

# The Hybrid Vehicle and Alternative Fuel Report

June 15, 2015

**The fine print:** This report is a summary of articles appearing in popular, business, and technical media referring to the impact of fuel costs and fuel efficiency on vehicle technology, development, and markets. At the end of the report is a list of all articles summarized, with hyperlinks to internet sources where available. Some articles may require free registration or paid subscriptions to access. *The Hybrid Vehicle and Alternative Fuel Report* (ISSN: 1946-1011) is compiled, written, and edited by Thomas L. R. Smith, Ph. D., Economic Analysis Branch of the Budget and Financial Analysis Division, Washington State Department of Transportation. Contact *The Hybrid Vehicle and Alternative Fuel Report's* editor at [smithtm@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:smithtm@wsdot.wa.gov) or (360) 705-7941. Contributions of news items, original articles, positive comments about *The Report*, and cookies are welcome. Please send cookies. And not the computer kind.

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## NATIONAL HYBRID, ELECTRIC, AND PLUG-IN HYBRID VEHICLE SALES

Overall, new car sales for May 2015 were the best for any May since records have been kept, *Automotive News* (Phillips, Versical, & Bunkley, June 2, 2015) says. The May sales mean that Seasonally Annualized sales for 2015 will be above 17 million cars sold, the highest since 2001. Car buyers are taking advantage of low interest rates, long loan terms, and good lease deals. Trucks and SUVs are selling particularly well. But readers of *The Hybrid Report* ask, but what about hybrid, plug-in hybrid, and electric car sales?

We answer: they also had strong sales. *HybridCars* (Cobb, June 3, 2015) reports that hybrids and plug-ins had their best sales of the year and the best sales since August and September 2014. Toyota, as usual, led the hybrid sector with 66.1% of all hybrids sold. Toyota had the top four selling hybrids, dominated, again as usual, by the three Prii models. The Toyota Camry hybrid slipped into the number three spot, while the Hyundai Sonata hybrid took fifth. The vast majority of hybrids increased sales over April, while only a handful of low-selling cars improved over May 2014. Overall, hybrids took 2.47% of the new car market.

The plug-in hybrid market was dominated by the Chevrolet Volt, which sold 36.6% of the plug-ins sold. Like hybrids, Ford came in second, with the Fusion and C-Max Energi, together, accounting for 38.5% of the plug-in market. Sales were up over April, but did not exceed last May's sales. Plug-in hybrids accounted for 0.27% of the new car market.

Electric cars were dominated by Tesla, with 32.6% of the electric market, followed by the Nissan Leaf with 29.8% of the market. Electrics improved over both the

previous April and May 2014. While these numbers are impressive, remember, that electric cars only made up 0.43% of the total new car market. The three sectors combined accounted for 3.17% of the new car market in May.

Looking at the same statistics, *Autoblog* (King, June 4, 2015) says that VW's sale of 410 e-Golfs, which was the best ever in the United States, was the only bright spot for "green-car vehicle advocates." *Autoblog* can't quite commit, but says that American car buyers "are either taking a bit of a break from buying hybrids, battery-electric vehicles and diesels, or they are weaning themselves off of those types of powertrains altogether."

## **HYBRIDS**

The German state of Baden-Wuerttemberg will conduct a feasibility study of so-called "eco-lanes," *Green Car Reports* (Voelcker, May 19, 2015) reports. The eco-lanes will be open to any vehicle that meets Euro 6 emissions tests and carpools. The study will determine the lanes' impact on air quality. The Euro 6 standards will allow certain new internal combustion engine cars in the lanes, not just electric or hybrids.

Coconut Creek, just north of Fort Lauderdale, is enforcing its preferred parking ordinance for hybrid and electric cars, the *Sun-Sentinel* (Geggis, June 5, 2015) shone. The City Council instituted a \$30 fine for a non-alternative fuel vehicle parking in a reserved spot. Regardless, one shopping center, The Promenade at Coconut Creek, reduced its reserved spots from 52 to 26.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has introduced a new human-electric hybrid taxi service, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (Schmitz, June 14, 2015) posted. The pedal-operated, electrically-assisted Autopods provide shuttles in the Downtown area. An Autopod driver will shuttle up to two passengers in the service area for \$5 to \$8.

## **ELECTRIC VEHICLES**

Fastned, a Dutch company that runs a charging network in the Netherlands, is offering members of the Founders Club free charging for life. To become a member, you have to buy 2,500 shares of Fastned stock directly from the company. Shares go for €10, so you have to invest €25,000 (\$27,212.50) to get the lifetime charging benefit. You can find out more at Fastned's [website](#).

Also in the Netherlands, specifically Brabant, electric car owners can sign up for a program that allows owners to schedule charging to receive the lowest available rates, *The New Motion* (May 6, 2015) moves. The program is available in 36 municipalities in Brabant and allows owners to choose from a number of different power and charging system providers.

The California Air Resources Board (CARB) rules that require automakers who want to sell cars in California and other States adopting those rules have been updated and modified, *Automotive News* (Nelson, May 30, 2015) notes. As originally planned, the first group of major automakers was required to have so many Zero Emissions Vehicles (ZEV, read electric or hydrogen) available for sale. Then by 2018, the next tier of mid-sized automakers would have to introduce ZEVs. Because the mid-size automakers complained that their smaller research and development staffs and budgets made ZEVs an undue burden, CARB gave them a break: they can build Transitional Zero Emissions Vehicles or plug-in hybrids instead. Apparently, the companies can buy credits from other car makers, as well. An official at Tesla complained that the deal was too lenient and that the midsize automakers should be held to higher standards. Tesla, which sells credits to other car makers, says that all of the mid-size companies are larger than Tesla, yet Tesla can comply with the standards.

Electric car owners in Minnesota's Great River Energy's service area can sign up to use wind power to charge their cars, *Business Wire* (June 3, 2015) wired. To get in on the deal, applicants must own or lease up to four electric or plug-in hybrid by December 31, 2016. Go to the [Revolt](#) website for more details.

**Check's in the Mail:** Over 800 new Georgia<sup>1</sup> electric car owners have \$5,000 coming to them due to an error by the Georgia Department of Revenue, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Torres, June 3, 2015) considers. The car owners applied for Georgia's now defunct tax credit on their annual income tax return but were denied the benefit. The Revenuers said they caught the error on May 18. They caught the error after hundreds of taxpayers called to complain. The problem occurred because the owners have to apply to Georgia's Department of Natural Resources to certify for the credit, then that agency sends the database to Revenue. It appears that a data field was missing causing the rejection of the credit.

The University of Alaska Fairbanks has an electric shuttle bus on campus that is reminiscent of a clown car, the *News Miner* (Richardson, June 14, 2015) digs. The \$40,000 bus is funded by a \$20 per student assessment. In a bit of brilliant planning, the bus can only be used in summer in Alaska because it does not have heat.

## ALTERNATIVE FUELS

Governor Pete Ricketts of Nebraska signed a bill that provides rebates for vehicle owners who convert to various alternative fuels, *Green Fleet* (June 2, 2015) flouts. The Nebraska Clean-Burning Motor Fuel Development Act sets aside half a million dollars for rebates ranging to \$4,500 for owners that convert to natural gas, propane, hydrogen, or 15% ethanol. Home owners who install a compressed natural gas fueling system can

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<sup>1</sup> We may have mentioned before that Georgia was the Editor's home State from 1961-1972.

get a \$2,500 rebate. The [U. S. Department of Energy](#) estimates a home station could cost between \$5,500 to \$10,000 (Smith & Gonzales, September 2015).

Oklahoma's Governor signed a bill that provides interest-free loans to county governments to purchase natural gas vehicles or convert to the fuel, [Heavy Duty Trucking](#) (June 9, 2015a) reported. Counties have to pay back the loans in five years.

Natural gas sales are booming in Texas, [Heavy Duty Trucking](#) (June 9, 2015b) says. So far, sales of compressed natural gas and liquefied natural gas are 78% higher than last year. There are 137 fuel stations for Texas's 7,900 natural gas vehicles. Texas expects to have another 44 stations in the next year and a half.

The Office of Naval Research and the Hawaii Natural Energy Institute are testing a hydrogen fuel station at Marine Corps Base Hawaii at Kaneohe Bay, [Green Fleet](#) (June 11, 2015) floats. The station has been around for over a year, but was recently converted and certified for self-service. Navy and Marine Corps hydrogen vehicle use the station for refueling. The Navy is trying to find out how much it costs to produce hydrogen at the station and determine the operating costs of hydrogen.

You can get compressed natural gas and propane autogas at the Sunoco APlus station at the Pittsburgh International Airport, [Green Fleet](#) (June 10, 2015) says. There are also electric charging stations as well.

**COMING TO A LOCATION NEAR YOU:** The latest news on new charging stations which may or may not be somewhere close to you.

**United States:** Cobb County, Georgia, northwest of Atlanta, is developing a charging network to support the county's fleet of Nissan Leafs, [Government Fleet](#) (June 2, 2015) floats. Four of the charging stations will be open to the public, while another 18 will be available only to county owned vehicles.

The New York Thruway will see charging stations open this summer at four travel plazas between Newburgh and Catskill, [The Journal News](#) (Saeed, June 3, 2015) of the Lower Hudson Valley journals. It is unknown if the Thruway Authority will charge chargers for charging.

The Sacramento Municipal Utility District installed its second fast charging station, [The Sacramento Bee](#) (Lindelof, June 3, 2015) buzzes. The station is on Lichen Drive, just off the Interstate 80 Antelope Road exit. While not specific as to the rate charged to customers, the Utility says the charge is the equivalent of \$2 a gallon.

San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) plans to add 550 charging sites to its charging network, San Diego's [ABC 10](#) (City News Service, June 3, 2015) reported.

SDG&E will install 10 chargers at the locations. Ten percent of the chargers will go into economically disadvantaged communities.

Seymour, Connecticut in the lower Naugatuck Valley, opened a new charging station at the fish bypass channel in downtown, the *New Haven Register* (Falbo-Sosnovich, June 8, 2015) registered. The charging station was installed as part of the fish bypass project.

More charging stations could come to California small businesses, condos, and apartment complexes if they take advantage of California's Electric Vehicle Charging Station Financing Program, the *Sacramento Bee* (Glover, June 9, 2015) says. That State initiated a \$2 million program to back loans from banks to small businesses to install chargers. The businesses also get a 15% rebate on the chargers.

The Mirbeau Inn and Spa in Skaneateles, New York, installed three Tesla chargers and a charging station for other cars, the *Skaneateles Journal* (Monfiletto, June 14, 2015) journaled. Charging is free for all guests. Skaneateles is just southwest of Syracuse,<sup>2</sup> New York.

**Around the World:** Aylesbury, northwest of London and just outside Bletchley, has three new fast charging stations, the United Kingdom's radio station *mix96* (June 12, 2015) broadcasted. The stations, financed through an Office for Low Emission Vehicles grant, are at the offices of Aylesbury Vale District Council.

## OTHER TECHNOLOGY

Platooning tractor-trailers could achieve fuel savings of 5 to 10%, *Fleet Owner* (Kilcarr, May 28, 2015) says. Platooning, or Driver-Assistive Truck Platooning (DATP) uses a variety of technologies that allow trucks driving together to set speeds, brake, and set distances between trucks using radar and inter-vehicle communications. Auburn University and the American Transportation Research Institute will test DATP at Auburn's National Center for Asphalt Technology test track and do some pilot tests on public roads. So far, the research has found that larger fleets that have trips of 500 miles or more will show the biggest returns. Urban delivery trucks will not benefit from platooning.

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<sup>2</sup> The home of one the Editor's many alma maters, Syracuse University, Master of Social Science, 1999.

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*That is all.*