

MotorWeek Transcripts

AutoWorld 'NASA's Star Fleet'

JOHN DAVIS: The greening of America's vehicle fleets is an important step towards the goal of ending our dependence upon imported oil, and reducing our cars' impact on the environment. But, this week we take an eye-opening look at one clean fleet that shows how caring for the earth and reaching for the stars can go hand in hand

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration is well-known for their headline-grabbing Space Shuttle missions and for launching satellites into space. But the underlying purpose behind high-profile space exploration is really to help make life better here on Earth.

To that end, NASA engages in good environmental practices throughout its organization and especially in its earthbound transportation fleet. Florida's Kennedy Space Center, known as America's Gateway to the Universe, is essentially a small city unto itself, and as an active stakeholder in the Department of Energy's National Clean Cities program, leads by example. Of their city-sized fleet of nearly 1,700 vehicles, an impressive 70% are powered by clean fuels or advanced power technology, including Compressed Natural Gas, E85, Biodiesel, Hybrid electric and a number of pure battery electrics. Most are refueled on-site at NASA's own depots, and battery charging stations have been set up at various locations around the facility.

For the past few years, managing this fleet has been the job of Bruce Chesson. Under his stewardship and encouragement, NASA's ground fleet drivers have embraced the use of alternative fuels. The use of E85, for instance has jumped from 144 gallons per month to over 17,000 gallons!

BRUCE CHESSON, ALT-FUEL PROGRAM MANAGER, KENNEDY SPACE CENTER: Our goal is right now to go ahead and take this program into, moving more into CNG, more into Hydrogen – we think that's going to be one of the next fuels, although I don't believe there's a silver bullet at this particular point to save us with anything; but I think we need to utilize every fuel that we have.

DAVIS: NASA has also found an innovative way to procure some of their vehicles. By scouring the GSA website for excess inventory, Bruce's team discovered 23 of these Ford Think low-speed electric vehicles, and brought them home merely for the cost of shipping. Needing little more than new batteries and air in the tires, all but 7 have been put into use so far.

Lest we forget, NASA was a pioneer in the use of electric vehicles. In fact you could say that they've taken electric vehicles about as far as you can go!

NASA also earmarks a percentage of funds raised through recycling scrap metal to put towards the purchase of new clean-fuel vehicles. This being NASA of course, the definition of scrap metal here is a bit more interesting than just a bin full of crushed soda cans!

CHESSON: I believe NASA's a leader in just about everything at this point, and our goal is to make life better here on earth. A lot of people don't realize what we do do, to support just about everything out there. But in the alt-fuel world, I think the government has stepped up to it. I know we have certainly stepped up to go ahead and do our part and we're going to move forward on everything that we can.

DAVIS: NASA's leadership in the use of alternative fuels and advancing the awareness of environmental issues points out the path that we all must take if we are to gain true energy independence – and you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure that one out.

