

Current FFVs horrible on fuel

U.S. auto manufacturers are doing a horrible job with the current flex-fuel vehicle lineup. There, I said it.

Gas is over \$4 a gallon. What types of FFVs are U.S. companies offering us? A bunch of bloated, ethanol-guzzling mammoths.

There are currently about 25 FFVs on



For Starters
By JOSH FLINT

the market from automakers. The most fuel-efficient offering is the Chevrolet

Impala, which gets 14/21 miles per gallon on E85 or 18/28 mpg on gas.

The Chevrolet Cobalt is capable of 25/36 mpg on gas. The Ford Focus is rated at 24/35 mpg on gas. Why not make these models in an E85-compatible version?

Several months ago, I voiced my displeasure about the FFV lineup to a fellow

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journalist who writes for an ethanol magazine. I told him there is nothing in the entire lineup that appeals to me, and I think there are a lot in my generation who feel the same way. His remark was, "Yeah, but Americans don't want to buy foreign cars." Maybe in 1950, but the times, they are a-changing.

In my lifetime, Toyota has gone from a distant Japanese automaker to No. 2 in the U.S. Many analysts predicted they would be No. 1 by now. However, General Motors edged them out this past quarter.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to knock ethanol or the U.S. auto industry. I happily burn E10 in my gas tank. I think it's wonderful as an oxygenate/octane booster. Plus, those in the ethanol industry say the blender's credit finds its way back into the wallets of consumers.

No FFV for me

My first car was a 1987 Toyota Celica. It had all the looks of a sports car, but no muscle. It got good gas mileage, but at \$1.60 a gallon, who cared?

After that, I upgraded to a 2000 Jeep Wrangler. It was my dream to lift it 8 inches, swap in a 454 V8 and bolt on 38-inch mud tires. I traded the Wrangler (without making my dream a reality) for a 2001 Jeep Cherokee Sport.

When I got married, somehow my wife decided she would drive the Cherokee, and I was relegated to the 1996 Toyota Corolla.

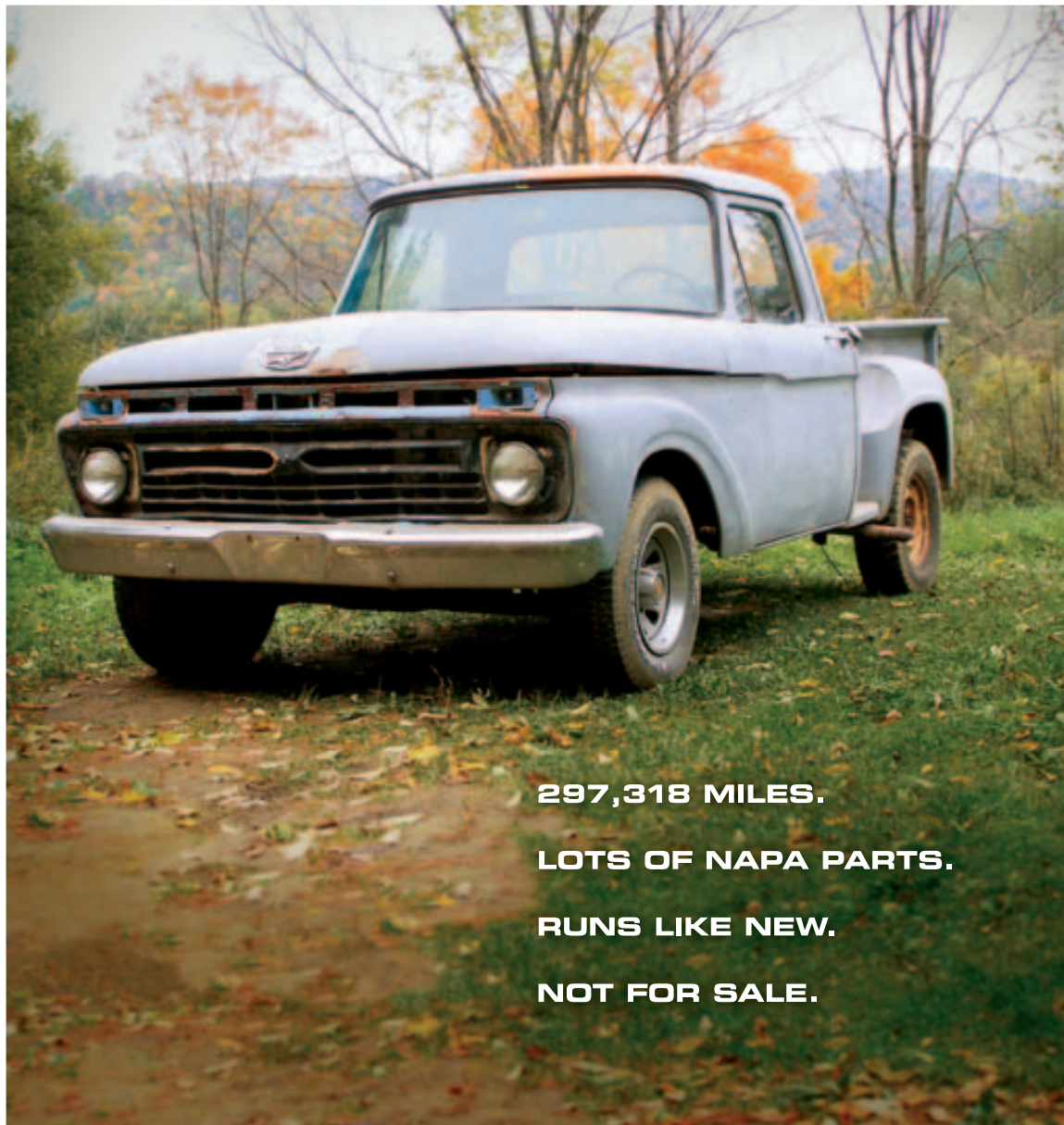
Five months ago, my wife found out she was pregnant. One of the first things we did was trade in my aging Corolla. During our car-buying adventure, we didn't look at one flex-fuel vehicle. In fact, we ended up buying another Toyota: a 2002 RAV4.

When we started looking at cars, we had several requirements: reliability, good fuel mileage, car seat friendly, SUV body style for capacity, four-wheel drive and under \$15,000.

Our quest for good fuel mileage ruled out any FFVs. On a recent trip, I calculated my fuel mileage at 26 mpg, combined highway and in-town driving. I'd like to see closer to 30 mpg, but according to *Consumer Reports*, the RAV4 is the most fuel-efficient SUV on the market.

The FFV SUV lineup isn't even in the same ballpark. The Dodge Durango gets 13/17 mpg on gas. The Jeep Grand Cherokee gets 14/19 mpg on gas. Again, the Chevrolet Equinox, which is comparable to the RAV4, is not available in an FFV version.

The next time we look at cars, I hope there's an FFV that appeals to us. However, if the ethanol industry wants to start marketing E85 as a replacement for gasoline, someone better make a car that appeals to more than large SUV-loving drivers.



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