

## Hybrids not immune from touch of spin

### GREEN CAR MYTHS

In the absence of clear standards, manufacturers are shirking responsibility for emission claims, writes **John Reed**

Toyota prides itself on its decorous public image, but in May its reputation took a rare knock. Britain's Advertising Standards Authority called the luxury Lexus brand to task for an advertisement with the tagline "High performance, low emissions, zero guilt".

The advertisement implied that the Rx400h, a hybrid crossover utility vehicle, "caused little or no harm to the environment", the ASA said. In fact its carbon dioxide emissions of 192 grams per kilometre were well above the European average of about 160.

Lexus averred that the Rx400h's hybrid drive system made it the cleanest in its class, but the watchdog upheld the complaint and the advert was pulled.

Separately, the ASA has in the past year ruled against Volkswagen and Citroën for claims that the Golf GT TSI and the C5 VTX were, respectively, "low-emission" or "ultra-low".

Renault applies an Eco2 symbol to a range of cars with CO2 emissions of 140g/km or less – below average but, analysts say, nowhere near the 120g/km or less the industry's cleanest cars achieve. "To brand a vehicle 'eco' with CO2 performance of less than 140g/km is setting the bar a bit too low," says David Riemenschneider, chief execu-

tive of Clifford Thames, an automotive consultancy.

As carmakers broaden ranges of lower-emission and alternative-fuel vehicles, there is a dearth of agreed marketing standards. And increasingly the public is barraged by conflicting messages about cars and the environment.

Under an eight-year-old European Union directive carmakers are required to include information on vehicles' fuel economy and CO2 emissions in showrooms and marketing literature including adverts. In practice, under national laws, many adverts omit the information or include it as fine print.

Campaigners are pushing for stricter regulation of carmakers' messages and the language they use. "When you talk about greenwashing, there is an issue here," says Dudley Curtis of the European Federation for Transport and Environment, a Brussels-based organisation campaigning for sustainable transport.

Manufacturers point to existing initiatives meant to inform consumers about cars' green credentials, including a colour-coded labelling by fuel economy introduced in the UK in 2005. In July the country's transport department began publishing a "Best on CO2" ranking of cars.

But regulators and even industry representatives acknowledge that many car buyers are still confused. In spite of the industry's fiercely competitive nature, there are signs that companies are poised to band together to give clearer messages on their cars' environmental impact.

In February the European Commission asked the

industry to devise a pan-European code of advertising conduct. The UK's Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders has discussed the issue with the ASA.

Behind the industry's move to self-regulate are concerns about a shifting public mood on cars and global warming. The fear is that entire vehicle classes or brands will be stigmatised.

"We're conscious of what is happening with food, alcohol and tobacco, and there's a recognition that we need to get our house in order," says the SMMT's Simon Barnes.

The issue is only likely to gain prominence as a wider range of hybrid, clean diesel and other lower-emission cars proliferate.

Clifford Thames and Cardiff University are devising a ratings system for cars' environmental friendliness. They hope that one day it will give the same kind of guidance for consumers and manufacturers that Euro NCAP does for safety. "A standard rating system is fundamentally important, and it's probably going to have to be European," says Mr Riemenschneider.

Although it is moving to clean up its act, the industry complains that cars are

being singled out for censure when they in fact emit less cumulative greenhouse gas emissions than either power generation or manufacturing.

Lobby groups such as the SMMT and the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association are looking to shift some carbon-cutting responsibility to areas that are unrelated to vehicle technology, such as better management of traffic speeds, lights and patterns, which can cut emission levels significantly.

They are also trying educate drivers themselves about cutting vehicles' carbon emissions. The ACEA and other groups promote fuel-efficient "eco-driving", which entails the more judicious monitoring of gear shifts, tyre pressure and other measures. With proper driver training, the group claims, a car's fuel consumption can be cut by up to 25 per cent.

Manufacturers, too, are putting more of the responsibility in drivers' hands. Nissan recently announced that it was outfitting all vehicles with a fuel-efficiency gauge, which lets drivers track their consumption. Similar devices are available on other manufacturers' cars.

### Toyota increases driving range of fuel-cell vehicle

Toyota more than doubled the driving range of its fuel-cell vehicle with the addition of a new hydrogen tank as it tries to develop pollution-free cars that can be mass-produced,

**Bloomberg reports from Tokyo.** The Toyota FCHV, which the company now leases in limited numbers to local governments, can cruise about 780km on a tank of pressurised hydrogen, compared with

330km for the previous model, the company said yesterday.

The model can store twice as much hydrogen with a new tank and has 25 per cent better fuel economy, Toyota said.

Extending fuel-cell vehicles' driving range is one of the hurdles Toyota and other carmakers are facing in making the cars a workable solution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.