

Plug-in hybrids are often seen as offering the best possible combination of powertrain attributes. You can't run out of power, as long as you have fuel in the tank, while at the same time, you may be able to operate them without ever touching that fuel. It all depends upon your driving patterns (and style). At the same time, they seem to remain the least understood. Fundamentally, they are like any hybrid powertrain, with extra battery power augmenting gasoline engine power (and torque) and with the ability to recoup additional power from the energy expended during braking

and other inefficiencies of a gasoline-only vehicle. Then they add one more special feature—the ability to plug them into the wall and top off more EV power than a hybrid alone will likely ever build up.

The Titanium PHEV driven here is the top model Escape by price. Whether that makes it “the best” depends upon your wants and needs. The Escape lineup (see chart at lower right) offers a diverse set of alternatives, starting with four trim levels and four engines, two of which are gasoline-only and two of which are part of hybrid powertrains, one of those a plug-in hybrid powertrain. The base

trim level offers only the base gasoline engine, while the other three offer a variety of powertrains—S with the smaller engine, SE with either, SEL with the larger engine, and any of these three trims with availability of both the hybrid and plug-in hybrid powertrain.

While this adds up to many forks in the road to your decision, prices are a neat and tidy staircase.

Horsepower and fuel mileage vary significantly, however, and it's notable that the highest priced build does not have the highest power nor the best fuel mileage. If you're an all-wheel-drive aficionado (or, for that matter, a front-drive fan), you have another wild card, as the majority of build combinations, but not all, offer both. Notably, the most powerful ones are AWD-only and the most fuel-economical ones are FWD-only (as is common).

It's quite a matrix, with something for everybody. Just about. If you had your heart set on an AWD PHEV, for example, it does not exist, as the drivetrain weight and complexity have been traded for the added weight and location of its battery. This adds appeal to the hybrid models, which offer either drivetrain and deliver stellar fuel mileage, well into the 40s—all at lower cost than the PHEV.

The added battery weight seems to impact ride, also, particularly harsh at times on what otherwise looked to be smooth and ordinary surfaces. (There is no suspension information provided for any.) Electric drive power sent to the rear seems to be more about efficiency (better grip) than power, though it does add a bit of zip to your driving.

The advantage of the pricier PHEV over the no-plug Hybrid is in its EV-only phase of operation, which—though its straight hybrid fuel mileage figure is just a round 40, lower than the regular hybrid due to battery weight—tops 100 MPGe.

EV-only operation seems to largely take care of itself. There is an all-electric drive mode option, among four with various degrees of power allocation, but only when available—which in our experience was only when first delivered. After that the option was greyed out, but notably, we were not plugging the vehicle in at home, which makes a significant difference. Nonetheless, our usage readout revealed that we had indeed driven a high percentage of EV miles—kicking in and out on their own, dependent upon conditions, largely the ongoing regeneration of EV capacity from braking.

It's a neat trick. And, as with any PHEV, if you have a driving pattern (say from a home plug to a nearby office with a plug-in opportunity) that optimizes battery load, you may be able to drive EV-only basically all the time—while knowing (unlike with a full EV) that you will never run out, as the gasoline engine (plus the system's electric-regenerative powers) is always there for you, too. ■

*Although it has a much sleeker and more carlike form than earlier “two-box” Escapes, there is ample headroom and legroom both front and rear.*

# Mixed formula

by Joe Sage



## SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY .....	Louisville, Kentucky
ENGINE BUILD .....	Chihuahua, Mexico
BUILD / SEATING .....	unibody / five
ENGINE .....	2.5L Atkinson-cycle 4-cyl, alum/alum, forged steel crank
HP/TORQUE .....	165 hp / na
COMPRESSION RATIO .....	13.0:1
BATTERY / MOTORS .....	na
TOTAL SYSTEM POWER .....	200 hp
TRANSMISSION .....	PowerSplit electronic CVT
DRIVETRAIN .....	FWD
SUSPENSION .....	F: na; R: na
STEERING .....	na
BRAKES .....	4-wheel disc, regen
WHEELS .....	18-in machined ebony alum
TIRES .....	225/60R18 100H all-season
LENGTH / WHEELBASE .....	180.5 / 106.7 in
GROUND CLEARANCE .....	na
TURNING CIRCLE .....	39.04 ft
HEADROOM (F/R) .....	40.0 / 39.3 in
LEGROOM (F/R) .....	42.4 / 38.9 in
CARGO CAPACITY .....	34.4 / 60.8 cu.ft
WEIGHT .....	3870 lb
TOW CAPACITY .....	na (pkg avail)
FUEL / CAPACITY .....	regular unl / 11.1 gal
MPG / MPGe .....	40 / 105 (comb)
<b>BASE PRICE (2021) .....</b>	<b>\$38,885</b>
<b>PAINT: Rapid Red Metallic Tint Clearcoat .....</b>	<b>395</b>
<b>TITANIUM PREMIUM PKG: 18-in machined ebony alum wheels, front/rear logo floor mats, pano vista roof, wireless charging .....</b>	<b>2500</b>
<b>DESTINATION CHARGE .....</b>	<b>1245</b>
<b>TOTAL (2021) .....</b>	<b>\$43,025</b>

## 2022 FORD ESCAPE LINEUP

	FWD	AWD	
<b>S</b> .....	1.5L EB .....	\$26,760 .....	\$28,260
<b>SE</b> .....	1.5L EB .....	28,095 .....	29,595
	2.5L Hyb .....	29,920 .....	31,420
	2.5L PHEV .....	35,190 .....	--
<b>SEL</b> .....	1.5L EB .....	30,470 .....	31,970
	2.0L EB .....	-- .....	34,340
	2.5L Hyb .....	32,285 .....	33,790
	2.5L PHEV .....	37,925 .....	--
<b>Titanium</b> .....	2.0L EB .....	-- .....	36,880
	2.5L Hyb .....	34,830 .....	36,330
	2.5L PHEV .....	40,435 .....	--

### ENGINES / DRIVETRAINS:

**1.5L EcoBoost:** S, SE, SEL  
181 hp / 190 lb-ft  
FWD 28/34/30 MPG, AWD 26/31/28 MPG

**2.0L EcoBoost:** SEL, Titanium  
250 hp / 280 lb-ft  
AWD only: 23/31/26 MPG

**2.5L Hybrid:** SE, SEL, Titanium  
165 hp / 155 lb-ft / 200 hp total system  
FWD 44/37/41 MPG, AWD 43/37/40 MPG

**2.5L Plug-in Hybrid:** SE, SEL, Titanium  
165 hp / na lb-ft / 200 hp total system  
FWD only: 40 mpg / 105 MPGe (comb)