

## Engines Get Smaller, More Powerful, During Last Decade

Mainstream auto buyers might be turning to fuel-sipping four-cylinders and refined V6's, but specialty-equipment enthusiasts still want a V8 in their new cars.

As automakers shift manufacturing to meet more stringent fuel economy and emissions standards, their engine lineups continue an overall shift towards smaller displacement options. In terms of market share, sales of four-cylinder engines grew from 2006 to 2007 while larger displacement eight-cylinder sales shrank.

Six-cylinder engines, however, remain largely unchanged, a shift more noticeable as more powerful compact engines replace outdated larger ones throughout the entire range. Considering the market shares of vehicles sold in 2008, the scenario is likely to be even more exaggerated.

Compact vehicles are now beginning to erode the dominance of their midsized counterparts as consumers look to smaller, lighter and generally more affordable vehicles. Influence not only comes from economic circumstances, but also from more contemporary offerings of attractive technology in this segment. Engines are becoming more powerful while improving efficiency; interiors more suitable for multiple passengers; and overall design is in line with upscale products.

The downsizing trend is pronounced enough that the 14th year of the Ward's 10 Best Engines competition, in which Ward's editors vote on the best contemporary engine designs, includes 13 four-cylinder nominees - double the number 10 years ago. Conversely, the number of V8s nominated for the award has been cut by more than half, just four options versus nine choices a decade ago. Six-cylinder options remain the largest grouping.

For the magazine's 2009 competition, there are eight forced induction candidates, along with three hybrid systems and three diesels, all meeting 50-state emissions requirements.

SEMA research shows that new cars powered by four-cylinder engines accounted for 20% of enthusiast new vehicle purchases. In 2008, that number dropped to nearly 16 percent. V8's, however, experienced a substantial popularity explosion, rising more than 36% in four years. Six-cylinder options meanwhile declined 25.4%.

Of those that purchased new vehicles in 2004 the largest group was six-cylinder engines. In contrast, the largest group for 2008 has been eight-cylinder engines. Keep in mind that these values are for new vehicles. In 2004, the largest group of vehicle purchases was for used vehicles with eight-cylinder engines.

Source: Wards Report



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