

by Dan Lyons • *Special to The Daily Gazette*

2023 Ford Escape Hybrid & Plug-in Hybrid

MSRP: \$39,460 (HEV) \$40,500 (PHEV)



We see hybrid vehicles everywhere these days, but it wasn't always so. Consider that when Ford introduced the Escape Hybrid in 2005, it was the first SUV to be so powered. Fast forward to 2023, and the Escape Hybrid is now in the fourth year of its fourth generation. The new series lineup includes seven trim levels (Base, Active, ST-Line, ST-Line Select, ST-Line Elite, Escape Platinum, and PHEV).

Escape buyers can choose from four powertrains; two of which are hybrids, and both of which I drove recently. Escape HEV employs a 2.5L four cylinder hybrid engine (192 total system h.p.), while the plug-in (PHEV) version of the 2.5L is rated at 210 total system horsepower. EPA says that the HEV's should yield the following MPG's: 42/36/39 (AWD or FWD). I logged 40 mpg's in an Escape HEV during a week behind the wheel - impressive, given that I wasn't consciously trying to maximize my mpg's. I've also driven an Escape PHEV extensively, posting 43 mpg's over an 800 mile stretch. Suffice to say, strong fuel economy numbers for both hybrids, and both cruise easily at highway speeds, with little in the way of engine noise. On a full battery, Escape PHEV can go up to 37 miles without tapping the gas tank. In terms of roadworthiness, while not sporty per se, both Escapes keep their composure while cornering, and ride quality is very good for this class.

The interior of the Escape Hybrids is comfortable and functional, and the cabins are quiet. Ford's SYNC4 infotainment system (with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility) is standard on all models. The latest SYNC system is capable of accepting over-the-air software updates, which can be scheduled by the owner, and handled automatically. A 360 degree camera (standard on Elite and Platinum, optional on Active, Select and PHEV) eases parking worries. The 13.2" center touchscreen display dominates the view from the driver's seat. A line of virtual buttons along the base of the display controls HVAC functions. Menus for other



Photos courtesy of the manufacturer



adjustments are accessed by means of a vertical string of virtual buttons. I find that having actual buttons, switches, or knobs makes for quicker response, and less distraction. That said, Escape's screen-based switchgear works well enough, once you drill down to where you need to be. Voice commands offer a shortcut for some adjustments, as do redundant controls embedded in the steering wheel. Rear legroom and cargo capacity in both hybrids are slightly less than in gas powered models (owing to the location of the hybrid battery packs), but the cabin size is such that adults fit in both rows. Stowage space ranges from 34.4 – 60.8 cu.-ft., (generous for this class) with a low liftover height for loading. Rear seatbacks fold mostly flat, though you may have to scooch the front seats forward first, to allow clearance of the rear headrests.

Ford's suite of standard, driver assistance technologies (Co-Pilot 360) includes auto high-beam headlights, blind spot monitoring with cross traffic alert, lane keeping system, pre-collision assist with automatic emergency braking, rearview camera, post-collision braking and road departure warning. Additional, available features include active park assist, adaptive cruise control, evasive steering assist, reverse brake assist, intersection assist and the aforementioned bird's-eye view camera.

Escape continues to earn a spot on the short list of segment shoppers, with its blend of functionality, technology and comfort. Of the two hybrid versions, I favor HEV over PHEV, only because the latter is unavailable with AWD.

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