Ford Developing Its Smallest Engine Ever

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DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) — Ford Motor Co. plans to introduce its smallest engine ever by 2013, part of the race to improve fuel economy across the industry.

Ford said Thursday it's working on a one-liter, three-cylinder engine that will be available in small cars globally. Ford didn't say which cars will get the engine, but it plans to release more details this fall.

Currently Ford's smallest engine available in the U.S. is the 1.6-liter, four-cylinder used in the Ford Fiesta subcompact. That engine has 120 horsepower and gets up to 38 miles per gallon on the highway.

Ford says the new three-cylinder engine would match that power but be more efficient. The engine has Ford's EcoBoost technology, which uses turbocharging, direct injection and variable camshaft timing to boost performance. It's also about 20 pounds lighter than the four-cylinder, which helps fuel economy.

"No one's ever built a three-cylinder engine quite like this," said Joe Bakaj, Ford's vice president of global powertrain engineering.

Three-cylinder engines are common in Europe and Asia, but the only one currently available in the U.S. is in the Smart Fortwo. The Fortwo has a 70-horsepower engine — the same as some snowmobiles — and gets 41 miles per gallon on the highway.

EcoBoost technology is currently available on four Ford products — the F-150 pickup, the Ford Flex and Lincoln MKT crossovers and the Taurus SHO sedan. Ford is adding it to the lineup for the Edge crossover and the Explorer SUV this summer. The starting price of the Flex SEL with EcoBoost is $40,080, or nearly $8,000 more than a Flex SEL with the base engine. It costs $4,400 to add EcoBoost to an F-150 XL.

Still, the option has been popular with some customers looking for fuel economy. Forty-one percent of individual F-150 buyers chose the EcoBoost option in May, the company said. Ford said there are currently 180,000 vehicles in North America with EcoBoost, which was introduced in 2009. Ford aims to have 1.5 million on the road globally by 2013.

Ford product development chief Derrick Kuzak said the company is exploring whether it could use EcoBoost technology in hybrid vehicles for even more fuel savings.

Ford also said Thursday it's developing its first eight-speed transmission, which will get up to 6 percent better fuel economy than its six-speed. General Motors Co. and Chrysler Group LLC have also said they're developing eight-speed transmissions,

which are already available on luxury brands like Lexus and BMW.

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