

Reflections on crossing the Nullarbor in an EV

My partner & I drove from Melbourne across the Nullarbor in December to meet family near Perth for Christmas.

Melbourne-Perth is around 4,000 km but we did 5,000 km because of side trips. We do Melbourne-Darwin trips (roughly the same distance) in 6 nights but allowed 14 nights for the Nullarbor trip because there's lots to stop & see. We have a 2022 Kia EV6 GT-Line AWD & stay in motel or roadhouse rooms.

Both are interesting, easy trips if you prepare for & pack for them. But you regret it if you don't.

Some Nullarbor Must Do's

Cable essentials

Your granny charger to handle the 10Amp common sockets, Type 2 socket to Type 2 plug, for amperages up to 32Amps, for use at Bring Your Own (BYO) cable charging stations. This is just a cable, & doesn't have a charging device, 32Amp / 22kW 3-phase *charger* with 5 pin male plug & 7 pin Type 2 male plug on a 5 metre lead. Only occasionally needed across the Nullarbor but essential when you encounter a broken traditional charger so need to use an AEVA or caravan park backup supply. This is also the single most important cable to have to be able travel in other remote rural locations throughout Australia.

You need the above because, if you drive directly between Melbourne & Perth, you'll charge about 25 times at *public* chargers & half a dozen times on the granny charger or 3-phase, & once at a BYO cable site. But 18 months ago in SA, I found numerous times when I needed to use the BYO cable – especially in the smaller towns. Your exact route will alter these numbers & types of cables used.

Range Prepare for getting about 20% less range than on the same speed Sydney-Melbourne type of road. That happens on the Stuart Highway to Darwin too. If you plan charging stops based on your normal interstate highway range, you'll run out.

Charger Planning Decide which *fast* chargers you'll stop at (to avoid time wasted at the many slow ones). That considers your specific EV's highway-driving range, & how much tourist stuff you'll do. You **MUST** also have a plan B for every rural charger because you'll encounter several non-functioning ones & it's sometimes 150km to the next one. Your Plan B will sometimes need to be the slower speed AEVA or caravan park 3-phase sites.

Apps Chargefox, NRMA, PlugShare & Tesla are all essential. Add ABRP if you use them.

RFID cards Chargefox, & a Mastercard or Visa, are essential. Internet in the bush is reliably erratic & ropey so there will be at least half a dozen times when you won't be able to charge without these cards.

Have Telstra or Telstra eSIM. Declaration: I have no beneficial interest in Telstra! You won't be able to call charger Help lines or anyone else without Telstra in some places. You *will* call the charger's Help line several times for varying reasons. We helped a Tesla guy who only had an Optus account at Nullarbor Roadhouse when the 4 NRMA plugs weren't working & he couldn't charge to get to the next charger.

Booking accommodation Book each night's accommodation that morning, except book it the day before in WA. WA accommodation demand is higher because their residents travel locally a lot. Putting aside school holiday surges, there's a large number of tradies & infrastructure folk, some permanently occupying rooms at some towns & roadhouses. A one bedroom Donga room without en suite, or sleeping in your car, aren't fun.

[Clothing](#) to suit hot, cold, wet & dry. We encountered 10°C to 44°C, & wet weather & dry weather, in December. Winds can be high if you go to the coast. Humidity ranges from high to low, accentuating the feeling of hot or cold. It's a nuisance to have clothing to cope with such a wide range, but necessary.

Be wise to

[More cables](#)

10Amp extension cable for the granny charger,
15Amp orange extension cable with the larger earth pin for the 15Amp chargers.

You might be able to borrow an extension, or do a work around, but we always use one or the other of these during each long trip.

[More Apps & cards](#) Ampol & BP Apps. AEVA card. Ampol, BP's EV (& possibly BP's retail purchases) cards. We didn't need EVIE brand for this trip, but maybe that'll change?

Be nice to

[Coffee plunger](#) & ground coffee :-). All rooms only have instant coffee.

Have taken [2 more days](#).

[Not have to end the trip by a definite date](#). That lets you handle any hassles & lets you stay longer when you want to. A second or third day sometimes is a huge relief from driving & from living out of a suitcase.

[A spare tyre](#) (hub not necessary) or a space saver tyre with hub. It takes a long time for our special EV tyres to get to small places in the bush. A tyre fits nicely in the floor-well behind driver or front passenger. Add a [jack](#) if you're going to change tyre yourself.

Some general thoughts

[Route options](#) At the western end of the Nullarbor, you could venture north to visit to mining sites like Kalgoorlie. You can also choose to go directly to Perth, or go south to Esperance then west along the coast to Perth.

[Apps & chargers](#)

[Test](#) each app is logged on the day before you go – you don't want to stand in the sun/cold/wind/rain trying to remember & feed in your probably long login password.

When the charger brand's App doesn't work, use the [RFID card](#) or the [QR code](#). QR codes are often not noticeable on the charger body so you can forget the QR option.

[I avoid NRMA](#) chargers to the extent possible because I've had so many failures with them. Not working, stopping before completion without advising you, & not showing on their app when the site's not working. Yes, NRMA have chargers in SA & WA, so having a Plan B is even more desirable if you're planning to use a NRMA site.

- NRMA don't yet have an RFID card, but if/when they do, get it.
- Chargefox apps & cards can usually also be used at NRMA sites, tho that isn't always shown on the charger.

At most [Chargefox](#) sites, be prepared to have to plug in & out several times because the first plug-in gets cancelled.

- Chargefox frequently overstate the kW of their chargers¹. They mislead & deceive badly in this aspect. You thus can't count on trip times calculated by you or by

¹ 12 of the 24 times we used Chargefox, the kW delivered was at least 25% less than claimed (50%). 6 of those 12 were over 50% slower than claimed. There were no mitigating factors, such as a recent previous user, our car's battery being ≥80%, or another car charging at the same time.

ABRP because you'll spend two to three times the expected amount of time to charge at many Chargefox installations. Sadly, there are many instances when you have no alternative to Chargefox because they'll be the only provider at many consecutive charging sites.

Few people seem to log their charger use on [Plugshare](#), but enough do so to tell you good stuff about each of the chargers you intend to use.

- When planning, you see roughly how truthful the power supply speed really is, how to overcome problems with particular plugs, quirks about finding the location of the site, whether you'll just have to sit in your car or be easily able to access services, etc.
- And on each day of travel, before heading to visit that site to charge, check Plugshare for whether someone has reported the plug isn't working.

The Nullarbor is used by [lots of vehicles](#) all day & night. My sense is that there's a third each cars, caravans & trucks. So you won't die of thirst in a desert if you break down.

There's a huge number of amazingly [huge trucks](#). They fill the highway lane envelope & travel at the 110km/hr maximum speed. We overtook some & faced hundreds coming the opposite way. Those were untroublesome. We also faced another couple of dozen of these monsters that travelled more slowly & were preceded by pilot cars with flashing yellow lights saying "Wide Load". Roughly 6 intruded into my lane & forced me to move onto the dirt beside my lane to avoid a collision. You don't know from the "Wide Load" sign, which may be a kilometre or two before the load-carrying vehicle, whether you'll be facing one that'll force you onto the dirt, so need to be wary.

Fixing 3 holes in the charging experience

EV media have begun to reflect user experiences of charger faults & that some things need to be done to improve quality.

One advance would be for government to mandate *and enforce* public, [real-time reporting](#) of whether the charger is [working](#), [and](#) the [real download speed](#). The charging companies have the data – they electronically charge us & can reboot chargers remotely – so it's possible to make their performance public & punish them when they let us down.

Another need is to have a [second charger brand](#) at lots of towns. For example, you can't presently escape Chargefox in WA, so a competitor brand needs interspersing along WA routes so we EV users aren't stuck with a monopoly supplier who is unreliable. The same anti-monopoly locating of competitive sites is probably also necessary elsewhere.

Thirdly, there are many charging sites with only 2 plugs. I had to wait to charge at only a small number of places on this trip, but we're adding 100,000 EV's a year to our Australian roads. On major routes, even in small towns, if the site is government subsidised, we should require governments to mandate a minimum of, say, [6 plugs per site](#). That caters for demand growth & for when some plugs at the site are not working.

I'd be happy to respond to questions. Maybe use Facebook Messenger?

RICHARD GOULD Jan, 2026