

Ford chief commits to the gas-sippers

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Fuel efficiency may not be top of mind with some Canadian drivers these days -- with trucks once again outselling cars -- but it is with Ford Motor Company officials.



The North American automaker has been on a bit of tear lately, introducing a whack of new models -- eight this year alone -- that are either the most fuel-efficient in their class, or on par with the most miserly.

Ford Canada president and CEO David Mondragon said in Winnipeg Friday gas prices are bound to rise again -- he predicts oil will be back above \$100 a barrel by 2012 or 2013. And when they do, demand for fuel-efficient cars and trucks will rise along with it.

That's why Ford has invested so heavily over the last three years in developing smaller, more fuel-efficient vehicles like the ones it has been producing for years for the fuel-conscious European and Asian markets. Its goal is to be a fuel-economy leader in every segment in which it competes.

The latest addition to its revamped lineup of North American fuel-sippers is the new Fiesta subcompact, which is being introduced to the Canadian market this month. It boasts a class-leading rating of 4.9 litres per 100 kilometres on the highway, and 6.8 litres in the city.

Another is the Transit Connect compact van, which has been a big seller for years overseas, and is now available in North America.

Mondragon said Canada Post is buying 1,175 of the four-cylinder vans this year as it begins to replace its aging national fleet of cargo vans. Canada Post officials have said they chose the Transit Connect because it's more fuel-efficient -- 9.5 litres per 100 kilometres in the city and 7.9 on the highway -- and more environmentally friendly.

Mondragon was in Winnipeg to attend the grand opening of Canada Post's \$100-million mail-sorting plant, which will be getting some of the new vans.

He said car sales have taken a back seat to truck sales this year in Canada, with 53 per cent of the vehicles sold being trucks, and 47 per cent cars. Last year, it was the opposite.

But he predicts the preference will shift back to cars once gas prices start climbing again, even though today's

trucks are also a lot more fuel-efficient than they used to be.

Electric cars due

TORONTO -- Fully electric vehicles should be widely available to Canadian consumers within two years, with offerings in the pipeline from Nissan, Ford, Toyota, Mitsubishi and others, automakers say.

Nissan is poised to be the first major carmaker to introduce a purely electric consumer vehicle into the Canadian market, with its Leaf set to be in showrooms here by late 2011, said Mark McDade, director of marketing at Nissan Canada.

Nissan will begin selling the Leaf in the United States this December.

Ford, meanwhile, said it plans to launch its Transit Connect battery- electric van and an electric version of the Focus sedan in roughly the same time frame.

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