

LEISURE



escape to... BOSINVER

AN ECOFRIENDLY COTTAGE NEAR ST AUSTELL, COMBINED WITH AN ELECTRIC CAR, MAKES FOR A GREEN WEEKEND

Words by **Kirstie Newton** and **Wailim Wong**

“I could quite happily live here,” said my mother-in-law with a contented sigh. We were sitting in the open plan lounge of Lowen, the newest addition to the holiday hamlet of Bosinver, near St Austell. The late afternoon sun was streaming through floor-to-ceiling windows, flagging up the vibrant colours of autumn outside; and we were

munching on the fresh cream cake we had found in our fridge, a welcome gift courtesy of Bosinver and local bakery Niles.

The appeal of Lowen came as no surprise to me. I was charmed instantly upon my first visit a couple of years ago. Lowen appeared in the Homes section, my focus being the impeccable style choices of owner Pat Smith, and the admirable eco-credentials she had strived to attain. I loved the quirky furniture, including individual pieces commissioned from Cornwall makers or rescued from reclamation yards. I was in awe of the huge beams which held the downstairs together, and which had known an entirely different life as part of St Lawrence’s Hospital in Bodmin. And I was envious of the opportunity to start a new build from scratch, aiming for green levels I could only dream of.

So it was only a matter of time before I came back to sample the joys of Lowen as a customer. We arrived at night, the full extent of Lowen’s promises shrouded in a ➤



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cape of darkness. "Wow," said my partner as we switched on the lights to see the stylish, open-plan downstairs space. "I wasn't expecting this."

A full-scale exploration of the house ensued, with Daughter at the front of the queue. As I anticipated, our three-year-old was delighted by the fairy lights, and the various nooks and crannies – in particular a walk-in wardrobe that could easily double for a prop in Narnia or Wonderland. The other half was in raptures over the underfloor heating and the techie panel which shows how much energy you're using, and where; while I got to work in the capacious kitchen, where even the colourful knives add a dash of panache to proceedings. Lowen sleeps 8, and we made use of the huge dining table to share our environment with a friend who lives in nearby Polgooth.

Should you decide to make the most of the kitchen – and you should – the information pack gives you plenty of inspiration for where to buy local produce. Meat, fish, veg; from Lobbs Farm Shop at Heligan to the Cornish Food Box Company, you really have no excuse for not supporting the businesses on your doorstep, reducing your carbon footprint.

What impressed us all, the following day, was Bosinver's provision for families. Lowen was stocked with toys, and a huge box full of plastic crockery and cutlery, so you don't need to fret about bringing any. Take your swimming things, as the new pool is a lovely distraction.

Pat is extremely supportive of recent campaigns to encourage children to connect with the great outdoors. If the weather's good, don't miss the Gruffalo trail in Bosinver's woodland. There is animal feeding most days, weekly pony rides and in summer, forest school expert Tatum Triggs (see page 132) runs the Wild Kids' club. We attended in August, and made twig fairies and built bug hotels.

There are also two outdoor play areas – including a tyre swing and, joy of joys, a full-size trampoline – and an indoor soft play barn. You can even borrow Nanny Pat's Baking Box from reception, containing everything you need to cook with kids on a wet afternoon. She really has thought of everything.

It would be so easy to come here for a few days and not leave the site, if that was your wish. But there was a dual purpose to our brief stay. In keeping with Lowen's environmentally friendly ethos, our steed for the weekend was the Renault Zoe – our second electric car, having tried out

the Peugeot iOn in October 2012. We love the performance and feel of these green machines; the only obvious limitation is mileage, and thus the places we visited were dictated by the availability of charging points. Having said that, the St Austell area seemed the ideal choice, as it boasts chargers in Asda car park and is a stone's throw from the Eden Project, Cornwall's green soul.

On the Saturday morning, we went to Kings Wood for the first time. This ancient wood at London Apprentice (on the main Mevagissey road) is managed by the Woodland Trust, and has been there since Guy Fawkes stocked gunpowder under the House of Lords. I don't doubt that it is beautiful all year round – certainly, on a sunny day in late November, the rich autumnal foliage was a sight to behold.

After a walk along woodland paths, we headed to historic Charlestown for lunch, setting the sat-nav and thereby finding a neat little shortcut that removed the need to take the congested main road through town. We chose Wreckers, which not only served fabulous grown-up food, but was also prepared to go off menu for a little girl who desired nothing more than beans on toast.

It was time to charge. Cue a trip to Asda. Not the most glamorous of activities, but made more interesting by the Renault Zoe. My partner stayed with the car while I shopped. Upon my return, he was beaming from ear to ear, having fielded queries from fascinated onlookers – a dream role for any petrolhead. "The salesman should try this approach," he mused. Annoyingly, an hour did not give us much extra power, but it was as much as we could bear to stick around a supermarket car park on a beautiful afternoon. We headed back to Bosinver for cake and tea, followed by a swim and dinner.

We had more than enough juice to get us to Eden, where we planned to spend Sunday morning with friends, ice skating and exploring additions to the Rainforest biome. The first hour on the rink is reserved for under 5s, who go on in wellies and play with all manner of toys, from sledges to yoga balls. Our daughter loves it, and we were looking forward to being that bit nearer to Eden so we could have a later start.

On arrival, however, we were alarmed to discover that our power cable was not compatible with Eden's charging points. A quick call to the man who installed them – Matt Trevaskis of Eco-Drive – confirmed that since our last drive 18 months previously, technology has moved on and the universal

socket most cars are fitted with is quite different. By the time you read this, the facilities should have been upgraded; but our own plans had come unstuck. Should we head back to Asda and spend yet more precious time kicking around the car park? Not likely. Matt had another idea: eco-company Natural Generation, in Perranporth, boasts a charging point which could give the Zoe full power in one hour. The big question was, did we have enough juice to make it there? We were due at a third birthday party, and the prospect of breaking down was not appealing.

We decided to bite the bullet and go for it. OH put the car in Eco mode, which chooses the most efficient way to drive, and turns down all the ancillaries – radio, air con, sat-nav etc. Having rejected my suggestion of driving through Clay Country to Summercourt, he left me in charge of navigating the long way round. By the time we hit the A30, we were barely speaking, and my neck was craned towards the passenger window so I couldn't see the miles going down, down, deeper and down. To others, we were the politest of drivers, slowing down to let people onto the carriageway, in the knowledge that braking would regenerate extra power.

When we met Matt at Perranporth's petrol station (oh, the irony), we were down to seven miles. Phew. Charging gave us a chance to catch up on the electric car scene. Matt explained that the Zoe is currently the only car capable of charging in one hour, which is the ideal; if supermarkets could be fitted with chargers capable of this, even better. An hour is the most I'd want to spend on a shop, while time-consuming tourist attractions like Eden would be fine with slower points.

We charged in plenty of time to enjoy balloons, cake and a game of pass the parcel. OH even had enough power to show off by taking one of his friends for a smile-inducing spin. Against all the odds, we'd achieved everything we set out to, and remained green at all times. Champion. 🌱

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RENAULT ZOE • RENAULT ZOE
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Electric car technology continues to evolve at a rapid pace, and Renault's new Zoe hatchback demonstrates the terrific advances that have been made.

Rather than adapting an existing conventionally powered car to electric, Renault has designed a completely new electric car from the ground-up. It's a

strikingly modern, clean design with a light airy cabin and futuristic but very intuitive dashboard. Like most electric cars, it has superb acceleration and is incredibly smooth, quiet and refined with no gears to worry about. It's the ideal car for stop-start town driving.

Powered by lithium ion batteries stored underneath the car, the Zoe also features regenerative braking which recharges the batteries when using the brakes or decelerating - for example, when driving down a long hill with your foot off the accelerator.

Range is an impressive 130 miles, which is fine for most people's daily usage, but of course this rules out longer journeys.

As for the rest of the car, it's spacious with decent boot space, great visibility and a good level of standard equipment, which includes an easy-to-use satnav, electric windows and cruise control, even on the basic model.

Prices for the Zoe range start from £13,995 with battery hire at £70 a month. Renault also supplies a free wall charger for your home so you can plug your car in overnight. 🌱

*Car supplied by Dales Scorer, Wheal Rose, Redruth, TR16 5BX.
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