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### The Fleet Spot

This Week: Curtis Donaldson



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**Curtis Donaldson** is the President and CEO of **CleanFUEL USA**, a leader in propane engine technology and the installation of alternative fuel infrastructure. Prior to founding the company in 1993, Donaldson spent over 10 years with Conoco ending his career in 1992 as the coordinator of alternative fuel marketing.

Donaldson served on Propane Education and Research Council for six years with two spent as the Chairman and Board member of the National Ethanol Vehicle Coalition. The Department of Energy's Clean Cities Group recently awarded him the Alternative Fuel "Hero" Award and last year the DOE named his company Alternative Fuel Exporter of the Year.

#### Tell us about CleanFUEL USA and where propane fits into fleets.

CleanFUEL USA has been in business since 1993. We started with the premise of helping the propane industry address infrastructure issues so they were more seamless to gasoline. What we found was that buyers not only wanted access to the fuel but the propane engines themselves since automakers manufacturing propane vehicles were ceasing production in the late 1990s. This presented an opportunity to set a new standard for propane engines, which we did by expanding on an innovative European technology to develop our liquid propane injection (LPI) system.

With LPI, we are competitive to gasoline and diesel engines today from a technology standpoint, but far exceed these traditional fleet fuel options from an environmental perspective. LPI technology is avail-

able for 8.1L medium-duty engines, which have been featured in G.M. trucks as well as Blue Bird school buses.

Our business and industry have evolved to a point where we can now go to fleet managers and help them improve their vehicle and fuel management needs.

You have to put yourself in a fleet manager's spot, taking a risk to change from something that the fleet is comfortable with – a traditional fuel, if you will – and making that switch to an alternative fuel. We want to be able to stand up and say, "We can help you. We can mitigate a lot of that risk because we are involved in all aspects of changing your fleet over."

#### Tell us about this new alliance with ConocoPhillips.

Propane is not only a cleaner burning fuel but an economical option for fleets struggling to achieve higher cost-efficiencies. The agreement with ConocoPhillips is significant because it provides the infrastructure resources needed for propane to become a more widely utilized and readily available alternative fuel.

We pride ourselves on being able to go to a fleet and say that we can do it all, but we don't have a retail presence. The partnership allows us to answer the concerns of propane fuel availability. It does this by providing access to the network of ConocoPhillips' retail stations, including Union76, Phillips 66 and Conoco.

#### What are the advantages of propane over gasoline and diesel?

Over gasoline, propane is cleaner burning, emissions are lower, and 90 percent of propane is produced here in the U.S. Propane prices on a per gallon basis are very competitive. We are still 50 to 70 cents a gallon lower than gasoline, not including the 50 cent per gallon federal tax credit. There is a slight decrease in fuel economy (about five percent) but this is offset by the fuel cost savings.

The comparison to diesel is similar. However, be-

cause diesel is more efficient than gasoline, when making the case for transitioning a fleet to operate on propane you have to have roughly a 30 percent differential to make the value case.

Where propane shines against other alternative fuels, and I'm in favor of all alternative fuels, is its applicability to meet the needs of medium to light-duty fleets. The distinction is that we are a liquid where CNG, for example, is a compressed natural gas. CNG may be a good option for large fleets that have the room to hold the number of tanks needed, but where space is limited it's not as viable a solution as liquid propane.

#### What about propane in terms of the wear and tear on a vehicle?

That is a good question, especially because propane has somewhat of a jaded past. We used to get 20 to 25 percent less on fuel economy and a lot of the fleets still remember that. Another problem was some valves prematurely burned out because propane is such a hot burning fuel.

A major difference now is that we have liquid injection technology that meets all stringent automotive standards for performance and safety. It is similar to gasoline because it is liquid all the way to the injector tip and works with onboard electronics (ECM).

I don't want to say that there are no problems with propane because there are with all types of engine fuels. But, the core issues propane experienced in the past have been solved.

#### Can you give us some sources for more information about propane?

There are several good sources. I recommend the Propane Education and Research Council (PERC) [www.propanecouncil.org](http://www.propanecouncil.org) website as well as the Department of Energy's clean cities site that covers all alternative fuels ([www1.eere.energy.gov/cleancities/](http://www1.eere.energy.gov/cleancities/)). Our website, [www.cleanfuelusa.com](http://www.cleanfuelusa.com), is another great resource.