

# Hybrid vehicles are beginning to take root

BY DEIRDRE O'SHEA  
Copley News Service

When a celebrity like Will Ferrell drives to the Oscars in his hybrid car, it's not to show off the size of his most recent paycheck. He can afford something far more expensive. Ferrell and other conservation-minded stars want to help publicize this newly available green technology.

In the wake of Sept. 11, Americans have become more aware of the dependence on oil. Along with rising gas prices and the specter of global warming, hybrid cars have been pushed into the spotlight. Around dinner tables

the question is: We've been to the moon — why can't vehicle manufacturers make affordable, desirable hybrids?

Well, the era of hybrids is at hand.

"What's happened up until now is that we've seen hybrids in only certain segments (of the car market)," said Brad Berman, owner and editor of Hybridcars.com and the author of a new e-book, "An Insider's Look at Hybrid Cars: How They Work and Why They Matter."

There's the two-door compact, the Honda Insight, and the four-door compact, the Honda Civic, Berman says.

"And there's the Prius,

## "Every gallon of gas produces 19 pounds of carbon dioxide."

### Brad Berman, owner and editor of Hybridcars.com

which Toyota is calling a mid-size, but it's really a (four-door) compact."

Now other market segments are filling in, he says. Honda, which brought out the first hybrid vehicle in America with the Insight in 1999, will launch a hybrid based on the Accord in the fall.

The first American hybrid will arrive around the same time with the Ford Escape Hybrid, which will have a fuel economy of 35 to 40 miles per gallon in city driving. Also this fall, Lexus introduces the first luxury hybrid, the Lexus RX 400h sport utility vehicle. Its estimated fuel economy will be that of a compact.

Hybrid cars are powered by both gas and electricity, created by rechargeable batteries that are intended to last for the car's lifetime (and probably will). All hybrids have a gas engine and electric motor, but the two power sources are combined in different ways, depending on the car. A computer integrates the use of both, deciding what power source is needed when.

"With all hybrids, you're doubling the fuel economy as a rule of thumb," said Berman. "The average car's fuel economy is in the mid-20s (miles per gallon). The average fuel economy of hybrids is in the mid-40s."

Less time at the pump means a reduction in the greenhouse gases.

"Every gallon of gas produces 19 pounds of carbon dioxide," said Berman. A Harper's Magazine article estimated that a Ford Excursion was likely to produce more than 130 tons of

point, hybrid sales account for a small portion of the 16 million cars sold every year — about one-half of a percent. Some experts believe, however, that sales will start to rise exponentially.

The key is going to be new models in all categories from all manufacturers. A Chevy truck man is simply not going to give up his favorite ride for a Ford. But if he had the choice of an affordable hybrid Chevy?

"A hundred years ago, electric vehicles were the most popular," said Berman. "Right now, we're seeing a shift again. But you don't turn the corner in a day after all these years of investment in gas."

For the present, it seems unlikely that manufacturers of hybrid cars will be able to keep up with demand in 2005.

"Currently, the Prius 2004 model is sold out," Berman said. "There are waiting lists across the country ... even though Toyota has increased production of the 2004 model by 44 percent."

Those interested in the Ford Escape Hybrid or the Lexus Hybrid SUV should get to a dealer, pronto.



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