Two-Thirds of Adult Vehicle Owners are Familiar with Flexible Fuel Vehicles

Contributed by Harris Interactive
Wednesday, 26 July 2006
Last Updated Friday, 08 September 2006

Harris Interactive Reports: Two-Thirds of Adult Vehicle Owners are Familiar with Flexible Fuel Vehicles and More than Half are Interested in Purchasing One
Reduced dependency on petroleum cited as key reason

DETROIT and ROCHESTER, N.Y. â€“ July 26, 2006 â€“ The most recent wave of the Harris Interactive AutoTECHCASTSM study reports that two-thirds of consumers surveyed are familiar with flexible fuel vehicles (vehicles can run on bio-fuels, including E85 which is comprised of 85% ethanol and 15% gasoline), and more than one-half are interested in purchasing such a vehicle. Though awareness levels are lower among younger consumers (ages 18 to 34) (59%), they are the group most likely to consider purchasing such a vehicle.

These are some of the results from the latest wave of the Harris Interactive AutoTECHCAST, a study conducted bi-annually among adult vehicle owners in the United States. AutoTECHCAST provides in-depth U.S. consumer trends on 60 advanced automotive technologies, and this most recent wave includes a special section on flexible fuel vehicles. This wave of the study was conducted online between May 15 and June 2, 2006 among 12,857 U.S. adults ages 18 and over who own or lease a vehicle, have a valid driverâ€™s license, have at least one household vehicle and own a listed U.S. model dated 2001 or newer.

"While hybrid electric vehicles have received a significant amount of attention and interest over the past few years, recent actions and announcements from some vehicle manufacturers suggests that flexible fuel vehicles may be the viable solution to decreasing the demand for petroleum-based energy," states Bryan Krulikowski, Senior Director of Harris Interactiveâ€™s Automotive & Transportation (ATR) Research Practice.

Reasons why consumers may consider flexible fuel vehicles

Among consumers interested in purchasing flexible fuel vehicles, most (88%) cite a reduced dependency on petroleum as the leading reason for consideration. To illustrate this point further, Harris Interactive finds that more than half of all those surveyed (53%) indicate that they are willing to pay more money for a vehicle that relies less on petroleum-based fuel.

Some confusion as to the actual benefits of flexible fuel vehicles

Consumers indicate they would choose a flexible fuel vehicle because of the improved fuel economy that will be realized (69%). However, ethanol-fueled vehicles will likely produce a slight decrease in fuel economy, though vehicle performance will be slightly enhanced given ethanolâ€™s higher octane rating.

"Consumers are assuming that a non-petroleum based fuel will result in better fuel economy, but that is not necessarily the case with ethanol," states Krulikowski. "Still, beyond fuel economy, consumers are interested in flexible fuel vehicles for the impact they will have on the environment and that is certainly a benefit that this type of fuel can provide."

About half are interested in flexible fuel vehicles, but what about the rest?

The study shows that about half of consumers are less enthusiastic about the alternative fuel. The vast majority (85%) of these adults indicate a limited availability of fueling stations as a key reason for their lack of interest.

Krulikowski adds, "With approximately 800 E85 pumps available nationwide, concerns of availability will have to be addressed before flexible fuel vehicles can have a meaningful impact toward reducing the nationâ€™s dependency on petroleum. As legislators and auto manufacturers continue to support increased production of flexible fuels, we should see a rapid increase in the number of fueling stations available. This will likely lead to increased consideration of these types of vehicles by those who are currently hesitant to consider this technology."

Methodology

Harris Interactive conducted this AutoTECHCAST survey online in the United States between May 15 and June 2, 2006 among a total of 12,857 adults aged 18 and over. Qualified respondents had to own or lease a vehicle, have a valid driverâ€™s license, have at least one household vehicle and own a listed U.S. model dated 2001 or newer. Figures for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, income and region were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions. Propensity score weighting was also applied to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All surveys are subject to several sources of error. These include: sampling error (because only a sample of a population

is interviewed); measurement error due to question wording and/or question order, deliberately or unintentionally inaccurate responses, nonresponse (including refusals), interviewer effects (when live interviewers are used) and weighting.

With one exception (sampling error) the magnitude of the errors that result cannot be estimated. There is, therefore, no way to calculate a finite "margin of error" for any survey and the use of these words should be avoided.

With pure probability samples, with 100 percent response rates, it is possible to calculate the probability that the sampling error (but not other sources of error) is not greater than some number. With a pure probability sample of 12,857 vehicle-owning adults one could say with a 95 percent probability that the overall results have a sampling error of +/- 1 percentage point. However that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

About Harris InteractiveÂ® Automotive & Transportation Research (ATR) Practice

The Harris Interactive ATR Practice, (www.harrisinteractive.com/services/automotive.asp) based in Rochester, New York and Detroit, Michigan, specializes in consumer-based and business-to-business- based market research for vehicle manufacturers, Tier 1-2-3 suppliers and automotive distribution firms. Additional information on the AutoTECHCAST study can be found at: www.harrisinteractive.com/services/autotechcasteurope.asp

About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is the 13th largest and fastest-growing market research firm in the world. The company provides research-driven insights and strategic advice to help its clients make more confident decisions which lead to measurable and enduring improvements in performance. Harris Interactive is widely known for The Harris Poll, one of the longest running, independent opinion polls and for pioneering online market research methods. The company has built what could conceivably be the worldâ€™s largest panel of survey respondents, the Harris Poll Online. Harris Interactive serves clients worldwide through its United States, Europe and Asia offices, its wholly-owned subsidiary Novatris in France and through a global network of independent market research firms. The service bureau, HISB, provides its market research industry clients with mixed-mode data collection, panel development services as well as syndicated and tracking research consultation. More information about Harris Interactive may be obtained at http://www.harrisinteractive.com/.

Â