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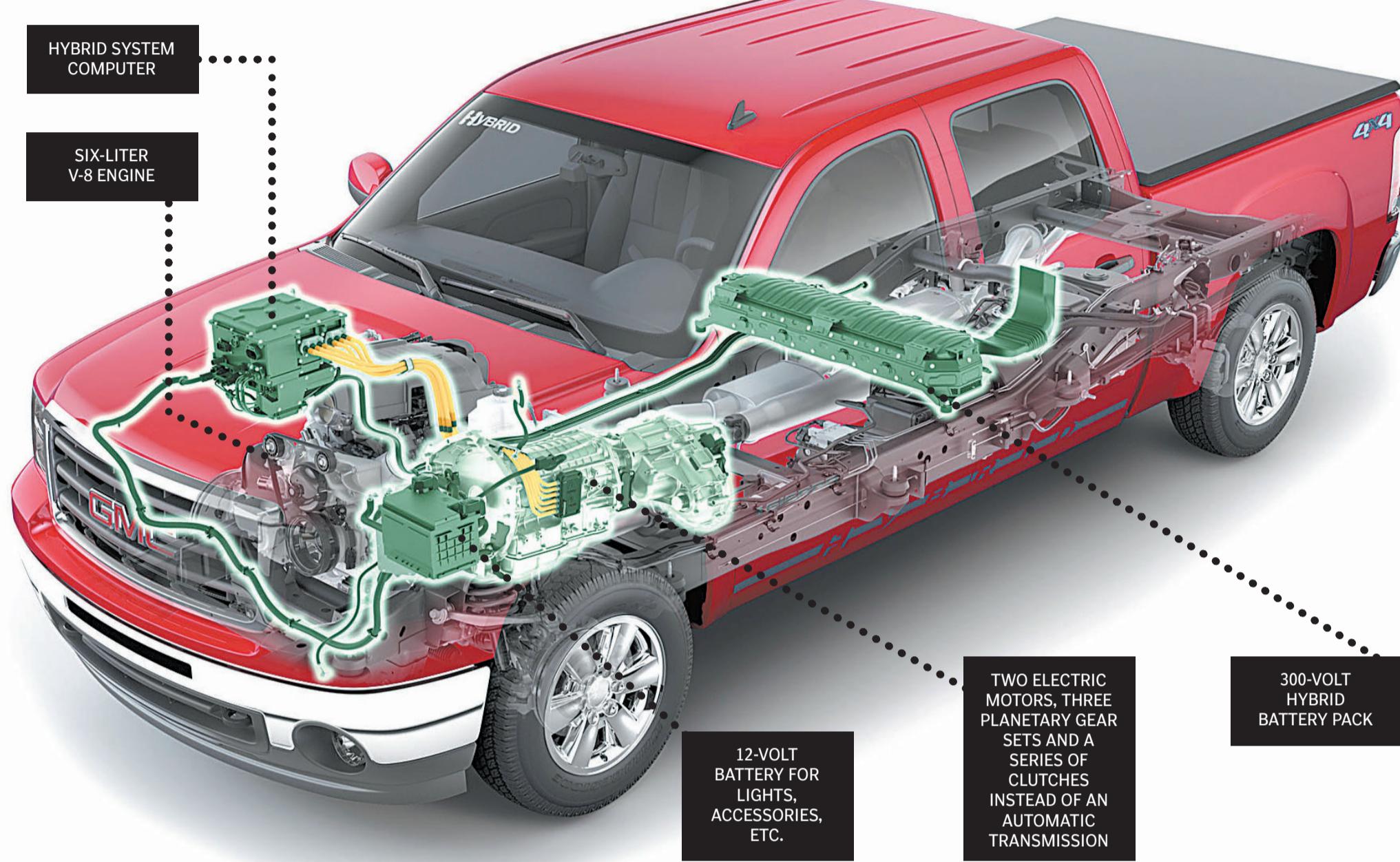
SATURDAY, MARCH 7, 2009 ■ SECTION D

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WHAT LIES BENEATH: GM HYBRID TRUCK



Full-size now comes in green

GM introduces hybrid pickups:
Chevy Silverado, GMC Sierra

By Pete Szilagyi
SPECIAL TO THE AMERICAN-STATESMAN

With all the buzz about gas-electric hybrids, I've heard plenty of exasperated people ask, "Why don't they make hybrid pickups?"

The questioners might assume a hybrid pickup would get 30 or 40 miles per gallon, like a hybrid automobile. Numbers like those are unachievable with current technology, but a hybrid pickup capable of about 20 miles per gallon in urban commuting has just arrived.

Last week, I drove General Motors' new two-mode hybrid half-ton pickups, sold as the Chevrolet Silverado Hybrid and GMC Sierra Hybrid in both two- and four-wheel drive. The Chevy and GMC are identical except for trim and styling differences and a \$370 price premium for the GMC.

The EPA rates two-wheel drive versions at 21 city, 22 highway; four-wheel drive at 20 and 20. My test drives suggest those mileage numbers are achievable only when the trucks are driven very conservatively.

On a 75-mile loop through San Antonio, which included lots of turns and traffic lights, the GMC Sierra 4x4 that I tested delivered 18.9 mpg. I accelerated leisurely but kept up with traffic.

The truck, with three adults aboard, had no cargo, and a tonneau cover that comes standard on the hybrids protected the bed. A typical four-wheel drive crew-cab pickup with a conventional V-8 power train probably would yield mileage of 14 to 17 mpg in the same driving scenario.

Even driven normally, the hybrids should wring a couple of extra miles from a gallon, and certainly do so with far fewer tailpipe



GENERAL MOTORS

The 2009 GMC Sierra Hybrid, above, and Chevrolet Silverado Hybrid offer higher mileage and lower emissions than their conventional counterparts.

emissions. As I've written before, hybrid fuel mileage and emissions levels depend on driving style as much as they do the advanced technology power train.

Drivers intent on getting the best gas mileage are aided by a simple gauge with a needle that points right during efficient driving and to the left when the driver's right foot gets heavy.

GM's new pickups share the two-mode power trains with GM's large hybrid SUVs. The system combines a six-liter V-8 engine, two electric motors, three planetary gear clusters and a 300-volt battery pack.

Developed by GM in concert with BMW and the former DaimlerChrysler, this impressive system is controlled by an onboard computer

almost powerful enough to calculate additions to the national debt.

These hybrids are available only in Crew Cab configuration in two trim levels. The least expensive, which is actually quite well-equipped, is \$38,995. An upper-trim hybrid with leather and navigation system is \$45,130. Unfortunately, most potential buyers are shut out at these prices.

GM's complex pricing strategy makes calculating the hybrid price premium over conventional trucks difficult, but the new hybrids seem to cost about \$1,000 more than similarly equipped Silverados and Sierras. Dealers probably won't discount the new hybrids as heavily

See TRUCKS, D4

According to Pete ...

Target audience: Small-business owners, individuals and families hoping to save money on fuel and go green.

Highs: Power, smooth operation, fuel savings, cleaner emissions, comfort, cabin quietness.

Lows: No less-expensive models to entice fleet buyers and those unable to pay \$40,000.

Bottom line: Probably the greenest full-size pickup on the planet.

EPA rating for greenhouse gas emissions (10 is best): 5

CLICK & CLACK

Timing belt should be changed by a pro

By Tom and Ray Magliozzi
KING FEATURES SYNDICATE

Dear Tom and Ray:

I have a 2002 Hyundai Elantra with 97,000 miles. During the state inspection this week, the mechanic told me that I will soon need to replace my tim-

ing chain. He also said that the hose running from the pump housing to the rack-and-pinion steering has a small leak. But he said the timing chain is a top priority. My son worked as an apprentice auto mechanic in a former life and has taken helicopter-engine repair in the

military. He has done all his own work on his Jeeps, past and present. He feels that he can do this job for me and told me to buy the repair manual. Since I cannot afford the more than \$900 that the mechanic wants for both jobs, I'm considering his offer. Should I let

my son do this? And how long would my car be "in the shop" if I let him?

— Arlene

Ray: Well, your car doesn't have a timing chain, Arlene; it

See CLICK, D4



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Having an amateur replace the timing belt on a 2002 Hyundai Elantra could put your car at risk of serious damage.

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