

***Response to another post*** from Slate column of March 18, 2008

Let me put this in a form that is perhaps easier to understand:

1. We never asked anyone to duplicate the study. It stands on its own. We are more than happy to provide data points to assist another research organization perform its own study. No such requests have been received by us.

An intention to duplicate requires a request for more details or simply to initiate a conversation about the types of data gathered. None has been received from any credible organization. And, no, we do not believe Rocky Mountain Institute is credible in this regard because, as mentioned, it is wrapped in a clear agenda.

2. We refuse to release the methodology because, and this is perhaps too simple to understand for some, we are a for-profit business. And proudly so. We receive no grants or other largess from public institutions, foundations, donors, endowments or governments. We would release the methodology to another research organization that we feel has an unbiased interest in the issue, but we will not release the methodology to competing businesses or to corporations who want to prove a point by cherry picking through the data.

3. We have received three serious requests for further data on the study and in all cases we supplied exactly what was requested. So the "many, many" is a misstatement at best or is including the merely curious, seriously biased or unqualified.

We always ask those folks to read the entire report first instead of relying on blogs or the media for what D2D says. Fewer than 1 in 1000 are willing to do even that much so why would we release methodology to them?

4. I have never failed to answer a question posed by any reporter from any news organization anywhere in the world. Some folks may not like the answers -- some Dutch are in a snit because of a recent interview there -- but no one here is hiding.

5. Slate never requested an interview nor posed an email question about the study. Nor did Rush Limbaugh or George Will, both of whom simply picked up the information from media, a practice I find both curious and lazy.

6. I did not question either Argonne or MIT. I questioned life-cycle studies that are incomplete.

One very simple example: Prius tires last approximately one quarter of the miles of those on a Toyota Corolla. No Prius life-cycle study, aside from ours, calculates the energy and resources consumption necessary to make those additional three sets of tires.

Nor does any other life-cycle study of Prius or any other vehicle include calculations reflecting the types of replacement tires purchased. Better than half of all Prius tire replacements are with less efficient, off-the-rack brands that significantly harm Prius fuel economy.

6. A headquarters Toyota executive stated to Australian media that the Prius was likely to be a 100,000-mile vehicle before major repairs, battery replacements or other significant maintenance was required. I am sure he is no longer allowed to discuss such topics with the press.

After seeing one (albeit major) attribution of the statement in a media source I trust by a reporter I similarly trust, it disappeared so I no longer reference it. That doesn't change the fact it was said.

Second on that issue: The mileage figure we posted for Prius was calculated BEFORE not after the executive made his statement. We didn't change the miles to match the statement because the mileage was derived from the research. And if you would read the reasons for listing Prius miles at 109,000 in the first study and 121,000 in the new one, you would perhaps understand the rationale and, yes, methodology.

7. I'm always suspect of statements ending in there are "too many" of anything to "challenge here." Or "not enough time" to discuss in detail. It usually translates into "There must be more, but I don't know what it is." If you have "logical fallacies" -- of which there were none in your post -- you want a response to, please feel free to send them directly. As stated, we're not hiding, nor are we ever rude.

8. As for our agenda, it is simple. We want consumers to be able to make a vehicle choice based on data, not feel-good, back-slapping atta boy you're saving the planet emotions. The more information consumers have the better.

In this case, the Prius is a complex vehicle that is inferior to a Jetta Diesel, for example, in any measurement of life-cycle energy efficiency. There is a reason Toyota is planning to switch to lithium ion batteries. There is a reason Toyota has reduced the size of the controller system, motors and other electric-drive components. The answer is cost and efficiency. In a purely comparative sense, the first Prius is rapidly becoming a relic when compared to what's coming.

9. I'm always amazed at how quickly a discussion turns to name calling when a person runs out of things to say or refuses to be willing to think.

Our credentials come from more than 20 years of performing automotive research and understanding what consumers are looking for and how they will spend the money they have. Our credibility comes from a subscriber base that has a drop out rate of less than 5 percent. Our credibility is derived from being willing to look at issues with a perspective that companies in North America, Asia and Europe find useful, informative and most importantly accurate.

Example: The first Dust to Dust report listed the actual real-world mileage for Prius at 46 mpg. We heard from angry Prius owner that such a figure was bunk and we clearly were in the pocket of General Motors, the oil industry, the CIA or some other nefarious evil doer. Toyota, the media and Slate were similarly busy pronouncing much higher mpg numbers.

The EPA, after revising its fuel economy ratings, lowered its numbers to 47 mpg. Considering we were two years ahead of the revision, I would say that kind of accuracy adds to our credibility.

Scientific inquiry doesn't mean agreeing with proponents of one view or another or owners of one product or another. It demands constant questioning of the consensus or the predominant theory. Internally, we have been the harshest critic of D2D and have added, subtracted and adjusted points in the methodology to improve the accuracy. That's what good scientific inquiry does.

And the new study will reveal some of those changes.

It won't reveal, however, what Prius and hybrid owners would like. Hybrids may be a good profit center for automakers, they may generate good personal feelings about oneself, but they continue to be less energy efficient over their lifetime than the industry average or some significantly larger vehicles. And diesels make both hybrid and gas-powered vehicles look positively wasteful.

At 07:29 AM 3/20/2008, you wrote:

"Finally, neither Slate nor the Rocky Mountain Institute or other so-called independent, unbiased naysayers have ever attempted to duplicate the Dust to Dust study. None have asked for the 3,000-plus data points used for each vehicle. None has requested additional information. Instead they rely on reports from those who have long used old techniques for determining product life cycles, techniques and methods proven to be inaccurate and woefully incomplete."

This is extremely misleading, Mr. Spinella.

First, no one can duplicate your study because you refuse to release your methodology.

Second, your data points alone are worthless without sourcing and methodology. However many data points you have.

Third: many, many inquirers have requested further data on your study, only to be told that it is proprietary and not public, available only to subscribers, etc., etc., etc. It should not be a surprise to you that people have given up asking.

Fourth: what qualifies you, a marketing research company with expertise primarily in consumer surveys, to question the methodologies of Argonne and MIT, calling them inaccurate and woefully incomplete? Besides your own personal opinion?

I've followed your "report" since it was issued. I remember your interview with "The Watt" soon after its initial release, when you claimed your figure for the lifetime mileage of a Prius was based on information from Toyota itself. I noticed when, after intense questioning on the matter, you posted a paper claiming that the number was in fact based on the absurd criteria of how many miles an owner is "likely" to drive it. The number itself didn't change, just your justification for it. Things like this do not inspire confidence.

Your response to Slate contains too many logical fallacies to challenge here. Increased complexity is inherently an environmental negative? Like sewage treatment vs. raw sewage, for instance? You "tweaked sensibilities" because your report is manifestly preposterous and beyond your ability to defend before an informed audience, as you once again prove.

Your report was, at best, far beyond your competence, and at worst, an utterly dishonest exercise. Over time, I've come to lean towards the latter conclusion. What, precisely, is *your* agenda, Mr. Spinella, since you put the topic on the table? It's certainly not disinterested scientific inquiry.