



Rice grinders and turbo diesels

MANY OF you are probably like me in that you consider your truck to be a very important part of your day-to-day existence. For years I drove rice grinders (those little Japanese pickups) because they were cheap to buy and cheap to drive. Now I've taken to driving diesels which are expensive to buy but relatively inexpensive to drive! I love flying up those long steep grades in Montana with the turbo diesel blowing the doors off those gutless trucks I used to drive! I wonder how many times I've overloaded the truck and trailer ridiculously and lived to talk about it! It seems to me that you might as well ride in comfort and style and have unlimited power because the fuel economies of small gas pickups and larger diesel trucks are virtually the same.

You can imagine my consternation this fall when the price of diesel was 60¢ more than the price of gasoline. You never heard so much "jonesing" when I had to fill the tank! The only good thing that happened was that my interest in using biodiesel grew because the prices of petrodiesel and biodiesel became virtually the same. My truck is one area of my life that has remained untouched

by environmental guilt; it wasn't until the economic penalty was removed that I considered this option. For some reason it's hard for me to get all worked up about vehicle pollution in Montana where we have as many drivers as Indianapolis (361 sq. mi.) spread out over 147,000 square miles. (Don't tell me that we're running out of potential landfill sites in Montana either!)

I'm not going to take the time to educate you about biodiesel other than to refer you to a good website from the National Biodiesel Board, www.nbb.org. The main advantages I can see are that much less harmful pollution is generated from using biodiesel as opposed to petrodiesel, and domestic production of vegetable oil benefits our national and local economies while decreasing our dependence on foreign oil. These are noble causes in their own right. Maybe it was possible after all for a diesel driving Montana redneck like me to get to greenie heaven driving the biggest rig possible!

You can only imagine my disappointment last week when I read on *NewScientist.com* that the Kyoto-driven demand for biodiesel in Europe was actually ruining the

environment in third world countries! The increase in demand for palm oil has encouraged the destruction of tropical rainforests in Southeast Asia, and demand for soybeans to make vegetable oil has caused the destruction of rainforest in the Brazilian Amazon. One prominent U.K. environmentalist-journalist proclaimed that raising these crops for oil was the “most destructive crop on earth!”

Almost every day we are bombarded with apocalyptic predictions of how we’re screwing up the planet. When we tire from all the bad news, our hope is restored when we hear about some alternative energy system that’s going to save us from ourselves. However, it would seem that there really are no perfect solutions, only trade-offs between imperfect choices. In fact, respected U.K. environmentalist James Lovelock has looked at all the alter-

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Biodiesel can be a feelgood story when it is taken from used French fry oil or from some scummy algae. But it may lose its punch if intensive agriculture in America must provide massive amounts of vegetable oil for conversion into biodiesel to fuel our nationwide transportation system. It’s not a pretty picture somewhere else if we export from developing nations who are only too glad to exchange their own environmental degradation for economic benefit.

Biodiesel may follow the same course as food and wood. One will pull up to the pump and have a choice between regular redneck biodiesel or certified sustainably produced biodiesel for just \$1 more per gallon!

natives and declared that nuclear power is the best solution to the global warming crisis. Go figure! The truth is that everything has some potentially negative environmental impacts and other limitations; anyone who tells you differently is ignoring reality!

Perhaps the only reality that applies in all situations is to *use less* through conservation and more efficient design. This seems especially applicable in a place like America. The funny thing is, people don’t conserve unless they feel it in the wallet. Maybe we should be praising the oil companies and the Arab sheiks for making record profits rather than castigating them. —*Merle Adams*