

Cab Gab
by **Abe Mittleman**

Energy Crisis-Where is The Help?

There are many ideas being floated as answers to the energy crisis in the U.S. Unacceptably high gasoline prices and emissions created with gasoline effects all drivers. We in the taxi industry know this as well if not better than everyone else.

We have to rely on others to pass along ideas that will ultimately solve the problem. So far those we rely on have failed us. The best they have come up with is a change to hybrid vehicles. This under tested unproven solution is now being challenged in court.

It took many years to find a vehicle that can handle the stress and abuse that must be endured as a NYC taxicab. Unfortunately the Ford Crown Victoria, a vehicle that has proven it is up to the task and has become the vehicle of choice within the industry does not meet fuel efficiency standards that are being asked of us. But, if

there is a way to keep these vehicles and modify them to meet the standards shouldn't we consider this option? The NY Post has reported that of the 13,237 medallion taxicabs 10,506 are Crown Victorias. Most of these vehicles still have several years to go before they are mandated to be replaced and most Crown Victorias being used as NYC taxis are 2006 and newer. So, what can be done to help these vehicles get more fuel efficiency?

In last month's issue of Mini-Press we explained that 2006 and newer Crown Victoria's have flex fuel engines and can run on any combined ratio of gasoline and ethanol. It can even run on 100% ethanol. But, although this fuel can be made available to the industry, those who should be helping us to obtain this fuel have not even taken this into consideration. Why?

There is another solution. This solution has been around for some time. I'm referring to Natural Gas. Undoubtedly many of you by now have seen the promotional advertisements of T. Boone Pickens. Mr.

Pickens, a self-made billionaire has been promoting the use of natural gas as a bridge to the future. Natural gas is the second largest natural resource in the U.S. Eight million vehicles in the world currently use this fuel. Natural Gas is clean, less expensive than gasoline and can be used in most of our taxis including the Crown Victorias that are still on the road and will be for several years to come.

This is already being done in many places. I recently read an article that claims taxi cabs in Buenos Aires, Argentina uses this fuel exclusively. According to this article the fuel is 70% cheaper than gasoline. The article goes on to say that many U.S. companies have been sending representatives to Argentina to take advantage of the advances in equipment for conversion that has been made there.

Yes, it's true that we do have some taxi vehicles here that are on natural gas. But, why hasn't this been presented to us as an option to keeping our Crown Victorias in use for now and past the deadlines

being mandated by the TLC? Previously, attempts to encourage drivers and taxi owners to convert to Natural Gas have not been as successful as desired. A major reason has been the shortage of places to refuel. But, why wasn't there a major effort to correct this? Where is the help we need to change this status?

Perhaps now that the mandate for hybrid vehicles is being challenged in court for safety and durability concerns, it may be wise to take a look at using natural gas as well as ethanol in the vehicles we know are safe and reliable.

In all fairness I do have to report that I did look into the cost of conversion to Natural Gas. In the article I read about Natural Gas use in Argentina a limousine driver claimed it only cost him \$1,500. to convert his vehicle. However, the cost here may be much greater and even prohibitive. But, there are vehicles, even some taxicabs in NYC that are using Natural Gas. So, the possibility should be explored.

Credit Card Limits

It has been some time now since we have all been accepting Credit Cards for payment of fares. So, I would just like to say that as time goes on passenger use of this payment method seems to be increasing. This is going well.

All transactions under \$25 that are accepted by the system is guaranteed to be paid. However consideration should be given to raising this amount to \$50. It seems silly that every time a transaction is \$25. or over that a signature from the passenger is required, since most airport and inter-borough fares and even some fares within Manhattan fall into this amount. Having the passenger sign really doesn't seem necessary.

Police Cars to Use Ethanol!

It's not as if they don't know, they do. It has been reported that a new fleet of police cars will be hitting the streets. Out of 100 vehicles 60 have flex-fuel engines. These vehicles will be running on a combination of gasoline and ethanol.

As stated else where in this column more than 10,000 of the Ford Crown Victoria taxis that still have several years to go before mandatory retirement also have flex-fuel engines and can use the same fuel. So why can the city help its own vehicles and not find some outlet for the taxis that can do the same to be fueled in the same manner? If they want a cleaner environment then why don't they work with us to find a way? There must be a way for them to help us to obtain the fuel!