

Fusion gains traction with OPP drivers

Several years ago, the Ontario Provincial Police adopted the provincial government's Ontario Public Service (OPS) green strategy, which encourages all Ontarians, particularly government, to look at greening their operations.

This initiative supports the OPS Green Transformation Strategy, which commits the government to lower greenhouse gas emissions from internal government operations to reduce the OPS environmental footprint.

That policy made sustainable sense to the OPP, which—with approximately 3,650 vehicles—is the second largest police fleet in Canada. It's a remarkably diverse fleet with two helicopters, vessels, motorcycles, ATVs, snow machines, tractor trailers, trucks, vans, patrol cars and finally, the standard vehicles that comprise the “pool” vehicles at the force's headquarters. Given the need for employees to travel to training sessions, meetings and conferences, pool vehicles efficiently address those needs.

The OPP committed to including environmentally friendly vehicles as part of its fleet. Staff Sergeant Rick Hawley, manager of the fleet services section of the fleet, supply and weapons services bureau, notes embracing hybrid vehicles made sense for the force as an environmentally sound alternative to help reduce fuel consumption as well as the fleet's carbon footprint.

To date, about 33 percent of the unmarked “pool” vehicles used for administrative duties are the 24 Ford Fusion hybrids that became part of the OPP's fleet in mid-2010. The OPP's hybrids are identical to those driven by the average consumer because they're used for general transportation rather than

for patrol duty.

“The fact employees prefer to reserve the hybrid over other pool vehicles is evidence that they have embraced the green strategy and want to be part of the solution,” says Hawley. “They feel they're helping reduce our carbon footprint, but also appreciate everything from the vehicle's appearance to its handling and quiet ride.”

“So far, the hybrids are low-maintenance and dependable, but they're just two years old,” says Hawley. “We really need to take them from cradle to grave to get accurate data on the potential cost savings and efficiencies.”

Like most fleets, the OPP had to seriously consider the available infrastructure when selecting a fuel-efficient vehicle from the relatively limited number of options. Gas-electric hybrids are efficient and more available, and—just as importantly—gas and electricity remain relatively accessible, unlike propane, natural gas or ethanol.

As Ford points out, the 2010 Fusion hybrid has three modes, coordinated by the vehicle system control to provide a smooth, seamless transition between modes. In Electric Drive, the HV battery powers the electric traction motor under light acceleration and at speeds of up to 75 kmh, about twice what other hybrids offer.

In Hybrid Drive, the combustion engine kicks in for strong acceleration, for speeds above 75 kmh, and when the battery needs recharging. Braking creates heat energy that is recaptured for recharging, but it also uses more fuel, so drivers need to remember that going green requires gentle deceleration and stopping.

“Fuel savings are difficult to

determine because driving habits as well as the use of heating and cooling systems do affect energy consumption,” says Christine Hollander, product communication manager at Ford of Canada.

While driver training may help remind lead-foots and brake riders that slow and easy wins the green game, Hollander notes that the Ford Fusion hybrid's own Smart Gauge with EcoGuide may ultimately be the best change-maker. As the EcoGuide display “grows” more leaves and vines because the driver's actions are reducing consumption, the driver may be inspired to continue and even improve on those driving behaviours.

“No training required—it comes with a single page of instructions that covers just five points,” says Hawley. “The first time you start the Fusion hybrid's engine, you wonder if it's on, but after that first experience you're accustomed to the virtually silent ride when you're on battery only.”

The 2010 and 2012 Fusion offer identical fuel consumption rates, and while its expected technological improvements will boost the 2013 models fuel efficiency, those figures won't be available from Transport Canada until late summer, sometime before the anticipated August/September launch. At this point, Hollander notes the 2013 Fusion FFV will be able to travel at 100 kmh on its battery alone, an improvement over the earlier models' maximum electric speed of 75 kmh.

As the OPP team has seen, hybrid vehicles make good sense when you need to meet fuel consumption and carbon footprint reduction targets, and as a bonus, the vehicles engage employees and help them feel like they're part of the solution. **b2b**