

## **New wave of hybrids offer more mean, less green**

By Tim Molloy, Associated Press Writer

in the Fresno Bee, Washington Post and S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, November 20, 2005; in LA Times, Tracey Press and LA Daily News on, Monday, November 21, 2005

SAN DIEGO (AP) - When automakers rolled out the first hybrid cars, drivers who wanted their spectacular fuel economy had to settle for weird shapes and a lack of luxury options.

Now it seems the high-mileage, low-frills trend in hybrid automaking may prove shorter than a Hummer's trips between fill-ups.

Newer hybrids are using the added boost from their gas-electric engines for more acceleration and power. But more mean equals less green.

To attract drivers looking for large and luxurious vehicles, automakers such as Lexus and General Motors Corp. are building hybrids with the looks and size of regular cars.

The focus on performance sacrifices the kind of jaw-dropping efficiency that got hybrids noticed in the first place.

Environmentalists say automakers are squandering gas-scrimping technology that reduces air pollution as well as the nation's reliance on foreign oil.

"Consumers are enthralled by hybrids because they sip gas and don't guzzle it, and they pollute less," said Dan Becker, director of the Sierra Club's global warming program. "So if you have a hybrid that guzzles and doesn't pollute less, then what are you doing?"

Though sales of large SUVs have taken a hit, luxury and midsize SUVs continue to do well.

American automakers are launching hybrid versions of those vehicles to remain competitive in the areas where they are most profitable, said Anthony Pratt, an analyst who covers hybrids for J.D. Power and Associates. It's cheaper to modify an existing model than to build a new competitor to the Prius or Insight, and SUVs have more room for adding hybrid components than sedans, he said.

Automakers say gas guzzlers have the most room for improvement. But some new hybrids barely get better mileage than their non-hybrid counterparts.

Take the hybrid Chevrolet Silverado, which gets the same 19 miles per gallon on the highway as a regular Silverado. On city streets it gets 17 mpg, two mpg more than the non-hybrid.

The Silverado is among six hybrids either available or being designed by GM, the world's largest automaker. All but one is an SUV or truck.

GM says small improvements make a big difference.

Upping an SUV's performance from 10 mpg to 11 mpg will save 110 gallons of gas every 12,000 miles, points out GM engineer Tim Grewe. That's more than the 100 gallons saved by increasing a sedan's fuel economy from 30 to 40 mpg and driving it the same distance.

Grewe's formula works only because SUVs use so much more gas. The 11-mpg SUV needs 1,090 gallons to go 12,000 miles; the 40-mpg sedan needs only 300 gallons.

Lawrence Dewey, 78, is among those not getting the mileage he expected from a hybrid.

Dewey and his wife love the plush interior, moving headlights, and "get up and go" of their new Lexus RX 400h hybrid.

The only problem, he says, is that it averages only 25 mpg, about what he used to get in a non-hybrid Volvo Cross Country SUV. The disappointing mileage has caused him to drive less.

"We look at that figure and go: 'Do we need to go now?'" said Dewey, who lives just outside Madison, Wis. "We'll combine it with another trip."

Dewey 's other quarrel is with the EPA, which rated the vehicle at 31 mpg city and 27 mpg highway. The agency's mileage figures for new cars often are inflated because testing conditions yield better efficiency than real-world driving.

Dewey doesn't come close to saving enough gas to make up the price difference between the \$46,060 400h and the \$37,770 non-hybrid Lexus RX 330. The hybrid does measure up in other areas: It goes from 0-60 mph in 6.9 seconds and has 268 horsepower. That's nearly one second faster and 45 horsepower better than the RX 330.

"A lot of people, whether they have size needs or need to carry more cargo ... they like to have a bigger car. In order to reach out to those folks you have to offer them performance," said Lexus spokesman Greg Thome said, "otherwise they wouldn't even look at buying a hybrid."

An estimated 220,000 hybrids will be sold domestically this year, about 1.3 percent of the market, according to car-industry analyst J. D. Power & Associates. That's a major jump from last year, when 87,000 hybrids accounted for 0.5 percent of domestic car sales.

Some cutting-edge hybrid researchers believe consumers shouldn't have to choose between performance and efficiency. At San Diego State University, engineering professor Jim Burns led a student team that built the Enigma - a diesel hybrid convertible that goes from zero to 60 mpg in 4.3 seconds while getting 80 mpg.

A close performance equivalent is a Dodge Viper, which gets about 12 mpg city and 20 mpg highway.

Burns, who says he would consider mass-marketing Enigmas for \$60,000 if he could get 1,000 orders, says it will take flash, not just good mileage, to make the public fall in love with hybrids.

Some environmentalists are experimenting with the same pragmatic approach.

Earlier this year, the Sierra Club handed out its first praise for a hybrid SUV, Ford's Mercury Mariner, which gets an EPA-rated 33 mpg city and 29 mpg highway.

"I think it would be vastly preferable for everyone to drive a 45- or 55-mpg vehicle and the technology exists to do that," said Becker, the organization's global warming specialist. "But not everyone wants to buy a sedan. ... If they're going to buy an SUV, it's better that they buy one that gets over 30 mpg than under 20."

## **Critics say pollution plan will cost consumers**

Warren Lutz - Record Staff Writer  
Stockton Record, Sunday, Nov 20, 2005

Some Central Valley officials are taking a stand against new air pollution proposals that they argue could tack on thousands of dollars to the price of a home.

A first-of-its-kind proposal would place fees on Valley projects that increase vehicle traffic -- including homes, shopping malls and schools. Air quality officials currently regulate stationary sources of pollution but can't directly control tailpipe emissions.

By having builders pay for the smog that sprawling construction projects create, officials hope to reduce air pollution by more than 10 tons daily in the San Joaquin Valley. But they're angering businesses and some local government officials who argue those fees would be passed to consumers.

"It's not the appropriate way to go about cleaning up the air," said John Beckman, Lodi's mayor and a representative of the Building Industry Association of the Delta, which opposes the proposal. "Grocery stores, government buildings and hospitals don't produce pollution."

The fees would increase each year for three years, beginning in 2006. The proposal would add

\$1,772 to the cost of a typical home by 2008 and between \$872,000 to \$1.3 million to the cost of a typical shopping mall, according to district projections.

Builders would pay less if they designed energy-efficient buildings, put them near mass transit and added bike and pedestrian paths, all of which would help decrease smog. The money would help fund the use of low-emission vehicles and public transportation along with other pollution-reducing efforts, officials said.

Stockton, Manteca and Tulare are among a handful of cities that has joined a group lobbying the San Joaquin Valley Air Quality Control District to turn down the idea. But that appears unlikely, since state law two years ago required the district to target indirect sources of pollution.

Some environmentalists say it's high time developers paid their share.

"Agriculture is taking part in reducing air pollution, manufacturing is taking part, and the oil industry is taking part," said Kathryn Phillips, who researches air quality issues for Environmental Defense, a national advocacy group. "Everybody recognizes there's a link to land use and air quality."

If the fees are approved, the San Joaquin Valley may become the first air district to tie fees directly to vehicle traffic.

"It could be the first in the nation in its innovative approach to find money to put toward clean air programs," Environmental Protection Agency spokeswoman Lisa Fasano said.

District officials knew they were "going into uncharted territory" and took extra time and effort drafting the new rules, district spokeswoman Kelly Malay said.

"We're beyond the point where we can require more and more reductions of stationary sources such as refineries and manufacturers," Malay said. "We have to sort of branch out and look at areas that haven't been regulated."

The district's government board plans to vote on the rules next month. They take effect March 1 if approved.

Escalon Mayor Ed Alves said the rules "are off base by a long shot" and place too large of a burden on businesses.

"The agriculture industry and building industry are critical to the Valley's economy, and neither of them can sustain the kind of hit proposed by these types of fees," he said.

Alves said the Valley attracts smog from other areas, and businesses here are paying for it.

"I don't think the building industry ... is unconcerned about air pollution," Alves said. "We all live here, and we all suffer like everybody else."

Alves belongs to the Stop the Air Board Tax Coalition, which is carrying out a letter-writing campaign against the proposal. Building groups, developers and real estate agents comprise the bulk of the coalition's membership.

Phillips believes builders are afraid the rules may catch on elsewhere.

"The development industry nationally doesn't want to see a link made between land use and air quality, just because it makes their life more complicated," she said.

## **Clean air receiveds \$8 million boost**

By JENNIFER M. FITZENBERGER - BEE CAPITOL BUREAU

Modesto Bee, Monday, Nov. 21, 2005

DAVIS - The University of California at Davis received an \$8 million federal grant last week to research why airborne specks of soot and chemicals make people sick in the San Joaquin Valley.

Scientists say the university's new San Joaquin Valley Aerosol Health Effects Center is the largest effort thus far aimed at better understanding particulate air pollution and why breathing it can cause health problems.

Several studies link particulate matter to asthma, heart disease and other ailments, but researchers want to learn more about what types are most hazardous. Airborne particles include road dust, diesel soot, ash, wood smoke, nitrates and sulfates.

"We really still are lacking a basic understanding of what are the exact mechanisms that lead to the health problems that we see associated with exposure to particles," said Kent Pinkerton, a professor of anatomy, physiology and cell biology at UC Davis and associate director of the new center.

Air regulators and policymakers will consider the research results as they fine-tune rules designed to help reduce air pollution.

The UC Davis project will last five years, but new data is expected in the next couple of years.

Four other air pollution research centers exist, including one at UCLA.

Over 15 years, the San Joaquin Valley has done a better job of meeting federal health standards for particulate matter, but its air basin still is considered one of the most polluted in the country.

At UC Davis, about 15 engineers, chemists, physicians, toxicologists and atmospheric scientists will join efforts to understand particulate matter better in the valley.

Researchers plan to take measurements and collect air samples from two spots in the valley.

The samples will be tested on cells and tissue.

UC Davis researchers will work with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the California Air Resources Board.

Don Hunsaker, a plan development supervisor with the local air district, said valley-specific data will help officials determine better ways to fight air pollution.

"It will help us understand trends in health and air quality," he said.

## **Kings Co. gets no-burn order**

**The ban is a first for the county since the program began.**

By Barbara Anderson / The Fresno Bee

Saturday, November 19, 2005

### **No burn**

The daily wood-burning status is available in English and Spanish toll-free at (800) 766-4463 and at [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org). Updates in Hmong are available toll-free at (877) 344-1212.

Kings County residents have escaped a no-burn rule until today.

On Friday, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a wood-burning ban for Kings County through midnight tonight.

Air-quality officials lifted a no-burn order in Fresno County, but asked residents from Modesto to Bakersfield to refrain from burning wood today and tonight to help clean the air.

Today's burn ban was the first time Kings County residents were told they couldn't burn wood in fireplaces and wood stoves since the air district initiated a no-burn program in November 2003.

Shawn Ferreria, a meteorologist and air-quality forecaster for the air district, said a combination of dust and fine particles from wood burning and vehicle combustion led to the mandatory no-burn order in Kings County.

But air quality throughout the San Joaquin Valley teeters on being unhealthy, he said.

"We have a very strong high pressure system that has provided a lid over the San Joaquin Valley, and this lid has trapped the pollutants underneath it."

The air-quality forecast for Kings County today is 152 on the Air Quality Index. Levels between 151-200 AQI are unhealthy for everyone.

Particles in the air can cause asthma attacks and have been linked to heart disease and other health problems.

The airborne particles include road dust, diesel soot, ash, wood smoke, nitrates and sulfates.

Air-district officials understand residents of Kings County may be unfamiliar with the "Check Before You Burn" program, said Kelly Hogan Malay, a district spokeswoman.

The burn-ban covers wood-burning heaters and fireplaces and includes any solid-fuel burning devices, such as manufactured logs, she said. Burning wood during a no-burn order can result in fines.

The no-burn rule does not apply to residents in the parts of rural Kings County that lack natural-gas connections and people who rely on propane or wood for heating, she said.

But Malay said: "If folks have propane and no natural-gas service and therefore are exempt from the rule, we still ask them to use their propane instead of wood to protect public health."

## **Wood burning discouraged by Valley air regulators**

News Brief in the Merced Sun-Star  
November 19, 2005

Air-quality forecasts are calling for unhealthy air in Merced County today and Valley air regulators are asking for residents not to use wood-burning fireplaces, stoves or inserts.

Wood burning is banned in Kings County today through midnight and discouraged in Fresno, Tulare, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus and Kern counties.

The requests are in tandem with the Valley Air Pollution Control District's check before you burn program.

The program runs Nov. 1 through Feb. 28, and it aims to reduce fall and wintertime air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley.

When air quality is expected to be unhealthy for the general public, the Air District bans wood burning.

In Kings County, stagnant air and poor dispersion have caused particulate to build up, contributing to poor air quality.

Homes that don't have natural-gas service, rely solely on wood heat and those above 3,000 feet in elevation, are exempt from the rule.

The daily wood-burning status is issued on a countywide basis and is available toll-free at 800-766-4463.

## **Number of smog days up**

### **More smoggy days in the valley**

By Jim Skeen, Staff Writer

LA Daily News

Nov. 19, 2005

LANCASTER - A blistering hot summer is being blamed for pushing up the number of days Antelope Valley's smog exceeded the federal health standard.

The Antelope Valley Air Quality Management District reported that the region's ozone levels exceeded the federal standard of 0.08 parts per million on 31 days this "smog season," compared with 24 days last year. The smog season runs from May to October.

The smoggiest day this year was Aug. 6, when an ozone reading of 0.127 was recorded.

The increase is being attributed to the hot weather that hit much of Southern California, including the Los Angeles basin. Most of the Antelope Valley's air pollution blows in from metropolitan Los Angeles through Soledad Canyon, and over the Tehachapi Mountains from the San Joaquin Valley, so worsening smog there usually means worse smog here.

"If it's warmer down there, if they don't get the coastal fog, we see our numbers go up," said Bret Banks, the district's operations manager.

The South Coast air basin, which includes portions of Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties, had 84 days that exceeded the federal standard. The San Joaquin Valley had 72 days over the standard.

"The Antelope Valley's air quality is overwhelmingly influenced by wind-blown air pollutants from the south coast basin - and other upwind urban areas - into the region," said Chuck Fryxell, the A.V. district's air pollution control officer. "As emissions continue to decline in the L.A. basin, the Antelope Valley will continue to reap the benefits in the form of cleaner, more healthful air."

This year is the first year in which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has switched from measuring ozone from a one-hour period to averaging it over an 8-hour span. Under the old reporting standard, there would have been one day of ozone excess instead of 31, district officials said.

This year was Antelope Valley's sixteenth without a Stage 1 smog alert. A Stage 1 alert is called when the level hits 0.20 or higher. During a Stage 1 alert, elderly people and children, as well as people of any age who have heart or lung ailments, are urged to stay indoors.

Air quality officials say Antelope Valley smog is far less than it was in the 1980s. The valley's worst smog year was in 1981, when seven Stage 1 alerts were declared.

## **Mileage Numbers To Reflect Reality**

### **EPA to Update Test Procedure**

By Sholnn Freeman

The Washington Post

November 19, 2005

ANN ARBOR, Mich., Nov. 18 -- The Environmental Protection Agency will replace its testing procedures for fuel-economy estimates with a system that better reflects how motorists drive today.

The planned changes follow complaints from consumers who have been paying more attention to the accuracy of the estimates as gas prices have spiked.

The EPA said the tests will take into account faster driving, more idling in traffic, and more abrupt acceleration and braking. Changes to the rules have been considered long overdue by consumer

groups and some automakers. The procedures were established in 1977 and don't take into account changes in automotive technology such as the prevalence of air conditioning.

"A lot has changed -- things such as speed limits, a lot more cars with air conditioning and other equipment," EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson said Friday. "Clearly, people do a little bit more stop-and-go and probably accelerate more than assumptions" behind the original standards, he said.

Johnson said a new system could go into effect in two years.

Johnson spoke during a tour of the EPA's National Fuel and Vehicle Emissions Laboratory in Ann Arbor. He said he was there to learn more about testing as the agency moves to complete new procedures by year-end.

By law, EPA fuel-economy information is provided in window stickers on new cars and trucks. Legislation approved this year by Congress requires the EPA to test under more real-world conditions.

The original rules were put in place after the oil price and supply shocks of the 1970s. High oil prices this year have again raised awareness of gas mileage. Some consumers have been particularly upset with the government's ratings on gas-electric hybrids, such as the Toyota Prius and the Ford Escape. Some owners of such vehicles have said they get far lower city mileage than the EPA estimates because of quirks in the testing system.

David Champion, director of automobile testing at Consumer Reports, said the EPA's numbers can differ from actual mileage by 50 percent and sometimes more. He also said automakers have learned how to optimize their vehicles to do well in EPA tests.

The EPA does not test vehicles for fuel economy. Instead, it issues guidelines that automakers use to test their own vehicles. Agency officials said the EPA audits 10 percent of the tested vehicles for accuracy.

The EPA laboratory Friday looked like a cross between a used-car lot and a science fair as its engineers showed off their best work to their boss. Technicians in long blue coats wheeled around carts of equipment. The engineers had lots of graphics and charts for Johnson, some perched on the exposed body of a giant delivery truck that had been dismantled.

Although it was his first trip to the lab, Johnson seemed at ease. He is a 25-year veteran of the agency and the first scientist to lead the EPA.

The Ann Arbor lab was established in 1971. It employs about 400 people, mostly scientists and engineers. Besides the fuel economy estimates, the labs establish national pollution emissions standards for cars and trucks.

Johnson said the EPA intends to propose the new testing rules by the end of the year.

The proposal would be subject to a 90-day public comment period before it took effect.

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Sunday, Nov. 20, 2005](#)

### **Late-night meeting turns weird**

**By Dianne Hardisty, Californian Editorial Page Editor**

A strange thing happened late into Wednesday's Bakersfield City Council meeting. The director of the state Conservation Department crashed the party.

And the really strange thing about Bridgett Luther Thompson's appearance is that she seemed lost set adrift by her staff that had left the meeting long before she arrived; and standing at the podium warning that the state might sue the city unless Bakersfield changes its ways, but seeming to have a vague idea what those "ways" may be.

The bizarre political theater can be viewed on the city's Web page ([www.ci.bakersfield.ca.us](http://www.ci.bakersfield.ca.us)) where a videotape is posted. Fast-forward to the end of the meeting.

"I was in my (hotel) room. I turned on my television. Here you guys were and you were quoting my department," Thompson said, explaining why she dropped in on the City Council meeting. She had spent the day in Bakersfield touring oil fields.

Gov. Schwarzenegger appointed Thompson in August to oversee the massive California Department of Conservation that includes the divisions of Beverage Container Recycling; Land Conservation; Mine Reclamation; Geological Survey; and Oil, Gas & Geothermal.

Thompson said she had planned to attend Wednesday's City Council meeting at 6:30 p.m., when major development projects, such as the Rosedale Ranch and Old River Ranch, were being considered. But other commitments delayed her arrival.

When she discovered the meeting was still going on, she decided to pop in. "I didn't have anything else to do." As it turns out, Thompson may have been better off if she had stayed in her room and watched the meeting on television (KGOV, channel 16) as I was doing at home. She would not have looked so clueless.

Thompson's staff is concerned about metropolitan Bakersfield's growth and the city's and county's approval of projects that consume agriculture land and place homes near oil fields.

Thompson warned City Council members they are exceeding their authority by canceling Williamson Act contracts on property outside the city, in the county's jurisdiction. These contracts give farmers a break on their property taxes to encourage the land to stay in agriculture production, rather than developed into homes and businesses. Thompson said the city may be sued by the state if it keeps on canceling contracts on land in the county.

The problem with Thompson's threat was that city officials are not canceling Williamson Act contracts on land in the county. They are giving notice that contracts will be canceled if and when the land is annexed to the city. It is an annexation procedure used for decades by the city and Kern County. That seemed to be news to Thompson.

Thompson also warned city officials they are cruising for a bruising if they continue to allow homes to be built near oil fields. Again, it seemed to come as news to Thompson that Bakersfield's long-standing oil well ordinance is used as a model throughout the state to balance the rights of developers and oil producers, and protect homeowners.

Two decades ago, city and county officials recognized that providing homes, jobs and stores for metropolitan Bakersfield's growing population would mean building near oil fields. They worked with developers, home owners, oil producers and representatives of the Division of Oil, Gas & Geothermal to write metropolitan Bakersfield's oil well ordinance.

Ironically, former Bakersfield resident Hal Bopp, who is now Thompson's Oil, Gas & Geothermal division supervisor in Sacramento, was instrumental in writing Bakersfield's ordinance. Seeming to be surprised by the ordinance's existence, Thompson asked city officials to give her a copy.

If you aren't confused already, you would have been really confused if you had stayed up late enough to watch Wednesday's City Council meeting.

But here's what I learned from the exchange:

- The governor's appointee to head one of his most important environmental departments needs to do her homework. She popped in on Wednesday's meeting and popped off to City Council members, revealing how embarrassingly ill-prepared and uninformed she is.
- The battle over development in metropolitan Bakersfield is shifting.

For months, the local chapter of the Sierra Club has blocked home and commercial projects by suing developers, contending the projects [pollute the air](#). The lawsuits are settled by developers agreeing to pay thousands of dollars to a private Sierra Club foundation.

The club's growth-stopping strategy now is shifting to concerns about the loss of agriculture land that will result if more homes and businesses are built.

It seems the Sierra Club now has a powerful new ally in Sacramento.

Thompson told City Council members Wednesday night that she had been a Realtor in North Carolina, before Schwarzenegger appointed her to oversee the California Conservation Department. But Thompson's most recent job was development director and fundraiser for Hands On the Bay Area, a Northern California environmental non-profit organization. Before that, she worked as the development director for Republicans for Environmental Protection and as a program director for Trust for Public Land in North Carolina.

The Sierra Club should be encouraged that Thompson posted on her Department of Conservation Web site that she belongs to the Sierra Club and Wilderness Society.

In a *Los Angeles Times* story following Thompson's appointment, Bakersfield's Republican state Sen. Roy Ashburn observed, "The quality of people (Schwarzenegger's) been picking, even if people disagree with their philosophy, has been very good."  
Maybe Wednesday was just an off night for Thompson.