

Climate killer

Sport utility vehicles, or SUVs, divide opinion. They are taller, wider, and heavier than other cars and consume more fuel. Is that in line with today's thinking? Two opinions.

Collected by — Sibel Şen

Dietmar Oeliger, 44, Head of Transport Policy at the Nature And Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU) in Berlin, usually travels by train and bicycle. But he can be inspired by attractive car design, like that of the Porsche 911 – whether it is from 1963 or 2016. However, he finds the Cayenne unacceptable, even aesthetically.



Admittedly, SUVs are enjoying growing popularity. And generating huge profits for the automotive industry. In 2015, every fifth new car was an oversized model, and the trend is rising. The fact that these heavyweights consume up to 30 percent more fuel seems to bother neither company car drivers nor well-off urbanites. No one can avoid the laws of physics: large vehicles mean higher emissions. That should worry the company with regard to the future. The EU has dictated that by 2021 car fleets will be limited to emissions of 95 grams of CO₂ per kilometer, or consumption of 3.6 liters of diesel or 4.1 liters of gasoline per 100 kilometers. The industry is a long way off this target – less so on paper, but especially in terms of actual consumption.

Even electric SUVs are very resource-intensive, and need larger batteries and more power than other mod-

els. Unlike with innovative safety technologies, such as ABS and ESP, the SUV is not a catalyst for the market introduction of new drive technologies. Manufacturers casually count SUVs with plug-in technology as green, but on the road, hardly anyone uses the electric mode. Certainly not when subsidized diesel is so cheap. While the purely internal combustion engine will disappear from our roads sooner or later, this doesn't spell the end for premium manufacturers. They are already offering models in each vehicle class that comply with the limit values. But they prefer selling the less ecological versions because the margin is more attractive.

Manufacturers are fully aware of the dramatic increases in efficiency they will have to achieve in the coming years and decades. Instead of acting on this, though, they are blithely planning the next generation of SUVs and developing costly advertising campaigns to persuade customers to buy more oversized cars. This is neither future-oriented nor sustainable. And climate protection isn't possible with the current vehicle portfolio. The industry has a simple choice: either force the technology shift through advances in efficiency or do away with whole market segments. Like the SUV, for starters. <



*“An anachronism
on wheels”*

or driver of progress?



“The SUV business enables jumps in innovation.”



Dr. Thomas Sedran, 51, Head of Group Strategy at Volkswagen, drives a Porsche Cayenne hybrid. In this perfect combination of sports car and robust family vehicle, he often drives his family, friends and dog to the mountains on weekends – to go trail-running in the summer and skiing in the winter.

No question, SUVs are in vogue. Our sales of these practical all-purpose vehicles have risen 20 percent annually since 2010. What attracts many customers is that an SUV offers extra safety and comfort and, on top of that, lots of luggage space. The driver's seat provides an excellent view of the road as well as more convenient entry and exit. The older drivers among us appreciate this – and, after all, we live in an aging society. The social prestige that one often still enjoys as an SUV driver also shouldn't be underestimated.

Ecologically minded customers, on the other hand, consider the SUV ostentatious and wasteful. But they are mistaken. It is true, SUVs don't make achieving our climate targets any easier. They are less aerodynamic, heavier, and often more powerful, making for in-

creased fuel or electricity consumption. However, electrifying the motor and putting ever more plug-in hybrids and all-electric vehicles on the road will allow us to reduce total CO₂ emissions. Especially if we offer our customers power from renewable sources. Electric motors have another advantage: they encourage customers to be more energy-conscious in their driving behavior.

All the technological innovations that are needed to keep SUVs in step with stricter future regulations will also benefit the many other models of the Volkswagen Group. In this respect, the willingness of SUV customers to pay higher prices funds necessary leaps in automotive innovation – in turn securing the jobs of over two million high-wage earners in Germany. ◀