



'Why buy a Corvette when you can buy a Zanis?'

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The Plexiglas, pyramid-shaped, 8,000-pound vehicle that seats one and runs on 80 batteries that power four electric engines doesn't resemble anything you'd see in a showroom today.

But Greg Zanis of Sugar Grove Township hopes his prototype can contribute in some small way to the development of a totally electric car in the near future.

Zanis and his sons have built the prototype after more than a year of hard work and an investment of about \$60,000 in supplies, and the construction of numerous scale models.

Zanis estimates that the car will travel only 80 miles before the batteries need re-charging (which takes about 4 hours), so it isn't very practical. But he will eagerly extol its virtues.

"It's revolutionary," said Zanis, a carpenter who is best known for his penchant for putting up crosses at tragic crime scenes locally and across the country. "Other people have converted gas-driven cars into electric cars. We built this from the ground up, we built the frame.

"It has neon lights that glow from the inside out, so it's unique, very different. The pyramid shape matches the frame and makes it aero-dynamic. And it is very safe."

Zanis and his 25-year-old son Chris -- who works with him in the remodeling business -- and his 15-year-old son Greg finished the car in December. They call their project Dream Car, and their Web site is www.dreamcar123.com.

Zanis said the car can reach 45 miles per hour, rides on four gel-filled tires, has a bumper that wraps completely around the car, possesses an electric braking system that locks the wheels for an immediate stop, and has four-wheel drive. The batteries weigh 80 pounds a piece. The car's total weight of 8,000 pounds is more than double that of his 3,500-pound pickup truck.

Zanis' passion for building the car didn't spring up overnight.

It is rooted in an idea he had in childhood, and a desire to contribute to a cleaner alternative to the gasoline engine.

He gives much of the credit to his sons.

Chris helps with wiring on the job and both sons enjoy the hobby of remote-control cars. In planning for the project, Chris and Greg built four, 1/4-scale models and several smaller versions. They completed a full-sized car in March that didn't run, but finished the present model in December.

"My sons helped me tremendously," he said. "They tackled all the questions I had and they wired the car for me."

He has patents pending for the car and various components of the design

Zanis was also helped by members of the Fox Valley Electric Auto Association. The group meets in Naperville and promotes the construction and use of electric cars.

Ted Lowe of Wheaton, who is president of the association, says that Zanis' car helps to fulfill the group's mission, even if it isn't a soaring breakthrough.

"He has learned a ton about building an electric car," Lowe said. "Maybe it won't be driven because it isn't practical. But one thing leads to another and it's a stepping stone. And who knows what may come next?"

Zanis would like to see American car manufacturers work faster in developing an electric car. He doesn't believe the focus should be on converting a gasoline-driven car, but rather building a frame for an electric car.

He intends to build a faster model with a range of 500 miles. He also wants to include an air bag system and a side entrance.

Zanis says that he needs a backer or funding of \$40,000 to continue. He doesn't want to go into debt.

Still, he dreams for himself and his sons.

"Why buy a Corvette when you can buy a Zanis?" he asked with a smile.