

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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**SEDANS AND
SMALL CROSSOVERS
COMPARO AWARDS EVENTS
AUCTIONS & CONCOURS
OVERLANDING TRAIL DINING
ARIZONA AUTO & TECH BUSINESS
AND MUCH MORE!**

Lucid Air Pure

VEHICLES • EQUIPMENT • TECHNOLOGY • PEOPLE • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS • ATTRACTIONS

PLUG AND PLAY

By Joe Sage
 Vehicle photos: Doug Berger / DBPics.com for NWAPA

We've driven in the Northwest Automotive Press Association (NWAPA)'s Run to the Sun event since 2014, ten years' worth now. Born before our time as a performance convertible drive from the rainy lowlands of Oregon or Washington to the sunny Cascade peaks, the event featured an open road course of hundreds of miles, divided into about 20- or 30-minute segments (eight to 25 miles or so, depending on terrain). As convertibles waned, the event evolved to a broader performance set, ranging from Focus RS to Rolls-Royce, Viper to Miata. A hallmark of this event, versus all other comparos we've done, is that the driver-and-vehicle sequence is predetermined, ensuring every media analyst drives every vehicle, with little time lost between each, no inefficient decisions about what to drive next, leading to neither overload nor neglect of any entry.

We've attended spring's "Mudfest," the off-pavement-leaning Outdoor Activity Vehicle of the Year Awards, for just as long.

The group's third event is Drive Revolution, for "alternative" powertrains (hybrids, plug-ins, EVs and the occasional fuel cell). Originally tied to a multi-day alternative fuels conference (with consumer inclusion) in Portland, it never worked for our schedule from our distance. In 2018, however, it split off, moved across the Columbia River into Washington, and became a focused media comparo. (We've covered results of the various versions a few times without attending). Due to EVs' dependency on range and recharging, Drive Revolution, unlike Run to the Sun, has had a hub-and-spoke format, with each drive starting at and returning to the same staging point.

Undercurrents on multiple fronts over the past few years have sparked evolution.

(cont'd)

Drive Revolution: Non-Luxury Electric or Plug-in Hybrid Vehicle



DRIVE REVOLUTION NON-LUXURY CATEGORY WINNER : 2023 Kia EV6 GT



Drive Revolution: Luxury EV or PHEV



DRIVE REVOLUTION

Non-Luxury Electric or Plug-in Hybrid Vehicle

Model	hp	lbft	mpg	price as tested
2024 Dodge Hornet R/T PHEV	288	383	21/29/24	\$52,305
2023 Hyundai Ioniq 5 Limited AWD	320	446	113/90 /101e	\$58,405
2023 Hyundai Ioniq 6 Limited Long Range	320	338	111/94 /103e	\$57,425
2024 Jeep Wrangler 4xe High Altitude	375	470	20/20 /49e	\$71,520
2023 Kia EV6 GT: CATEGORY WINNER	576	545	85/74 /79e	\$62,865
2023 Kia Sorento PHEV	261	258	35/33 /79e	\$52,140
2023 Nissan Ariya Evolve+ AWD e-4ORCE	389	442	97/86 /92e	\$56,135
2024 Toyota Prius Prime	220	139	48/47 /114e	\$43,292

★ 2023 Kia EV6 GT: **CATEGORY WINNER**

*mpg = city/hwy/combined or /MPGe

Luxury Electric or Plug-in Hybrid Vehicle

Model	hp	lbft	mpg	price as tested
2023 Genesis Electrified GV70: CATEGORY WINNER	483	516	98/83 /91e	\$74,340
2024 Lexus RZ 450e	308	320	102/87 /131e	\$67,270
2022 Lucid Air Grand Touring	819	885	130/132 /131e	\$137,500
2024 Lucid Air Pure	480	686	121/120 /131e	\$98,300
2024 Mercedes-AMG EQE SUV	617	701	77/71 /74e	\$127,400
2023 Volvo V60 T8 E-AWD Polestar	455	523	31/31 /74e	\$72,190

★ 2023 Genesis Electrified GV70: **CATEGORY WINNER**

*mpg = city/hwy /MPGe

DRIVE REVOLUTION ELECTRIC OR PLUG-IN HYBRID VEHICLE OF THE YEAR

★ 2024 Toyota Prius Prime: **OVERALL WINNER**

DRIVE REVOLUTION LUXURY CATEGORY WINNER : 2023 Genesis Electrified GV70



DRIVE REVOLUTION OVERALL WINNER : 2024 Toyota Prius Prime



RUN TO THE SUN

Non-Luxury Performance Vehicle

	hp	lbft	*mpg	price as tested
2024 Honda Civic Type R	315	310	22/28/24	\$44,385
2023 Kia EV6 GT CATEGORY WINNER	576	545	85/74/79e	62,865
2024 Subaru Impreza RS	182	178	26/33/29	31,045
2023 Toyota GR Corolla Circuit Edition	300	273	21/28/24	44,884

★ **2023 Kia EV6 GT: CATEGORY WINNER** *mpg = city/hwy/combined or /MPGe

Luxury Performance Vehicle

	hp	lbft	*mpg	price as tested
2024 Acura Integra Type S	320	310	21/28/24	\$52,595
2023 Genesis Electrified GV70	483	516	98/83/91e	74,340
2022 Lucid Air Grand Touring CATEGORY WINNER	819	885	130/132/131e	137,500
2024 Lucid Air Pure	480	686	121/120/131e	98,300
2022 Mercedes-AMG SL	577	590	14/21/24	206,285
2024 Mercedes-AMG EQE SUV	617	701	77/71/74e	127,400
2023 Volvo V60 T8 E-AWD Polestar	455	523	31/31/74e	72,190

★ **2022 Lucid Air Grand Touring: CATEGORY WINNER** *mpg = city/hwy/combined or /MPGe

RUN TO THE SUN PERFORMANCE VEHICLE OF THE YEAR

★ **2022 Lucid Air Grand Touring: OVERALL WINNER**

Pandemic lockdowns interrupted event cycles, as well as manufacturing and product release cycles. And through it all, electrified powertrains have become arguably not as “alternative” as they used to be.

TWO RETURN TOGETHER

As Run to the Sun (RTTS) and Drive Revolution (DR) bounced back to life, challenge became opportunity, as the decision was made to combine them into one “double feature” this year. Might this mean having one on one day, the other on another? Or combining all vehicles into one event and/or format, but which? The solution included elements of each. As such, it was a bit of a touchstone, to see what worked best this year and evolve or adapt from there.

Run to the Sun’s typical 24 or so vehicles and matching number of drivers fit the natural balance among the clock and calendar, available membership and vehicles, and the map. Drive Revolution, without such a matrix, had settled at about 18.

The plan this time became for the two to be run in about a day and a half total—far less time, combined, than just Run to the Sun used to take on its own. The key was that the vehicles would be interwoven—a predetermined driver-vehicle matrix, as there had always been at Run to the Sun, but with vehicles for both events now falling into one overall sequence.

Drive Revolution vehicles would include full EVs and plug-in hybrids, while other hybrids would now be in the Run to the Sun

group. RTTS vehicles could be gasoline-powered (including non-plug-in hybrids), as always, but could also now, for the first time, be full EVs—up to the manufacturer.

THE VEHICLES

It turned out to be a good plan for getting it all done, but it also turned out that quite a few vehicles were entered in both events. In fact, this turned out to be roughly half of all vehicles. Of 25 total entries—14 in Drive Revolution and just 11 in Run to the Sun—six were entered in both. The blue dots in our charts show 12 out of 25 total slots were dual-event entries, the other 13 splitting out as just eight that were in Drive Revolution only and five that were in Run to the Sun only. Sorted and sifted, this totaled 19 actual different vehicles,

Run to the Sun: Non-Luxury Performance



Run to the Sun: Luxury Performance Vehicle



about the same as either past event on its own.

Of those 19, seven were from Japan (from six brands under four corporate umbrellas); five were South Korean (three brands, one corporation); four were from the US (three brands, two corporations); and three were European badges (two brands, two corporations, one of which is majority-Chinese-owned).

A look at our charts suggests the split between non-luxury and luxury aimed for \$70,000, with a couple of exceptions for vehicles that wanted to be in the other, surely in line with target market and brand image (e.g. one Jeep over \$70k entered as non-luxury and an Acura below \$70k entered as luxury). Of note, while non-luxury dual entries between DR and RTTS were minimal, luxury vehicles entered in the two groups were almost completely the same.

The whole thing was affected by RTTS becoming a hub-and-spoke affair this year—as DR had always been—rather than a distance route, eliminating range anxiety and opening the door to EVs in RTTS.

THE DRIVE & OUTCOME

Our base for the event was new—the Ilani Casino and Resort on the Cowlitz Reservation in Washington State, about 25 miles north of Portland, Oregon on I-5. Route options included rural two-lanes, small towns and a stretch of Interstate if desired.

The both-events approach, with its cross-pollination, proved interesting.

For example, Kia won the non-luxury categories for both Drive Revolution and Run to the Sun—with the same full-electric EV6 GT, the only vehicle winning in both events.

Lucid, despite entering the same two different price levels of full EV in both events, had no wins in EV-centric DR, yet won its luxury category and the overall event trophy for all-performance-powertrains RTTS.

Genesis Electrified GV70, which has done well wherever it goes, was entered in both events, but had its big category win in Drive Revolution, as you’d expect for a full EV.

(cont’d)

The all-new Toyota Prius, on the other hand (also well received wherever it goes), did not win its category in Drive Revolution, yet took the top trophy in DR overall.

Thus, despite traditions of pedal to the metal in liquid-fueled RTTS, and despite advantages of plug-in hybrids in DR (especially while gasoline pumps remain more plentiful and quicker than charging stations), it turned out both category winners and the overall winner were full EVs, long the established turf of Drive Revolution.

THE STATE OF THE SPLIT

Deeper dives into vehicle statistics always inform guesses as to whether voting in various categories may have leaned toward lower-price value and higher fuel mileage, hang-the-expense power and thrills, or combinations thereof. As individual shopping missions and buying decisions often follow the same variables, you'll find our comparative charts useful for making your own best conclusions.

It seems to add up to the mysteries of EVs and PHEVs fading more into the fabric of a general process that may increasingly involve any and all possible powertrains.

Reflecting its own trends—but also as the entire industry bounces back from the past few years' lockdowns, while working through supply chain and now labor issues—full EV sales nationwide were up 63 percent year-over-year by fall 2023, rising from 4.7 to about 7 percent of the total.

It's worth noting that Washington and Oregon—the event's host region and home to most of the voting drivers—have very high plug-in adoption rates, each over 15 percent for 2023 (the vast majority being full EV, plus a small percentage of PHEVs)—behind only California's almost 25 percent—making this fertile ground to check the state of things. This is at least four times Arizona's under-five-percent EV-PHEV share. Ours is, however, the ninth largest EV adoption rate per capita. It all suggests that results from this event skew away from Arizona's heavier interest in gasoline vehicles, though for those especially interested in EVs and PHEVs, it's of enhanced interest.

EVENT(S) MOVING FORWARD

This year's combined event format was as much adaptive as evolutionary, as events everywhere, from these comparos, to the big auto and specialty shows, as well as

factory flow itself, have worked through a complex return fully to normal.

The dominance of EV entries and wins is in itself significant, but is this so much so that the two events—Drive Revolution and Run to the Sun—should simply merge into one, ongoing? Is this year's percentage of both-event entries only likely to increase? Or was this mix a response to this year's combination itself? Would a larger number of traditional powertrains likely return to a freestanding Run to the Sun?

All in all, the “double feature” approach ran smoothly and meaningfully enough to continue into at least next year, depending upon those many outside factors. The shorter-route hub-and-spoke format adopted from Drive Revolution was key for the EVs. As combined this year, the key differentiator of Run to the Sun was that it was not limited to EVs. But it almost seems that it may as well have been.

But the open-road format has been one of Run to the Sun's most significant—and enjoyable—defining elements. When you take another look at its non-EV entries, you certainly would not want to chase those off and would surely welcome more.

If the two *were* permanently combined, which name would be best? Drive Revolution might seem more appropriate if it remained a mostly-EV event, based on heritage. Then again, if EVs are to become so mainstream that they dominate the marketplace, is it really still a revolution? Or will they become status quo, in which case Run to the Sun remains a great name—with its own heritage—especially for an open road version. Range-risk remains an obstacle to that format for EVs, though will become less so all the time (through both technical progress and everyone's increasing familiarity and comfort).

Much will be analyzed and discussed by the group and the manufacturers, while all are now also keeping an eye on the many issues that could change the timeline of an ongoing overall EV shift, as well.

The best news is that this year's results are useful to all concerned. All brands and models are never present at such events (it surprises most people that there are some 450 different cars and trucks you can buy today), but a great cross-section of hardware from many motivated brands was on hand for this. We all gained a range of insights during a great series of drives, which will be solid reference, ongoing. ■

Our special thanks go out to the hard-working fleet personnel who keep everything in top shape throughout; to the manufacturers, who send their most capable vehicles and the smiling faces to support them; to our host facility; and to our friends and colleagues in NWAPA for one of the best-conceived and best-executed events in the business.

