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BYRON CRAWFORD

Lexington man gushes over water as a gas alternative

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Does your blood pressure rise and fall with gasoline prices that seem to bounce up and down by the hour?

So does James A. Robey's.

"I've always hated it when I drive by a gas pump and it's 30 cents higher today than it was yesterday, or when they raise the price on holidays," said Robey. "But I believe things are about to change."

Robey, who owns a commercial cleaning business and rental properties in Lexington -- and has written a book called "Water Car" -- hopes to have a 1960 Rambler converted from gasoline to water-derived fuel by spring.

In 2005 he opened a Water-Fuel Museum in a Lexington machine shop and rented a billboard to commemorate the anniversary of the first known hydrogen-powered car in 1805.

Advertisement He had intended to keep the museum open only six months to promote water as an alternative fuel source, but public interest was so encouraging that he extended the lease to one year.

"During that year, people were coming to share their experience and their knowledge. It was like a workshop, and some people stayed several days," said Robey. "In one generation we've lost a great deal of our ability to survive as independent inventors and tinkerers."

The California-born son of a space flight engineer, Robey gave up studying music in college to start his own business. He became interested in alternative fuels out of concern for the environment.

"Many people say, 'If some good alternative really existed, we would be using it,' " he said. "That would be true if it weren't for the trillions of dollars made by those who sell energy."

In limited use

General Hydrogen Corp. of Gallatin, Tenn., markets hydrogen fuel cells as an alternative to lead acid batteries for use in lift trucks and towing equipment for industrial materials. Company vice president Tony Troutt said the technology is feasible for cars and some hydrogen-powered vehicles may be available for lease as early as next year.

"But if it's going to be done, the automotive companies are the ones that are going to do it," he said. "It's really not going to be somebody sitting in their garage converting their own car. Is that possible? Yes, it's possible; but it's just not very practical."

Cliff Ricketts, an agriculture researcher at Middle Tennessee State University, is hopeful that by spring,

he and his students will have a car -- powered only by the sun and water -- ready to drive 600 miles across Tennessee in one day.

One of Ricketts' former students built a hydrogen-powered car 15 years ago that set the land speed record of just over 108 mph for an engine of its type. And in 1991 Ricketts removed the passenger seat from a 1974 Mustang II and installed a large electrolysis unit that allowed the car to operate on hydrogen power, as well as propane and gasoline.

"Everything on board the vehicle ran off water, but you can't produce enough (hydrogen) to keep you going," said Ricketts. "It's not a simple under-the-hood process. Like with gasoline, you don't take oil and put it on board. It has to be sent through the refinery before you put it into a fuel tank."

Even so, Robey is determined to make his license plate, H2O CAR, reflect reality.

"I may be just a janitor," he said. "But remember, the Wright Brothers were both just bicycle mechanics."

Byron Crawford's column appears on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Reach him at (502) 582-4791 or bcrawford@courier-journal.com. Comment on this column, and read previous columns, at www.courier-journal.com/byron.

STORYCHAT

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WAY TO GO!!

I, like every other American, am tired of being gouged by the oil companies. Every time a promising alternative energy source reaches a stage where it might truly become a threat to the gas and electric conglomerates, the oil companies buy up the patents and sit on them to prevent mass production. Let's hope that this guy is able to resist the lure of easy money at the expense of the environment and the best interests of his fellow men. And, let's hope that some investor will provide him with funds to help speed up the development and implementation of this technology.

We need more creative visionaries to help free us from the oil dependency that is crippling our country!!! KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!!

Posted: Wed Jan 17, 2007 11:16 am

In the TV sitcom The Beverly Hillbillies, Jethro Bodine claimed to have devised a water to gasoline pill that ran the Clampetts' old truck on water.

Is this guy also involved in "cold fusion" experiments too ? 😊

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