

Seamless (to a point) By Joe Sage

*** NOTE:** Just as we were wrapping up this issue, Ford released revised fuel mileage numbers for this vehicle, along with the Fusion Hybrid we compare it to here, plus the hybrid and plug-in hybrid versions of C-MAX (and Lincoln MKZ), as well as for the neither-hybrid-nor-Energi Fiesta with 1.0L EcoBoost. This was done per an internal review of processes and results, not a dictate from EPA; rather, they informed EPA of the changes. If you already own any of these, you will be getting a "goodwill" payment from Ford. Our write-up here compares the value of the Fusion Energi Plug-In Hybrid with a Fusion Hybrid and a gasoline Fusion. We could have just edited this piece, but instead have footnoted it; the evolutionary info gives perspective. Tradeoffs and conclusions are the same or moreso.

Midsize sedans are the biggest selling segment. You are familiar with most of them to the point of invisibility—from top-selling Camry, Accord, Altima and Fusion (usually in that order), to Malibu, Mazda6, Optima, Passat, Sonata and more. Chrysler has just gotten (very) serious in the segment, with its new Alfa Romeo-based 200. Subaru is drawing more attention to its Legacy. For more dough, you have a list of luxury options.

Also for more dough, you have several hybrids. The first Fusion was a 2006 model, joined by a hybrid for 2010, rated at 39 MPG combined. A more innovative next generation gained a 47th MPG test rating—and sales promptly grew almost four-fold. *** NOTE:** The revised figure for Fusion Hybrid is now 42 MPG combined. Since 2013, Ford also offers the Fusion Energi plug-in hybrid driven here, bringing C-MAX Energi technology to the midsize sedan format.

The "seamless" part

The Fusion Energi plug-in hybrid bears the same 2-liter Atkinson cycle engine as the Fusion Hybrid,

but its electric motor is the big news. The Fusion Energi can run in all-electric mode at speeds up to 85 mph, and for up to 21 miles, which is much farther than the couple of no-gasoline miles you can eke out of a Prius in eco mode.

As with the Fusion Hybrid, the Energi plug-in does not go overboard with displays and calculators, though it does give fun and useful information about its systems and achievements. It does not have to become an obsession, as with some others—you can drive this quite normally.

Suspension was smooth and solid, providing a very comfortable ride. The cabin is inviting, with plenty of range of adjustment in everything. No matter how you calculate the power and torque (see specs), it's short on acceleration, but very capable overall and easy to live with—a good long-term car.

A gasoline Fusion starts at just \$21,970 and gets 34 MPG highway. Fusion Hybrid starts at \$27,480 and gets 42 MPG *** (was 47)**. Fusion Energi plug-in hybrid starts at \$36,500 (\$40,500 for our Titanium test car) and is rated 38 MPG *** (was 43)**.

Other than minor experiments in electric-only after startup, we drove normally. After 110 miles, but based on only an eyeball of the fuel gauge, we calculated 19.6 MPG. A lighter foot would do better.

In 2013 (with a late start), the Fusion Energi represented 14 percent of combined Fusion Hybrid or Energi Plug-in Hybrid sales. So far in 2014, this has climbed closer to 19 percent (an almost 34 percent bump). Nice. *** NOTE:** Our conclusion remains the same—or only moreso—after the restated figures: We are impressed with the efforts and the intent, but for most buyers, we would say save the dough and get the more conventional Hybrid—or gas. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE:.....2.0L Atkinson-cycle IVC T I-4 HEV
POWER:

Engine horsepower (6000 RPM).....141 hp
Engine torque (4000 RPM).....129 lb-ft
Electric motor (6000 RPM).....118 hp / 88 kW
Electric motor torque.....117 lb-ft
Total system power (sustain).....188 hp

TRANSMISSION.....ECVT auto/powersplit
DRIVETRAIN.....front-wheel drive

FUEL ECONOMY:

Electricity & gasoline ..88 MPGe *** (was 100)**
Gasoline only38 MPG *** (was 43)**

TOTAL RANGE.....up to 620 miles

ELECTRIC-ONLY RANGE.....up to 21 miles

INCLUDED: 17" aluminum wheels, auto halogen headlights, rear spoiler, dual-zone electronic auto climate, capless fuel filler, fog lamps, keyless entry keypad, power fold heated mirrors, heated leather power seats, Sony premium audio, rear vents, full range of stability and handling electronics, Sync with MyFord Touch.

MANUFACTURED: Engine in Chihuahua, final assembly in Hermosillo, Mexico.

WARRANTY:

Bumper-bumper.....3 yr / 36,000 mi
Powertrain.....5 yr / 60,000 mi
Roadside assistance.....5 yr / 60,000 mi
Hybrid unique portion.....8 yr / 100,000 mi

BASE PRICE.....**\$40,500**

WHITE PLATINUM METALLIC TRI-COAT.....595

NAVIGATION SYSTEM.....795

DESTINATION CHARGE.....795

TOTAL.....**\$42,685**

LOGBOOK NOTES

(The "to a point" part)

You pay a price for batteries and two motors. The trunk is tiny. Clean shirts didn't even fit.

The charging cable unpacks easily, works easily, but is extremely difficult to restash.

Brakes could be lurchy, grabby—or lack-of-grabby, feeling like nothing, followed by crisis.

Pulling into a garage also made us lurch, as the transmission and brakes interact.

At a stop, we heard a dramatic thump as the inside vents shut down. No airflow till restart.

The rear area often generated some odd sound effects after shutting off. The nose wanted to bottom out when entering our driveway, no matter how careful we were.

MyFord Touch is notoriously frustrating.

Driving with a window open generates an ear-beating helicopter effect from seatbelts.

Ultimately, there's no question it's pretty cool to drive through the neighborhood in electric mode, perhaps rolling down the windows to enjoy the full effect of dead silence, nothing but the breeze blowing by.



Fusion Energi is extremely smooth-running. If you want to make a point of hearing it switch from electric to engine, good luck, even with the windows down—it is that quiet.

