

Green Car Buying Tips

Fuel Economy Plus Sales Incentives Equal Big Savings

by Jim Motavalli



While some carmakers are filling showrooms with ever-larger gas-guzzling sport utility vehicles (SUV) thanks to lower gas prices, some car buyers want to do just the opposite and go greener with their wheels. Fortunately, more eco-friendly options exist than ever before—many of which come with surprising personal benefits in addition to a cleaner, greener planet.

The green share of the U.S. auto market, combining battery electrics, hybrids and plug-in hybrids, peaked at 3.8 percent in 2013, according to the Automotive News Data Center. Despite a record 59 models available now, the share was just 2.87 percent in 2016. As Millennials—the generation that could be buying 40 percent of all new vehicles by 2020—fully emerge into the marketplace, eco-car numbers could zoom, although some think it's possible they'll by shunning car purchases for

car-sharing services.

"The market has continued to shift to crossovers and big SUVs, and there aren't many hybrid models available in those categories," says Sam Abuelsamid, senior research analyst at Navigant Research. "We expect that to change in the next couple of years, when vehicles like the hybrid Ford Explorer reach the public." Navigant projects only 3.4 percent annual compounded growth in hybrid sales

by 2025, but a much more robust 31 percent rise in battery-run electrics.

"Conventional hybrids without a plug no longer have the halo they once had," says Bradley Berman, founder of *HybridCars.com*. "The cutting edge has moved to electric cars with ever-bigger battery packs and longer electric range. With gas prices at relatively low levels, the green car market remains a small niche."

Getting a Green Bargain

Many of the greener choices are now a tremendous bargain for consumers. The federal government currently offers a tax credit of up to \$4,500 for electrified vehicles, and many states kick in with added subsidies. Highlights include maximums available for electric vehicles (EV) with big batteries: California, \$1,500 in rebates, plus single-occupant use of the high-occupancy vehicle lanes; Colorado, \$5,000;



Audi A3 e-tron

Connecticut, \$3,000; Delaware, \$2,200; Maryland, \$3,000; Massachusetts, \$2,500; Michigan, \$2,500; Pennsylvania, \$2,000; Rhode Island, \$2,500; Texas, \$2,500; and Utah, \$750.

The Prius Prime is a prime example of the savings available. The acclaimed plug-in hybrid, with an electric range of 25 miles, starts at \$27,100, before subsidies (starting prices are before destination costs). In California, it would be \$21,100. This means this well-equipped plug-in hybrid is, for state purchasers, approximately \$3,585 less than a base Prius liftback hybrid (\$24,685). It's a buyer's market for green cars, as manufacturers incentivize them to meet federal and California fuel economy averages. Buyers are encouraged to act now before subsidies disappear.

Hyundai is taking an interesting approach with its green Ioniq line, offering, beginning this year, affordable battery electric, hybrid and plug-in hybrid versions of the same mid-sized car platform. "This is about freedom for the customer—they can choose the level of electrification that fits them," says Mike O'Brien, Hyundai vice president of corporate and product planning.

Great Green Choices

Here are some more good choices.

Battery electric: Chevrolet Bolt

With the Bolt—GM's first battery electric since the EV1—the buyer can get from zero to 60 miles per hour (mph) in 6.5 seconds from its 200-horsepower motor plus attain 238 miles of range from its huge, 60-kilowatt-hour battery, winning it 2017 *Motor Trend* Car of the Year, *Green Car Journal's* 2017 Green Car of the Year and 2017 North American Car of the Year from a jury of automotive journalists. Prices start at \$36,620, but subsidies can top \$10,000.

Plug-in hybrid: Audi A3 e-tron

The power (204 horsepower) and zero-to-60 mph time capability is similar to the Bolt, but the A3 offers a more sumptuous cabin and Audi's celebrated driving dynamics. The electric range is a mere 16 miles, but 380 miles total using the 1.4-liter, four-cylinder gas



Toyota Highlander

engine. Prices start at \$38,900, but it qualifies for a \$4,500 federal tax credit and some state subsidies, too.

Hybrid car: Toyota Highlander

Mildly updated for 2017, the Highlander is the only three-row hybrid SUV currently available, making it worth considering. Good news includes a power increase in the 3.5-liter V-6 (to 306 horsepower), although there's a small fuel-economy penalty. The hybrid is rated at 30 miles per gallon in the city, 28 highway and 29 combined. The bottom line cost starts at \$36,270 without subsidies.

Other worthy cars: The fuel cell-powered Honda Clarity, Toyota Mirai and Hyundai Tucson (for southern Californians); any of the Ioniqs; the



Chevrolet Bolt

versatile plug-in hybrid Chevrolet Volt; and the quick BMW i3 and i8 and Tesla Model S if the budget allows.

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