

A little more like a hybrid

By Barbara and Bill Schaffer



GM has pledged another vehicle to the elite HEV fraternity. It's hard to think of the other GM hybrids, the Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra, as true Hybrid Electric Vehicles, because electricity doesn't really power the vehicles. The new Saturn Vue Green Line is a little more of a hybrid, but still not the kind that will allow you to silently motor through parking lots or cruise silently through slow-moving traffic.

The Saturn Green Line drive system combines sophisticated controls and an electric motor/generator with a 2.4-liter four-cylinder gas engine with variable valve timing and four-speed automatic transmission. The system provides additional power during acceleration and increased fuel economy through engine shut-off at idle, fuel cut-off during deceleration and the capability to capture elec-

tric energy through regenerative braking. This means owners should not anticipate 50 mpg fuel economy ratings; rather the EPA says to expect 27 mpg for city driving and 32 mpg on the highway. That compares with 22/27 for the comparable gas-powered model or about a 20 percent improvement over a gasoline-only Vue.

The Vue has a clean contemporary styling with fender flares, a unique five-grille front fascia and distinctive flat roof rear panel. Inside nearly all switches, including window and mirror controls, are conveniently located on the center console panel that extends down from the dash and surrounds the shifter. The steering wheel houses redundant audio controls as well as cruise controls.

The Vue seats four adults comfortably or five tightly. The 30.8 cubic foot cargo area can be expanded to 63.8 cubic feet by folding the 70/30 split rear seat backs. The front row passenger seat also folds flat to haul longer cargo like ladders or boards. The cargo compartment has an organizer that flips up to hold grocery bags and side storage bags that will hold items as large as a one-gallon milk carton.

The Vue's gasoline engine is the Ecotec 2.4-liter four-cylinder, which is rated at 170 horsepower; that's 27 more horsepower from the 2.2-liter base engine. Combined with GM's smooth four-speed automatic transmission, the front-wheel drive Vue is comfortable to

drive. It's not very fast, 0 to 60 mph in 10.1 seconds, but it's about one-second quicker than the base model.

The Green Line Vue has a base price of \$22,995 including the destination charge. It comes with an extensive list of features including cruise, power windows and locks, keyless entry, automatic dimming rear view mirror with compass and outside temperature. Available options include leather seating, Comfortably Safe package (head curtain side air bags, six-way power driver's seat, heated front seats and XM® Satellite Radio), power sunroof, AM/FM stereo with six-disc in-dash CD/MP3 player, and rear DVD entertainment system.

The Vue received five-star crash test ratings for front and back seat occupants in both frontal and side impacts.

We were disappointed that the Vue Green Line lacked a trip computer for the driver to keep track of fuel economy levels. That defeats one of the fun things to do while driving a hybrid—monitoring your fuel economy. It also lacks an available stability control system.

Just like the non-hybrid version, the Saturn Vue Green Line is fun to drive. The ride is smooth and quiet with agile handling and plenty of power for the average driver. Slightly higher ride height gives the driver a little better forward view than a sedan, but it's not high enough to feel venerable in sharper corners. ■

