

Letters to the Editor
Los Angeles Times

RE: "Honda FCX Clarity: Beauty for beauty's sake," by Dan Neil, Feb. 13, 2009.

Dear Editor:

I am a huge fan of Dan Neil's writing, but he really spun his wheels in his piece on hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.

California needs zero emission vehicles, including both battery-electric and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles to meet health-based air quality standards and to stem the effects of global climate change. The fact that hybrid electric and battery powered vehicles are currently making stronger progress is no reason to abandon the promise of greater range and lower life cycle emissions offered by fuel cell technology.

California is proud to be the testing ground for new technologies and hydrogen vehicles are part of that legacy – the air is significantly cleaner due to reduced vehicle emissions – but not clean enough.

Contrary to Neil's assertions, hydrogen-powered vehicles are making significant progress toward meeting cost, durability and performance targets. Honda's latest offering, the Clarity, is not only beautiful but it represents a commitment to build a commercially viable product. Our assessment of fuel cell vehicle cost is also significantly less than Neil's estimate.

The Zero Emission Vehicle regulation has served as the incubator of advanced technologies for personal transportation that hold promise of mass commercialization. Based on investment, engineering progress, and the distinct advantages of each, we expect both batteries and fuel cells to be a big part of California and the world's transportation future.

Zero-emission energy, whether stored in a battery or as hydrogen to propel a fuel cell, will be required to attain a future where every car can run on renewable fuel. Not everyone will be able to make a battery-electric vehicle work for them; not everyone will need the extended range of a fuel cell, but with both technologies everyone will be able to drive emissions-free. It is not productive to pit one technology against another when both hold promise for a more sustainable transportation future.

Sincerely,

Mary D. Nichols
Chairman
California Air Resources Board