

NEW CARS STAR AT CONFERENCE

Several new LPG Autogas conversion kits for popular new cars have made their debut at the 2007 LPG Australia Conference on the Gold Coast.

State-of-the-art Autogas conversions for Toyota's new Aurion family sedan, Chrysler's 300C cult car, Toyota's 4-litre HiLux and Mazda's new Bravo utility were on display when the conference opened at the Marriott Hotel in Surfers Paradise on February 28.

LPG Australia's Phil Westlake said: "It's fantastic to have such a wide-ranging collection of popular vehicles on display at the conference. It goes to show that just about any vehicle can be converted to reap the multitude of benefits LPG Autogas provides."

Volatile fuel prices and escalating concerns about greenhouse gas emissions have thrown a spotlight on the advantages of running LPG Autogas in large vehicles.

LPG Autogas produces extremely low particulate emissions during combustion, insignificant levels of sulphur dioxide emissions and one of the lowest life-cycle greenhouse gas emissions of all commercially available automotive fuels.

Bringing the 'bling' factor to the Autogas-powered car club is the Chrysler 300C, which incorporates the Parnell VSI system that is sourced from respected Netherlands kit manufacturer Prins Autogassystem B.V.

Parnell LP Gas Systems Managing Director Mark Somers said its unique injectors, which were sourced from Japanese manufacturer Keihin (which has Honda as a parent company), particularly distinguish the system.

"Over the past 10 years we've dealt with the good, the bad and the ugly when it comes to injectors and these are exceptional in terms of performance and longevity," he said. The kit is currently undergoing EPA certification and will be available for sale in March 2007, priced from \$3500 plus GST.

Conference delegates and media showed keen interest in the LPG kit



Parnell LP Gas Systems' Mark Somers (left) and Geoff Borg with the LPG-converted Chrysler 300C – one of many new vehicles with Autogas kits on display at the Conference.

for the Toyota Aurion, which was co-developed by Apollo Gas Products and LPGas1.

Aurion is Toyota's most serious assault so far on the large car market. The development of the kit means it joins Ford Falcon, Holden VE Commodore and Mitsubishi's 380 in being Autogas convertible.

Apollo Gas Products has a long history of developing LPG conversion kits for Toyota vehicles, having created a factory-approved HiAce kit in conjunction with it.

"Our Omegas kit suits the Aurion perfectly and we've been getting some phenomenal results from it," said Apollo Gas Products Technical Manager, Gerard Allen.

Developed and distributed in Italy by Landi Renzo, LPGas1 Director Brett Coventry said Aurion's Omegas kit offers the latest in sequential gas injection technology. "It uses the Toyota engine control unit (ECU) which means all the Toyota features are also optimised on LPG."

The kit costs \$4400 including GST.

One of the biggest areas of LPG sales growth is in the commercial vehicle market.

Diesel/Gas Australia has responded to the growing demand for diesel-vehicle LPG systems by offering a new LPG injection kit for the recently launched Mazda Bravo and other diesel-powered four-wheel drives.

The Diesel/Gas Australia kit is an add-on rather than standalone alternative fuel system. It mixes LPG with diesel via the engine's air intake system, increasing the amount of diesel burnt by around 10 per cent.

Diesel/Gas Australia General Manager Kingsley Songer said this results in increased power and torque. "The first thing people who use our system notice is that it gives them more power – anything from 20 to 30 per cent more."

"Just about any vehicle can be converted to reap the multitude of benefits LPG Autogas provides."

"Because you replace diesel with 20 to 25 per cent LPG, the system can also achieve up to a 20 per cent fuel cost saving."

The standard Diesel/Gas Australia kit costs \$3850 plus GST and qualifies for the Federal Government's LPG Vehicle Rebate Scheme, which provides a \$2000 grant to eligible motorists who have their vehicles fitted with a

Diesel/Gas Australia-approved LPG conversion.

Another popular Toyota vehicle kitted-up for the conference was the 4-litre HiLux.

IMPCO Technologies' General Sales Manager John Coggins said: "The HiLux kit came about after working closely with the NRMA to develop a system for its fleet that would provide fuel cost savings while maintaining engine power, vehicle operating performance and, importantly, reliable motoring."

IMPCO Technologies uses the BRC Sequent dual-fuel system in the HiLux, a similar kit to the one it supplies to Holden for its factory-optional dual-fuel VZ Commodore utility and wagon, and VE Commodore sedan.

IMPCO's Sequent dual-fuel systems cost approximately \$4000 installed.

Manchester LPG tanks supplied many of the tanks used in the project vehicles on display at the convention.

Manchester Auto Tank National Sales Manager Peter Craven said he was pleased to support the projects. "We always try to help our distributors with the new projects for which they need new or specialised tanks, and we fully support their efforts to demonstrate that there are plenty more options in the LPG car market than just Falcons and Commodores."

A BUMPER YEAR FOR LPG

Australian businesses and private motorists embraced the economic and environmental benefits of LPG Autogas in record numbers in 2006.

National sales of new LPG Autogas-powered vehicles increased 139 per cent last year, according to figures recently released by the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries (FCAI).

Sales of Autogas passenger cars rose by more than 2500 vehicles, or 48 per cent.

Sales of Autogas light commercial vehicles increased 93.6 per cent while sales of petrol-powered light trucks fell by a whopping 29.3 per cent in 2006.

The latest figures released by AusIndustry confirm Autogas' popularity.

Over 30,000 motorists have shared in over \$60 million in grants since the introduction of the Federal Government's LPG Vehicle Scheme in October 2006.

All parts of the LPG industry, including tank manufacturers and equipment importers/distributors, have quickly doubled their output to meet the increased demand.

In the first half of 2006, 26,680 cylinders were manufactured and supplied to LPG Autogas system installers.

Production surged in the second half of the year, with 55,564 cylinders manufactured and supplied – an increase of 108 per cent over six months.

“Even before the government subsidy was introduced, conversions and new sales were already booming. The industry supplied 42,000 gas cylinders in 2005, largely due to unstable petrol prices. The subsidy has added impetus to a clearly evident trend,” said LPG Australia Industry Development Manager Phil Westlake.

One of Australia's leading

distributors of LPG systems, IMPCO, says it has increased its imports of core products by between 50 and 100 per cent in order to meet the demand.

“We've had huge backing from the IMPCO factory in the US and BRC in Italy, who've increased supply to us,” said IMPCO Dealer Development Manager Brett Smith.

“At the same time we've had to double our Sydney warehouse staff and we've moved to bigger premises in Melbourne.”

For Manchester Tank & Equipment Co, Australian manufacturers of various LPG Gas cylinders, Autogas tanks have gone from being a minor segment of overall production to a major focus.

“Before the government subsidy we were already busy, but since then we have had to add a whole extra shift to handle the added production requirements,” said National Sales Manager, Peter Craven.



Brett Smith from LPG equipment supplier IMPCO with the stockpile of Autogas engine systems.

TELSTRA MANDATES AUTOGAS

Telstra – the nation's largest private vehicle fleet – is aiming to use environmentally friendly LPG Autogas to power 90 per cent of its large vehicle fleet by 2009.

Telstra Fleet General Manager Brendan Stooke said at present

more than 50 per cent of Telstra's large wagon fleet is running on LPG.

“I'm a fan of using Autogas for this vehicle category,” said Mr Stooke.

“We have 2100 dedicated LPG vehicles in our national fleet,

including 1400 Ford E-Gas wagons, and from now on we are purchasing large wagons operating on LPG wherever possible,” Mr Stooke said.

“We anticipate that the overwhelming majority of our

large fleet vehicles will run on LPG by 2009.

“LPG reduces greenhouse gas emissions by up to 20 per cent over petrol and is much cheaper.

“Using clean, green energy to operate large vehicles is the best decision for Telstra and the environment,” he said.



Ray Loudon about to refuel one of the 1400 LPG Autogas-powered Ford E-Gas Falcons in Telstra's large vehicle fleet.

“Most fleet managers realise when they crunch the numbers that Autogas is too cheap and clean to ignore.”

LPG Australia Industry Development Manager Phil Westlake said the time when the vast majority of Australia's vehicle fleets will use LPG Autogas is a lot closer than many people may think. “Most fleet managers realise when they crunch the numbers that Autogas is too cheap and clean to ignore,” said Mr Westlake.

A GREEN WINNER FOR WA FLEET

The Western Australian government's fleet operator State Fleet has achieved its target of converting 25 per cent of its eligible fleet to LPG Autogas as part of a long-term environmentally friendly and cost-effective program.

Director of financial operations for the Western Australian Department of Treasury and Finance, Doug Tyler, said State Fleet's ongoing environmental campaign focused on three areas – increased use of Autogas-fuelled vehicles, promotion of the use of four-cylinder vehicles, and a carbon offset program.

"We started six years ago with a requirement that at least 25 per cent of eligible six-cylinder vehicles in the WA government fleet must be LPG Autogas-powered," Mr Tyler said.

"LPG Autogas is a good fuel as it is an environmentally responsible

and cost-effective alternative to conventional fuels," Mr Tyler said. State Fleet manages 10,000 passenger and light commercial vehicles. About 2140 are six-cylinder vehicles suitable for Autogas conversion. Of these, 615 (or 25.8 per cent) are powered solely by Autogas.

State Fleet also runs approximately 60 dual-fuel vehicles.

LPG Australia's Industry Development Manager Phil Westlake said that while long-term dollar savings on fuel is incentive enough, there are also several important environmental reasons for making the change to Autogas.

"Autogas has almost no sulphur dioxide emissions – the main contributor to acid rain – and in the case of spills there is less damage to soil and water than from other fuels," Mr Westlake said.

In recognition of the Western Australian government's clear commitment to the environment, the Australasian Fleet Managers Association (AFMA) awarded it the 2006 National Environmental Award.

"Autogas-powered vehicles produce 12 to 14 per cent less greenhouse gas emissions than petrol-powered cars."



State Fleet's Doug Tyler says Autogas is an environmentally responsible and cost-effective alternative fuel.

LPG AUTOGAS INFLATES LUBE MOBILE BUSINESS

LPG Autogas-powered Toyota HiAce vans have saved mobile mechanic company Lube Mobile 25 per cent in fuel costs while boosting its fleet numbers and compounding business growth, according to General Manager David Sayer.

Mr Sayer says the fuel's numerous benefits became readily apparent after trialling LPG Autogas-powered vehicles.

"Once we discovered the vans' gas consumption and multiplied it out, we realised the potential fuel savings would allow us to

increase our uptake of new vans roughly 50 per cent faster than we would have otherwise.

"Our vans average 2500 kilometres per month. The savings on LPG can be up to 10 cents per kilometre cheaper than petrol, which translates to a saving of \$250 per month.

"The savings pay for around half of a new van's lease cost. With two vans making those savings we can afford to buy another one: it's like getting another van for free," he says.

"Renewing our fleet at a quicker rate also compounds the savings by ridding ourselves of older, fuel-inefficient vans."

Lube Mobile first examined Autogas for its fleet when Toyota provided it as a factory option, Mr Sayer says.

"When the Autogas HiAce arrived in late 2005 we grabbed three vans and trialled them for performance, consumption and emissions. We found that while LPG consumption was higher than that of petrol, the fuel savings were clearly recognisable. Also, differences in driveability were near negligible.

"As a clean-burning fuel, Autogas also helped us meet our

environmental objectives, fitting in well with our Health, Safety, Security and Environment policy. We strive to be corporately responsible and help protect the environment where we can," he says.

Lube Mobile's uptake of Autogas-powered vans has been rapid, increasing from three in 2005 to 41 at present. "It was obvious early on that the vans met our criteria and we have since ordered every new van from Toyota with the LPG Autogas option.

"We went hard with it in 2006, adding over 30 vehicles throughout the year and we've already got a few of the 30 converted vehicles we plan to add this year," he says.

"The way we're going, the whole fleet will be running on LPG Autogas by 2010. That's our goal."

Mr Sayer says he recommends all businesses examine the LPG Autogas option. "It helped our business a great deal by providing the savings and environmental benefits we were after, and I'm sure it will help other businesses.

"I definitely urge them to evaluate their fleet and running expenses. They'll quickly be able to work out what the Autogas payback is."

David Sayer says LPG Autogas-powered Toyota HiAces each save Lube Mobile \$250 per month in running costs.



FAMILY MAN GIVES LPG THUMBS UP

One of the first grant recipients of the Federal Government's LPG Vehicle Scheme says he is now saving a third of his former fuel costs after spending just \$640 on an LPG Autogas conversion.

"We have two kids at university," said Colin Frisch of Geelong, Victoria. "My son Tim works at a bottle shop on weekends to contribute to his full-time engineering degree, but we're still putting our hands in our pockets for his car and rego", and fuel is a considerable expense.

"When Tim's course moved campus for the second half of his studies, our family had to toss up whether he moved or made the daily trip of around 200 kilometres in his Commodore.

"We discussed the pros and cons and decided an LPG Autogas conversion would make the travel option worthwhile, and would be best for the family."



Colin and Tim Frisch.

Mr Frisch was among the first applicants to receive \$2000 of the \$50 million in grants already approved under the LPG Vehicle Scheme since it began in October last year.

After getting a few quotes,

Mr Frisch settled on JR Gas Conversions in Geelong, who he said did "a super-professional job". The installation was completed in three days and the final result was neat and tidy. The LPG tank was installed unobtrusively in the

Commodore's boot and allows Tim Frisch to fit in all his cricket gear.

"The staff were just incredible in how they took Tim through the process. They explained to him how the whole thing works and the way he should treat the vehicle. They even took him to a service station and showed him how to correctly fill the gas tank!" Mr Frisch said.

"The best installers will want to talk to you about the process," he said. "Shop around and get your quotes, but don't cut corners on the installation. It's an investment.

"For us, it's also an investment in our son's future. He reckons he's cut his fuel costs by a third – probably more than that because he's a canny student and keeps his eye out for stations that accept fuel vouchers for LPG."

SYDNEY INSTITUTE CREATES NEW LPG TRAINING

In the first major shake-up of the Sydney Institute of Technology's Automotive Liquefied Petroleum Gas Engine course since 1979, students can now undertake a shortened course module limited only to the servicing and repair of LPG-powered vehicles.

Prior to 1 January this year, students were required to

complete a lengthy system installation course, regardless of whether they intended to perform any installations.

Sydney Institute of Technology Head Teacher of Automotive Special Courses, Dennis Spagarino, who co-developed the Automotive Liquefied Petroleum Gas Engine course, says: "Most people who don't need to do

installations will find the course extremely appealing because it's 60 hours only, yet it's still thorough, focused and comprehensive."

The complete service, repair and installation course required for a full-class licence is now 90 hours.

LPG Australia says the course changes and ongoing course commitments illustrate one of the many ways in which the industry is collaborating to meet strong consumer demand for automotive LPG conversions, servicing and repair.

LPG Australia Industry Development Manager Phil Westlake said: "We're confident it will encourage a new raft of potential students to gain qualification to share in the wealth of work associated with unprecedented consumer demand for LPG-powered vehicles."

On the back of hundreds of pre-Christmas student bookings the course has been made available in other New South Wales

TAFEs, including Blacktown and Wetherill Park in Sydney and many regional centres.

Mechanics David Moore and Jamie Waterhouse are two former course students who both heartily recommend it.

Mr Moore, of Mobile Moore Mechanical Repairs, said: "The teachers are excellent. They've been doing it for a long time so their industry knowledge is amazing.

"I'm really glad I did it because I have more options to exercise now."

Jamie Waterhouse, of Waterhouse Autocare, is a prime example of a mechanic perfectly suited to the new service and repair-only module.

"I didn't do the course to perform installations – though we've done quite a reasonable amount since – I did it because we do lots of repair and servicing work on existing systems.

It's a great thing to have under your belt – but if I had my time again I would probably go for the shorter module."



Jamie Waterhouse and (right) David Moore.