

The Future of Alternative Energy for Cars

During the old hot rodding days, oil was king. It was also only about 25 cents a gallon, and everyone thought there was an endless supply. Then we were hit with the oil shock of the seventies, and we realized that there was not an endless supply of oil (only of lines at the gas tanks) and we had to change our ways. Big, gas guzzling cars had to give way to economy models, and many of the traditional car companies suffered. But continued high oil usage still threatens the supply.

This fact has forced the world to look at alternative sources of energy to fuel our vehicles. What kind of alternatives are suitable to running cars? Let's have a look at the facts.

There are many forms of alternative energy, primarily from the forces of the earth: water (tidal or hydroelectric), air, waste (biomass), the sun and the earth itself. But currently, we only meet 10% of our energy needs through these alternative natural sources. Coal, gas and nuclear fuel supplies 88% of our needs, and oil 2%. For vehicles, however, oil is by far the biggest source of power. Diesel and gas oils power most of the cars, trucks and SUVs on the roads today. Biodiesel fuel such as vegetable oil, methanol and ethanol are starting to be used in some buses. Using the same logic, we should be able to make our cars into mini-windmills or mini solar panels. But this use is limited and we need to find a longer-range solution.

What does the future hold?

Using alternative energy directly in cars is not practical. What's the solution, if not windmills and solar panels? Hydrogen as a source of fuel for vehicles has proven to be the most viable. Many hydrogen powered vehicles exist today, and more are being developed.

How do we involve alternative energy more in our lives? Hydrogen as a source of power is extracted from a number of different natural resources, such as water, biomass, coal and methane. The best source is water and many cars today are being run on fuel cells that extract hydrogen from water.

There are many processes to extract hydrogen molecules. But, in general, all of these processes require electricity to function. As the world's population grows, the demand for power and energy grows with it. That will help the popularity of hydrogen power, but this type of alternative power will eventually be replaced by other, more efficient types of alternative energy.

So the quest for other, better energy sources for our vehicles will continue. We may see the day when an extremely powerful solar cell or roof mounted turbine will power a car for miles.

For now, the present problem of finding alternative energy solutions to power our vehicles continues. The task is large, but it is certainly achievable.

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About the Author

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