

smart cars and hybrids and scooters—oh my!

Six new vehicles to get you from A to B with *less CO₂* (and *more savings*)

WITH GAS PRICES RISING and a growing worry over car emissions and global warming, drivers are thinking about what comes out of the tailpipe. But there are headlights at the end of the proverbial tunnel. Manufacturers of nearly every kind of transportation are coming up with ways to reduce harmful emissions. From buses to scooters, vehicle manufacturers are working to create more fuel-efficient vehicles. Here are just a few.



HAPPY HARLEY

Harley-Davidson enthusiasts are in for a surprise as electric and biodiesel fuel-powered motorcycles are rolling in with the masses.

Carl Vogel, an inventor-entrepreneur, modified a Harley-Davidson chassis into an electrical beast of lead-acid batteries and an electric motor that can achieve 85 mph, weighing about 560 pounds. In one charge, this bike can travel 60 miles at 55 mph and be recharged through an electric outlet in three hours.

Harold Benich, another Harley fan, converted his Fat Boy chassis so the diesel engine could run on soybean oil, averaging a fuel economy rating of 95 miles per gallon.

PRO: No louder than a golf cart, these smooth rides coast the open road. Having one of these bikes definitely decreases the dent in your wallet.

CON: Many motorcyclists argue that a louder engine alerts other motorists of their presence.



SMART CAR

Minis? So 2006. The smart car, manufactured by Mercedes-Benz, is the latest European import to hit the nation, and it hasn't even arrived yet. Stateside sales begin in early 2008 for the cute-as-a-button Smart Fortwo, which comes in three styles and a Crayola box of metallic colors. These capsule vehicles are all born green, though: The company uses eco-friendly production, from the thermal insulation of production centers to powder-coated instead of painted cars. Some of the car parts, like the dashboards and wheel housing covers, are built from 100-percent recyclable synthetics, keeping the smart car green even after it runs its course. With these specs and top-notch safety features, the name says it all.

PRO: This puppy gets 40 miles to the gallon and fits in any parking space.

CON: It only reaches about 90 mph, so it'll poop out before you can even get a speeding ticket (maybe not such a con, after all).

TOP: COURTESY OF VSMART CARS; BOTTOM: COURTESY OF CARL VOGEL

california almonds

How to improve your body by lifting an ounce a day.

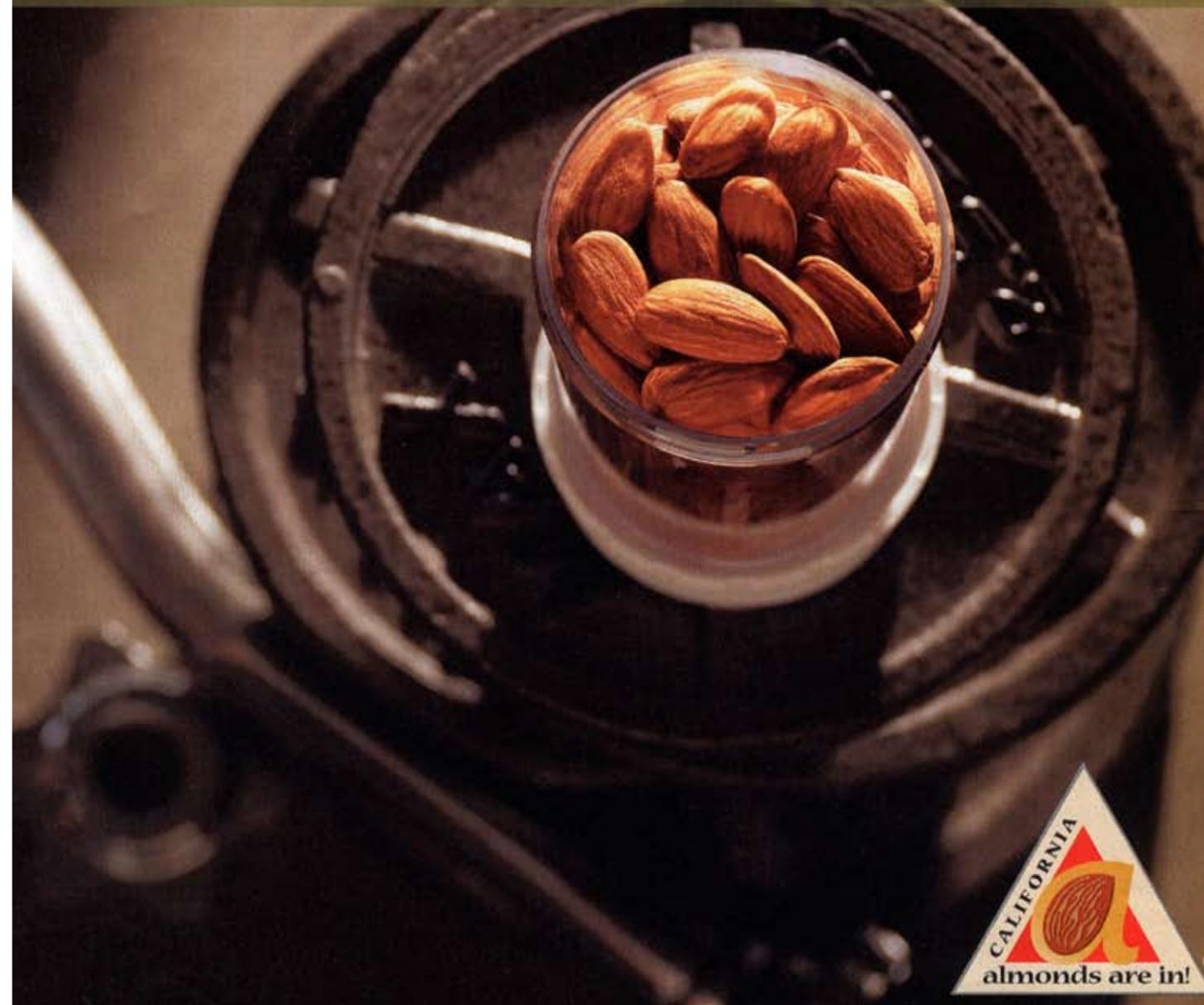
Step 1: Take some tasty California Almonds to the gym.

Step 2: Snack on a handful before or after you work out.

Step 3: Get pumped up knowing that studies show adding an ounce of almonds a day (about 23) to a diet low in saturated fat can help maintain a healthy cholesterol level.

Step 4: Repeat daily.

Remember: Snacking on almonds always gives you a powerful lift. They have protein, fiber and vitamin E, plus every crunch is cholesterol-free.





SCOOTERS

Eco-friendly scooters have had a boost in sales, with good reason. A study conducted by transportation engineering and planning firm Sam Schwartz PLLC simulated the effects of swapping cars for fuel-efficient scooters and found that more scooters would save drivers both time and money.

If 20 percent of commuters traded their cars for scooters, in one year carbon emissions would go down by 26,000 tons, fuel consumption by 2.5 million gallons, and traffic delays by 4.6 million hours.

For those who aren't ready to trade in their luxury vehicles, researchers stress that small changes have a big impact. Use scooters for short trips, so save the big wheels for carpooling and bad weather.

PRO: Revive the buddy system — New York State law allows two scooters to share a lane, and nobody has to call "shotgun."

CON: Riding scooters, while decreasing CO₂ emissions, may increase a sense of European elitism.

MAGIC BUS

If you've ever gotten stuck behind a city bus, you have noticed two things: They're slow, and they spit out a cloud of smelly black smoke. While many bus manufacturers have switched to clean-burning natural gas (CNG), some have gone a step further by building hybrid diesel-electric buses. The Central New York Regional Transportation Authority, Centro, recently bought nine of these buses for service in the Syracuse area. Hybrid buses capture energy during the braking process and convert it to electricity, which is used to accelerate the bus. This process makes the bus more efficient in stop-and-go traffic. Centro hopes to save 4 million gallons of fuel over the lifespan of the buses. The buses are only a hint of what is ahead. Centro plans to have 125 hybrid buses in their fleet in the next few years.

PRO: Hybrid buses are quiet. In fact, they aren't much louder than the average passenger car. But, more importantly, they are 33 percent more fuel efficient than current CNG bus technology.

CON: Centro spent \$466,000 for each of the nine buses, which is nearly double that of a diesel or CNG bus.

HYBRIDS

Greeniacs like Leonardo DiCaprio can't get enough of these cars. As environmental concerns continue to rise, so do the number of half-gas, half-electric cars on the road.

Not all hybrids are the same. Russell Berse, a district parts and service manager for Honda, says the Honda hybrids rely more on gasoline to run the engine, using the electric motor to aid acceleration.

Hybrid technology has room to grow. Berse says many car manufacturers are exploring plug-in hybrids, which charge extra batteries by plugging in to an electrical outlet. But the technology isn't perfect.

"On the plus side, there is more electric capacity and less reliance on gasoline," says Berse. "But the electricity has to come from power plants, many of which burn fossil fuels, so we might not be saving that much oil, and there is still some negative effect on the environment."

PRO: Spend less on gas, and drive the same car as Leo DiCaprio.

CON: The Prius might be the ugliest car on the market.

FUEL CELLS

If you're ready to take a step toward the future of driving, look out for fuel cell vehicles. Fuel cells use hydrogen and oxygen to produce electricity for an electric motor, similar to how a battery might power the motor of an electric vehicle. The only by-products are water and heat, thus having low or zero emissions.

"You can literally drink the water," says Barry Carr, vice president of Alternative Fuels for Homeland Energy Resources Development Inc. Carr, who is also a consultant for the American Honda's Alternative Fueled Vehicle Department, says the new hydrogen fuel cell-powered Honda FCX is probably the cleanest vehicle available.

PRO: Clean and efficient, fuel cell vehicles are also quiet because they operate electrically, so the only noise you hear are the fans and pumps for the fuel cell and radiators.

CON: One can cost as much as \$1.2 million, and hydrogen fueling centers for these vehicles are scarce.

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eXplorist 210 GPS

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