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Saving the earth, a little at a time

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The personalized license plate on their white 1985 Mercedes Benz 300D sedan is as unique as the fuel that powers it. The plate says BIOBENZ, advertising the fact that Xenia residents Matt and Stephanie Jopson run their car on biodiesel.

This alternative fuel is nontoxic, biodegradable and made primarily from soybeans.

"There is a faint smell of burnt vegetable oil when we run our," Matt said.

They purchase their fuel from Southwest Landmark of Wilmington and store it in 55-gallon drums in their garage, all with the permission of the director of Homeland Safety/Risk Management of Xenia.

Matt and Stephanie said there were many advantages to biodiesel that convinced them to make the switch. It is better for air quality than burning regular diesel fuel because biodiesel emissions have 80 percent to 90 percent fewer potential cancer-causing compounds. It is a very safe and stable fuel to handle and store, and it is produced in the United States from crops grown by our country's farmers.

"It could make America safer and economically stronger if more people used biodiesel," said Matt, saying the United States would be less dependent on foreign sources of oil.

The Jopsons were also motivated by religious reasons to use biodiesel fuel. "As followers of Christ, we think it's a good way to take care of the environment and hence, take care of people."

For the amount of biodiesel fuel the Jopsons purchase at a time, they pay around \$3 a gallon. There is an additional road tax of 47 cents per gallon, which they must pay, just as anyone does when they buy fuel at the pump. The biodiesel delivered to their home is produced in Cincinnati from soybeans grown in the region.

No special modifications had to be made to their Mercedes Benz diesel engine. After they started running biodiesel for a short time, they changed the fuel filter because the vegetable-based fuel cleaned a lot of buildup out of the engine. In the winter, however, Matt said they would probably switch to regular diesel fuel because biodiesel becomes more vicious when the temperature drops into the 30s. Additives can be mixed into biodiesel to allow it to flow well at cold temperatures.

Pure biodiesel and bio-blends are used nationwide in personal vehicles, fleet trucks, recreational marine craft and in farming, construction and off-road equipment. Singers Neil Young and Willie Nelson and actress Daryl Hannah are some well-known celebrity promoters of biodiesel.

Locally, WPAFB decided two years ago to start running all general-purpose government vehicles on B20, a blend of 20 percent vegetable oil and 80 percent diesel fuel. Ohio State University is conducting a one-year pilot program of having 20 percent of the campus buses run on B20 fuel on its main campus in Columbus. And Mike Noll, president of **Alternative Liquid Fuel Industries**, is planning to build a \$30 million to \$35 million plant near Washington Court House, in neighboring Fayette County, to produce 13 million gallons a year of biodiesel fuel from soybeans and used cooking oil from restaurants. Noll's Web site is **www.alfindustries.com**.

Matt tries to promote the benefits of switching to biodiesel in his community by talking to neighbors and by handing out information cards to people who express an interest or are already driving a diesel engine car.

"We sold our Honda Civic and gave up 'cheap' gas with the hopes that it will make a difference and others will join the effort," Stephanie said.

More information about biodiesel, including a list of registered fuel marketers, is at the National Biodiesel Board's Web site (www.biodiesel.org) or can be obtained by calling (888) BIODIESEL.