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## Wheels



The Nuts and Bolts of Whatever Moves You

October 1, 2009, 7:41 am

## E.P.A. Says M.P.G. for Electric Cars and Plug-in Hybrids Are a Work in Progress

By [Jim Motavalli](#)

Few auto industry power players are satisfied with the calculations that [award the Chevrolet Volt a stellar 230 miles a gallon](#) (which is topped by the [Nissan Leaf battery car at 367](#)). Those numbers are based on a draft Environmental Protection Agency standard for plug-in hybrids and battery cars. But the agency says that work isn't complete, and it is searching for meaningful ways to present the information to car buyers on the window sticker.

The E.P.A. and the Transportation Department issued their proposed rule-making for combined greenhouse gas and corporate average fuel economy standards on Sept. 15. The agency admitted that designing test procedures and calculations for advanced technology vehicles "can be very complicated" and that what it called "adjustment factors" needed to be weighed. There's certainly no consensus on which approach will resonate with consumers, and many admit that the advantage of measurements in miles a gallon is sheer familiarity.

In a letter released on Wednesday (but written Sept. 23), the agency said it will "initiate a new rule-making to explore in detail the information displayed on the current fuel economy label and the methodology for deriving that information." The E.P.A. letter also said it was seeking input on consumer labels that could "provide practical, usable and meaningful information to vehicle purchasers" interested in battery electrics, plug-in hybrids and "other advanced technology vehicles."

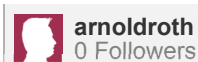
The E.P.A.'s letter was in response to a Sept. 10 [proposal from Israel's ETV Motors](#), which is working on battery technology as well as a hybrid concept that uses a micro-turbine to replenish an E.V.'s batteries. In an interview, ETV's chief operating officer, Arnold Roth, said the company wrote to the United States agency because "the world needs the E.P.A. to take the lead. What the E.P.A. does will have a ripple effect into all markets." The United States, said Dror Ben-David, ETV's chief executive, "is a leader in rule-making."

ETV proposed that consumers be given three pieces of information: the E.V.'s all-electric range, its energy efficiency in electric mode (expressed in miles a 10 kilowatt-hours) and, for plug-in hybrids, its fuel efficiency when the internal-combustion engine kicks in.

Automakers and environmentalists interviewed have their own take on what an ideal E.V. window sticker would look like. Jim Kliesch, a senior engineer in the Clean Vehicles Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists, echoed the views of many when he said that using the miles-a-gallon standard on vehicles that don't actually use gasoline is, as he put it, a dog that doesn't hunt. "We need to capture the full effects of the vehicle's energy consumption," he said. And looking only at gasoline in the Volt and plug-in hybrid cars "means you have only part of the equation."

Diarmuid O'Connell, vice president of business development at Tesla Motors, said, "We would like to see a scientific approach that treats all technologies equally, instead of a haircut that favors one or the other."

Richard Canny, chief executive of Norway's Think battery carmaker, said the company's preferred method is measuring how much energy the vehicle uses in a standard driving cycle (different in Europe and the United States). He likes the idea of a star rating "just like on home appliances," plus an estimate of annual


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Kevin Czinger, president and chief executive of another battery car company, Coda Automotive, said he would like to see his cars labeled with their battery range and a “clear and nonconfusing statement” that the vehicle in question was zero emission.

Of course, E.V. critics say that battery cars aren’t really zero emission because their electricity was generated by power plants. And so the debate on this question as the E.P.A. searches for meaningful window sticker information is likely to be colorful.

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Some smart person should develop software to load on a iPhone, Blackberry, laptop w/GPS etc, to collect and chart the actual driving habits of the car owner. Miles per trip, miles each day, idle time per day (stuck in traffic), etc, etc.

This would help the consumer understand the benefits (or inconvenience) of a particular EV, Hybrid or ICE car.

What it’s going to tell most people is that EV’s could be useful as a very expensive second car, car, a PHEV a very expensive first car, and a hybrid a reasonably priced high efficiency gas car.

However, as the technology improves and becomes more widely accepted (and less expensive), EV’s and PHEV’s may become more attractive to mainstream consumers.