Historic shift: 2026 Wards 10 Best Engines & Propulsion Systems awards go entirely to electrified powertrains

It's the first time in the awards' 32-year history that no pure internal-combustion engine wins: Four BEVs, four HEVs, and two PHEVs claim the top honors



Wards 10 Best

DETROIT, MI, UNITED STATES, October 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- WardsAuto has announced the winners of its prestigious 2026 Wards 10 Best Engines & Propulsion Systems awards, marking a watershed moment in automotive history: for the first time since the program's inception in 1995, not a single winner is powered solely by an internal-combustion engine.
The 2026 winners represent a complete embrace of electrification, with all ten honorees employing battery-electric, hybrid-electric, or plug-in hybrid-electric propulsion systems. The list includes four battery-electric vehicles, four hybrid electric vehicles, and two plug-in hybrid electric vehicles, selected from a field of 26 nominees.

"The sheer number of hybrids, plug-in hybrids and battery-electric vehicles that made up this year's nominees tells a story in its own right," said Robin Warner, manager of Wards 10 Best awards programs and a juror. "Even the hottest sports cars utilize electric help to engage drivers and, indeed, enhance the experience."

The 2026 Wards 10 Best Engines & Propulsion Systems winners:

Battery-electric vehicles:
- Mercedes-Benz GLC 400 4Matic Electric – Dual-Motor BEV
- Rivian R2 Performance – Dual-Motor BEV
- Subaru Trailseeker – Dual-Motor BEV
- Volvo EX60 P10 AWD – Dual-Motor BEV

Hybrid electric vehicles:
- Chevrolet Corvette ZR1X – 5.5L Turbocharged V-8 HEV
- Hyundai Palisade Hybrid – 2.5L Turbocharged I-4 HEV
- Nissan Rogue Hybrid – 1.5L Turbocharged I-3 HEV

- Porsche 911 Carrera GTS T-Hybrid – 3.6L eTurbocharged Flat-6 HEV

Plug-in hybrid electric vehicles:
- BMW M5 Touring – 4.4L Turbocharged V-8 PHEV
- Toyota RAV4 PHEV GR Sport – 2.5L I-4 PHEV

Electrification reaches every performance segment

The diversity of winners demonstrates that electrification has permeated every vehicle segment and performance category. Even the most powerful winner, the 1,250-horsepower Chevrolet Corvette ZR1X, combines a twin-turbocharged 5.5-liter V-8 with a robust 186-horsepower electric motor powering the front axle.

"It's hard to believe the car-buying public once considered hybrids slow and underpowered," said juror Drew Winter.
The winners span seven CUVs, two sports cars, and one sport wagon, manufactured across five countries: Germany (3), Japan (3), the United States (2), South Korea (1), and Sweden (1). Prices range from the $43,035 Nissan Rogue Hybrid to the $242,060 Corvette ZR1X, with seven of the ten winners carrying stickers averaging under $55,000.

A trend years in the making

"The trend toward electrification reflects a marketplace that continues to evolve away from more than a century of dominance by pure internal-combustion propulsion," noted juror Bob Gritzinger. "Hybrids, in particular, are no longer niche vehicles, but are now considered integral to automakers' product portfolios."

The all-electrified winner list represents the culmination of a trend that began accelerating nearly a decade ago. Electrification first appeared on the Wards list in 2001 when the first-generation Toyota Prius hybrid won. The competition's name was changed in 2020 to "Wards 10 Best Engines & Propulsion Systems" in recognition of electrification's growing impact on the industry.

Evaluation criteria and nominee list

Wards judges evaluated 26 nominees during real-world driving conditions, scoring powertrains based on horsepower, torque, noise/vibration/harshness (NVH) management, observed efficiency, and innovative technology. Only all-new or significantly improved powertrains are eligible for testing, along with returning winners from the previous year.

To determine winners, judges meet to evaluate nominees’ combined scores, which ultimately help answer a guiding question: “Does this powertrain or propulsion system sell the vehicle?”

This year’s nominees are listed below, in alphabetical order:

- BMW M5 Touring (winner)
- Cadillac Optiq RWD
- Chevrolet Corvette 6.7-L
- Chevrolet Corvette ZR1X (winner)
- Dodge Charger Scat Pack
- Genesis GV60 Magma
- Honda Civic Sport Touring Hybrid
- Hyundai Ioniq 9
- Hyundai Palisade Hybrid (winner)
- Infiniti QX65
- Jeep Cherokee Hybrid
- Lexus ES 350h
- Lexus ES 500e
- Lexus LX 700h Overtrail
- Lucid Gravity Grand Touring
- Mercedes-Benz GLC400 4Matic Electric (winner)
- Nissan Leaf
- Nissan Rogue Hybrid (winner)
- Porsche 911 Carrera GTS T-Hybrid (winner)
- Ram 1500 TRX
- Rivian R2 Performance (winner)
- Subaru Trailseeker (winner)
- Toyota RAV4 Hybrid Limited
- Toyota RAV4 GR Sport PHEV (winner)
- Volkswagen Atlas
- Volvo EX60 P10 AWD (winner)

"Given the proliferation of hybrids being offered by OEMs, there should be little surprise that hybrids make up a solid portion of our list," said juror Gary Vasilash. "And the level of excellence being achieved by these systems is impressive, whether people are looking for performance or efficiency."

About Wards 10 Best Engines & Propulsion Systems

Celebrating its 32nd anniversary, Wards 10 Best Engines & Propulsion Systems honors innovative engineering in the latest powertrains offered in vehicles in the U.S. market. The winners showcase a diverse array of internal combustion and electrified propulsion technologies. Each year, WardsAuto editors rigorously evaluate a wide variety of vehicles, meticulously scoring each powertrain on various factors. The ceremony brings together hundreds of the world’s leading powertrain experts to honor the crème de la crème of the industry for their outstanding achievements in powertrain excellence.

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