

CNG and Beyond

The Prospects for Natural Gas Vehicles Said Better than Ever at National NGV and Southern California Clean Vehicle Meetings

A pair of West Coast meetings kept clean vehicle advocates hopping last week, as NGVAmerica's national natural gas vehicles conclave was held in



LNG-fueled Autocar dump truck operated by San Bernardino County on show at the Southern California Clean Vehicle Expo in Ontario

Reno, and the South Coast Air Quality Management District hosted the Southern California Clean Vehicle Technology Expo in Ontario, Calif.

The South Coast Expo was the more colorful of the two, with bullish presentations and an

impressive line-up of ride-and-drive vehicles ranging from diminutive scooters to bright yellow school buses, including electric drives. But the real excitement was in Reno, where a resurgent NGV sector sees its fuel making a major comeback among U.S. fleet customers.

The Price's the Thing

"We have all the tools we need for the United States NGV industry to break out," said NGVAmerica president Rich Kolodziej.

Fundamentally divergent oil and gas prices are the key. China and India compete for global oil, while prices are historically weak for domestic natural gas. "We have economics on our side," said Clean Energy chief Andrew Littlefair. "Our commodity is 80¢ a gallon."

"We've never had a better opportunity for alternative fuels as we do now," said McKinley Addy

of the California Energy Commission. His agency has just said that that NGVs offer a 30% greenhouse gas advantage over gasoline and 23% over diesel, amounting to a fundamental vindication of CNG and LNG fuels.

Geopolitical issues like a failed oil war and such health and environmental matters as children's asthma and global warming are icing on the cake.

"This is a fabulous, fabulous opportunity, particularly for heavy duty trucks," said Westport Innovations president Mike Gallagher.

"We're going to have to stop being bashful," said Kolodziej. "We need to reach out. We have to amplify our message."

The Reno theme was Making Waves.

Discussion there was not about the merits of NGVs, but on the best way to convey those merits to the public, and to manufacturers who might restore CNG- and LNG-fueled cars and trucks to their vehicle line-ups.

"First and foremost, we need vehicles," said Brian Pacific of Pacific Gas & Electric. "Having the engine is not enough. We need the engine in the chassis."

Clean Vehicle Education Doug Horne called for a resumption of NGV Technology Forum activity and for improved "real market intelligence."

"We need good market intelligence to guide and direct the scarce R&D programs that are out there," said Mike Eaves, president of the Natural Gas Vehicle Coalition. Others in Reno pointed to \$1 billion in new California money for alt fuel vehicles development (see page 7). Clean Energy and Calstart were among the organizations that went out of their way to praise the new California commitment.