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Hybrid Cars

Hybrid cars work in clever ways. Instead of only having the regular internal-combustion engine, they also have an electric motor. This electric motor runs on battery power. The battery gets charged in a couple of ways. When the car is cruising, the engine does not have to power the car, so it charges the battery. The battery is also charged when the brakes are used. The mechanical energy of the car moving gets changed into electrical energy to charge the battery. Those ideas are great ways to get a high performance from a car while using a lot less gasoline. The first hybrid car, the Toyota Prius, came out of Japan in 1997. I think that it is almost time for me to get one.

The first time I climbed into a hybrid car, I knew that I was in for a different kind of driving experience. The number of gauges staggered me and made me feel intimidated but curious. When my friend started the engine, I just felt mystified. It was silent! At the time, I thought that was very strange. I'm used to cars with engines that you can rev up. I've always equated cars with noise – lots of noise.

It is now seven years after my first experience with a hybrid car. Seven years ago, they were a novelty. Now it seems that in some parts of town, every fifth car is a hybrid.

They are such a fixture on the highway that when my stepsons made up a car game last summer, hybrids were one of the cars that gained the player points when spotted first (along with Bugs and Penske trucks). I am not yet driving a hybrid, but notice that I say “yet.” I’m ready to trade in my loud, gas-guzzling car for a quiet, fuel-efficient hybrid.