

Plugged in and focused in Phoenix

By Joe Sage



Prior to our trip to Michigan (see next feature) to drive the Ford Focus Electric and other emerging powertrain vehicles at Ford's Dearborn Development Center, we joined Ford engineers and the Green Chamber: Greater Phoenix, as they invited consumers to slip behind the wheel and whisk around downtown Phoenix. The occasion? Phoenix and Tucson have been chosen as two of 19 initial markets for the Focus Electric. The venue? The Children's Museum of Phoenix, which already has a solar panel installation in its parking lot to power electric vehicle (EV) charging stations.

Ford's Power of Choice approach—a combination of hybrid, plug-in hybrid, electric and highly efficient EcoBoost gasoline vehicles—is aimed at typical current shoppers, fully 44 percent of whom say fuel economy is their number one goal when buying a new vehicle (61 percent "would consider" an electric or plug-in hybrid vehicle). As Ford is engineering one third of its lineup to get 40-plus MPG, the Focus Electric is tops. This frugal car has been certified to achieve the equivalent of 110 miles per gasoline gallon (MPGe).

Interest in the vehicle was high at this event, with smiles all around as people experienced life behind the wheel of an electric car for the first time. Quiet is something they expect, though it still registers delight. What surprises most is the high torque—the potent grip and push of the electric motors through the wheels to the pavement—that an electric vehicle provides. This is no golf cart, and more people understand this every day.

We've spent significant time with the fully-electric Nissan Leaf, the range-extended Chevrolet Volt and the Toyota Prius Plug-In Hybrid. Each vehicle feels more familiar, and the appeal grows stronger and stronger. ■

