

Is A Hybrid Car For You

You may have seen one zipping past you in the high occupancy lane, a lone driver at the wheel. It's a gasoline-electric hybrid car and driving in the HOV lane is just one of the benefits of ownership in many states. But what is a hybrid? How does it work? Is it the right car for you and your family?

A hybrid car has a both a gasoline engine and a battery. The battery is recharged by energy from the gasoline engine that would normally be lost during braking or decelerating. The car uses either the battery or the gasoline engine depending on several factors including how fast the car is traveling. Sometimes, both will work together to provide an extra boost of power without using too much extra fuel.

The result of this technology is cars that get significantly better gas mileage and produce less carbon dioxide emissions than traditional gasoline powered cars. For example, according to Honda, the 2006 Civic Hybrid gets 50 miles to the gallon on the highway, 14 miles to the gallon better than the 2003 regular Civic. When driven the national average of 12,000 miles, that represents a savings of 69 gallons of gas and 258 pounds of carbon dioxide per year.

In the early days of hybrid cars, there were few models to choose from. People desiring to purchase a hybrid car were stuck in tiny cars with little cargo space. Today, however, manufacturers produce hybrid cars and light trucks in nearly every category including family-sized sedans, sport utility vehicles and minivans. The smallest cars still get the best gas mileage, but larger hybrids consistently outperform their regular siblings in gas mileage and carbon dioxide emissions.

Unfortunately, hybrid cars cost more than regular models. In the case of the 2006 Honda Civic, the hybrid model costs almost \$7,000 more than the regular model. Congress passed a law providing tax credits for hybrid car owners that took effect on January 1, 2006 that would save the buyer of a 2006 Civic Hybrid \$2,100. It would take several years to break even on the purchase of a hybrid counting gasoline savings alone. However, many hybrid owners are as dedicated to the environmental benefits of driving a hybrid as they are to the money they save.

One of the fears when hybrid cars first became available was that maintenance and insurance costs would be prohibitive. Research has shown that regular maintenance costs for hybrid vehicles are no higher than for regular vehicles. Additionally, hybrid car owners are less likely to be involved in accidents and some insurance companies have begun offering discounts to hybrid car owners.

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About the Author

Kadence Buchanan writes articles for <http://iautomotiveworld.com/> - In addition, Kadence also writes articles for <http://livingtheoutdoorslife.com/> and <http://recreationandmore.com/>