

EnerGuide for Cars 2005 Winners - Save Money, Reduce Smog

Transportation accounts for 27% of Canada's emissions of greenhouse gases that can cause climate change. More than half of this comes from cars and light trucks which also produce smog. Although car ownership has doubled since the 1960s and so have the miles driven, the average vehicle fuel economy has not changed in two decades.

In Caledon we are car-dependent and will continue to be until fast, frequent and practical public transit is available. In previous columns, I've discussed ways to reduce vehicle idling and annual distance driven. If it's time for a new car, you can make a difference by choosing a vehicle that emits less smog and greenhouse gases. With fuel prices at near-record levels, it's a double bonus when you buy an efficient vehicle.

Car manufacturers have come a long way in reducing some pollutants through better emission controls. Many vehicles are now rated LEV (low emission vehicle) or ULEV (ultra-low emission vehicle). However, emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂, the major greenhouse gas) and other pollutants are directly related to fuel consumption. Many of them are not removed by emission controls. The only way to reduce CO₂ emissions is to use less fuel - and you'll save money too.

Today's cars get similar gas mileage to new 1990 models, but they have more powerful engines. Manufacturers are mandated by the U.S. EPA to meet a specified average fuel economy across model lines. This requirement has not changed since 1985, so new technology to improve fuel efficiency has led to more powerful vehicles that meet the outdated mileage requirements.

In 1986 I drove a 4WD wagon that got 7L/100km with 62 horsepower. The current model has twice the horsepower, yet gets exactly the same mileage. The manufacturer could easily have compromised, improving efficiency and horsepower by 50% each, but this is not the current focus of the auto industry and consumers have not demanded it.

Unfortunately, SUVs are only required to meet the less stringent light truck fuel economy standard. Their popularity has led to a decline in average fuel economy for the entire passenger fleet.

Environment Canada assigns EnerGuide ratings to identify vehicles with the best fuel economy in their class: <http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/transportation/tools/fuel-consumption-guide>. Many of us are concerned about the safety of smaller, more efficient cars, so I checked safety ratings at www.safecarguide.com/mak/mak.htm. This site includes all available crash test data including frontal, side and offset collisions, accident statistics and vehicle weight. I've listed some of the 2005 EnerGuide award winners below; I encourage you to do your own research based on your family's needs.

Subcompact vehicles: The Toyota Echo hatchback gets excellent mileage and an "acceptable" safety rating. The VW New Beetle TDI has excellent mileage and "good" safety, although diesels emit more smog per litre.

Compact and Mid-size: The Honda Civic Hybrid and Toyota Prius Hybrid received top EnerGuide ratings and both scored "good" in crash tests. Gas-electric hybrids represent the near future of engine technology. They get almost unbelievable mileage, especially in city driving - around 4-5L/100km.

Wagons: The Toyota Matrix and Pontiac Vibe wagons were EnerGuide winners with "good" safety. Another winner, the VW Jetta TDI diesel wagon, has "excellent" safety.

Full-size: The Chevy Malibu Maxx received the best EnerGuide rating with a "good/ acceptable" safety rating.

Pick-up trucks: The Ford Ranger and Mazda B2300 4-cylinder trucks were EnerGuide winners with "good" safety scores.

Minivans: The Honda Odyssey has the best mileage and an "excellent" safety rating. Many minivan models have similar fuel efficiency.

SUVs: The most efficient SUV is the Ford Escape Hybrid which has an "acceptable" crash test rating. Its mileage in the city matches a small car! Some SUVs are more than twice as fuel efficient as others. The most efficient are car-based SUVs, which get similar mileage to a mid-sized car or minivan. There is a wide range in safety scores, with some large truck-based SUVs earning surprisingly low ratings.

For more information about this or other topics in the Caledon Clean Air Clean Energy Program, please contact us at cca@caledoncountryside.org or (905) 584-6221, or visit www.caledoncountryside.org/stepup.htm.

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