



Prius Success Undermines Conservative Attacks On Electric Vehicles

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The Prius is now the [world's third best-selling](#) car line, but before it became a clear success story, it was the target of attacks from conservative media similar to those now being leveled against electric vehicles.

In 2000, the year the Prius was released in the U.S., Diane Katz and Henry Payne [wrote](#) at the *Wall Street Journal* that hybrid cars are not "what the public wants." The next year, the Cato Institute's Patrick Michaels [declared](#) the Prius would "never" deliver a profit for Toyota and hyped how "demand has been weak" for hybrids. That these conservative pundits have clearly been proven wrong with time is a lesson for today's pundits who [suggest](#) that current electric car sales mean that electric cars will never be successful. As Bloomberg reporter Jamie Butters [noted](#) in a video report, "a lot of people will criticize the sales of the Chevy Volt by GM or the Nissan Leaf, but when you really look back they're selling at significantly higher opening volumes than the Prius when it came out 15 years ago."

Even after Prius sales had significantly [ramped up](#), conservative media were still downplaying the market for hybrids in the U.S. In 2004, a Fox News guest declared that "Americans don't want hybrids":

JOHN GIBSON: What about hybrids? Is it true that Americans desperately want hybrids and get better gas mileage and be kinder to the environment, or is that sort of environmentalist propaganda?

DAVID NAUGHTON, NEWSWEEK: Americans don't want hybrids. That's not true at all. Americans are buying a few hybrids, but Hummer outsells the Toyota Prius by two to one. And even Toyota sells as many Camrys in a couple of months as they will an entire year of Prius.

It gets a ton of attention. It's a technological marvel, but as long as gas is \$1.50 a gallon in this country, people don't want green cars. They want big cars; they want SUV's. [Fox News, *The Big Story with John Gibson*, 1/6/04, via Nexis]

That same year, *The Weekly Standard's* Henry Payne [called](#) tax incentives for hybrid vehicles a "sweet bonus for upscale customers like Arianna Huffington and Cameron Diaz." The criticism is strikingly similar to the [conservative narrative](#) that electric car subsidies only benefit the rich, when in fact tax incentives help make electric vehicles available to the middle class, just as they did with [the Prius](#).

In 2005, the *Wall Street Journal's* Holman Jenkins dedicated [two columns](#) to spewing [contrariannonsense](#) claiming if more people switched to Priuses, it wouldn't reduce oil consumption. And in 2007 Rush Limbaugh [absurdly declared](#) that driving a Prius causes "more environmental damage than if you had a Hummer." Electric cars have recently endured similar attacks from conservative media outlets who deny the fact that they have [substantially lower carbon dioxide](#) emissions and [feign concern](#) about how the batteries will be recycled.

Fox News was running with similar attacks in 2006: suggesting that the Prius would not sell, criticizing incentives for hybrid cars, and sowing unwarranted doubt about the environmental benefits of hybrids.

Many of the recent [attacks on electric cars are coming from the same people](#) who criticized the Prius.

But the Prius survived all the scorn, and became an undeniable success story. In 15 years -- particularly if a [serious climate change policy](#) is implemented -- will we be saying the same thing about the electric car?

Jill Fitzsimmons contributed to this post.