

Automakers Up MPG Ratings, But Only Slightly

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The fleet of new cars and trucks sold to U.S. consumers averaged 21 miles per gallon in the 2008 model year, a modest increase over the previous year, the Environmental Protection Agency reported Friday.

New vehicle fuel efficiency improved 2 percent in 2008 from 20.6 mpg for the 2007 model year. The government projected it will improve slightly to 21.1 mpg in the 2009 model year. The EPA figures are based on real-world estimates for city and highway mileage found on window stickers at dealer showrooms instead of mileage values developed through laboratory testing.

Honda Motor Co. led the industry in 2008 with 23.9 mpg, followed by Hyundai Motor Co. and its affiliate Kia Motors Corp. with 23.7 mpg, and Toyota Motor Corp. with 22.8 mpg.

Volkswagen AG's fleet averaged 22.3 mpg, followed by Nissan Motor Co. with 21.9 and BMW AG with 21.2.

General Motors Co. led U.S. automakers with 19.7 mpg, followed by Ford Motor Co. with 19.4 and Chrysler Group LLC with 19.3. The EPA projects Ford will increase its fuel efficiency by more than 1 mpg in the 2009 model year and overtake GM.

The Obama administration has pressed for tougher fuel efficiency requirements and proposed a 40 percent increase by 2016. Environmentalists said the EPA data showed the need for stiff requirements, noting that \$4 gasoline prices in 2008 failed to dramatically boost fuel efficiency.

"Despite the highest gas prices ever, it didn't move the needle," said Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate campaign for the Center for Auto Safety.

Charles Territo, a spokesman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, said the industry recognized the need to enhance fuel efficiency. He said manufacturers were offering nearly 200 models during the 2010 model year that achieve at least 30 mpg on the highway.

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