



FORD MOTORS MERCURY DIVISION

2008 Mercury Mariner Hybrid

By **JO ANN HOLT**
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The 2008 Mercury Mariner Hybrid is still one of the most economical and fuel efficient cars on the road, offering drivers an amazing 34 mpg in town and 30 on the road. This in-town mileage has improved almost 14 percent over the 2007 model!

The good news is, the small SUV is better looking than ever—both inside and out. It certainly doesn't look like something that's supposed to be "good for you" (like veggies you have to eat even if you don't like

them). In fact, in comparing the 2008 Mariner Hybrid to other cars in the small SUV class, it is one of the most stylish on the lot.

Probably the most eye-catching element is the new, larger, waterfall grille, with the Mercury badge in the center. The Mariner has a crisp and seamless look, with integrated side repeater lamps and a power-dome hood that draws your eye from the grille toward the windshield.

The 2008 Mariner Hybrid that I drove had a shiny, silver, clear coat, metallic finish and a stone-colored leather interior. The 2008 models have an upscale interior design with new seats, a center console with extra

storage and pullout bins, and a floor-mounted shifter. The power moon roof also widened vistas inside the car. The Mariner's thicker interior carpet, increased side glass thickness, and laminated acoustic windshield all work together to reduce annoying wind noise. The all-wheel drive model adds a new, quieter, rear differential that makes for an even smoother ride.

The Hybrid has a 2.3-liter DOHC 16-valve Atkinson cycle 4-cylinder engine and a magnet AC synchronous motor. While the gas engine produces 133 hp at 6,000 rpm and 124 lb.-ft. of torque at 4,250 rpm, the electric motor produces 70 kw

at 5,000 rpm and 330V maximum voltage, resulting in 155 hp with 0-60 times comparable to a 200 hp V-6 engine, boosting city driving fuel economy nearly 75 percent. The electronically controlled Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT) is the only available transmission.

The intelligent all-wheel drive test model proved an easy car to drive, automatically transferring just the right amount of torque from front to rear without any input from the driver. I'm getting spoiled with all these smart cars knowing what I need before I do, even turning on the lights when it starts to get dark or cloudy, but it's nice to know

someone—in this case, Mercury—is looking out for my safety.

They also provided a safety canopy system, dual-stage front air bags, a tire pressure monitoring system, and lower anchors and tethers. The Mariner has power locks, windows, and mirror, and remote keyless entry with keypad.

When asked to pick up clients at the airport, we found the Mariner unexpectedly roomy inside, even with a full load of five adults. There was more than enough cargo space for their luggage; and if we had needed more luggage room, the rugged-looking roof rack, with retractable leather cover, was also available.

The base price for the 2008 Mercury Mariner Hybrid FWD is US\$25,765, but the test model options including Sirius Satellite Radio, power heated mirrors and front seats, navigation and audiophile system, leather trim package, mini overhead console with map light, and the power moon roof with shade, brought the total to US\$31,000. Quite a deal when you consider how much you will save at the gas pump.

Jo Ann Holt is a columnist and car writer based in Dallas, Texas, and a member of the Texas Automobile Writers Association (TAWA).

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