

CAR CORNER

Shopping For Hybrids: Important Points To Ponder

(NAPSA)—Hybrid cars are helping drive the auto market, with sales of the green vehicles rising 38 percent last year alone, according to the Associated Press.

As drivers continue to face sticker shock at the pump, experts don't expect hybrid sales to cool off anytime soon. But is a hybrid vehicle right for you?

It depends on what you're looking for in your car, the way you drive and what you hope to spend.

"Hybrids can be a silver bullet to high gas bills. But some hybrids don't boost fuel economy much at all," says Marty Padgett, editor of TheCarConnection.com. He offers these reasons to buy—and not to buy—a hybrid:

The Right Reasons

- To replace a dying car: If you're buying a new vehicle for other reasons, it's the right time to consider a hybrid. "If you just want to ditch a big SUV, don't—the used values are dropping fast," Padgett warns.

- For tax breaks: While the Prius is no longer eligible for tax breaks, hybrids such as the Mazda Tribute qualify for up to a \$3,000 tax credit.

- For company perks: Companies from Bank of America to Timberland give money or parking privileges to employees who own hybrids.

- For high occupancy (HOV) lane rights: "Some cities let hybrid owners drive in the HOV lanes," Padgett says.

- To downsize: Trading a Chevy Tahoe for a hybrid version



Certain hybrid vehicles qualify for tax breaks as high as \$3,000.

saves some gas—but trading it for a Honda Civic Hybrid gives you more bang for your buck.

The Wrong Reasons

- To save money now: You won't save money at first. A Honda Civic Hybrid costs about \$2,500 more than the gas-only version. Even at \$4 a gallon, it could take four years to repay the hybrid cost.

- To get lower service bills: It might use less gas, but at some point your hybrid will need its batteries replaced, and it still needs regular service, including oil changes, new tires and new brakes.

- For regular-car performance: Hybrids feel mostly like normal cars—but generally have less sensitive steering and brakes.

- For the fuel economy on the sticker: Even with changes to the EPA's testing cycle, those window stickers still have optimistic city and highway ratings.

- To be cool: Fashions are fickle.

For more information on hybrid vehicles, including reviews of specific models, details on tax breaks and other incentives, go to the Web site TheCarConnection.com.