

## green saver

Rae Doble

## Clean cars

Can you keep driving and cut greenhouse emissions too?



**A**USTRALIANS LOVE THEIR CARS, but unfortunately cars don't love the environment. With vehicles accounting for 14% of Australia's total greenhouse emissions, it's obvious that the cars we drive need to change.

Top of the green list are petrol/electric hybrids. There are four hybrid cars on the Australian market: Toyota Prius, Honda Civic Hybrid, Lexus RX400h SUV and Lexus GS 450h saloon. A total of 2081 hybrid vehicles have been sold this year, and the number looks set to increase on the back of petrol price hikes.

A hybrid car's greenhouse gas emissions and fuel costs are low, but this is offset by high initial costs. Currently Queensland is the only state to offer consumer incentives, with a 2% sales tax on hybrids compared with 4% on V8s. It's also planning to bring in free registration for hybrids.

Several lenders also offer discount loans for "green" cars. Bendigo Bank has an interest rate of 9.5% fixed for the loan term,

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while Savings & Loans Credit Union offers 9.77% fixed for three years.

Zero-emission cars are still in development. These are hydrogen fuel cell and full electric cars. They are many years away from commercial release, although Shaun Williams, in Brisbane, made his own. For the cost of around \$14,000, he converted his Toyota Echo in 2004 into probably Australia's first registered fully-electric car (see [www.electric-echo.com](http://www.electric-echo.com)).

LPG-powered vehicles are another option. LPG releases 1.6kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per litre, compared with petrol's emission of 2.4kg per litre. According to LPG Australia, LPG cars emit 15%-20% less CO<sub>2</sub> than petrol cars. The Government offers a \$2000



rebate on LPG car conversions, and a \$1000 rebate on new LPG car purchases.

Third is the option of low-emission, low-pollution biofuels – ethanol (made from sugar and wheat starch) and biodiesel (made from waste oil). The Federal Government has a biofuel production target of 350 million megalitres by 2010. This seems unlikely to be met, due to market forces, an excise of 38 cents per litre on biofuels and obstructions by oil companies. In 2002 a scare campaign saw consumers steer clear of E10 fuel (petrol with a 10% ethanol blend), but contrary to claims E10 will not damage any car made since 1986. In Brazil, where they have been moving from oil to ethanol in the past 30 years, four million cars run on 100% ethanol.

Biodiesel can be made from virtually any vegetable oil or animal fat. It can be used in any diesel engine without modification (the original diesel engine ran on peanut oil). Seventy-two service stations currently stock biodiesel, mainly in country areas. See [www.grownfuel.com](http://www.grownfuel.com).

You can make your own biodiesel, using waste oil from your takeaway. The process is simple but messy, and can be dangerous – check the internet for instructions. Or, you can convert your car's fuel system instead of making biodiesel. Vegie Cars ([www.vegiecars.com](http://www.vegiecars.com)) sells a range of products that allow you to pour used oil straight into your diesel tank. Basic conversion starts at \$300, and Vegie Cars estimates fuel costs at around 30 cents a litre or less.

### Green tip

If you can't afford to upgrade your car right now, there are things you can do to reduce your petrol use.

- Use public transport, walk or ride a bike when possible. If you use your car rarely, consider selling it and becoming a member of a car-share program instead.
- Drive more efficiently – avoid unnecessary braking and accelerating, and drive in high gear. Turn the engine off rather than idle.
- Reduce your speed – a car at 110kph uses 25% more petrol than one at 90kph.
- Minimise drag by ditching the spoilers, roof racks and unnecessary weight in the boot. Drag can increase petrol use by 20%.
- Inflate your tyres to the highest pressure recommended. Ensure they are correctly aligned and regularly service your car.
- Use air conditioning sparingly, although at speeds of over 80kph, air conditioning is more fuel-efficient than open windows.