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## Pumped up

Biodiesel is catching on for local business owners as well as motorists

By [Eric Fetters](#) / Herald Writer

MARYSVILLE - At Donna's Travel Plaza, a bustling fuel spot for long-haul truckers and freeway commuters along I-5, motorists sometimes pause a moment at the diesel pumps these days.

The blue nozzles and signs on the pump indicate the fuel has a green tinge to it. Not in color, but in its effect on the environment.

Biodiesel has arrived at the mainstream truck stop.

"I was surprised by the amount of interest we got out of it," said Brian Couch, who oversees Donna's fuel station.

When he replaced all 12 fuel pumps in front of Donna's as part of a larger remodeling of the business three months ago, regular diesel went away. It's still available for the big rigs at the business's truck station to the south of Donna's restaurant and store.

Now, however, passenger cars and trucks filling up at Donna's are getting tanks of B20 - 20 percent biodiesel, a fuel made from vegetable oils, mixed with conventional diesel fuel. That means it burns cleaner than diesel.

Some motorists come to the station now just for the biodiesel.

"Every chance I get, I fill up here," said Steve Martin of Smokey Point, whose truck sports a biodiesel bumper sticker that says "No war required" on his Chevrolet Silverado pickup truck. "I've been using biodiesel for a long time."

He added that he often burns 100 percent biodiesel in his John Deere tractor, which has eliminated the headaches he used to get from diesel fumes.

That, as well as biodiesel's contribution to weaning the U.S. from dependence on foreign oil, are what he said he likes most about the fuel.

As Martin finished filling up his rig, Mike and Dee Graham of Warm Beach pulled up to buy fuel. After a moment of hesitancy as he read the pump, Mike Graham started fueling.

"It's the first time I ever filled up with it," he said. "We'll see."

As his wife came back with a cup of coffee, he shouted to her, "We're green!"

Couch said the environmentally friendly aspect of switching to cleaner diesel is nice, but Donna's owners wouldn't have done it if they doubted the growing demand.

"We've always been looking at the renewable aspects of everything, but it has to make good business sense, too," he said.

In May, the business sold about 11,000 gallons of B20. It's been selling at the same price as regular diesel for the trucks - just under \$3.25 a gallon as of last week. Couch said the wholesale price for the two fuels is comparable.

Donna's began selling biodiesel the same week as Snohomish Co-op's Cenex station. Those two businesses have the only known pumps in the county selling B20 biodiesel.

Sean Aydlott, who runs Biodog Biodiesel from his Bothell home, said he's happy to see more interest in the alternative fuel. He's been selling B99, a nearly complete biodiesel blend, for more than a year now.

He sells more than 500 gallons a month of B99 on average and runs the fuel in his Ford F350 pickup.

The combination of high gasoline prices and the resulting political debate over energy sources have raised interest in biodiesel, said Josh Clements, a marketing manager for Bellingham-based Whole Energy, which distributes the B20 sold in Marysville and Snohomish.

"We're seeing a lot of demand," said Clements, adding that Whole Energy sold about 100,000 gallons last month. That's up by 50 percent to 60 percent compared with last year. "All these factors have come together at the same time."

Fans of the fuel will have even more places to fill up soon, Clements added. Whole Energy is finalizing plans with American Distributing to place a B99 pump at American's facility in Marysville. It will be the first retail pump selling that blend of biodiesel north of King County.

As Mike Graham finished filling up his vehicle with biodiesel for the first time, his wife, Dee, glanced at an informational flyer that Couch has at Donna's. As long as it works in their vehicle, she said she likes the idea.

"This is cool," she said. "We'd be all for this."

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