

Emissions from plug-in hybrid vehicles far higher than advertised

Plug-in hybrid vehicles emit up to eight times more CO₂ than carmakers claim in official test results, a study by Transport & Environment (T&E) has revealed. Hybrid cars, which use internal combustion engines but feature a rechargeable battery for shorter journeys, were described as "fake electric cars" by the Brussels-based group, and less environmentally friendly than advertised.

The zero-emissions driving range capacity of the three models tested were reduced significantly when subjected to varied conditions such as hill climbs or heavy acceleration. The tests indicated BMW X5's battery could sustain the car for only 17.5 km, less than three-quarters of the distance in official readings.

Why does this matter?

The UK government's recently unveiled [10-point green plan](#) to tackle climate change and decarbonise the transport sector includes banning the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030. Some new hybrids that have significant zero-emissions ranges will be exempt from such regulations until 2035 in

acknowledgement of their supposed eco-friendly functionalities.

Hybrids, however, should not be seen as an interim solution for the low-carbon transition, according to T&E. The organisation's study found the BMW X5, Mitsubishi Outlander and Volvo XC60 released between 28% to 89% more CO2 emissions than advertised when tested on a fully charged battery in optimal driving conditions. While in battery-charging mode, the plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) emitted three to 12 times more emissions than official figures.

This means the UK is potentially set to allow the continued purchase of vehicles that may not be as green as they seem beyond its 2030 phase-out deadline. It's also worth noting other European markets have later phase-out dates for fossil fuel and then hybrid vehicle sales.

From a marketing standpoint, the difference in lab-tested emissions used by manufacturers to advertise vehicles, compared with much higher real-world emissions, highlights the inconsistencies in emissions testing and transparency – which regulators are working to improve.

Banning advertisements for emissions-heavy vehicles to reduce consumer demand has previously been suggested to tackle climate change, and with firms being held to tighter standards over misinformation in advertising, could there be grounds to argue for similar restrictions to be applied to PHEVs?

Lateral thought from Curation

While efforts are being made to clamp down on eliminating tailpipe emissions, non-exhaust emissions and particulate matter from car tyres and brake wear remain unregulated and could grow as demand for PHEVs and electric vehicles (EVs) increase. A study by Emissions Analytics suggests that air pollution from car tyres could be up to 1,000 times worse than exhaust emissions.

This highlights that switching from ICE vehicles to EVs, while better for CO2, may not necessarily tackle air pollution in cities.

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