Ford To Bring Smaller Engine To U.S. In 2014 Fiesta

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DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) — Ford is bringing its smallest engine to the U.S. in the race to meet stricter government fuel economy rules.

The company says the 2014 Fiesta will be the first North American vehicle to get Ford's new 1-liter, three-cylinder EcoBoost engine when it goes on sale next year. The 1-liter has been sold in the European version of the Focus sedan since March.

Ford isn't releasing fuel economy numbers yet, but says the 1-liter Fiesta will be the most fuel-efficient non-hybrid available in the U.S. It should get well over 40 miles per gallon.

"This is truly a dynamo of an engine," says Bob Fascetti, Ford's director of global engine engineering.

Ford plans to show a Fiesta with the new engine at the Los Angeles Auto Show later this month. The Focus sedan has the engine in Europe, and Ford hints the U.S. Focus may also get it soon.

Three-cylinder engines are common in small European cars but have rarely ventured across the Atlantic. That's partly because they gained a reputation for being loud, shaky and underpowered in 1990s econoboxes like the Geo Metro. The tiny Smart ForTwo is currently the only car for sale in the U.S. with a three-cylinder engine. Its sales are just a fraction of the Fiesta's, however. Daimler AG had sold just 8,309 Smart cars in the U.S. through October, compared with sales of 47,475 for the Fiesta.

But getting new customers isn't the only consideration. Car companies are under pressure to increase the fuel efficiency of their cars. President Obama ordered them to double their average fuel economy to 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025. One of the easiest ways to do that is use proven technology from Europe, where gas is more expensive and customers place a premium on fuel economy.

General Motors plans to bring a diesel version of the Chevrolet Cruze from Europe to the U.S. next year. It's expected to top 40 mpg. And Ford probably won't be the last to bring over its smaller engines. BMW AG recently unveiled new three-cylinders that could be bound for America.

Ford's first three-cylinder uses turbocharging and direct fuel injection to give it the power of a larger engine. It has 123 horsepower, for example, which is three more than the current Fiesta with a 1.6-liter four-cylinder. At the same time, the 1-liter will likely get far better fuel economy than the 33 mpg combined city and highway

rating for the current Fiesta

By comparison, the Smart ForTwo gets just 70 horsepower and 36 mpg out of its 1-liter three-cylinder. And unlike the Fiesta, it uses premium gas.

Dave Sullivan, an analyst with auto consulting firm AutoPacific, said he was pleasantly surprised by the three-cylinder he tested in the European Focus. He doesn't think customers will care if the engine has fewer cylinders as long as it performs well and saves fuel.

"Other European automakers like VW and Fiat have these, but none of them are as quiet as this one," Sullivan said.

The 1-liter is the fourth member of Ford's EcoBoost engine family. The first engine was a 3.5-liter V6 that gave the Taurus SHO performance sedan the power of a V8. Ford also has 1.6-liter and 2-liter versions.

EcoBoost engines cost around $1,000 more than conventional ones, but they've been a popular option anyway. Ford says 80 percent of Ford Escape SUV buyers and 42 percent of F-150 pickup buyers are springing for EcoBoost engines. In Europe, about 30 percent of Focus buyers are getting the 1-liter EcoBoost.

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