

MotorWeek Transcripts

MotorNews 'BIG GREEN SUVS'

JESSICA SHEA CHOKSEY: Over the last couple of years, sales of full-size SUVs have been feeling a double punch of unstable gas prices, and a growing concern that their less than spectacular fuel economy is hurting the environment. But now, General Motors hopes to take the pain out of buying big.

Waving the Green flag, GM is ready to offer consumers two full-size SUV hybrids, the 2008 Chevrolet Tahoe Hybrid and the GMC Yukon Hybrid.

Using GM's "Two-Mode Full Hybrid" system, derived from its transit buses, these big-UTES are designed to maximize fuel savings for both urban and rural lifestyles. Like the typical gas-electric hybrid vehicle, the Tahoe and Yukon hybrids will enjoy a substantial boost in mileage in stop-and-go city driving. That means they can start off and drive at low speeds on electric power alone. Plus, the gasoline V8 engine will automatically shut down when the vehicle is stopped. But, unlike the typical hybrid, the "Two-mode" Tahoe and Yukon will also provide an electric motor power boost during rapid acceleration such as passing.

We've driven a Tahoe Hybrid at highway speeds and the power kick is comparable to a jet engine's afterburner.

Along with more aerodynamic body-work, the Tahoe and Yukon Hybrid's 6.0-liter V8-engine also uses GM's Active Fuel Management system. It improved fuel economy further during low-load highway cruise by cutting off fuel to 4 of 8 cylinders.

The net result is up to a 25% gain in gas mileage. Government Fuel Economy ratings are 21 City and 22 Highway for 2-wheel drive Hybrid models. That compares to 14 and 20 for the standard Tahoe and Yukon.

4-wheel drive hybrids are rated at 20 miles-per-gallon both city and highway. That's up from 14 and 19.

Striving for conservation without compromise, these full-size UTES can still tow 6,000 pounds. So, GM's green giants may just be what big-sport-utility buyers have been craving.

GM plans to put their "Two-Mode" hybrid system in other vehicles, including the compact Saturn Vue utility, starting next year. And that's it for this week's MotorNews.