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## Awareness of alternative fuel technologies remains low

Despite record oil prices, concerns about global pollution levels and dependence on foreign energy, Canadians' awareness and use of alternative fuel engine technologies is still fairly low, according to a recent Synovate survey.

Synovate, a global market research firm, surveyed over 900 respondents in Canada and the U.S. as part of an international assessment of 4,500 vehicle owners around the world.

"Virtually every automotive manufacturer worldwide is trying to understand consumers' familiarity with, usage of and preference towards hybrid electric, direct injection diesel and alternative fuel source vehicles," commented Scott Miller, CEO of Synovate's global Motoresearch practice.

Canadian and American consumers have similar awareness and adoption behaviors toward alternative fuel technologies, but significantly differ in their top reason for considering such a vehicle: Canadians, along with most respondents across the globe, want cleaner emissions and less pollution, while the majority of Americans surveyed want to reduce dependence on foreign energy.

Canadians responded similarly to consumers around the world when asked which factors keep them from purchasing an alternative fuel vehicle. By far, high vehicle cost is the number one deterrent. Consumers' perception of these vehicles' limited driving range was the second most cited reason.

While 91% of North Americans are familiar with alternative fuel sources such as natural gas, ethanol, methanol or bio diesel, less than 4% of Canadian respondents currently own or previously owned a vehicle that uses

this technology. One major hurdle may be fueling infrastructures in Canada.

"Alternative fuel vehicles are typically developed in small, experimental volumes for commercial application, which is why so few retail consumers have seen or even heard of them," explains Miller, adding that the fueling infrastructure does not exist to offer general consumers a minimally acceptable level of convenience. "This is a serious 'chicken and egg' problem for the energy and automotive industries. Manufacturers can't afford to launch vehicles that are not supported by a refueling infrastructure, and the energy industry can't afford to build the infrastructure and wait 10 years for enough vehicles to be on the road to make it worth their investment."

"The principal perceived benefit of most of these technologies is a reduced impact on the environment, which while important, does not tend to strongly affect individual purchase behavior in most markets," notes Miller. "As a result, consumers have not driven the demand for such vehicles. Instead, these vehicles have been regarded as requiring the consumer to pay a higher price and make unacceptable tradeoffs in areas like performance, vehicle size and design."

But hybrid vehicles may be leading a change in consumer attitude in markets where they are being promoted aggressively by well-respected manufacturers such as Toyota and Honda. And the required sacrifices are disappearing with some new hybrids actually boasting better acceleration than the vehicles' conventional engine options.

-Article by Car Care Canada,  
www.carcarecanada.ca

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