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CARBBUZZ

Climate Activists Don't Like The New Chevrolet Tahoe Or Suburban

DEC 13, 2019 BY IAN WRIGHT SUV

We see the point, but you don't get to decide what people need over what they want.

GM has just rolled out the next generation of its big truck-based SUVs, complete with more room and features. The Tahoe and Suburban are both also heavier and with only an incremental improvement in gas mileage. In short, exactly what we expected for the giant SUVs. That's gotten under the skin of a Washington environmental group called Safe Climate Campaign, according to the Associated Press. "GM claims that they are merely meeting consumer demand for gigantic vehicles, but most consumers don't use their pickups and SUVs for lumber and machinery but to haul lattes home from Starbucks," the director of the group said.

That's a broad and brash stereotype, but more insidious is the idea that a business should try and force its customers to buy only what they need, and not what they want. Ignoring the whole aspect of dictating what people buy with regulation for another day, if an automaker doesn't build what people want, then it stops making money. More to the point here, change won't come overnight, and companies like GM need to fund the next stage of the automotive cycle, which is alternative power to gasoline engines. For now, however, if you need a lot of room, towing capacity, and range, there is no alternative to a big gas-powered truck or SUV.

"People wanted a greater ability to haul families and their cargo, so that was the baseline that set our decision-making process," said Dwight Schoenefeld, lead development engineer on the SUVs. However, Safe Climate Campaign claims that "GM and other automakers spend billions on advertising to convince people to buy the thirsty and highly profitable trucks and SUVs."

Again, that is a willful misinterpretation of what's happening. The demand is already there, and the advertising is mainly the automakers competing with each other to get people to buy their models rather than its competitors. It's in the same way Coke isn't trying to persuade you to drink more sugar to make people unhealthy; it's catering to demand and trying to get you not to drink Pepsi instead. Of course, they all want to sell more products but people need to want and like it to keep buying it.

While we understand environmental concerns, there needs to be a degree of reality in our discourse. The reason we don't have any big trucks or SUVs powered by batteries is because there is a point of diminishing returns between the balance of extra weight and range. That's something that will be fixed, and hydrogen looks to be the answer in the future, but right now the technology is still developing. Companies like GM and Ford are working on large electric vehicles, but it's absurd to think any company is just going to end production on money-making models they need to sell to fund developing next-generation technology.

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