

In the valley, it's horsepower that matters

By JACK DOO, MODESTO BEE STAFF WRITER, October 30, 2002

With the Northern San Joaquin Valley possibly the pickup truck capital of the nation, it's not surprising fuel economy takes a back seat to horsepower.

The valley's and the nation's love for thirsty passenger trucks and sport utility vehicles has pulled down the average fuel economy of the 2003 new car fleet.

"Pickups and SUVs are 80 percent of our business," said David Halvorson, president of American Chevrolet in Modesto. "That's what consumers want and Americans buy what they want."

The average fuel economy for all 2003 model cars and passenger trucks is 20.8 miles per gallon, according to the Environmental Protection Agency's annual gas-mileage statistics, released Tuesday. That is down slightly from about 21 mpg last year, and about 6 percent below the peak for passenger vehicle efficiency of 22.1 mpg set 15 years ago.

For the 488 models of cars being made, the average is 23.6 mpg, marking a continued decline from 23.9 mpg for 2002 models and 24.2 mpg in 2001. For the 446 models or variations of SUVs, vans and pickup trucks, the average is 17.6 mpg, down from 17.9 mpg for 2002 but above 2001's 17.3 mpg.

Buyers and industry officials alike say the trends reflect lifestyle choices.

Halvorson said while Chevrolet offers many economical vehicles, including the four-cylinder Cavalier, the V-8 Silverado

extended-cab pickup is the McHenry Avenue dealership's best seller.

"For every Cavalier we sell, we'll sell 10 Silverados," he said.

James and Aysha Green were car shopping Tuesday and miles per gallon was not high on the Modesto couple's list.

"Fuel economy is not really a concern," James Green said. "Whether I get 20 miles per gallon or 25, it's not an issue with me."

"It's not going to make any difference in what we buy," Aysha Green said.

Work trucks need horsepower

Keith Cunha, general sales manager of Fireside Dodge in Modesto, said buyers typically are looking beyond fuel economy for vehicles that are practical.

"We sell a lot of trucks," Cunha said. "Our vehicles are for working and towing. You need the big V-8s to do that. You'll give up a little bit of fuel economy for the ability to work."

Cunha said among the dealership's Dodge brand, 85 percent of the vehicles sold are pickups or SUVs.

The latest pickups are dual-purpose vehicles that can haul the family and bales of hay.

"The new trucks drive and handle great," Cunha said. "You've got four doors and seating for six. Everyone needs a truck."

Rigoberto Garcia of Escalon is planning on replacing his 1991 Lincoln sedan with a four-door Dodge Ram 2500 pickup.

"I'm looking for a Dodge diesel," he said. "A diesel lasts longer and is cheaper than gas."

While buyers may be giving up fuel economy when buying a pickup or SUV, Brett Steves of Steves Chevrolet in Oakdale said they're gaining safety when compared with a subcompact economy car.

He said the dealership's No. 1 seller, a Silverado extended-cab pickup, can average 15 to 18 miles per gallon. A typical Silverado costs about \$27,000.

Area called 'big truck country'

Pickups are by far the most popular offering at Steves.

"I would say pickups out-sell passenger cars 7-to-1, maybe 8-to-1," he said. "We're still doing very well with our Buicks and Chevrolet cars, but this area is a big truck country."

Josette Merced Bello, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, is concerned that the consumer appetite for less fuel-efficient vehicles could make this big smog country.

"I think it's a very disturbing trend in terms of air quality," she said. "Not only are we driving more miles, we're driving in less fuel-efficient cars. That doesn't paint a rosy picture for the future of our air quality."

The valley's air is among the worst in the country for dust and soot, as well as for ozone or smog, created when emissions from cars, trucks and other sources combine with sunlight.

Perceived value is often the top concern of consumers, followed by convenience, she said.

Environmental concerns are not often considered, she said.

[Previously missed in the Madera Daily Tribune:](#)

Resolution says Ag not to blame for pollution

By Glenna Jarvis, Sunday, October 20, 2002

With all the blame for the poor air quality in the Valley being placed on agriculture, Madera County Board of Supervisors Tuesday will consider a resolution making it clear that "Valley agriculture is beneficial to the air quality."

Last June, King's County supervisors approved a resolution recognizing the positive contributions of agriculture crop production to the San Joaquin Valley air quality.

On Aug. 7, the supervisors sent a letter to the Madera board urging it to enact a resolution, as well.

Kern County also enacted a similar resolution, according to documents provided to the board from County Counsel, David Prentice.

"The problem for both Kern and Kings counties was the perception that Valley pollution was being laid at the feet of agriculture when studies have proven that Valley pollution is primarily caused by mobile sources and 'out of Valley' sources," Prentice said in a prepared statement. "This

proposed resolution will add Madera County's voice to the argument that Valley agriculture is beneficial to the air quality."

In the letter from Kings County, the supervisors said the "negative publicity being presented to the general public concerning the emissions from agriculture tended to place the blame for this Valley's degrading air quality on agriculture."

County acreages of crops that emit the highest amount of reactive organic gas, which react with oxides of nitrogen in the atmosphere to form ground level ozone, in Madera are pistachios (19,270), cotton (27,500), alfalfa (36,500), and almonds (47,600).

Other crops include figs (9,550), corn (17,100), oranges (3,830) and peaches (2,080).

Crops which comprise less than 2,000 acres are olives, nectarines, and walnuts.

Ozone removal, based on crop type and listed by pound-per-acre, per-day, were determined to be about 650 tons.

These crop types are rangeland (0.06), grapes (0.22), cotton (0.27), orchards (0.21), and corn (0.26).

There are about 5 million acres of croplands and about 5 million acres of rangeland in the San Joaquin Valley.