

¡Viva la revolución!

Yesterday's alternative drivetrains are increasingly mainstream

It seems like long ago, but it was just 2007 when the Arizona Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Division ruled that three specific hybrid cars—the original Honda Insight, the Honda Civic Hybrid and of course the Toyota Prius—could receive special “cloud” plates and use metro Phoenix HOV lanes, even with just one occupant aboard.

Fast forward to 2014, and the alternative drivetrain niche—hybrids, plug-in hybrids, electric vehicles, clean diesels, natural gas vehicles—has become a routine part of many new vehicle shopping lists.

Members of the Northwest Automotive Press Association (NWAPA)—of which we are a member for just this kind of reason—assembled in Portland this summer to test drive 18 of the automotive industry's

most technologically advanced and fuel-efficient offerings—including electric vehicles, hybrids, and diesel or natural gas-fueled models. Members of US and Canadian media outlets evaluated each vehicle with on-road testing based at the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, and through conversations with product experts from the manufacturers. After analyzing each vehicle's individual attributes and how they contribute to reducing our reliance on gasoline, NWAPA journalists selected winners in four categories: Alternative Fuel, Electric Vehicles, Hybrids and Green Luxury.

WINNER: Alternative Fuel Vehicle

Among alternative fuel vehicles, the 2015 Volkswagen Golf TDI took top honors.



With a newly enhanced turbodiesel engine, Golf TDI combines excellent fuel economy, utility and sporty demeanor at a value-conscious price. • “Volkswagen has led the diesel passenger car market for years, and the Golf TDI proves that they're likely to stay on top for a while,” said event co-chairman Jeff Zurschmeide.

WINNER: Electric Vehicle

In the fast-growing EV segment, Portland-based participants were pleased to learn that the Fiat 500e is now available in Oregon. The model had been limited to California sales and leases until recently. The assembled experts selected the 500e as the top purely electric-powered car at the event. • “The Fiat 500e is attractive and fun. It remains a model that will, with

a short test drive, convert people who hadn't even thought about electric cars into EV enthusiasts,” said event co-chairman Bengt Halvorson.

WINNER: Hybrid Vehicle

Almost every automaker offers some kind of hybrid by now, and this year's competition included SUVs as well as passenger cars. In the end, it was hybrid efficiency paired with traditional luxury and performance that swayed the vote in favor of the Lexus CT200h. • “This Lexus represents the state of the art in both small car luxury and hybrid technology, and the combination is impressive,” said NWAPA president Nik Miles.

WINNER: Green Luxury Vehicle

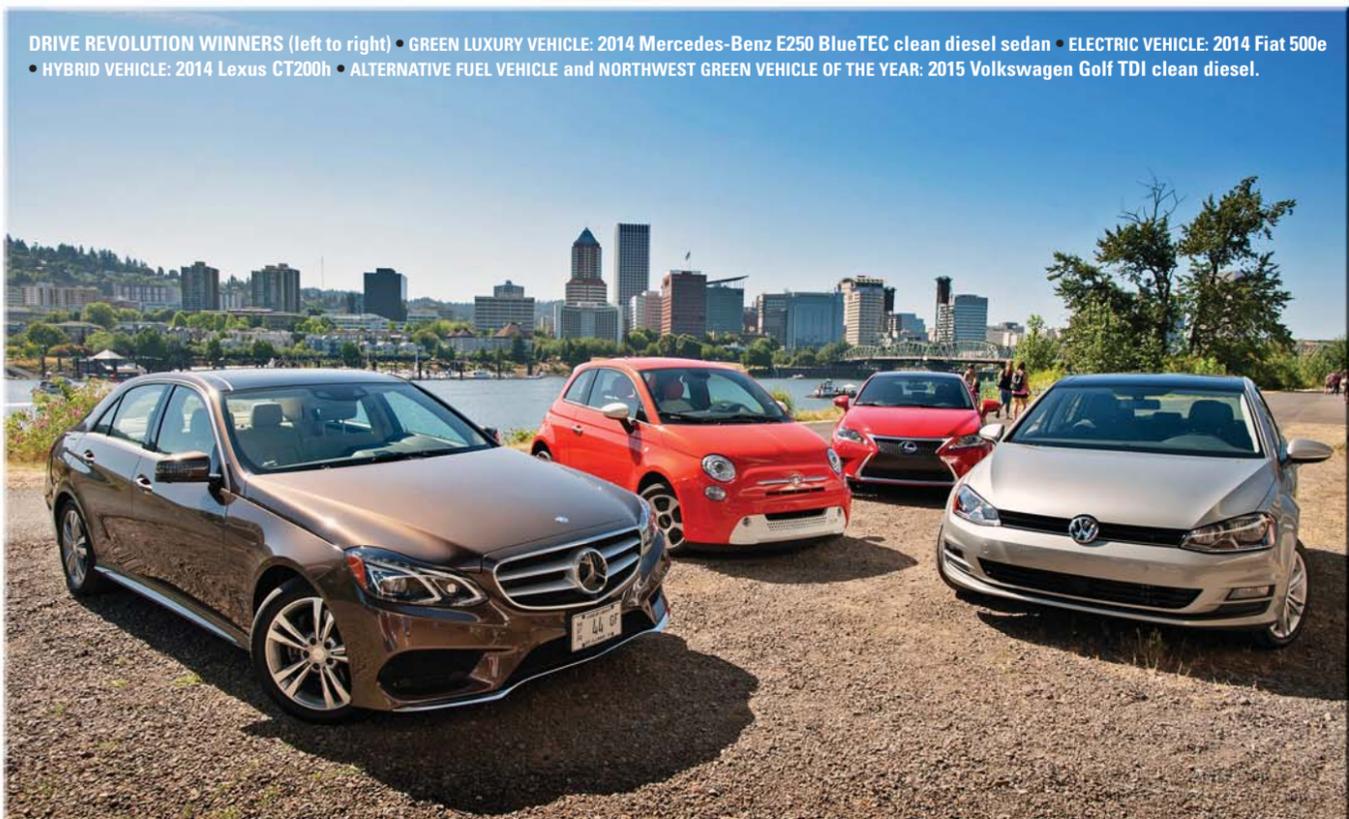
All drivetrains at the event could be eligible for this category, in which journalists were asked to evaluate what it means to be a luxury car in the face of tight fuel economy and reduced tailpipe emissions. The clear winner was the Mercedes-Benz E250 BlueTEC diesel sedan, with modern technological and luxury features, excellent performance and 38 MPG highway. • “Luxury is synonymous with Mercedes-Benz, and the new four-cylinder BlueTEC diesel model fully lives up to the longtime reputation of the marque—all with confident performance, absolutely no compromises in comfort, and the fuel efficiency of a small car in a spacious luxury sedan,” Halvorson said.

WINNER: Green Vehicle of the Year

The 2015 Volkswagen Golf TDI, winner in the Alternative Fuel category, was also named the 2014 Northwest Green Vehicle of the Year.

Portland served as an ideal backdrop for this event, with the city's reputation for early adoption of green vehicle technology—with one of the nation's highest counts of EV charging stations per capita and also one of the strongest markets in America for clean-diesel vehicles.

Nik Miles summed up the event's mission: “Drive Revolution is a forward-looking event that brings together a variety of solutions for the critical question in modern personal transportation: How can we reduce dependence on fossil fuels without sacrificing utility, comfort and performance?” ■



DRIVE REVOLUTION WINNERS (left to right) • GREEN LUXURY VEHICLE: 2014 Mercedes-Benz E250 BlueTEC clean diesel sedan • ELECTRIC VEHICLE: 2014 Fiat 500e • HYBRID VEHICLE: 2014 Lexus CT200h • ALTERNATIVE FUEL VEHICLE and NORTHWEST GREEN VEHICLE OF THE YEAR: 2015 Volkswagen Golf TDI clean diesel.

Photo: John M. Vincent/NWAPA