

One solution at a time

By Edward Noga

Kudos to Gates Corp. for helping, in a small way, to solve the enormous problems of the energy crisis.

Gates has brought to the aftermarket a couple of devices that reduce vehicle fuel consumption. The company showed them off recently at what it termed a "ride and drive" event for politicians and media in Washington. We in the journalism trade call it a "dog and pony show."

It's pretty interesting technology from one of the world's largest belt makers. Two are for cars.

The first is called the Electro-Mechanical Drive, a stop-start system for hybrid cars Gates said will save 6-20 percent in gas. Another is the E3Drive technology, a two-speed drive system that allows air conditioning compressors and alternators to operate at idling speed while the engine is running at drive speed. You know that will save fuel.

It was the third system that really caught my attention-the CabRunner Integrated Power System.

Ever pull into a truck stop on a highway and see 50 tractor-trailers idling while the drivers are loading up on coffee and doughnuts? I'm on the road a bit, and often have noticed this phenomena-understanding, too, that this is being done out of necessity. If there is any group of people that understands the need to conserve fuel, it's truckers.

A big rig's diesel engine requires a certain level of heat to operate efficiently, and it's cheaper to let them run than start them cold. And if a driver is catching a nap, necessary for a long-haul trucker, the engine needs to be running to keep the air conditioner or heater operating.

Also, some trucks that use air brakes need at least 10 minutes from a cold start to work, and in cold weather a diesel engine could take up to an hour to warm up to operating temperature.

Gates claims its CabRunner system can cut idling fuel consumption of tractor-trailer cabs by 60 percent. Emissions are reduced by that amount, too.

Gates doesn't claim the system will save the world. But it could make a dent in the 960 million gallons of diesel fuel burned by idling trucks each year.

This is a nice example of how companies in the rubber industry are doing their part to help cut energy consumption. The tire industry, of course, has been all over this since the first oil shocks of the 1970s. Tire makers constantly are trying to squeeze out more fuel efficiency in their tires, while not compromising on other performance characteristics. It's quite a balancing act.

The world didn't get into an energy crisis overnight, and won't get out of it until it gives up its addiction to a finite resource. Until then, every little bit of energy saving counts.

Noga is editor of Rubber & Plastics News. [[Editorial](#)]

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