

POWERTRAIN REVOLUTION & EVOLUTION

By Joe Sage / Vehicle photos: Doug Berger / DBPics.com for NWAPA



We attend the Northwest Automotive Press Association (NWAPA)'s exceptionally well-run comparative drive events to bring you the pulse on the latest hardware and technology. It's a chance to learn a lot about the vehicles we also drive here, under controlled, time-intensive and competitive circumstances, and often with the manufacturers' representatives on hand to add product and development insights and background and to answer questions.

This is a region with quite a bit in common with our home turf—open roads, mountain twisties, rural and urban conditions, demographic mix, the works. Only the weather tends to be a bit different at times. Well, that and the fact that their urban regions in particular tend to be generally farther on the leading edge of such things as next-generation powertrains.

One event is Mudfest—the Outdoor Activity Vehicle of the Year Awards, generally held in spring. At its core, this is an off-road event, but with equal time spent on pavement, just as in real world usage.

Two others over the year—Run to the Sun and Drive Revolution—are pavement-only and have focused, respectively, on open road performance and what used to be called “alternative” powertrains.

Event evolution

The lockdowns and general disruption of the past few years—affecting everything from travel, to lodging, to group activities, to manufacturing itself, as well as to a big Portland consumer tech event that anchored Drive Revolution—led to consolidation of the two paved events, which has proven to be as much an opportunity as a consequence.

Last year, Run to the Sun and Drive Revolution were held together, unified in logistics, location and timing, while the categories were kept separate (with a number of vehicles appearing in both).

Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) Performance Vehicles

	hp	lbft	*mpg	price as tested
2024 Audi RS 6 Avant Performance	621	627	14/22/17	\$149,820
2025 Dodge Durango SRT Hellcat Last Call AWD	710	645	12/17/13	115,315
2024 Genesis G70 RWD 3.3T Sport Prestige	365	376	18/27/21	56,250
2024 Honda Civic Type R	315	310	22/28/24	45,890
2024 Hyundai Elantra N	276	289	20/27/23	36,820
2024 Mazda MX-5 Miata RF Grand Touring	181	151	26/34/29	38,925
2024 Nissan Z Nismo	420	384	17/24/19	68,290

*city/hwy/comb



CATEGORY WINNER: INTERNAL COMBUSTION PERFORMANCE: 2024 Audi RS 6 Avant Performance

RUNNER-UP: 2025 Dodge Durango SRT Hellcat Last Call AWD



This year, this was simplified further, all held under the Drive Revolution name, with powertrains as the clear point of distinction—ICE (internal combustion, keeping its Run to the Sun emphasis on performance); BEV (full battery electric commonly known as EV); and PHEV (plug-in hybrid, the long-standing but increasingly top-of-mind and popular combination of hybrid internal combustion systems with plug-chargeable batteries and a degree of all-electric range).

Winners would be chosen among each of those three powertrain categories. Then a separate vote would pick an overall performance winner (regardless of powertrain) and an overall electrified winner (whether full BEV or PHEV).

Run to the Sun used to run over hundreds of miles of open road, most often in north-central Oregon.

Drive Revolution always ran a hub-and-spoke set of routes, for the sake of recharging logistics.

As one category of vehicles—the largest this year—is pure battery electric, the hub-and-spoke format was used for last year's dual event and again for this year's unified event.

A key attribute of Run to the Sun that has carried forward into this event, however, is one that is unique to this organization. The rotation of drivers and vehicles is mapped out in advance, meaning every driver is guaranteed (as required) to drive every vehicle. This also keeps things on schedule, as wasteful decision time about what to drive next is eliminated, along with potential bottlenecks around particular vehicles, common at other events.

An unexpected plus with hub-and-spoke is that—unlike the point-to-point open road method—the number of vehicles and drivers does not have to match perfectly, though that is still the ideal goal. This year, the event had 20 automotive media professionals driving 23 different vehicles. Rotation predetermined, efficient and on time.

The vehicles

Of the hundreds of new vehicles available in the marketplace, those entered are a cross-section from manufacturers with the staff and budget available, particular interest in the particular market (though news and results from regional comparos always spread worldwide), and/or those with new or special product in particular categories

(cont'd)

Full Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs = EVs)

	hp	lbft	*mpg	range	price as tested
2024 Acura ZDX Type S Perf Tire	499	544	83/74/78	278	\$ 76,450
2024 Audi Q8 e-tron	402	490	80/83/81	285	88,990
2024 Fiat 500e Inspired By Beauty	117	162	121/100/110	149	37,595
2024 Genesis GV60 Performance	429	516	97/82/90	235	72,245
2024 GMC Hummer EV 3X SUV	830	1200	55/45/50	298	117,435
2024 Honda Prologue AWD Elite	288	333	99/84/92	273	59,750
2025 Hyundai IONIQ 5 N AWD	641	568	84/72/78	221	67,685
2024 Kia EV9 GT-Line AWD (Long Range)	379	516	88/72/80	270	78,430
2024 Lucid Air Pure	430	406	71/79/74	394	77,150
2024 Rolls-Royce Spectre	584	664	134/127/130	266	558,700

*city/hwy/MPGe



CATEGORY WINNER: FULL EV (BEV):
2025 Hyundai IONIQ 5 N AWD
RUNNER-UP: 2024 Lucid Air Pure



represented—which is especially significant at this event.

Based on this targeted sampling, it's always interesting to try to interpret the state of evolution around the world by who enters what.

Of the 23 vehicles total, three were from the US—two from the Detroit Three, plus Lucid. Six were European, though two were from the same manufacturer (Audi, one gasoline and one EV), and Fiat is of course a



Detroit first cousin. Japan had the most representation, with eight vehicles from a full range of manufacturers, with Honda-Acura hitting both gasoline and EV and Mazda both gasoline and PHEV. Korea's Hyundai group brought six direct cousins (Kia, Hyundai and Genesis).

The US entered more EVs than gasoline (and the one American gasoline model is in its last year).

Japan brought gasoline (including PHEV) at a ratio of three-to-one versus pure EV, as these pioneers of hybrid and other innovative powertrains seem to continue to put an emphasis on further perfecting these.

Europe was tied for EV and gasoline (when gasoline includes PHEV) or went five-to-one electrified (when PHEV is looked at that way).

Plug-in Hybrid Vehicles (PHEVs)

	hp	lbft	*mpg	e-range	price as tested
2025 Kia Sorento PHEV SX-Prestige AWD	227	258	33/74	31	\$54,690
2024 Lexus TX550h+ Luxury AWD	404	247	29/76	33	82,534
2025 Mazda CX-70 PHEV Premium Plus	323	369	25/56	26	59,275
2025 McLaren Artura Spider	691	531	19/45	11	344,718
2024 Mercedes-AMG GT 63 S E Perf PHEV	831	1084	18/25	1	224,820
2024 Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV SEL S-AWC	181	181	26/64	38	51,835

*comb/MPGe



CATEGORY WINNER: PLUG-IN HYBRID (PHEV):
2024 Lexus TX550h+ Luxury AWD
RUNNER-UP: 2025 McLaren Artura Spider



Korea's ratio similarly leans EV, although they also continue to develop enhanced-performance-specific ICE models, notably N variants.

Such events often split vehicles by price groups or luxury designations. As organized here this time, it's all about powertrains, with a wide range of pricing in each.

Categories and voting

Each driver pauses at the end of each half-hour drive slot to score each vehicle on a range of attributes. This data, however, is not how the winners are chosen, per se, although it provides supremely useful perspective or confirmation during the time-sensitive final voting process. In this, each driver votes a first and second within each of the three categories. These will likely be based on the sum of individual attribute scores, but do not have to be. (Second place votes in this process are applied to a tie-breaking algorithm, if need be.)

One more Best Overall vote is also informed by all of the above, but even more fluid—pick a favorite. This year, there were two of Overalls—one for performance (essentially a vote among all 23 vehicles, as there are no slackers) and one combining pure battery electric and PHEV as “electrified,” as the industry itself has been doing.

Winners are highlighted and illustrated here per the group vote tallies.

A few vote notes

A wide range of attributes within each category, as well as a number of apples-and-oranges scenarios, suggest a few observations and some speculation.

While Honda has come to the EV game a little later than some, their Prologue EV brings a formula of power, price and range, along with style and function, that seems sure to find a big audience. Its first cousin Acura ZDX being in the same group (similar format, but higher price, higher power, lower range) most likely split some votes.

As consumers continue to develop some resistance to EV price, purpose, charging options and so on, along comes Fiat 500e—a city commuter car, very small (but spacious inside) and very affordable—more like the original EV idea. This whole car weighs less than just the battery in some EV beasts. Since distance and weather road trips are still tough in most any EV, this approach, even with its low range, may

(cont'd)

OUR PICKS

We have a tradition, for various reasons, of not presenting our own picks at these regional comparos, just those awarded by the group overall. Usually, it's sufficient to note that some of our choices were the same as the group's and some were different. But breaking with that tradition, we're compelled to revisit our own votes. The group votes sometimes suggest emotion (disregard the expense) over logic. But then again, so do our own. Here's a look at how we may have considered both factors in our own selections. This doesn't (necessarily) mean these are the ones we would buy, just the most well-rounded and/or inspirational solutions.

Category picks

INTERNAL COMBUSTION PERFORMANCE (ICE).....hp.....lbft.....city/hwy/comb.....—.....as tested

1. 2024 Genesis G70 RWD 3.3T Sport Prestige...365...376...18/27/21.....—...\$ 56,250
2. 2025 Dodge Durango SRT Hellcat Last Call AWD...710...645...12/17/13.....—...115,315

Our number one vote was a logical one, a solid formula of decent power, fuel economy and price.

Number two may be the emotional choice, knocking it out of the ballpark on power, though being lowest on fuel economy and second-highest on price. It also hits at a time when this manufacturer group is wrestling between European ownership wanting to go full bore on full-EV evolution and US dealers who want to hold off on that a bit. However all that turns out, this Durango's Last Call name says it all—grab an ICE SRT Hellcat while you still can.

FULL EV (BEV).....hp.....lbft.....MPGe.....range.....as tested

1. 2024 Honda Prologue AWD Elite...288...333...92...273...\$59,750
2. 2024 Fiat 500e Inspired By Beauty...117...162...110...149...37,595

Our number one vote was an entirely new vehicle to us, as Honda is just amping up their full-EV efforts. And the Prologue struck us as a home run on styling and format, as well as all its statistics. As a fraternal twin to the Acura ZDX, we wonder if the vote was split and how either would have scored if there had been only one. The Acura has far more power, a higher price and lower operating economy and range, but we liked the Honda's styling.

Number two could have been number one, winning us over on both logic and emotion. This effort goes to the core of EV thinking, a small, local convenience vehicle with plenty of spirit and sportiness. We may have voted it second just because it's likely to have more of a niche market—which, of course, could also give it extra appeal.

PLUG-IN HYBRID (PHEV).....hp.....lbft.....MPGe.....e-range.....as tested

1. 2025 McLaren Artura Spider...691...531...45...11...\$344,718
2. 2024 Lexus TX550h+ Luxury AWD...404...247...76...33...82,534

This is why we vote on the spot, when impressions are fresh, as this choice surprises us, ourselves, a few days later. But there's no denying the power, thrill and distinctive ownership of the McLaren—thus an emotional choice.

The Lexus is clearly the more logical choice. This luxury cousin of the Toyota Land Cruiser (related in build, but quite different in style and content) already impressed us in our local fleet, as presented in our prior issue.

Drive Revolution Best Overall picks

PERFORMANCE VEHICLE (ICE-EV-PHEV).....hp.....lbft.....mpg.....e-range.....as tested

1. 2024 Mercedes-AMG GT 63 S E Perf PHEV...831...1084...MPGe 25...1...\$224,820
2. 2025 Dodge Durango SRT Hellcat Last Call AWD...710...645...comb 13.....—...115,315

As the Best Overall awards are more of a clean-sheet dart-throw, equal parts analysis and gut, we have two pricier, high-powered options getting our votes here. The AMG's hybrid powertrain differs from other PHEVs in competition here, as it aims toward a boost throughout all drive states, with EV-only range purely an asterisk. But its combination of power and fuel economy, in a package of top German engineering, is hard to beat, if you have the price of entry. As you can tell from Category notes above, these were both largely emotional choices.

ELECTRIFIED VEHICLE (EV-PHEV).....hp.....lbft.....mpg.....range.....as tested

1. 2024 Honda Prologue AWD Elite...288...333...MPGe 92...273...\$59,750
2. 2024 Lexus TX550h+ Luxury AWD...404...247...comb 76...e) 33...82,534

Both of these, also as noted in Categories, above, fall toward the logical end of the scale. A question then may be: does an EV purchase inherently lean more toward logic than emotion? Statistical analysis, over gut? Perhaps. But most likely this is just an appearance of random happenstance with the choice of these two favorites.

be most realistic. And with easy parking.

Lucid goes the other way. Last year, they entered two models, but this year's is a third, a rear-driver with the most range of any from them and by far the highest range in this event.

Hyundai IONIQ 5 was the biggest winner overall, taking its category (Best BEV), as well as not one both both overall wins (Best Overall Performance Vehicle and Best Overall Electrified Vehicle). IONIQ 5 has been with us awhile, but the big difference is that this is an "N" version, a high performer in its own right, but also evidence that there is serious effort being put into not only electrifying classic internal combustion, but into amping up electrics.

Put it all together, though, and the biggest electrified winners are all Goldilocks models—not too pricey, not too small, not too big, decent range, and from popular bigger brands with established reputations for reliability and dealer availability.

We've noticed that votes often go to far more expensive vehicles at many comparos, even as pricing (or at least value) is one of the attributes ranked. Judges can easily skip over that, to a degree, as they will not actually be pulling out the checkbook. On the ICE side, the priciest, second most powerful and second-thirstiest Audi RS 6 Avant took home the trophy.

On EVs and PHEVs, there seems to have been more cost consideration. Perhaps this is because these are a newer topic, themselves, and their price ranges, wide-ranging powertrain options and other tangibles have more of the judging drivers thinking more directly about actual purchase.

Then for every trend spotted, there's one to refute it, or maybe it's more of a mix. The priciest, the over-half-million-dollar Rolls-Royce Spectre EV, did not win this time (though Rolls has won before), yet the second-priciest, the McLaren PHEV, did come in second as Overall Best.

Also noteworthy is that McLaren's second place finish overall was under Performance (ICE-EV-PHEV), not Electrified (EV-PHEV), even though as a PHEV, it qualified for either trophy.

Combined event(s)

After last year's simultaneous Run to the Sun and Drive Revolution events, we speculated about the future and what name might be used if they were thoroughly integrated into one, as they now (or for now)

DRIVE REVOLUTION BEST PERFORMANCE VEHICLE OVERALL (ICE-EV-PHEV):

2025 Hyundai IONIQ 5 N AWD (BEV)

RUNNER-UP: 2025 McLaren Artura Spider (PHEV)

DRIVE REVOLUTION BEST ELECTRIFIED VEHICLE OVERALL (EV-PHEV):

2025 Hyundai IONIQ 5 N AWD (BEV)

RUNNER-UP: 2024 Lucid Air Pure (BEV)



have been. Drive Revolution seemed appropriate if it remained a mostly-EV event, based on its "alternative powertrain" heritage. But as EVs become mainstream, and may end up dominating the marketplace (as has been intended for a few years), they can become status quo. Run to the Sun's name originates in a drive for convertibles to the Pacific Northwest's mountaintops, above rainy weather, but evolved to be synonymous with the open road. Charging range considerations for EVs remain an obstacle to the open road format. And we will be collectively keeping an eye on the many factors that could color the revolutionary nature of an ongoing overall EV shift.

The Drive Revolution name prevailed, at least this year. This works, as even the internal combustion entries continue to push the envelope on engineering and—using the other key word that defines the ICE category's title, but also one of the two Best Overall awards—performance.

As you can tell by the variety of entries, as well as the general pulse outside this event, electrification for some (buyers, analysts and manufacturers) is a primary mission. For others, it's mitigation or increasingly a regulatory necessity. For example, it's unlikely anybody is buying the McLaren first and foremost because it's electrified. It offers its own familiar thrills and bragging points, but adds certain bonus benefits and perhaps a defense as a hybrid.

Be all this as it may, as always not all brands and models are ever present at such events (it surprises most people that there are some 450 different vehicle models on the market each year), nor are all powertrain solutions (hydrogen, say). But we had a particularly great cross-section of hardware from brands all around the world on hand, making the results useful to all concerned—you, the buying audience; us, the collective media; and the manufacturers themselves. All gain a range of insights that will be a solid reference, ongoing.

Special thanks go out, as always, to the hard-working fleet personnel; to our hosting venue the Ilani Casino and Resort, on the Cowlitz Indian Reservation near Ridgefield, Washington; to the manufacturers who sent their most pertinent vehicles and the smiling faces to explain and support them; and to our friends and colleagues in NWAPA for one of the best-executed events in the business. ■