

Quiet power

By Joe Sage

LOTS OF PLUSSES AND A FEW QUIRKS

The Ford C-MAX tackles that widely interpretable terrain comprising crossovers, small vans, wagons and whatever else it evokes for you. It does so within its own specialized niche: the C-MAX comes two ways, as a C-MAX Energi Plug-In Hybrid and as a regular ol' C-MAX Hybrid—the car we have here.

When we last drove the C-MAX Hybrid, about a year and a half earlier, we noted that it also dovetails with Ford Escape product planning: As the C-MAX Hybrid entered the world, an Escape Hybrid became no longer part of the mix. Conversely, there is no all-wheel-drive C-MAX. It's one or the other. To compare and contrast (using 2015 figures, recalibrated from the 2014 sticker figures at right), the C-MAX Hybrid rates 42/37 MPG city/highway, while its Energi Plug-In variant rates 40/36 MPG (and costs about \$7500 more). A front-drive Escape is \$1500 more than the C-MAX Hybrid and rates 23/32 MPG, while an AWD Escape adds about \$1750 and rates 22/30 MPG.

There are other differences, of course. The Escape is about five inches longer, can tow 3500 pounds and has 7.9 inches of ground clearance to C-MAX's 5.5. If you can manage your needs in just the electric mode of a C-MAX Energi Plug-In Hybrid, it could have appeal, though it takes awhile to get your \$7500 back. If you want AWD, it's Escape all the way. If not, the C-MAX Hybrid—with its much higher fuel mileage—is essential to shop while shopping the hot-selling Escape.

Driving the C-MAX is largely a treat—its powertrain delivers a real kick in the pants, taking anything we threw at it on the freeways, and it's quite maneuverable, although its turning circle gets mixed reviews (see sidebar). This little multiple segment invader demands a spot on your small crossover shopping list. ■



SPECIFICATIONS (2014)

ENGINE ..2.0L DOHC inline-4, Atkinson-cycle	
POWER: Engine horsepower	141 hp
Engine torque	129 lb-ft
Total system power (sustain) ..	188 hp
TRANSMISSION	eCVT hybrid powersplit
DRIVETRAIN	front-wheel drive
SEATING	five
WEIGHT	3640 lb
TOP SPEED	115 mph
Top speed electric-only mode	62 mph
MPG ...(old method) 45/40/43 (city/hwy/comb)	
TOTAL RANGE	540 miles
INCLUDED: 17" machined aluminum wheels,	
blind spot power mirrors, manual bucket	
seats (6-way driver, 4-way front passen-	
ger), cloth seats, cruise, 2nd row 60/40	
fold flat, dual-zone auto climate, in-floor	
rear storage, leather wrap wheel/shift,	
smart gauge/ecoguide, 6-speaker AM-	
FM-CD-MP3, LiOn battery, power locks/	
windows, remote keyless entry, traction	
control, 110v outlet and more.	
BUILT	Chihuahua, Mexico
WARRANTY: Extended hybrid warranty.	
BASE PRICE	\$25,170
EQUIP GROUP 203A: Power liftgate, rear park-	
ing aid, reverse sensing, ambient interior	
lighting, MyFord Touch/Sirius/nav	2290
EQUIP GROUP SAVINGS:	(295)
DESTINATION CHARGE:	825
TOTAL	\$28,285

LOGBOOK NOTES

One quirk is the power liftgate—dirt slow and not readily overridden by your own firm push. Though we're sure the engineers had the best of intentions, using the key fob is the best way to at least reduce this annoyance.

There are the usual annoyances (or more) with the MyFord Touch interface, notably audio. With time, you can learn it better.

We found a conundrum with steering. While trying to do a U-turn in a familiar easy spot, this little guy required a three-point turn. Our lead photo shows the wheels turned as tight as possible—not very. Yet in another instance (a parking lot with no obstacles), it seemed fine. Other reviewers have noted the same. Ford oddly seems to publish no turning circle specification.

Most of our driving was comfortable, smooth and pleasant, though we did find suspension brutal on a speedbump or two.

