



But not when it rains

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The current solar powered cars chasing from Austin up to Calgary cannot realistically be expected to become household vehicles anytime soon – given the relative proportions of usable space to the overall size of the vehicles among other reasons. Those reasons include a sensitivity to clouds since at least one of the solar powered cars in the lead ran out of power today due to storms on the race path, and was, in consequence, passed by four others (MIT may now be in the lead, being apparently the first car into Topeka).

Electric cars will certainly, however, play some greater part in our collective future. The Advocate reports that after a month he is getting about 50 mph on average with his hybrid and is very pleased with it. And (courtesy of [Peak Oil](#)) there is an interview in Resource Investor with Dr Gal Luft, co-director of the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security. There were also comments from the Institute in the [LA Times](#) earlier this week. In that story, which discusses the growing activity of the Chinese in assuring their future oil supply, there are these comments and a Chinese response.

China's aggressive search is putting it in growing competition with the United States, the world's largest oil consumer. Some observers even warn of a possible showdown between the two economic giants.

"The Bush administration's attitude toward China at the moment is to look for ways to work with them, but I don't know how sustainable this policy is going to be," said Gal Luft, executive director of the Washington-based Institute for the Analysis of Global Security, a conservative think tank. "At the end of the day, you've got two very large consumers competing over the same sandbox. Sooner or later the Chinese are going to run out of places they can look for oil."

China says wealthy countries need to adapt. It notes that those countries have been the largest energy users for a century despite accounting for just 15% of world population. It also insists that its appetite for foreign oil does not challenge U.S. interests or global stability.

I was attracted to the [Resource Investor article](#) by the title "How Existing Energy Technologies Can Offset Peak Oil" and thus was curious to see what they proposed. The Institute has formed the **Set America Free Coalition** to cut dependence on foreign oil. This is a reputable objective and it is instructive to have a quick look at how they plan to get there. The steps include:

Fuel diversification which should utilize additional fuels that are "domestically produced, where possible from waste products, and that are clean and affordable."

The range of these is, however, restricted to :

Real world solutions that should implement technologies that exist today and are ready for widespread use." (This as opposed to expending resources on immature technologies and research).

And that means

Using existing infrastructure which requires technologies that do not require prohibitive or, if possible, even significant investment in changing our transportation sector's infrastructure. Instead, "fuel choice" should permit the maximum possible use of the existing refuelling and automotive infrastructure."

When this is put together it means that we must focus on

Domestic resource utilization (which) means tapping "energy sources from which transportation fuel can be safely, affordably and cleanly generated. Among them (in the U.S.): hundreds of years worth of coal reserves, 25% of the world's total (especially promising with Integrated Gasification and Combined Cycle technologies); billions of tons a year of biomass, and further billions of tons of agricultural and municipal waste. Vehicles that meet consumer needs (e.g., "plug-in" hybrids), can also tap America's electrical grid to supply energy for transportation."

In other words (and this comes out in the interview) the solution proposed is quite heavily focused towards electric cars of different varieties. This will potentially require a significant growth in our ability to generate electricity, and is a more indirect method for producing transportation fuel than the suggestions of the experts from 30 years ago, to whom I referred yesterday and who anticipated that, by this time, we would be getting significant quantities of synthetic oil and gas from coal.

There have been a number of suggestions as to how we can extract fuel from current waste, including bio-waste, but one would wonder as to how these fit in with their desire to use existing technologies and infrastructure. Somehow I get the feeling that they have particular processes and ideas to push, but that they have set too many bounds to the answer. And I begin to doubt that their solutions will have much impact in the near term (say this decade) when we are going to be in need of that immediate answer.

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