BY ROD O'CONNOR

DRIVING THE KEYS

Off the tip of Florida sits a coral archipelago full of rich literary history, delicious Cuban food and stunning beaches. Follow the **C-MAX Hybrid** on a journey from Miami to Key West.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIEL BYRNE

One hour before sunset, streaks of rosy-red smear the sky as I speed over a series of coral and limestone islets on a joy ride toward the literal end of the road.

I'm nearly two-thirds of the way across the Overseas Highway, the mythic 113-mile stretch of Highway 1 that connects the Florida mainland to Key West, the funky port town perched at the southernmost tip of the U.S. The span of bridges and byways is a stunning achievement, its sprawling concrete and steel arches stretching like a magic carpet over endless turquoise-blue waters. But as impressed as I am with this marvel of engineering, all I can think about is the natural beauty that surrounds me.

To my right is the twinkling Gulf of Mexico; to my left are the vast Straits of Florida that extend all the way to the Cuban coastline. Scenes like this, I think to myself, explain why so many people visit this magical chain of islands—and decide they never want to leave.

Perhaps the most famous of those visitors was Ernest Hemingway. During his decade-long residency in Key West, the larger-than-life literary figure fell in love with the area's pleasant subtropical climate, amazing fishing and laid-back vibe. And, like me, when wanderlust hit and he took to the peninsula's vast open roads, his mode of transportation was a Ford.

Hemingway's car of choice, a Model A roadster, was the state-of-the-art car of its time. Among its many firsts was a powerful 40-hp 4-cylinder engine and a fuel gauge built right into the dash. My ride is the ultimate low-emission vehicle: the new C-MAX Hybrid. The sleek, sterling gray hatchback cranks out 188 net horsepower from its combined electric and gas engines and features plenty of next-generation technology, like the Smart Gauge that displays my fuel efficiency in real time. As I grasp the leather-trimmed steering wheel, and watch my miles-per-gallon continue to rise as I cruise along at a steady 65 mph, it's safe to say Papa Hemingway would have been envious.

Scan the image of the C-MAX Hybrid (left) and take a drive to Key West.

STYLISH AND SMART
The C-MAX Hybrid matches sleek looks and innovative tech with hybrid efficiency.

"The sleek, sterling gray hatchback cranks out 188 net horsepower from its combined electric and gas engines."

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE
The eclectic culture of the Keys includes souvenir shops like The Shell Shack (right).

FAST FACTS

2014 C-MAX HYBRID

>INNOVATIVE ENGINEERING Hybrid technology—including the Regenerative Braking System and an electronically controlled, continuously variable transmission—mean peak efficiency.

>FULLY CHARGED The lithium-ion battery gives you enough power to go all-electric for your short trips to the shops and school.

>FUN INTERFACE SmartGauge® with EcoGuide, with its innovative instrument gauge cluster, shows you how to drive more efficiently in real time.

>EASY PARKING Available Active Park Assist uses sensors to identify suitable spots and takes over the wheel while the driver controls acceleration and braking.

ISLAND HOPPING

More than 30 million people visit Miami every year to revel in the art scene, nightclubs and white sand beaches. But after a few days among the see-and-be-seen set in sexy South Beach, a road trip from Miami to Key West showcases an earthier, grittier side of South Florida.

On the way out of a gridlocked Miami, the spinning battery icon on my dash shows the energy being returned to the car's 88-kW electric traction motor. Thanks to regenerative braking, I've soon replaced the power I used cruising around South Beach the night before.

Thirty miles from South Beach, I reach Key Largo, known as the "dive capital of the world" because of its plentiful coral reefs and a sunken 510-foot navy ship surrounded by all manner of colorful sea life. This first stretch of the Overseas Highway is thick with kitschy souvenir shops and when I reach Islamorada, about 40 miles further down the highway, I stop at a roadside emporium called the Shell Shack. I pick out a piece of metal wall art shaped like the smiling face of the sun that, thankfully, fits perfectly in the C-MAX Hybrid's ample cargo space.

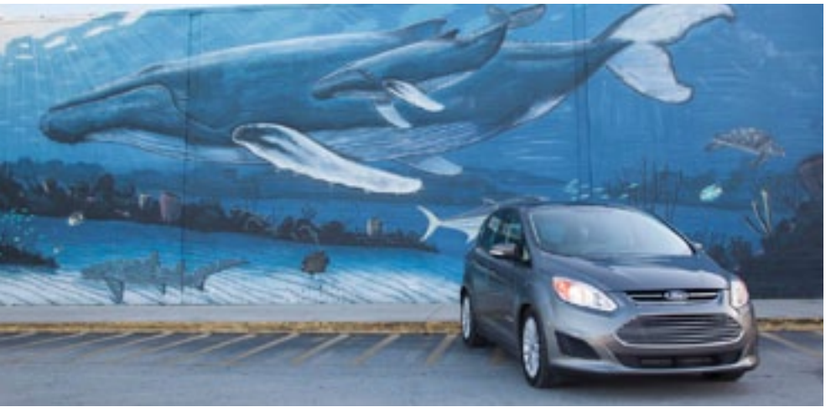
A few minutes later, at the 77.5-mile marker, I pull down a gravel driveway toward Robbie's, an Islamorada institution known for its waterfront dining (try the blackened grouper), charter fishing excursions and the school of hungry tarpon lingering at the end of its rickety dock. I notice a weathered sign that reads "Feed the tarpon" and pay the shipmaster a few bucks for the chance to feed these majestic silver fish, which can reach 150 pounds, and have been known to leap into the air to snatch a piece of bait.

I finally arrive in Key West as the sun is ready to drop, just in time to join the revelers who gather nightly in Mallory Square to celebrate this ritual. Fighting through the thick crowd, I watch athletic buskers balance atop 10-foot-high unicycles as they juggle flaming sticks and escape from straitjacket chains, Houdini-style. When the sky finally goes dark, everyone fans out to the watering holes on Duval Street, the town's rowdy main drag. But I escape to my waterfront hotel to rest up for a day filled with sightseeing.

IN PAPA'S FOOTSTEPS

The next morning, I park the C-MAX Hybrid across from Sandy's Café, a fast-food counter on a Cuban-American stretch of White Street. It's just past 8 a.m., and a mix of tourists and locals fill the barstools on the sidewalk. I order a Cuban

ISLAND LIFE
Great seafood, Key lime pie, and a unique arts and culture scene can all be found anywhere you look in Key West.



ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S LUXURIOUS VILLA

SUNSET STUDIES
Left, the C-MAX SEL Hybrid easily fits all the necessities for the perfect beach trip. Above, people gather to watch the sunset.

"People come here to escape. That's the great thing about Key West—you never know who you're going to sit down next to."

sandwich and chat up Skip O'Neill, a 71-year-old resident who looks a little like a lost Kennedy.

"People come here to escape," he says. "That's the great thing about Key West," he tells me. "You never know who you're going to sit down next to."

Another thing people come to Key West for? Its signature dessert: Key lime pie. And while Key Westers argue over who serves the best, Kermit Carpenter's Kermit's Key West Key Lime Shoppe, just across the boardwalk in Old Town, is always in the discussion.

Undoubtedly, the most famous resident of the town was Hemingway. But, if it wasn't for that Ford Model A, Hemingway might not have ever discovered this island community's unique spark. Hemingway's arrival in Key West in 1928 via ferry from Havana was supposed to be a quick stop to pick up his brand-new Model A, which he planned to drive north to Chicago. But the vehicle's delivery was delayed, so to make amends, the local Ford dealership offered Hemingway and his wife an apartment above the showroom.

SYNC guides me straight to Casa Antigua, a 1919 brick building that now houses a nondescript souvenir shop. I walk inside and find a palatial courtyard with balconies overlooking

a small pool. Inside one of these residences, Hemingway's first in Key West, he knocked out a draft of *A Farewell to Arms*.

I hop back in the car, and set a course for the Spanish colonial villa where Hemingway eventually settled. I park in front of the coral stone mansion, which features two levels of balconies, and take a walk through the living quarters filled with antiques from Hemingway's travels. Inside the sunlit loft that served as his writing studio sits the Royal Portable typewriter that Hemingway dragged with him everywhere he went.

"Aside from his indulgences, he was a very disciplined writer," Dave Gonzalez, the facility's events director, tells me. "He would wake every day at 6 a.m. and write here until noon. And then he'd either go fishing or head to Sloppy Joe's, which is a world-famous bar here in Key West."

After parking the C-MAX Hybrid back at my hotel, I decide to follow Hemingway's footsteps to the latter. Among the dozens of watering holes that claim him as a former customer, Sloppy Joe's on Duval Street is the real deal. When I arrive, the large room is packed with revelers embracing the spirit of the man who put this place on the map. The walls are crammed with magazine covers and pictures of him hoisting his catch after a day spent chasing marlin.

I sidle up to a stool, order a beer and picture Hemingway sitting there next to me at the bar. As a man who also loved a road trip, I bet he and I would have plenty to talk about. MF

ON THE WEB> GET A CLOSER LOOK AT THE C-MAX HYBRID AT **FORD.COM/CMAX.**

ON THE iPAD> MEET THE KEY WEST LOCALS AND TOUR MORE ISLAND HOT SPOTS ON THE ***MY FORD*** **APP.**