



Japanese cars top 'greenest' list

U.S. automakers 'not closing the gap,' energy conservation group says

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Japanese cars — three of them hybrids, one that runs on natural gas, and one a gasoline model — took the top five spots in the annual "greenest" vehicle ranking by an energy conservation group.

The gasoline-electric Honda Insight took the top spot in the list compiled by the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy. The two-door was followed by Honda's natural gas version of its Civic GX, which took the top spot in 2005. Rounding out the top five were Toyota's Prius hybrid, the Honda Civic Hybrid, and the Toyota Corolla, which runs on gasoline.

Scores are based not only on fuel economy but also emissions tied to smog and global warming. Thus, while the natural gas Honda and the Toyota Corolla mileage are nearly half that of the top hybrid models, their overall score was high due to very low emissions. Natural gas, in particular, is much cleaner burning than gasoline.

The ranking also listed vehicles by category, and the ACEEE noted that U.S. automakers took the top spot there in just four of the 14 vehicle classes.

"Unfortunately, the domestic manufacturers are not closing the gap with the leading foreign manufacturers on fuel economy," Therese Langer, ACEEE's transportation program director, said in a statement. "Detroit has had a difficult year, but given high gasoline prices and shifting consumer preferences, offering more fuel-efficient vehicles is not a luxury — it's a business necessity."

Not all hybrids alike

The group added that hybrids are shaping up to be the vehicle of choice for people looking to save money and the environment.

"Hybrids are still the team to beat, as they generally have better fuel economy and cleaner emissions than other models in their respective classes," ACEEE researcher James Kliesch said in the statement.

But the group also noted that some automakers are using the extra output from the hybrid's electric motor to boost vehicle power instead of using it to save fuel. A case in point is the Honda Accord Hybrid, which has more horsepower than the standard Accord but gets about the same mileage.

"Consumers should be aware that having 'hybrid' in the name doesn't necessarily mean the vehicle will be green," Kliesch added.

Other greenest — and meanest

The greenest cars by class included these:

- SUV: Ford Escape Hybrid SUV
- Minivan: Honda Odyssey
- Pickup: Toyota Tundra pickup
- Station wagon: Ford Focus Wagon.

ACEEE's policy director said that Americans could cut their average gasoline bill by \$510 a year and reduce emissions tied to global warming by more than 30 percent simply by buying the greenest vehicle in the class they're interested in.

The group also listed its "meanest" vehicles — the worst being the 8.3-liter, 500-horsepower Dodge Ram

SRT10 pickup truck, which took that same spot last year.

It was followed by the Lamborghini Murcielago, Bentley Arnage, Dodge Durango and Dodge Ram 1500 pickup. Other models on the "meanest" list were the Hummer H2, Ford F-250 pickup, GMC Yukon XL K2500, Volkswagen Touareg, and Chevrolet Suburban K2500.

Additional information about the ACEEE listings is online at www.greencars.com.

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