

T. BOONE OR NOT T. BOONE

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We have had quite the go lately here at the FDL Borg Hive over the automaker bailout and, more specifically, the most pressing of which is GM. For the moment though, I want to touch on a corollary to the future of the American auto industry, and that is the transition to clean and green that needs to occur for long term sustainability of Detroit wheels.

If we could flip the switch on a perpetual motion device, heck even the Chevy Volt, tomorrow, that would be wonderful. But we cannot. The path back to health and profit prosperity for American auto will be a process that takes time, and it is going to take intermediate steps while the new technology comes on line, gets refined and evolves into maturity.

The guy, for better or worse, that has been out front making noise about the *transition* from oil to clean and green is none other than the infamous, and legendary, Texas oil man T. Boone Pickens. Transition is the key word regarding the Pickens Plan as it relates to our topic de jour, automobiles. Because the Volt is not scheduled for release until 2010, and even assuming GM and its Volt makes it that far (which is no given), it will take a while for plug in technology to become deeply rooted. And, of course, a massive shift all at once to electric autos would crash our strapped and deteriorating power grid.

Pickens' main point on internal combustion transition is that natural gas should be a, if not the, transition fuel for cars, and, more significantly, fleet vehicles.

Pickens' Plan proposes that the natural gas that is currently used to fuel power

plants could be used instead as a fuel for thousands of vehicles. Ken Medlock says that the US will continue to use natural gas for electric power generation. Natural gas burns cleaner than coal, making it an increasingly popular fuel for power plants. Gas plants also produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions.

The technology needed for Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) vehicles such as City buses, fork lifts and passenger cars with CNG drivetrains is available now. Honda sells the Civic GX, with a 170-mile range. In addition, it is possible to convert vehicles to run on CNG in addition to leaving the conventional fuel injection intact, allowing the driver to switch back and forth at will. Kits are available for the do-it-yourselfer. One can buy a CNG compressor called Phill that hooks up to the city natural gas line making it possible to refuel a CNG car at home.

There are a lot of issues to be taken with T. Boone Pickens however, there is some merit to the compressed natural gas (CNG) idea as an interim fuel to power the transition to the clean and green engine/power modalities of the future. Especially for municipal and other fleet vehicles; however, the Honda Civic GX and conversion kits are viable ideas for daily driving by individuals as well.

Now, as to whether T. Boone *or not* T. Boone, well that is a much more difficult proposition. It is pretty hard to listen to the Boonester preach about all this after being one of the leading right wing asshole oil men of all time. Very hard. Is he genuine? Probably not entirely, no; he stands to profit from the build out, production and sale of facilities and the product, and, make no mistake, at some point there is a domestic and global natural gas peak limit just like that of oil.

As a short term, interim part of the transition, however, there are some real merits to consideration of CNG, especially on fleets. And as to T. Boone, well I am not buying in very far to his schticht, but his relentless hawking of his plan on TV, radio, and every other forum he can get his mug in front of has some incredible side benefits of getting the public inured to alt fuels and new ways of thinking on energy. That is a *very* good thing. We don't want to throw in with the man and his plan, but the publicity for wind and solar, and alt fuels is priceless.