

Ford gets greener than ever with the 2008 Escape Hybrid

JIM ROBINSON
Metroland Media Group

Hybrid vehicles have gone from a curiosity to the mainstream almost overnight and that's a good thing.

The public has accepted the wisdom of hybrids and the proof is in the sales charts.

The Ford Escape is already the top-selling small SUV on the market, a fact I didn't know. And, as far as I know, it is still the only small hybrid SUV you can buy.

When it came to styling the 2008 version of the Escape and Hybrid, designers dropped the cladding of the previous model and then set about rounding the corners of what was essentially the brick-like form that SUV buyers covet for its rugged/brawny appearance. In the process, the 2008 is now much handsomer. Another journalist likened it to the Land Rover LR3, a comparison that had the Ford guys smiling.

The 2008 Escape Hybrid front-wheel-drive (AWD) starts at \$31,499 and the all-wheel-drive (AWD) version starts at \$33,899.

The interior was given a complete makeover with a centre control stack that features a top-of-dash information display. Ford also dropped the traditional green nighttime interior lighting for something they call Ice Blue.

The Escape Hybrid is based on the same 2.3-litre, inline four-cylinder engine as the base 2008 Escape. The engine produces 133 hp and 124 lb/ft of torque.

An integral electric motor that is driven by the transmission produces up to 94 hp and 152 lb/ft of torque. Because the gasoline and electric drives work at different times, the power numbers are not combined. However for simplicity, Ford says net power of the Hybrid is 155 hp.

Ford claims fuel savings of up to 75 per cent if the Escape is used in mostly urban driving. Ford produced an intriguing data sheet comparing fuel consumption and CO2 emissions of all the carmakers' standard and hybrid versions. The front-drive Escape Hybrid showed a 30.5 per cent increase in efficiency over the standard front-drive, four-cylinder Escape. As a comparison, the Toyota Prius had a 35.9 per cent increase in efficiency over the Toyota Yaris (both with 1.5-litre engines).

But for the average person like you and me, what real benefits are there in buying a hybrid? Right off the bat, you pay thousands of dollars more for a hybrid, so when does it start making financial sense? And what happens if the system dies or the battery fails?

Luckily for me, I got to ride with Dave Gabriel, the Electric Drive Systems Project Design Engineer of the Escape Hybrid. He has been involved with the Escape Hybrid project since 1998. In that time, his team has almost 200 patents and Gabriel himself has five, some of which are international patents.

Asked if there ever was a 'Eureka' moment, he said, "There wasn't one, but lots of little things that we learned and applied. Looking back at any point in time on what we had done two years earlier, we couldn't believe how much we had improved."

Gabriel explained there are "mild hybrids" and "full hybrids". The mild hybrid consists of an engine with an electric motor driven off it. It can shut off the engine at stop lights and also give a boost of additional power under acceleration, but can never be driven under full electric power. Normally, mild hybrids get about 10-15 per cent better fuel economy.

Full hybrids, Gabriel said, use both an engine and/or an electric motor to drive the wheels.

Full hybrids like the 2008 Escape get about 50 to 85 per cent better fuel economy, with stop-and-go urban driving being the most beneficial. This is because the Escape Hybrid not only shuts down when stopped, but it can travel at up to 48 km/h on pure battery power for up to two kms before the battery needs a boost. But you can lengthen this out because during braking or deceleration, the electric motor acts like a generator supplying regenerative power straight to the battery.

Much recent effort has gone into using as much battery power as possible and extending the time of battery duration. During a driving demonstration, you could feel the engine shutting down long before you came a full stop. Similarly, lifting off the brake and feathering in the power could all be done on the battery, provided you were prepared to take your time about it and ignore the hothead behind you.



Looking much more purposeful for 2008, the Ford Escape Hybrid is 30.5 per cent more fuel efficient than the regular 2008 Escape thanks to its "full hybrid" drive system that lets this SUV run on gasoline, battery or a combination of both.

APRIL IS SHOWERING DEALS IN MILTON

2007 VERSA SEDAN 1.8S

\$169* 1% FINANCING AVAILABLE

60 MTH LEASE 24,000
KMS/YEAR \$3,550
DOWN PAYMENT



- 1.8L 4 CYL. 122 HP ENGINE
- 4 SPEED AUTO
- AIR CONDITIONING
- POWER WINDOWS/LOCKS
- REMOTE ENTRY
- POWER MIRRORS
- AM/FM CD STEREO
- MUCH MORE

0 DOWN LEASES AVAILABLE

2007 ALTIMA 2.5S

\$239* 1% FINANCING AVAILABLE

60 MTH LEASE 24,000
KMS/YEAR \$4998
DOWN PAYMENT



- 2.5L 4 CYL 175 HP ENGINE
- CVT AUTOMA INTELLIGENT KEY PUSH BUTTON START
- AIR CONDITIONING
- POWER WINDOWS/LOCKS
- CRUISE CONTROL
- TILT/TELESCOPIC STEERING WHEEL
- AM/FM CD STEREO
- FULL SIZE SPARE
- MUCH MORE

0 DOWN LEASES AVAILABLE

2007 PATHFINDER SAVE UP TO \$6,500

STARTING AT

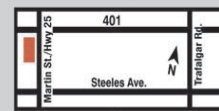
\$31,798**



Milton's
NORTH END
NISSAN LTD.

610 MARTIN STREET, MILTON
905-878-4137

SALES DEPT. HOURS:
Mon.-Thurs. 9:00 - 9:00
Fri. 9:00 - 6:00
Sat. 9:00 - 5:00



SHIFT

See ESCAPE, pg. 6

PRICE EXCLUDES FREIGHT OF \$1,385, SEC. REG. FEE 175 AIR AND FUEL TAXES, GREEN LEVIES, PST, GST AND LIC. FEE. *LEASE OFFERS ARE FOR VERSA SEDAN B4LG77 BNO0, ALTIMA 2.5S T4RG17 AE00. RESIDUAL VALUES ARE \$6,089.30 AND \$9,477.26 LEASE RATES 3%/3% APR. TOTAL LEASE OBLIGATION IS \$13,690/\$19,398. PAYMENTS ARE PLUS PST & GST. DOWN PAYMENTS EXCLUDE SEC. REG. FEE \$175, AIR/FUEL TAX, PST, GST, AND LIC. *PRICE + SECURITY REG FEE \$175 TAXES AND LICENSING.