

# If you need a hybrid, but not all-wheel drive

By Jim Prueter and Joe Sage



## Ford takes dead aim at current hybrid champs

When Ford recently introduced the completely redesigned Escape for 2013, they decided to discontinue the Escape hybrid model, due to a high degree of overlap with the new 2013 Ford C-MAX, a dedicated hybrid crossover utility vehicle.

In fact, the C-MAX will be offered in not one, but two hybrid models: the C-MAX Hybrid and the C-MAX Energi Plug-In Hybrid, available soon. (C-MAX has been sold in Europe since it was first launched there in 2010.)

**C-MAX ENERGI PLUG-IN HYBRID.** You charge the C-MAX Energi by connecting the vehicle's external charge port to either a standard 120-volt outlet or available 240-volt charging station. The C-MAX Energi delivers better fuel economy equivalent in electric mode than a Toyota Prius plug-in hybrid, with a 500-mile overall driving range that bests the Chevrolet Volt. It will also operate in all-electric mode at higher speeds than any other hybrid. Once the electric charge is exhausted, the C-MAX Energi automatically continues operation like a tradition-

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# If you need all-wheel drive,\* but not a hybrid\*\*

By Jim Prueter and Joe Sage

\*(optional)  
\*\*(optional in the past but no longer)



## Popular SUV gets dramatic new styling, loses hybrid

After 12 years on the market, the small-sized, family-friendly Ford Escape utility vehicle has finally received a full redesign for 2013. The new Escape arrives this spring with a starting price of \$22,470. A fully-loaded top-of-the-line Titanium trim level starts at \$30,370, or \$32,120 with all-wheel drive like our test model.

Ironically, overall sales of the current model had improved 33 percent, with the 2012 model the best selling in its 12-year history and beating the second-place Honda CR-V by about 36,000 units. Escape is the number two best-selling Ford vehicle and the fifth best-selling vehicle of any brand in the US.

The new Escape looks nothing like the current boxy-styled model. The striking new design features a sloping rear roofline, gaping split grille, angular shaped head and taillamps. It shares styling cues with Ford Fiesta and Focus. It's also four inches longer than its predecessor and adds three inches to the wheelbase.

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## LOGBOOK NOTES : C-MAX

- We drive in utter silence for the first bit, no whirring as in an electric.
- Brakes are exceptionally strong.
- On broad sweeps, the C-MAX is quiet and smooth, but steering can be twitchy, for an odd mix between underresponsive and overresponsive.
- The CVT has a responsive kickdown feature, providing a comfortable power curve. You can almost feel a series of very subtle surges, which don't feel like shifts but also don't feel like straight line continuity. Acceleration, competitive maneuvers and sharp cornering can produce slight hesitation but generally strong and dependable shifts and moves.
- Then again, a right turn on surface streets seems to "fake left" at times, and movements at slow speed are abrupt.
- We were surprised to find ourselves driving slower than others at times.
- We have a series of beefs with the touchscreen interface, not unusual.
- The C-MAX has no towing capability.
- Grade assist, with a button on the shifter, can be too easy to click on by mistake.
- We barely made our boulevard U-turn, though specs state a 35.8 turning circle. Others have had the same experience.
- Acceleration, cornering, steering and an odd patch-out under normal driving have us think it might benefit from a tire refit.
- Torque steer is our only real beef, but ultimately we like the car well enough to overlook that.
- After about 3.5 gallons, we had driven 124 miles with no special tricks, largely on track for the 500-plus range Ford predicts.

Metro light rail makes an apt companion for our new-tech Ford C-MAX Hybrid SEL. One wiper has huge reach, the other not: fun to watch but only mostly effective. The interior is well appointed and spacious throughout.

## FORD C-MAX (CONT'D)

line minivan look of the Prius. Its grille treatment is similar to that on other recently updated Ford products like the Escape, Focus, Fiesta and Fusion.

C-MAX Hybrids come with seven airbags including driver's knee airbag, Advance Trac with roll stability control, and a variety of electronic safety technologies. Those include torque vectoring to better guide the vehicle through corners, and curve control to slow it if the driver enters a corner too fast.

With gas prices shooting up fast, Americans are clamoring for fuel-efficient vehicles, yet it's still unclear whether they have a love affair with gas-electric hybrids. Only the Prius has captured the public, continuing to outsell all other hybrids combined, with a million-plus on the road.

Even with the numerous advantages of a lower price, more power, better fuel economy and being more fun to drive, Ford will have to convince car shoppers that it can match Toyota's perceived quality and reliability. But with a pure utility hybrid that's also the first that's fun to drive, we think C-MAX has hit the bull's-eye and might just give Prius a run for its money. ■

### OUR TEST 2013 FORD C-MAX HYBRID SEL

Base price .....	<b>\$28,200</b>
Equipment Group 302A: Premium audio and nav, hands-free tech package, power liftgate, rear camera, keyless entry/start .....	2215
White Platinum Metallic Tri-Coat .....	495
Destination and delivery .....	795
Equipment group savings .....	deduct 520
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>\$31,185</b>



## FORD ESCAPE (CONT'D)

Ford is also introducing a clever, industry first hands-free rear liftgate, which by using current Wii technology allows you to open it by simply sliding your foot beneath the center of the rear bumper—so you don't have to look for your keys, set packages down or pull a handle when your hands are full.

Ford designers have also improved the vehicle's interior quality: there's a new soft-touch dashboard, the rear seats now fold in one simple motion, and there are substantial improvements to the previously frustrating MyFord Touch system. MyFord Touch houses the climate, navigation and audio controls on an eight-inch touchscreen that's standard on the upper trim levels.

There's also a new optional active park assist feature, enabling the Escape to automatically parallel park itself. That option also includes a backup camera, front and rear proximity sensors, and a blind spot warning system.

Escape offers a choice of three engines, all four-cylinder: a 168-hp 2.5-liter (a carryover from last year), a new 173-hp 1.6-liter EcoBoost, and a 2.0-liter EcoBoost with 237 horsepower that replaces the outgoing 3.0-liter V6. Fuel economy ranges from 21-23 MPG city and from 28-33 highway. Our Titanium AWD test Escape had the 2.0 EcoBoost and was rated 21/28/24 MPG city/hwy/comb.

Ford has dropped the Escape Hybrid, which had been offered for several years. Ford wanted a unique brand that touts its electrification program—their response to Prius—so in addition to the new Focus Electric, they introduced the C-MAX crossover vehicle shown opposite. C-MAX is available with only two powerplants: hybrid and plug-in hybrid, and is built on the same plat-

form as the new Escape.

Ford is changing its trim level nomenclature to S, SE, SEL and Titanium, replacing the XLS, XLT and Limited levels on the outgoing model.

We had a chance to spend some time behind the wheel of the new Escape and found it to have a firmer ride and sportier feel than the outgoing model. It felt stable and sure-footed on winding mountain roads, thanks to the security of enhanced features like torque vectoring control, which helps the vehicle accelerate smoothly through corners, and curve control, which slows the vehicle when it is going too fast into a corner.

We think the new Escape is an excellent, fun-to-drive crossover that will not only maintain Ford's current spot at the top of the small crossover pack, it should steal customers away from other makes' premium and near luxury brands. ■

**COMPETITION INCLUDES:** Chevy Equinox, Honda CR-V, Hyundai Tucson, Jeep Liberty, Kia Sportage, Mazda CX-5, Nissan Rogue, Subaru Forester, Toyota RAV4, Volkswagen Tiguan

### OUR TEST 2013 FORD ESCAPE TITANIUM AWD

Base price .....	<b>\$32,120</b>
Equipment Group 401A: Titanium tech package, tonneau cover, roof rails and cross bars, HID automatic headlamps, power liftgate, rear parking sensors .....	incl
MyFord Touch / HD / Sirius/Nav .....	795
Parking Technology Package .....	995
Destination and delivery .....	825
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>\$34,735</b>



## LOGBOOK NOTES : ESCAPE

- We liked the prior Escape a lot, so were apprehensive, but once sitting in the driver's seat, who doesn't want one of these?
- Keyless locking had some buggy behavior, and the alarm was triggered by either our pocket or nothing, more than once.
- The audio system, after adjustment, was stronger in the low range than the high, but gave pretty solid performance overall.
- The shifter could use detents, to help it stop in D without ending up in Sport.
- The B-pillar seems visually thinner inside than out, but creates the usual blind spot.
- Our experiences with MyFord Touch include a number of gripes, including slow and incomplete iPod functions.
- The foot-motion-operated tailgate is handy, though at night it could use a light on the button perched high overhead.
- Power and shifts are adequate, ditto fuel mileage. EcoBoost results seem ordinary.
- A Mercedes-Benz GL in traffic prompts a comparison of stature, wheel arches, hood creases and such, leading to a new appreciation of the Escape's styling.
- Doesn't seem tall at the roofline, but does at the hood and beltline. Overall a good size, handling four or five like a sedan. Might make the Explorer seem oversized.
- Could it have been styled more like a small Explorer? Yes. Instead, you could call it a copycat, or you could call it the clear recipient of an obvious trend.
- Some of our test vehicles we love, some not, and some simply become comfortable, useful and attractive enough to keep indefinitely without thinking about it that much. This is that good, or better.

Open everything up and think "Swiss Army Knife": the Ford Escape does deliver utility. Seating space is about the same as C-MAX, but the Escape holds more cargo. We gave it all As on a nighttime dash to Wickenburg.