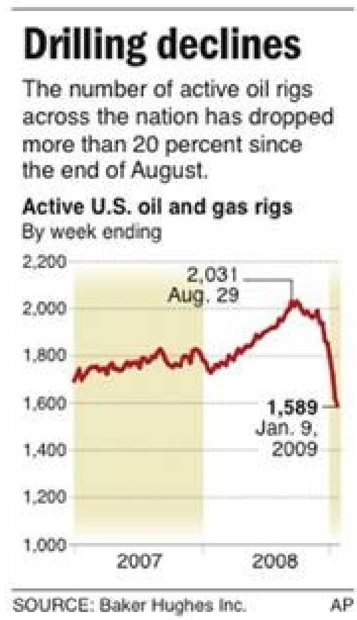
The Oil Drum
DISCUSSIONS ABOUT ENERGY AND OUR FUTURE

DrumBeat: January 21, 2009

Posted by Leanan on January 21, 2009 - 9:50am
Topic: Miscellaneous

Texas oil country sees the downturn coming

> MIDLAND, Texas (AP) -- In the West Texas oil patch, they can see the downturn coming at them from miles away like a pickup truck kicking up a dust cloud on the horizon.
>
> With crude dropping below $40 a barrel from a high of around $150 over the summer, oil and gas companies in the Lone Star State are cutting back on drilling, the layoffs are beginning, and the boom of the past few years appears to be drawing to a close.
>
> The boom may not necessarily give way to a bust. But the days of plentiful jobs, big paychecks and shiny new pickups and SUVS seem to be numbered.
>
> "It's been a good ride up, but we're bracing ourselves for the ride down," said Midland City Manager Courtney Sharp, who expects a drop in tax revenue next month because of slumping sales in the city of about 98,000.



The perils of plunging oil prices

> The soaring price of oil punished airlines through the first half of 2008. Now we're seeing how they got pounded again on the barrel's way back down. UAL, parent of United Airlines, reported on Wednesday a $1.3 billion loss for the fourth quarter. While a drop in passengers accounts for some of the decline, the company's cash losses and write-downs on fuel hedges added up to a staggering $936 million, a classic case of the cure causing more harm than the disease.

Antarctica is warming, not cooling: study

> ROTHERA BASE, Antarctica (Reuters) – Antarctica is getting warmer rather than cooling as widely believed, according to a study that fits the icy continent into a trend of

global warming.

A review by U.S. scientists of satellite and weather records for Antarctica, which contains 90 percent of the world's ice and would raise world sea levels if it thaws, showed that freezing temperatures had risen by about 0.5 Celsius (0.8 Fahrenheit) since the 1950s.

"The thing you hear all the time is that Antarctica is cooling and that's not the case," said Eric Steig of the University of Washington in Seattle, lead author of the study in Thursday's edition of the journal Nature.

Gap Oil

It is Gap Oil not Peak Oil that is the problem. Rising demand for oil will exceed the quantity of it that can be withdrawn from the earth, resulting in a supply-demand gap. Once production does peak the gap will be enlarged from both sides, drawing down the supply side against rising demand. This I suggest should be termed "Gap Oil". Energy efficiency and a reduction in our demand for oil is paramount and a growing dependence on what can be grown, to create a sustainable "bioeconomy".

You heard it here first: GAP OIL. I am coining this term since I haven't seen it used before but it succinctly sums-up the prevailing situation regarding the provision and price of oil. We hear much about peak oil, and often this is misunderstood to mean that the world will imminently run out of oil. However, this is neither the case nor the definition of peak oil. Dr Richard Pike, the CEO of the Royal Society of Chemistry and a former oil-man, has made convincing arguments that there is more oil - about twice as much - to be recovered than the 1.2 trillion barrels worth that is generally accepted. That may well be true, but it does not impact on the rate of recovery of oil *per se*, which is the crux of the issue.

Mexican crude production down 9.2 percent in 2008

MEXICO CITY (AP) -- Mexico's state-run oil monopoly said Wednesday its 2008 crude production was down 9.2 percent from 2007.

Petroleos Mexicanos, or Pemex, blamed bad weather and declining reserves at its biggest oil field, Cantarell.

Pemex produced 2.79 million barrels of crude a day in 2008, down from 3.08 million barrels daily in 2007. Exports dropped 16.8 percent to 1.4 million barrels a day.

Pemex said production at Cantarell fell 461,000 barrels a day in 2008, to close out the year at 1.01 million barrels daily. But production rose to 702,000 barrels a day, from 513,000 daily in 2007, at the second-largest field, Ku-Maloob-Zaap.

Williams Discovery Mainline Restored After Hurricane

> (Bloomberg) -- Williams Partners LP said the 30-inch mainline of its Discovery offshore gas-gathering system in the Gulf of Mexico returned to service after repairs for damage sustained from Hurricane Ike last year.
>
> The mainline is now delivering 150 million cubic feet of gas per day, its approximate volume prior to the hurricane, the Tulsa, Oklahoma-based partnership said today in a statement.

Petrobras Says It May Build Refinery Without PDVSA

> (Bloomberg) -- Petroleo Brasileiro SA, Brazil´s state-owned oil company, said it may build a planned oil refinery in northeast Brazil on its own if it fails to agree on a fuel-supply contract with partner Petroleos de Venezuela SA.
>
> PDVSA, as the Venezuelan oil producer is known, wants above-market prices for heavy crude to supply the Abreu e Lima refinery near Recife, Paulo Roberto da Costa, head of refining at Petrobras, told reporters today in Sao Goncalo, Brazil.
>
> “Petrobras very much wants to build the refinery with PDVSA,” he said at the event in Rio de Janeiro state. “But it will build it on its own if it has to.”

The cost of the biofuel boom on Indonesia's forests

> The clearing of Indonesia's rainforest for palm oil plantations is having profound effects – threatening endangered species, upending the lives of indigenous people, and releasing massive amounts of carbon dioxide.

Automakers aim for green nirvana in Detroit

> Up until now, most hybrid-electric cars have been built with fuel economy, not comfort or prestige, in mind. That means thin soundproofing and tinny stereo speakers, and probably no multi-adjustable leather seats or cushy ride.
>
> But Cadillac, Lincoln, Lexus and others are planning luxury green models that will offer great gas mileage without asking the driver to wear an automotive hair shirt.

ASPO Newsletter - January 2009 (PDF)

> 1100. Imaginative Data Reporting
> 1101. U.S. Election.

1102. Non-Conventional Oil and Gas
1103. Major Oil Company Production
1104. A Prestigious Peak Oil Taskforce
1105. Iraq re-visited
1106. The Energy Challenge facing the United States

World food crisis will be 'survival of the fittest'

> A looming world food crisis, caused by climate change and economic growth in emerging nations, will come down to 'survival of the fittest', according to the Working Party chairman of a new report published today by the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Institution of Chemical Engineers.
>
> 'The Vital Ingredient – chemical science and engineering for sustainable food' says changing weather patterns, crops being used for fuel rather than food, and emerging Chinese and Indian middle classes will all contribute to a breakdown in the global food supply chain.
>
> The report describes meeting energy and food demand despite declining fossil fuel resources - without permanently damaging the environment - as the greatest technological challenge facing humanity.

Peak Moment: The Twilight of an Age (video)

> In his book, *The Long Descent*, John Michael Greer observes that our culture has two primary stories: “Infinite Progress” or “Catastrophe”. On the contrary, he sees history as cyclic: civilizations rise and fall. Like others, ours is exhausting its resource base. Cheap energy is over. Decline is here, but the descent will be a long one. It’s too late to maintain the status quo by swapping energy sources. How to deal with this predicament? He lays out practical ideas, possibilities, and potentials, including reconnecting with natural and human capacities pushed aside by industrial life.

Ecuador sees no benefit in another OPEC cut

> QUITO (Reuters) - Ecuador sees no benefit in OPEC slashing oil output again at its next meeting if world prices do not start to recover, Oil Minister Derlis Palacios said Wednesday.
>
> Palacios said his country, which is a marginal producer of around 500,000 barrels per day, would lose money if it agrees to cut output again with prices at current levels.

Cheap oil: a poisoned gift

> We can expect renewed shortages of oil and price hikes way beyond $150 a barrel very soon, and this will have economic, political and geopolitical implications beyond what many expect. This could forewarn of a new world (dis)order, with the "rise of the rest", as we see the world move into post-globalization, post-AngloSaxon fragmentation – what the late Samuel Huntington and others have called "civilization clash", when international rivalries are exacerbated by power blocs, jockeying for advantage, to ensure the secure supply of oil at the best possible price.

GM loses sales title to Toyota

> NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com) -- General Motors lost the title of world's largest automaker to rival Toyota Motor in 2008, according to sales figures released Wednesday by the troubled U.S. automaker. It was the first time in nearly 80 years that GM did not sell the most cars in the world.

World oil demand shrinks

> LONDON/NEW YORK (Reuters) - Global oil demand is seen contracting more sharply this year than previously expected, as the deepening economic crisis spreads to the developing world.
>
> World oil demand will decline by 430,000 barrels per day in 2009 to 85.43 million bpd, according to a Reuters poll of 10 analysts, banks and industry groups.
>
> The large predicted fall is a significant shift from a Reuters poll in November, which forecast demand would slip by 20,000 bpd in 2009, following a similar decline in 2008.
>
> "Demand growth in emerging nations almost offset the demand contraction in the developed world in 2008, but with demand growth now expected to almost halve in 2009 in the developing world, that is no longer the case," said Francisco Blanch, head of commodities research at Merrill Lynch.

The Audacity of Hope, I hope.

> President Obama asked us to choose hope over fear but at least on the day of his inauguration, the market chose fear over hope. Wide spread fears were played out all over the market place as the UK bailed out some banks reminding us that this crisis is not quite over.
>
> Oil fell hard in the back end of the curve and gold soared and treasuries fell as traders feared another global meltdown and seemed to be preparing for the worst instead of the best. Platitudes and finger pointing did not inspire the type of confidence that the market wanted to hear.

Do WTI Oil Prices Reflect Underlying Market Conditions?

> The volume of oil stored in tankers has climbed to 80 million barrels, based on 40 VLCCs each holding roughly two million barrels of oil. According to Frontline (FRO-NYSE), the world's largest operator of VLCCs, the current rate to charter these tankers is about $75,000 a day. That translates into about $1.12 a barrel per month for storage. As long as a buyer of crude oil can cover this cost for storing the oil, he will engage in these time-spread trades. The contango condition (future crude oil prices being substantially higher than current prices) that exists in the crude oil market today as it relates to West Texas Intermediate (WTI) oil has begun to raise questions of whether the price for this crude actually reflects the oil market's underlying fundamentals, or rather is a victim of a regional market imbalance between supply and demand.

Join Wendell Berry and Bill McKibben in Civil Disobedience Against Coal-Fired Power Plants

> There are moments in a nation's -- and a planet's -- history when it may be necessary for some to break the law in order to bear witness to an evil, bring it to wider attention, and push for its correction. We think such a time has arrived, and we are writing to say that we hope some of you will join us in Washington D.C. on Monday March 2 in order to take part in a civil act of civil disobedience outside a coal-fired power plant near Capitol Hill.

Coal Will Still Be King

> Assuming that CCS turns out to work, it will take decades to deploy in new coal-fired plants and to retrofit old generation facilities. In addition, moving carbon dioxide around from power plants to locations where it can be stored geologically will require constructing a pipeline infrastructure that rivals the hundreds of thousands of miles of gas and oil pipelines. While there might be a moratorium on new coal-fired plants in the U.S., the rest of the world will not be joining it. The International Energy Agency's *World Energy Outlook 2008* projects that fossil fuels will still account for 80 percent of the world's primary energy production in 2030. Nearly 90 percent of the increase in world electricity demand will be driven by the economic growth of developing countries, especially that of China and India. In other words, coal will still be fueling civilization for the next couple of generations.

In Canada, a Push for Obama-style Green Stimulus

> The proposal for a Green Economy Action Fund is backed by unions, environmental organizations and other Canadian civil society groups with a combined membership of over 850,000 people.
>
> The plan calls for $22.7 billion in federal investments and $18.6 billion in low-interest loans to stimulate the green economy and catalyze provincial action. Dollars would flow to retrofit buildings, ramp up renewable energy, expand public transit and support

clean-tech manufacturing.

The risks of Plan B

The dynamic is this: An energy transition from Bush's Plan A to Obama's Plan B is likely to be felt as a major and decisive *shift* in U.S. national consciousness, as well as in policy detail. This shift of plans may be as wrenching and controversial a change in national character as has been achieved since the gradual awakenings of the civil rights era. It should be no surprise that a shift of this magnitude would contain some risk of failure, and the possibility that Plan B might fail therefore merits open and serious discussion. We should be talking about whether Plan B is really a risk worth taking – and even if so, whether some investment should simultaneously be made in the low-risk, high-reward Plan C.

Big Oil Races to Become Big Clean

The realization that diversification of energy is in everyone's interest has shifted perceptions and the big oil companies, the likes of BP and Shell, have taken the lead in alternative energy.

Astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson

With this new administration, is there a sense in the scientific community that there is at least an attitudinal change coming to Washington with regard to science?

What's driving attitudinal change is the fact that we need solutions to our energy crisis and we need them fast. You can't get those solutions from politics. You have to get them from scientists and engineers. So the value of science to the nation, I think, is currently being driven by our economic needs. But what people need to keep sight of is that the bigger value of science and technology to a nation is so that you can thrive as a nation going forward, so that you can thrive five years out, ten years out, twenty years out. And investments in research and development today pay dividends on those time scales, not on the time scales of the re-election of politicians. Someone has to have foresight beyond their own election cycle.

Oil Addiction: Don't Count on Mexico to Supplant Mid-East Crude

Whether the calls for reducing America's oil dependence on the Middle East that played such a big part in Barack Obama's campaign will find a home in today's inaugural address is an open question. But one thing is increasingly clear: America won't be able to count much on Mexico, still its third-biggest supplier, to help it wean off Persian Gulf oil.

Mexico sees refinery costing up to $10 bln

> MEXICO CITY (Reuters) - A planned new oil refinery in Mexico could cost up to $10 billion, the head of the state oil company Pemex said on Tuesday.

Gaza Aftermath May Impact Israel Oil Pipe Development

> Israel's offensive in Gaza will certainly have an effect on the country's status as an energy corridor, experts say. But whether it will be positive or negative depends on Israel's ability to prevent further attacks from Gaza and the country's battered relationship with Turkey.
>
> A little-known 254-kilometer Israeli pipeline, from the Mediterranean port of Ashkelon to the Red Sea port of Eilat, could rival the Suez Canal as an oil shipment route between former Soviet Union producers and Asian consumers.

China to seek 60,000-90,000T Feb naphtha on shortage

> SINGAPORE - China, normally a net naphtha exporter, has emerged to seek spot cargoes for February delivery to fill a shortfall in domestic production, regional traders said on Tuesday.
>
> Traders estimated that the country could need about 60,000-90,000 tonnes of the petrochemical feedstock to plug the shortfall, as its top refiners cut runs to their lowest in about 2-½ years due to slow overall fuel demand.

CNOOC Cites Strong Production Growth, Anticipates Busy Schedule in '09

> CNOOC has announced its business strategy and development plan for year 2009.
>
> The total targeted net production of the Company in 2009 is 225-231 million barrels of oil equivalent (BOE) (with WTI at US $60.0/barrel), compared with the estimated net production of 194-196 million BOE (with WTI at US $100.1/barrel) for 2008.
>
> During the year, ten new projects are expected to come on stream, eight of which are located in offshore China. In overseas, OML130 in Nigeria and Tangguh LNG project in Indonesia will start production this year. These new projects are major contributors to the production growth in 2009.

The Philippines: The coming perfect storm

According to Energy Secretary Angelo Reyes and the big oil companies, there is no hoarding of liquefied petroleum gas, the most common cooking fuel in the Philippines that is also fast becoming an alternative fuel for thousands of taxicabs all over the country. There's just none that can be bought anywhere.

The oil companies have long been predicting price increases for LPG, and now we have a full-blown shortage in our hands even if petroleum prices remain depressed the world over. But, Reyes and the Big Three say, there's really no evidence of hoarding.

Who do they think they're fooling?

[Indonesia: Gas stations dry up due to supply reroute]

A number of gas stations in Jakarta reported they were out of Premium gasoline Tuesday despite the state-owned oil company claiming supply to the city would not be threatened by the massive explosion at one of its Premium gas tanks at its Plumpang depot in North Jakarta on Sunday.

[Alaska: Rural energy crisis isn't a surprise]

The increased attention the residents of Emmonak are receiving is long overdue. The crisis isn't, however, a surprise to the governor or anyone in the Alaska Legislature.

Recent press reports fail to note that Alaska's rural fuel cost crisis was a loud topic of debate during the August special session, when the governor and other policymakers were told fuel costs were going to reach and exceed $9/gallon in some villages. The following summary is being provided to give those reporting on this issue some context on this issue, and the efforts many made to prevent the problems faced by residents in Alaska's small communities like Emmonak.

[Era of cheap oil is over]

"We will work our way through these financial problems, but what would be really unfortunate is that once things bounce back, oil prices will bounce back too," said Matt Simmons, chairman of Simmons & Company International, at a roundtable held in mid-December. He says that supply shortages could help oil prices soar through $147 as unhindered as a hot knife cuts through butter.

..."Oilfields aren't like emptying a bucket or taking boxes out of inventory," says Robert Hirsch, a senior energy adviser at Management Information Services, speaking at the same roundtable as Simmons. "You can't keep pulling oil out of the ground at the rate that you did in the past because of the basic geological processes."

In the midst of a global recession, much of the explanation for falling prices has focused on the supposed collapse in demand for oil, particularly from Asia's rising economic powerhouses, but talk of China's falling oil imports is misleading. It is only growth that is falling – from 28% in October to 17% in November.

According to Simmons, the story of supply destruction is a more immediate problem. "We're unwinding supply right now just as fast as we've ever done and it's like a bulldog chewing on somebody's behind," he says.

[Oil around $41 amid grim economic news]

VIENNA, Austria (AP) -- Dismal global economic news pointing to deteriorating energy demand kept oil prices in check Wednesday, with crude oscillating around $41 a barrel.

The market continued to focus on bad news from the banking sector, with investors concerned that a deepening global slowdown will further undermine demand for crude. But indications that OPEC was showing unusual discipline in taking extra barrels off the market gave prices some lift.

[Japan’s Power Sales Drop Most Since 1972 on Recession]

(Bloomberg) -- Japan’s industrial power sales fell the most in more than three decades, plummeting 13 percent in December from a year earlier, as automakers such as Toyota Motor Co. and steel companies shut plants and scale back output.

The drop was the biggest since May 1972, when the Federation of Power Companies of Japan started compiling data, the group said in a statement today. Sales to steel companies declined 25 percent last month, exceeding the previous record in February 1981, and sales to machinery manufacturers sank 18 percent.

[Russia gas heads to Europe after Ukraine dispute ends]

MOSCOW (AFP) – Russia started pumping natural gas to Europe after ending an energy war with Ukraine that left millions in deprived of winter heating.

"We can now tell our citizens that gas is finally on its way," European Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso said after the taps were turned on again. "Our monitors on the ground report that the gas is flowing normally."

[Can Ukraine leverage gas deal with Russia?]

After weeks of tense negotiations that involved the European Union, Kiev reached a compromise with Moscow over how much Ukraine would pay for its gas imports and how much Russia would pay for sending gas across Ukraine's transit pipeline network to Europe. Those parts of the deal made the news.

What is not so well known is that their agreement also involved RosUkrEnergo, a Russian-Ukrainian energy trading company that has played a considerable role in thwarting Tymoshenko's efforts to push through economic reforms.

[Kazakhstan bumps up gas transit price]

Kazakhstan has raised transit fees for Uzbek and Turkmen gas being piped to Russia by 21%, Energy Minister Sauat Mynbayev said today.

[Iran: OPEC needs non-OPEC help to steady oil market]

TEHRAN: Iran's oil minister said demand for oil had declined more than supply and cooperation between producers inside and outside OPEC was needed to reach market balance, an official news agency said on Wednesday.

[3 oil firms compete for Iraq oil field]

BAGDHAD (AP) -- The Iraqi Oil Ministry is studying offers submitted by three international oil companies to develop a prized oil field in southern Iraq, an official said Wednesday.

Ministry spokesman Assem Jihad said Italy's Eni SpA, Spain's Repsol and Japan's Nippon Oil submitted bids for a service contract to develop Nasiriyah oil field.

[Oil tanker attacked off Nigeria]

Unidentified armed men have abducted a Romanian crew member after an attack on an oil tanker off Nigeria's southern coast, security sources say.

The *MT Meredith*, loaded with 4,000 tonnes of diesel, was badly damaged in the attack early on Wednesday.

[Crime, not politics, drives Nigeria oil delta unrest]

LAGOS (Reuters) - Kidnapping oil workers and blowing up pipelines may have focused attention on Nigeria's oil delta, but three years of militant attacks have locked the region into a spiral of crime which is hindering much-needed development.

New Nigeria oil firm to rival Petrobras, Saudi Aramco

> ABUJA (Reuters) - The new head of Nigeria's state oil firm NNPC has pledged to press ahead with reforms that would break up the company into profit-driven units able to operate like counterparts in Brazil, Malaysia or Saudi Arabia.

Chevron reconsidering Indonesian deepwater venture

> Chevron Corp., the second-largest U.S. oil company, will review a $7 billion project to extract natural gas in Indonesia's first deep-sea drilling venture because of the global recession.
>
> Chevron will consider the cost and schedule to develop the Ganal gas fields off the country's part of Borneo, Suwito Anggoro, president director of the oil company's Indonesian unit, said in an interview in Jakarta today.

Police departments look for more fuel-cutting cars

> CAHOKIA, Ill. (AP) — Police Chief Richard Watson admits his department's newest patrol car is a curious departure from its big-horsepower Ford Crown Victorias. But the four-cylinder Pontiac Vibe GT has plenty of pep for policing, he said, and gets twice the gas mileage.
>
> Law enforcement agencies across the country looking for ways to cut corners and reduce costs after last year's $4-a-gallon gas are increasingly turning to more fuel-efficient cars.

Clock is ticking for GM and Chrysler

> NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com) -- General Motors and Chrysler LLC have four weeks to win deep concessions from unions and creditors to prove they are viable, or they risk losing the $17.4 billion in government loans that are keeping them from bankruptcy.

Blacks feel auto industry's pain; it was road to middle class

> The financial crisis in the auto industry has been more devastating for African Americans than any other community, threatening a half-century's economic gains by the black middle class. From blacks who left behind subsistence jobs in the South for high-paying factory jobs in the North during the Great Migration, to entrepreneurs who translated hard work and the gift of selling into their own businesses — they're all getting hammered.

"One of the engines of the black middle class has been the auto sector," says John Schmitt, an economist who studies the issue at the Center for Economic and Policy Research, a liberal Washington think tank. In the late 1970s, "one of every 50 African Americans in the U.S. was working in the auto sector. These jobs were the best jobs. Particularly for African Americans who had migrated from the South, these were the culmination of a long upward trajectory of economic mobility."

Which company did best under Bush? Southwestern Energy

The runaway winner: Southwestern Energy, (SWN) the natural gas exploration and production company that had a compounded annual return of 48%, says Capital IQ. That's far better than Apple, up 31%, even though it dropped in the last days over concerns for the health of CEO Steve Jobs. Apple may have been the most regaled highflier of the Bush era. Google, (GOOG) which was not included because it first joined the S&P 500 in 2004, has had a 28% compounded return since.

New group prepares for high gas prices

There's a group of Lawrence residents who definitely aren't betting on cheap gasoline prices being around for long.

The city's new Peak Oil Task Force met for the first time Tuesday with discussions of how the future may include the need for more food to be grown locally and more jobs to be closer to home because fuel prices will be at new highs.

Stand Up to Corporate Power: 5 Ways to Get Free

Making lifestyle choices that protect the environment, reduce global injustice, reflect social responsibility, and contribute to richer communities can also move us away from corporate control.

Customizing legend is bringing Batmobile panache to Prius

LOS ANGELES — He built the Clampetts' jalopy for *The Beverly Hillbillies*, TV's original Batmobile, the Monkeemobile and KITT, the chatty Trans Am in the first *Knight Rider* series.

Now auto-customizing legend George Barris, 83, says he's taking a bold voyage into the 21st century: He's trying to give dowdy hybrids like the Toyota Prius his distinctive, flamboyant touch.

Little cars get big electric boost

> Regular Prius models, which sell for $22,000 to $28,000, get 40 to 45 miles a gallon depending on how aggressively they are driven - they switch to gas use when traveling above 35 mph.
>
> When adding the A123/Hymotion 5-kilowatt-hour battery, a driver can expect 80 to 95 miles a gallon. Each battery operates on 50 percent to 70 percent of the charge, taking the driver about 40 miles using both gas and battery power. After a battery is spent, the engine switches to the car's 11 to 12 gallon gasoline tank. A driver can then plug the battery, which is estimated to last a decade, into a standard 120-volt wall outlet for charging.

Top 100 Stories of 2008 #1: The Post-Oil Era Begins

> If biofuels aren't the answer, what is? Surprisingly, the thing that replaces oil might not be a liquid fuel. It might not, strictly speaking, be a fuel at all. Nor is it some exotic source you have never heard of.
>
> It is electricity. And it is already making its way into an auto dealership near you.

Sun 'could supply Gulf's day-time energy needs'

> ABU DHABI (AFP) – Oil-rich Gulf Arab states enjoy year-round sunshine but they remain slow in adopting environmental technologies to let them harvest their abundant solar power, industrialists said Tuesday.

UK: New nuclear power plans

> SCOTTISH & Southern Energy and Iberdrola – the Spanish owner of Scottish Power – are launching a joint bid to build new nuclear power stations in the UK.

Excerpts and Commentary on Ben McGrath's "The Distopians" – Jan 26th, New Yorker

> In a blog that he maintains, Club Orlov, he categorises his readers into three basic cultural categories;
>
> 1. "back-to-the-land types," united in their opposition to industrial agriculture;
>
> 2. "peak oilers," who worry about the shock effects on energy markets of reaching the maximum global crude-extraction rate; and all-around Cassandras, and
>
> 3. "people who sometimes derisively are called doomers." (The doomers are currently

enjoying a little less derision, which is a mixed blessing, because it is axiomatic among true believers that mainstream respect means that it is too late for anything to be done.)

Orlov has recently acquired a fourth audience, composed of financial professionals, who have been, as he said, “bolstering my gut feeling that the United States is bankrupt.” A number of them have placed orders for multiple copies of his book, and he took some pleasure in imagining them passing it on to their friends and families this past holiday season as a grim kind of stocking stuffer.

Ecology: The moment of truth—an introduction

It is impossible to exaggerate the environmental problem facing humanity in the twenty-first century. Nearly fifteen years ago one of us observed: “We have only four decades left in which to gain control over our major environmental problems if we are to avoid irreversible ecological decline.” Today, with a quarter-century still remaining in this projected time line, it appears to have been too optimistic. Available evidence now strongly suggests that under a regime of business as usual we could be facing an irrevocable “tipping point” with respect to climate change within a mere decade. Other crises such as species extinction (percentages of bird, mammal, and fish species “vulnerable or in immediate danger of extinction” are “now measured in double digits”); the rapid depletion of the oceans’ bounty; desertification; deforestation; air pollution; water shortages/pollution; soil degradation; the imminent peaking of world oil production (creating new geopolitical tensions); and a chronic world food crisis—all point to the fact that the planet as we know it and its ecosystems are stretched to the breaking point. The moment of truth for the earth and human civilization has arrived.