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Your Money

SPENDING

Now, Even Those Temporary Wheels Can Be Greener



Hiroko Masuoka for The New York Times

Roo Rogers, a co-founder of the car-sharing company OZOcar, with one of his Toyota Priuses in Lower Manhattan.

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ROO ROGERS, who lives in Lower Manhattan, is helping to reduce auto emissions by not owning a car. But he still likes to take the wheel for occasional multistop spins around town, for hundred-mile drives to a vacation home on Long Island and for business trips when he's in California.

When he rents a car or uses a car-sharing service, Mr. Rogers tries to help the environment a little more by driving only a hybrid vehicle, the [Toyota Prius](#). And he has ridden to the airport by using OZOcar, a car service of which he was a founder; it has an all-hybrid fleet of Priuses and a few Lexuses.

"The Prius is the most practical and sustainable car with the best gas mileage," he said. "And I don't have the problems of parking, the insurance and even the gas whenever I go anywhere."

In city driving, the Prius gets 60 miles for each gallon of gas — a dozen more than its main competitor, the [Honda Civic Hybrid](#), and double the urban range of the highest-mileage gasoline-only cars, according to the [Environmental Protection Agency](#).



Photo courtesy of The New York Times
New York's Clean Pass sticker certifies
fuel efficiency

As more consumers express concerns about greenhouse gas emissions, and as gasoline prices rise, rental car companies are reshaping their fleets. In June, Enterprise, Hertz and Avis, the largest renters, added several thousand Priuses to their fleets, as well as other hybrids, and more are on the way.

Car service companies are another source of Priuses. Evo Limo, based in Los Angeles, began adding the cars to its fleet two years ago — the same year when Mr. Rogers started OZOcar.

To be sure, rental hybrids are not necessarily bargains, nor are they always available. The biggest range of services and the greatest number of hybrids can generally be found in West Coast cities including Portland, Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles, and Northeastern cities like Boston, New York and Washington.

Some cities offer more choices than others — at least for now. In the Los Angeles area, for example, Hertz branches and EV Rental Cars, a smaller company with an all-hybrid fleet, have had Priuses readily available for years.

When Chloe Eilers of Los Angeles had to take her Audi in for repairs, she got a Prius as a replacement vehicle from Midway Car Rental, without even asking for one.

Avis has joined the competition in Los Angeles and several other West Coast cities. "It's all about demand," said John Barrows, a spokesman for Avis.

In the East, change is coming more slowly. Hertz has only recently moved into New York with its hybrids, and Avis plans to follow by year-end.

To make online reservations for a Prius from Hertz, renters need to click onto the "green collection" category under vehicle type. For a recent midweek reservation, the Prius cost \$127 a day in Manhattan (not including any insurance). That was \$7 more than for a regular gas-powered [Toyota Corolla](#).

Enterprise Rent-A-Car has hybrids across the nation, and among the lowest rates. Priuses account for half of the company's more than 3,000 hybrids, said Pat Farrell, a company spokesman. Other hybrids in its fleet include Saturn Vues from [General Motors](#), [Ford](#) Escapes and [Toyota](#) Camrys. Its midweek daily rate was \$56 in Manhattan for the category that includes the Prius. But customers may not necessarily get the hybrid because Enterprise doesn't rent specific models, only vehicle types, and the Prius is just one of a number standard sedans.

Torshana Towles tried to rent a Prius from Enterprise in Silver Spring, Md. — asking for one twice in the last few months. She came up empty both times. Instead, she got a [Ford Escape](#), a sport-utility hybrid.

"It was cool, though," she said. "It doesn't get any better mileage than a sedan does, but it does much better than other S.U.V.'s and it's so quiet when it's on the electric motor."

Priuses are easier to get from car services — for customers in the two cities they serve, OZOcar in New York charges rates of \$65 from Manhattan to Kennedy Airport and \$50 to LaGuardia or by the hour. The cars are equipped with laptops, Sirius radio and Internet service.

But it may be the car-sharing services that offer drivers the best way for drivers to reduce their impact on the environment. The five most successful companies, Zipcar and Flexcar, rent cars by the hour and the day to members only. Members pick up cars from various locations in a city and return them to the same spot. Gasoline and insurance are included in the rental costs.

Both Zipcar and Flexcar have had Priuses in their fleets for more than two years and have been adding them as their businesses grow.

Flexcar, based in Seattle, has a 2,000-car fleet, including about 30 percent that are Priuses (250 cars) or Honda Civic Hybrids (350). Flexcars can be found in 12 cities on the East and West Coasts (but not in New York), and in Chicago. Rates start at \$8 an hour and \$63 a day. There is a \$35 annual membership fee.

Zipcar, based in Boston, has 3,000 cars, including 150 Priuses and 20 Honda Civic hybrids. The hybrids are in New York and 13 other cities, mostly on the East and West Coasts. Priuses at Zipcar rent for \$8 an hour and \$85 for a weekday in New York, with drivers paying a \$50 annual membership fee and a \$25 application fee.

Renting a hybrid is just one way for drivers to reduce their impact on the environment when using a car-sharing service, Scott Griffith, chief executive of Zipcar, said. "We see that drivers change their behavior when they become members," he says. "They're being charged by the hour, so they tend to group their trips together and so they don't drive as much as they did before. Many members who owned cars sell them. Of our 100,000 members, some 40,000 have sold their cars or decided not to buy one since joining."

Mark Norman, chief executive of Flexcar, reports a similar experience at his company.

RUSSELL CAPRIO is one of the converts. He lives in downtown San Francisco, one of the few cities where the two car-sharing companies compete, and owned a Subaru until he sold it after becoming a Zipcar member earlier this year. He hadn't used his car much, and when he took into account all the costs of owning it — insurance, gasoline, depreciation and parking — he found that sharing cars would cost hundreds of dollars less. He can also drive a Zipcar in Boston, where his family lives, rather than rent a car.

While he drives other cars, he prefers Priuses because he sees them as better for the environment.

"It depends on availability," he says. "I'll walk for one, though. The most I ever had to walk was eight blocks, which was O.K. That's the same distance I had to walk to the garage where I had my Subaru parked."