



Jumping on the technology bandwagon

Posted by [Yankee](#) on December 4, 2005 - 6:16pm

Topic: [Alternative energy](#)

Tags: [alternative techonologies](#), [coal gasification](#), [peak oil](#), [synthetic fuels](#) [[list all tags](#)]

Not me...that would be Wired magazine.

Not surprisingly, I guess, the cover article of [Wired](#) for December is called "[Why \\$5 Gas Is Good for America](#)". Why, you ask? Well, because it's going to kickstart funding for new, clean, alternative technologies, of course.

I'm going to let you guys read this article and form your own opinions, but I did want to provide just a few reasons why this article managed to push my buttons.

The basic gist of this article by author Spencer Reiss is that while it may actually be true that oil is in depletion, it's not a problem because (a) there are many alternatives to oil already somewhat developed, and (b) rising gas prices gives companies (big oil, I guess?) the incentive to really invest in these new options.

So rising oil prices are more than just an irritant or even an ominous nick out of the GDP. They're an invitation to corn and coal and hydrogen. For anyone with a fresh idea, expensive oil is as good as a subsidy - with no political strings attached. Indeed, every extra penny you pay at the pump is an incentive for some aspiring energy mogul to find another fuel.

What bothered me the most about this article is that there's absolutely no concrete examples of said "aspiring energy moguls" and their projects to back up his claims. Maybe I've been a scientist in academia for too long, but I find it irresponsible to be making grandiose claims about our happy future without a single example.* The mere mention of tar sands and synfuels is not good enough for me; even if he doesn't have room in his article to discuss specific projects, this is the web after all, and some links are critical to making his point. Thus, I can only assume he doesn't provide such links because no projects are sufficiently well developed that they *convincingly* provide the silver bullet, even in combination with one another.

A look at a [recent thread](#) of ours demonstrates that for every promising alternative someone mentions, someone else points out a problem. For example, [NW Rich](#) mentions that biofuels from algae look interesting, but [Coffee17](#) worries about how clean such a process can be. [T.J.](#) worries that coal gasification will take a rather long time to come online, and other have noted that not only may we not have that time, but it will take an enormous amount of fossil fuel input to get the relevant technologies in place—input we may not have if we wait too long. I won't even get started on Reiss's suggestion of synthetic diesel made from natural gas, which many people believe has

already peaked.

If technology is going to save us, why aren't the technogeeks (sorry) already showing us working prototypes and convincing us of how easy it will be to scale the technology up to current levels of consumption? I'm hoping as much as anyone else that technology *will* be our savior, but I have yet to get really excited about one or more of the possibilities being able to replace petroleum in all of its many forms someday.

*I guess that the [BP announcement](#) about their plans to spend \$8 billion in investments in wind, solar and hydrogen was too late to appear in the Wired article, but even if Reiss had mentioned this, it would only have shown that companies may now be willing to invest, but not that there are any proven technologies that will eventually be able to account for a significant proportion of worldwide energy consumption.



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