

MotorWeek Transcripts

ROAD TEST '2008 SATURN VUE GREEN LINE HYBRID'

DAVIS: Saturn's VUE has gone through several iterations since it first arrived for 2002. After this compact crossover's initial success, it was joined by the red-line performance model in 2004. Then, in 2007, the VUE became eco-friendly with the Green Line mild-hybrid. Now, with an all-new 2008 VUE in place, the Green Line hybrid continues its role of offering consumers practical utility with affordable fuel-saving benefits. But, for this VUE, it's just the beginning.

The second generation 2008 Saturn VUE Green Line carries over the same mild hybrid system as the previous model, and for good reason. It's both less complicated and less expensive to buy than a full hybrid system, while still providing about a 20% gain in fuel economy over its gas-powered counterpart.

But late this year, the VUE will add a full hybrid as well with the first V6 application of GM's two-mode hybrid system. With its anticipated 30% overall gain, it will allow VUE buyers to buy as much fuel saving compact crossover as they can afford. Further, a plug-in hybrid is also expected soon after that.

The current mild hybrid VUE Green Line uses a hang-on belt-driven motor/starter/generator that provides its power boost through a simpler belt and pulley configuration.

The 10-kilowatt electric motor mates to a corporate Ecotec 2.4-liter inline-4, rated at 172 horsepower and 167 pound-feet of torque. Power is managed by a conventional 4-speed automatic, instead of the more expensive continuously variable transmission used by most full hybrids. To further save on costs, the VUE Green Line is front-wheel drive only.

Like most hybrids, the gas engine shuts off when the VUE Green Line is stopped. On take off, the electric motor provides a small amount of initial momentum until the 4-cylinder engine takes over. Additionally, the electric motor assists with power during acceleration and uphill climbs.

Government Fuel Economy ratings for the VUE Green Line are 25 city/32 highway. We managed 26.9 miles-per-gallon on regular gas. It's Energy Impact Score is also a thrifty 12.2 barrels of oil consumed per year.

The Green Line has the highest highway fuel economy rating of any utility, and a long 575-mile interstate cruising range. The driver can monitor energy use by a battery charge indicator, a tachometer that shows when the engine is shut off, and an ECO light that indicates you are exceeding EPA mileage estimates.

As for performance, we timed our tester at a reasonable 10.2 seconds from 0 to 60, with the quarter-mile at 17.8 seconds and 83 miles-per-hour. If your needs include rapid acceleration, this certainly isn't your vehicle.

Otherwise the Green Line wears all the upgrades of the new gen Saturn VUE. That includes fresh Euro styling that trades the previous plastic body panels for metal ones.

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Inside, the Green Line enjoys a totally redesigned and people friendly interior. The 5-seater cabin is decidedly more upscale than before, with firm seats and a nice roster of standard amenities such as OnStar.

The rear seat has a 60/40 split fold with a new recline feature. Behind these seats is an under floor compartment as well as 29.2 cubic feet of cargo room. With ~~all~~ the rear seats down, the Green Line has a small-for-its type 56.4 cubic feet of bulk cargo space. But, the convenient fold-flat front passenger ~~fold-flat~~ seat extends that room nicely for long items.

And the well equipped Saturn VUE Green Line was built to be affordable. It carries a base sticker of \$24,795. That's about a \$3,000 premium over the cheapest non-hybrid VUE. But, at about \$2,500 less than a Ford Escape Full-Hybrid, it remains the least expensive hybrid utility on the market.

Saturn's new 2008 VUE Green Line Hybrid combines efficiency with versatility in the most affordable package available. And, with the two-mode hybrid and plug-in versions just around the corner, the VUE could become the one-stop-shop among green utilities.