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Wheels



The Nuts and Bolts of Whatever Moves You

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Ford Is Covering Seats in Soda Bottles

By JIM MOTAVALLI



Ford Motor

The fabric seats in the Focus Electric utilize a yarn manufactured in part from plastic soft drink bottles.

According to Shopautoweek.com, an automotive information site and shopping portal, more than 70,000 bottles of soft drinks will be consumed and discarded during the [Detroit auto show](#) this month. But one man's trash is apparently another's seat cover for a \$40,000 hatchback.



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Ford, partnering with the yarn manufacturer [Unifi](#), will collect some of those bottles for use in Unifi's Repreve polyester yarn, which is made from a mix of plastic soft drink bottles and other reusable types of post-consumer waste.

The plug-in Focus, which reaches retail customers in the first half of this year priced at \$39,995 before a maximum \$7,500 federal tax credit, is the first Ford to use Repreve for both front and rear seats. Wes Sherwood, a spokesman for the automaker's [electric vehicle](#) programs, said in a telephone interview that customers who wanted leather would have it as an option.

Ultimately, Ford expects to keep about two million plastic bottles out of landfills through the use of Repreve, which is spun into fabric by [Sage Automotive Interiors](#) in South Carolina.

Roger Berrier, president and chief operating officer of Unifi, said in an interview that the recycling rate for plastic bottles in the United States was just 29 percent, about half the rate of Europe. Ford and Unifi plan to place recycling bins on the Ford stand in Detroit next to the Focus, which would demonstrate for visitors "some emotional connection to the recycling effort." The companies will follow a similar strategy during the [Consumer Electronics Show](#) in Las Vegas, also next week. Mr. Berrier estimated that 600 million bottles would be recycled to make Repreve yarn in 2012.

Susan Collins, executive director of the [Container Recycling Institute](#), a recycling advocacy group, noted that Ford was catching a trend that already had momentum with clothing manufacturers.

"It's definitely commendable, but it's not a new process," she said.

"Patagonia, for instance, has been making clothing from P.E.T. bottles for more than 15 years. In fact, more than 35 percent of plastic bottles that are collected and reprocessed in the United States are made into fiber, including clothing and carpeting."

The Focus Electric is a low-volume product, but Mr. Sherwood and Mr. Berrier said that Repreve yarn would find its way into Ford's more mainstream vehicles at a later date.