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Madison's 'Parade of Hybrids' aims for world record

By Thomas Content of the Journal Sentinel

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What can be more quintessentially "Madison" than a protest at the Capitol? How about a parade of hybrid cars?

What supporters hope will be a record-setting parade of hybrids ever will ease onto Madison's Beltline highway this summer.

Paul Cooley, showroom manager at Smart Motors in Madison, said he came up with the idea more than a year ago when he was looking at the Guinness Book of World Records website and saw they had a category for longest parade of hybrids.

It seemed like a natural fit for Madison, given the popularity of the fuel-efficient cars in the state's left-leaning capital city. Madison also plays host each summer to the GreenDrive Expo, formerly known as Hybridfest, which attracts enthusiasts from around the country.

"It's well known Madison has a green streak," Cooley said.

The record to beat is 140 hybrids that formed a parade in Belgium. Cooley thinks it'll be easy for Smart Motors to top that.

"We've limited it to 500," he said. "Once people get wind of it, we'll be fending them off. We could practically walk from Smart Motors to the Capitol without touching the ground, just stepping on Priuses or other hybrids."

The plan calls a morning parade on Sunday, July 24, to start at Smart Motors and travel more than 6 miles, taking the Beltline Highway to the Alliant Energy Center, where the GreenDrive Expo is held, in conjunction with the Dane County Fair.

Hybrid owners who want to participate will need to register online, Cooley said.

Given how little noise hybrids make when running on battery power, before the gasoline engine kicks in, this could also be the quietest parade ever.

They may have to check to see if Guinness has a category for that.