



Biodiesel Misconceptions

Posted by [Robert Rapier](#) on September 9, 2007 - 4:15pm

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Sometimes I am astonished at the misconceptions people have. Take this article:

[Old cars become green machines](#)

The story is about a woman who has a number of cars that have been modified to run off of biodiesel. The cars include gas guzzlers like a Lincoln Continental Mark V, a Chevy Tahoe, and a Cadillac. But because she is running them on biodiesel, she thinks she is neither using oil nor polluting:

Colette Brooks' **sprawling ocean-view property*** is dotted with tricked out cars -- from a low-rider Lincoln Continental to a Cadillac with plush leather seats. The petite 49-year-old business owner might be a car junkie, but **she's indulging her obsession without polluting the air by running her rides on biodiesel and other alternative fuels.**

"I feel so superior driving next to a Hummer and going, 'Dude, yo, look at this, this is what you should be doing,'" Brooks said.

While I sincerely appreciate her intent, someone walking, riding a bike, or even driving a Prius running entirely on gasoline could say the same to her. She does not recognize that her fossil fuel footprint is still very high. The problem with these sorts of perceptions is that they end up shaping policy. People may not recognize the critical need for conservation if they think they have eliminated their fossil fuel usage by switching to biodiesel (or corn-ethanol).

Today, at least 10 vehicles are parked on her property in Malibu. They include the Lincoln Continental Mark V designed by the late fashion designer Bill Blass. The gold luxury coupe has tinted windows to give it a "gangsta" look, Brooks said.

Her Chevy Tahoe demonstrates that **it's possible to drive a jumbo SUV without fouling the air.** And with an increasing number of filling stations in Southern California selling biodiesel, motorists don't have to go too far out of their way to feed their green machines.

A Los Angeles architect who got his 1980 Mercedes coupe from Biobling boasted that he hasn't bought gasoline in nearly a year. Though he spends about \$3.29 per gallon for

biodiesel, Warren Wagner said he didn't mind paying more for fuel that's produced domestically.

"I'm not supporting big oil," Wagner said. "When I'm driving it around, my car is an ambassador for alternative transportation."

I wonder where they think the gasoline and diesel that the soybean farmers use comes from. How was the biodiesel transported to the filling station? Where did the plastics and rubber in all of those vehicles come from? Where did the methanol come from that is used to make the biodiesel? Biodiesel is certainly better than corn ethanol in this respect, but don't kid yourself that you aren't using oil or polluting if you are using biodiesel.

So, while I applaud the effort, I think a better recognition of the actual embedded fossil fuels might lead to more informed decisions about which actions are more environmentally responsible. When the oil starts to run scarce, some people are going to have a rude awakening to the fact they are far more dependent upon oil than they think. This article provides a perfect example of people who suffer from such fossil fuel delusions, and it is the same kind of delusional thinking displayed by our political leaders. "Renewable fuels" with heavy fossil fuel inputs are not truly renewable, nor are they non-polluting.

I can't help but be reminded of the article I read regarding the Hummer owner who was "[kicking the oil habit](#)" because his Hummer ran on E85. A Prius running on 100% fossil fuels is going to have a lower fossil fuel footprint than a Chevy Tahoe running on biodiesel or a Hummer running on ethanol. A Prius running on biodiesel (or [green diesel](#)); well that's potentially a different matter.

* For the purposes of this essay, I shall not discuss the possible energy footprint of that sprawling property. I will presume it is not powered by coal.



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