

Yeah, But Tesla Is So Much Cooler

By Jeff Reinke, Editorial Director, Manufacturing Group

At the risk of losing my membership card in the middle class, white republican club, I'm going to go out on a limb and admit that I like the technology and environmental benefits of E85, as well as its soon to be developed ethanol brethren, as a fuel source for my vehicle. However (cue the Evil Galactic Empire music that marks Darth Vader's entrance), I rarely use it because of the cost disadvantages, and I'm not alone.

Although I may be one of the few to vocalize my stance, I'm confident of my presence in the silent majority after both a conversation with Luke and Carrie following their attendance at [the opening of Coskata's new cellulosic ethanol facility](#) [1], and in reading a post on www.biofuelsdigest.com [2] regarding a study that compared an E85 flex fuel vehicle with the all-electric Tesla Roadster.

Coskata feels their plant and proprietary process will result in lower processing costs and higher fuel octane levels, but unfortunately this still doesn't solve the distribution and accessibility roadblocks associated with ethanol—which is why the dark side of the force still drives my purchasing rationale.

Then there's the *Biofuels Digest* study. According to which, a vehicle running on E85 corn-based ethanol generates 30 percent fewer CO₂ emissions over its lifetime when compared to the Tesla all-electric sports car. This is based on the amount of coal that needs to be burned in order to generate the electricity coming via the plug.

Using this same logic, the Tesla will also create 21 percent more CO₂ emissions than a car running on conventional gasoline. Additionally, other ownership issues, like a higher initial cost and having to replace a \$12,000 lithium-ion battery, would seem to make a vehicle using E85 or any other variation of ethanol, a better option.

So armed with this type of knowledge, why did the U.S. Department of Energy provide Tesla with a \$465 million low-interest loan, and offer potential buyers with tax credit incentives of up to \$7,500?

Simple. The Tesla has a better chance for greater public acceptance.

Even though it strains the national grid and complicates environmental controls, electrical outlets are everywhere. There's no issue with plugging in/refueling the Tesla. I have to go out of my way to fill up on E85, and then I know that I'd have to go back to re-fill sooner because of the lower energy density. So the cost savings

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are mitigated because I'm buying more fuel, simply at a lower price.

At the end of the day a cool looking sports car that I can plug in to an outlet in the garage is going to get more momentum and change more attitudes than hunting and searching for an ethanol pump that I'll have to frequent more often with basically the same, old boring vehicle I'm driving now.

I like the cleaner element of ethanol. I like the fact that more feedstocks based on current waste products can be used to produce it. I even like the fact that it makes a hardcore conservative like me think a little greener. However, until the availability options for ethanol are solved, I'm afraid this segment of our industry is simply spinning its wheels.

Is ethanol-blended fuel just an inconvenient stepping stone on the path to electric vehicles? Drop me a line at jeff.reinke@advantagemedia.com [3].

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<http://www.chem.info/blogs/2009/10/yeah-tesla-so-much-cooler>

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[1] <http://www.chem.info/ShowPR~PUBCODE~075~ACCT~0000100~ISSUE~0910~ORIGRELTTYPE~TJ~RELTYPE~PR~PRODCODE~000000~PRODLETT~GK.html>

[2] <http://www.biofuelsdigest.com/>

[3] <mailto:jeff.reinke@advantagemedia.com>