

Ten Diesels We'll Soon Be Driving

Clean diesel-powered cars that promise great fuel economy are starting to arrive in the U.S.

by JACQUELINE MITCHELL, Forbes.com



The diesel-powered Audi Q7 will go on sale in January.

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Everyone agrees that America needs to wean itself off foreign oil. No one agrees, however, about how to do it.

Diesels Now Available

- **Jeep Grand Cherokee CRD**
- **Mercedes-Benz GL320 Bluetec**
- **Volkswagen Touareg V10 TDI**

Hybrids, electric plug-ins and natural-gas cars all are seen as steps in the right direction. And much has been made in the media about the potential for diesel-powered cars, already popular in Europe. But are they right for American drivers?

We'll find out soon enough. A new group of clean diesel-powered cars is headed to dealer showrooms. (See a slideshow of the diesels that are on the way [here](#).)

BMW is gearing up to launch diesel versions of the **3-Series** sedan and **X5** sports utility vehicle. Both will make their North American debut at the Los Angeles Auto Show this month and will go on sale sometime thereafter. In January, the **Audi Q7**, a diesel-powered luxury SUV, also will go on sale.

And there is much more in the pipeline. Between now and 2011, **Acura**, **Nissan**, **Hyundai** and **Kia** all plan to launch clean-diesel cars of their own.

"This is the perfect storm for clean diesel-powered cars," says Allen Schaeffer, executive director of Diesel Technology Forum, an advocate for diesel technology. "Diesel engines are a proven technology that never took off. We are now in a climate where people are focused on energy, and diesel is energy-efficient. This is the perfect time to bring out diesel."

Diesel's Departure — And Return

Research vehicles that have or will get diesel engines:

- **Acura TSX Sedan**
- **Audi A4 Sedan**
- **Audi Q7 3.0 TDI**
- **BMW 3-Series Sedan**
- **Cadillac CTS**
- **Ford F-150**
- **Hyundai Veracruz**
- **Jeep Grand Cherokee**
- **Mercedes-Benz GL-Class**
- **Mercedes-Benz M-Class**
- **Mercedes-Benz R-Class**
- **Nissan Maxima**
- **Saturn Aura**
- **Volkswagen Touareg**

Diesel isn't new. The technology has existed since the dawn of the automobile and remains widely popular in Europe. Auto experts say 50 percent to 60 percent of all vehicles sold in Europe are powered with a diesel engine.

Americans also drove diesel cars until 30 years ago, when air pollution concerns mounted. The smelly, smoky diesel cars on the road then were partly to blame for city smog. Most of what remain of diesel engines in America are in buses and commercial trucks. A turning point came in 2006, however, when the Environmental Protection Agency required the introduction of ultra-low-sulfur diesel. This reduced the major polluting component of diesel fuel.

Now auto experts believe that diesel-powered cars, which can get 25 percent to 40 percent better mileage than gasoline-powered cars, may appeal to American drivers.

But switching to a diesel, a car buyer should think about the type of driving he or she does. The clean-diesel vehicles on their way to the American market probably will get better mileage on the highway than hybrids, which do better in stop-and-go city traffic (the battery recharges when the car is idle).

Unfortunately, details on the upcoming diesels are scarce. Typically, automakers don't release pricing and other information until closer to the time when the vehicle becomes available to the public.

Porsche has yet to make an official announcement that it is considering bringing a diesel-powered **Cayenne** to the U.S. next spring, with a Porsche spokesman saying only, "We have not ruled it out." Similarly, an Acura spokesman said the company will introduce a diesel in 2009 with an engine called i-DTEC, but would not confirm which model will get the upgrade.

Some diesels have already arrived in the U.S. as 2009 models. In the spring, the 2009 **Volkswagen** Jetta sedan and sport wagon went on sale and last month the 2009 **Mercedes-Benz** trio of crossover SUVs (**GL320**, **ML320** and **R320** Bluetec) went on sale. Each of the cars meets emissions standards in all 50 states.

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Promise of Popularity

Hybrids, popular as they are, still make only a small part of the total auto market — and diesels already outsell them. As more diesels are introduced, the number sold will continue to rise.

"We expect diesel in the U.S. to increase from 3.2 percent of the market in 2007 to 3.6 percent this year and reach 10 percent market share by 2015," says Mike Omotoso, senior manager of powertrain forecasting at auto industry analyst J.D. Power and Associates.

"Despite all of the publicity surrounding hybrid vehicles, diesels have outsold hybrids in the U.S. by a large margin," says Omotoso. "We expect that to continue as the European manufacturers introduce more diesels in the U.S. market."

The advantage to consumers is that, while the diesel models will cost \$500 to \$2,000 more, some of that additional cost can be offset by a federal tax credit of up to \$1,300 that is available on certain diesel vehicles. The tax credit applies to vehicles purchased before the end of 2010. (Get more information about the tax credit [here](#).)

Savings on fuel also can help offset the cost difference. While diesel fuel currently averages \$3.96 nationwide (regular gas is \$3.40), highway drivers gaining extra mileage on diesel can rack up savings quickly. A drop in the price of diesel could spur the cars' popularity even more.

See the full list of new diesels in the [accompanying slideshow](#).

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