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Car fueled by hydrogen drives through

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GREER - U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis held what was unmistakably a bottle of water in his hand, but the label said "Exhaust."

The Congressman from Greenville had consumed about three-fourths of the bottle, which contained purified water given off by a hydrogen-powered vehicle.

"It tastes perfect, clean and crisp," Inglis said just before jumping behind the wheel of a hydrogen fuel cell Volkswagen Touran.

Inglis was among more than 150 attendees to take a test drive/ride Saturday at the BMW Zentrum as the cross-country Hydrogen Road Tour '08 made its way through the Upstate. Inglis drove around a course set up on BMW's grounds and was impressed by the vehicle's smooth acceleration.

The tour is a 13-day cross-country trek of several hydrogen-powered vehicles intended to provide exposure and education about fuel cell vehicles to potential consumers.

Inglis addressed the crowd and said it is critical for America to relieve its dependency on foreign oil. He said hydrogen-powered vehicles would lead to cleaner air, create jobs and improve national security.

"This is the beginning of the next American century," Inglis said. "Let's not be afraid of change. Let's lead it."



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BMW employees check the status of a Hydrogen 7 after the vehicle was test drives as part of the Hydrogen Tour '08 when it stopped at the BMW Zentrum on Saturday.

Cheryl McQueary, with the U.S. Department of Transportation, said the vehicles would most likely become available between 2010 and 2015. She said the major delay is needing manufacturers to mass produce the cars, which they do not want to do until there is a stable infrastructure of hydrogen fueling stations. She said Honda is offering its Clarity model on lease in California for \$600 per month.

Chris White, communications director with the California Fuel Cell Partnership, said the tour will encompass 24,000 combined miles using domestically produced fuel and emitting zero greenhouse gases.

White said 1 kilogram of hydrogen is about the equivalent of a gallon of gasoline in anticipated cost, but produces about twice the energy. She said the vehicles have been getting between 50 and 70 miles per kilogram. She said a Nissan midsize SUV demo can travel about 200 miles because it has a 4 kilogram tank for compressed hydrogen.

BMW also showcased its Hydrogen 7, the world's first luxury performance sedan that can use liquid hydrogen or gasoline, available at the touch of a button, to power its internal combustion engine.

Bob Boyd, a project development manager with Linde North America said the Hydrogen 7 could get between 20 and 30 miles per kilogram.

The South Carolina Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Alliance, a nonprofit collaboration, helped schedule three stops in the state. After leaving BMW, the tour went to Midlands Technical College in Columbia and then to Aiken's Bridgestone Firestone plant, which has an on-site hydrogen fueling station to power its fleet of forklifts.

Ron Yount drove to the BMW stop from Asheville, N.C., to see the vehicles.

He said they are the future of automobiles, but "everything needs to be on the table" to produce energy solutions.

"I'd love to buy one today, if I could," Yount said.

The SCHFCA is a collaboration between six core institutions - The Center for Hydrogen Research, Clemson University, Savannah River National Lab, S.C. Department of Commerce, South Carolina State University and The University of South Carolina - hoping to accelerate the use of hydrogen fuel cells.

Inglis said South Carolina can "be at the top of the charts" in that effort.

He said the state can lead the way in producing technological solutions. Inglis compared the search for alternative fuels to the space race, saying that the Russian launching of Sputnik (Oct. 4, 1957) generated creative focus from Americans that allowed the U.S. to land astronauts on the moon (July 20, 1969).

"Gas at \$4 a gallon was this generation's Sputnik," Inglis said.

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