

Fuel economy for Ford C-Max Energi most apparent in city

August 12 2015, by Ann M. Job

Ford's first dedicated hybrid for North American consumers, the C-Max gasoline-electric hybrid hatchback, is turning out to be an acquired taste. Sales are declining for the second straight year, lower gas prices have led the C-Max and other hybrids to lose their luster and Consumer Reports predicts the plug-in C-Max Energi's reliability to be worse than average.

But a recent test drive of the 2015 model illustrated how, if driven right, the mid-size car can endear itself to a driver, especially those in cities.

In its third model year, the C-Max remains a fuel-thrifty vehicle, ranking third best in fuel economy among plug-in hybrids and 10th best among non-plug-in hybrids. Plus, the C-Max—which is sold as either a plug-in hybrid with onboard gasoline engine or as a non-plug-in hybrid with a gasoline four-cylinder supplemented by onboard-generated [electric power](#)—offers a lot of room for the money. The tall, five-door vehicle has more front and rear headroom than major competitors, such as the Chevrolet Volt and Toyota Prius, as well as more legroom in the back and a range of cargo space from 19.2 cubic feet to 52.6 cubic feet.

All this comes at a starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, that's on par with or less than other hybrids.

The non-plug-in model, a 2015 C-Max Hybrid, starts at \$25,045—\$20 more than the starting MSRP and destination charge for a 2015 Prius Two. The 2015 C-Max Energi, which is the plug-in model, starts at \$32,645—\$2,525 less than the 2015 Volt and qualifies for a tax credit.

But shoppers who want to reduce oil consumption—regardless of [gas prices](#)—have plenty of choices, including all-electric cars like the Nissan Leaf that can go 70 or more miles on electric power vs. the 20-mile range of the plug-in C-Max Energi. Plus, some would-be buyers might remember the C-Max publicity from 2013, when Ford lowered mileage numbers after customer complaints. And U.S. sales are down again, with just 13,101 sold through July.

A test drive of the C-Max Energi showed that the short commutes and quick errands mostly fit the electric-power range. The fully fueled and charged tester arrived with a travel range of 550 miles. After five days and 158 miles—accumulated via many short city driving trips—the travel range for the C-Max Energi was 527 miles. No gasoline had been purchased and the gas gauge hadn't budged.

Federal government mileage rating is 40 miles per gallon in city driving and 36 mpg on highways with the 2-liter, Atkinson cycle four-cylinder, which is the primary driver of the C-Max.

The C-Max Energi's four-cylinder engine mostly took over the duties for longer trips.

It was like having two cars—one electric, one not. Passengers couldn't tell if the front-wheel drive C-Max was in electric or gas mode, because transitions between power modes were seamless.

Power came on strongly and silently at startup. Total horsepower peaks at a healthy 188, and while torque from the electric power is instantaneous, the engine's torque of 129 foot-pounds felt decent.

Styling makes the car look like a practical but inexpensive hatchback, but the turning circle in the C-Max is surprisingly big at 38 feet.

The C-Max Energi's cargo space behind the back seats is compromised by the lithium-ion battery pack, so much so that the cord and plug for charging the car are stored in a compartment in the back-seat floor.

The ride was firm, not plush, and the weight of the battery pack gave the C-Max an unsettling pivot point in aggressive turns. Passengers heard some road noise and wind noise, and wind buffeting noise was severe when the front windows were open.

A backup camera is not standard on the C-Max and can cost more than \$2,000 to add because it's part of an option package.

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