I just remove a paddle from the charger and plug the car in. I'm spoiled. I don't ever want to give this car back!

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