

LIFE AFTER SPORT!

Green Party

At people in monster cars: watch out. Your time has come. In future we'll all be driving a Honda Civic Hybrid or a Toyota Prius to work, like it or lump it.

That's what the whale-huggers and polar bear-strokers (you know who you are) want you to think. Twenty-first century transport will consist of bubble-shaped Popemobiles, piddling along at 28km/h and won't that serve everyone right.

Toyota wants to own this future. Its Prius has the weird shape endemic to hybrids; time will tell if this car will lodge in the public's mind as "the car that saved the environment" or "lame-o battery-powered mistake that everyone laughed at".

Ah, yes, the battery. The Prius is powered by a regular petrol engine, plus an electric motor and nickel-metal hydride battery. It's back-to-the-future technology. I ask

the bloke from Toyota what happens if it goes, like, flat. He looks at me like you'd look at your mum if she unplugged your PC at the wall. "This cannot go flat," he says. "Impossible."

Naturally, I resolve to run the battery flat as soon as I can.

What the bloke at Toyota doesn't know is that I'm going to spank the Prius to within an inch of its hybrid life. To be fair, it's designed for, and runs best as, a car about town – but unfortunately life isn't fair. Snowy Mountains, here we come.

It's clear the last thing Toyota wants is for its human luggage to do anything drastic. Every page of the user manual features the word "caution" in bold type. The centre console, while

The Prius hits the mark as a basic city car built for the green-conscious

containing an iPod connection and storage, is also a potential death trap. "Caution" it warns. "Do not trap your fingers in the central console." It even has one for the glove compartment. "Caution: the glove compartment must not be left open while you are driving along." One cannot be too careful.

The Prius is a proper family car, despite the progressive shape. It has plenty of room in the back for a couple of environmentally conscious kids, and a boot you could get a few recycled cardboard suitcases in, no problem.

The kit is decent, including sat-nav and reversing camera, but you pay for it – the Prius comes in at a rather expensive \$37,400 – and if you're going more than 40km/h, the battery

doesn't get a look-in. Meanwhile, I'm driving the Prius up mountain roads it was never meant for. A steep,

winding stretch makes it emit a strange groaning sound, like a cow stuck in a pit. The car has no gears, but "continuously variable transmission", so maybe it's that. Either way, it's straining. The fuel economy drops off, too, but it's still impressive: I never come close to Toyota's claimed 4.4l/100km, but somewhere between five and six isn't bad.

The Prius feels like what it wants to be: a comfortable, driveable runabout for the average family of 2.4 to go to the footy in, with a trip to Woollies on the way back. And no matter what I did, I couldn't make the battery go flat. "Impossible." – *Ivan Smith*

Driving more than 40km/h, the battery doesn't get a look-in.



ALTERNATIVES



HONDA CIVIC HYBRID

This roomy, classy hybrid looks rather much like a regular Civic. It's better value than the Prius, but a little less economical, because the petrol engine gets more say. It's also several thousand bucks cheaper. **From 32,990.**



TOYOTA HYBRID X CONCEPT

Already looking into the 22nd century, Toyota have unveiled the Prius replacement of your twilight years. Like Viagra, it's smooth-edged and blue; unlike Viagra it does nothing for our pantsfront.

ON YA BIKE

BMW F 800 GS

Looking like something that chased down Mad Max, the BMW F 800 GS is now in Oz. It offers excellent ground clearance, long suspension and precise steering if you decide to leave the bitumen. **\$17,000.**



HONDA DN-01

Forget the clutch, Honda's DN-01 is the world's first automatic two-wheeler. This futuristic bike has a low-slung saddle for comfortable highway riding and a liquid-cooled, fuel-injected, 680cm-cubed V-twin engine. **\$17,000.**



SUZUKI BANDIT 1250

Suzuki's stripped-back Bandit 1250 is here. With its classic lines, the 1250 is powered by the 1255cc, DOHC, liquid-cooled engine that made its debut in last year's model, plus a hefty 19-litre tank. **\$12,000.**



STRAIGHT DRIVE

NISSAN GT-R

Nissan's Bathurst-slaying GT-R supercar is back. Relunched at the Australian Motor Show, it skips "subdued" in favour of 20-inch aluminium wheels and front black leather sports seats with red leather inserts. **\$150,000.**



DODGE AVENGER

Chrysler – realising its 1957 "thirsty American" image has got to go and fuel economy tops the wish list – is releasing its Dodge Avenger. The Dodge has a dual-clutch transmission and efficient engine to go easy at the bowser. **\$27,000.**



BMW X1

BMW's smallest-ever off-roader, the luxury X1, has a surprisingly long wheel base. Choose between a two-litre, four-cylinder petrol engine; three-litre, six-cylinder diesel; or three-litre, six-cylinder petrol. **\$35,000.**



WACKY RACERS

MAZDA TAIKI

Despite looking like it's still wrapped in a sheet, the Mazda Taiki concept car showcases some green initiatives including streamlined design, lightweight components and fuel efficiency. Quite when we'll see it on the road is another matter entirely.



TOPIA HUVO

Japan, bearer of bonsai and the pod hotel, has long excelled in small sizes. Now the country brings us the car for people with terrible BO: Topia Corporation's one-person HUVO, which weighs 150kg and looks like a golf cart with ideas above its station.



APTERA TYP-1

The Typ-1, which is the sort of vehicle Captain Kirk would drive, comes in all-electric and hybrid models with solar panels on its roof. It fits two grown-up passengers. Available in December. **\$37,600 (all-electric) or \$41,700 (hybrid).**

