1920s: Cheap gas, electric starters, and a superior ability to travel long distances help gasoline cars to dominate the auto market and slowly send electric cars into obscurity.

1966: U.S. Congress passes the first bill endorsing electric vehicles

1885: First practical car, the three-wheel Benz, is built in Europe.

1891: First electric car is built in the United States.

1897: First commercial U.S. electric cars, Electrobat Taxis, hit the roads in New York.

1890: Lohner-Porsche gas and electric hybrid presented at the Paris Exposition.

1904: More than 1/3 of New York, Boston, and Chicago's vehicles are electric, of various makes and models.

Sources:
Nissan USA.
U.S. Energy Information Administration.

1859: The lead-acid battery is invented by Gaston Plante.

1879: Thomas Edison installs electric lights in New York City, popularizing electricity.

1859: Large oil deposits are discovered in Pennsylvania, marking the beginning of widespread petroleum use.

1908: Henry Ford begins to mass produce the Model T, selling it for $850.

1949-'51: In Japan, Tama Electric Motorcars sells an electric car during a severe gas shortage.

1960s: Automakers experiment with electric cars, though none are widely adopted.

1972: A Buick Skylark is made into an electric hybrid for the U.S. Clean Car Incentive Program, but the program ends in '76.

1990: California orders automakers to sell electric vehicles through its Zero Emissions Vehicle Mandate. (The requirements are retracted by 2003).

1999: Toyota releases the Prius in California, a hybrid vehicle that uses regenerative breaking. This first generation cannot be "plugged in" to charge.

1999: General Motors buys Hummer.

1996: General Motors begins leasing the EV1, one of several electric brands rolled out to meet California's Zero Emissions rules.

2006: After suing California in 2001 for its mandate, automakers like GM, Ford, and Nissan, have pulled nearly all their electric cars off California's roads. Some are not merely mothballed but crushed or shredded.

2011: The Tesla Roadster electric sports car is offered. It has a range of 245 miles but costs over $100,000.

2010: Nissan delivers first U.S. customer the Leaf, an electric car with 100 mile range, a lithium-ion battery, and regenerative braking.

2015: Year by which most major automakers announce they will sell fully electric vehicles.

2008: Gas prices are more than $3 per gallon.

2011: Hybrid cars with regenerative braking are available from at least 15 automakers. Plug-in hybrids are becoming available.

2004: Gas prices are $2 per gallon.

1960: Gas prices are $0.31 per gallon. ($2.39 in 2011 dollars)

1930: Gas prices are $0.20 per gallon. ($2.71 in 2011 dollars)

1933-'45: German, French, and Dutch automakers sell a small range of electric cars, spurred by gas rationing and WW II.

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Photo credits: Tesla Roadster: Tesla Motors; EV1: Right Brain Photography; Tama Electric Motorcar: Nissan.