

Update from a recent meeting with the Department for Transport (UK)

On 19th April 2009 Chris Hunt Cooke mentioned in his V8BB posting that he had spotted an article in The Times on possible difficulties arising from increasing the proportion of bio fuel in pump fuel in the future. The article mentioned the damage that might be caused to the fuel systems of older vehicles. He felt it was something to keep an eye on. His colleague at the FBHVC recently attended a meeting at the Department for Trade (UK) and provides a useful summary of the bio fuel changes that might affect owners of classic cars.

In pursuit of lower greenhouse gas emissions and improved air quality, the EU is pushing for the increased use of renewable fuel blending components and materials, and is also pursuing a vigorous reduction in sulphur levels in all fuels. One good aspect of the EU focus on renewable fuel materials (bio-components) is reflected in the much more realistic approach to the actual benefits in carbon dioxide reductions which must be adopted. This should end the practice of making optimistic assessments of these benefits. However, the EU enthusiasm for bio-components means that we shall see higher ethanol contents in petrol and higher bio-diesel content blends in the quite near future. This is a situation which I believe the FBHVC is unable to resist, and the best approach may well be to maintain contact in order to keep informed for the benefit of members, who at least will know what is coming.

Sulphur levels are coming down, which will affect those with preserved off-road machinery running on diesel-type fuel. Many tractors run on Tractor Vaporizing Oil (TVO) or kerosene, so will be unaffected, but for those with diesel powered historic machines normally using "red" diesel or gas oil, dramatic changes in sulphur levels over the next eighteen months may cause some difficulties. Without wishing to suggest what these might be and to avoid actually sensitising the issue, historically when a sudden change to ultra-low sulphur levels has occurred there have been problems of seal swelling or shrinking, leading to leaks from the fuel system, and fuel stability issues which have resulted in blocked fuel filters and similar problems.

In summary, the bio fuel changes proposed which may affect FBHVC members are:

- **Permitted ethanol content in petrol** to rise from 5% to 10%. Fuels containing above 5% ethanol will need to be labelled, but fuels containing less than 5% ethanol will continue to be sold unmarked. There will be a requirement to continue to offer fuels with a limit of 5% ethanol until 2013. (It is assumed that after this date such fuels will be harder to find and may disappear).
- **The current level of volatility in petrol will not change**, but will be adapted (downwards) to accommodate the increased volatility caused by adding ethanol. In theory, this should mean that drivers will not notice any difference in hot operation with fuels containing ethanol, but this is not a firm conclusion because no tests have been carried out on the sort of vehicles favoured by FBHVC members.
- **Non-road gas oil sulphur level is to drop** from 1000ppm to 10ppm from 1st January 2011. This could affect historic agricultural and construction equipment as outlined above.
- **The permitted volume of leaded petrol sold in the UK will be reduced** from the current 0.5% of total petrol sales to 0.03%. While this may seem a savage reduction, in fact it is broadly equivalent to the current level of leaded petrol sales. In fact, sales of leaded petrol have never been close to the 0.5% limit since this concession was offered by the EU, probably because of the difficulties of setting up a suitable distribution network.
- **MMT, an alternative octane boosting additive for petrol, will also be severely curtailed** in years to come, but in fact has been very little used in the UK, so this should not pose a problem.
- **Diesel fuel will be permitted to contain more than 7% bio-diesel** component, provided it is labelled. Currently no labelling is required if less than 7% bio-diesel is added to the fuel.

The likely timescale suggests consultation on these issues during the latter part of 2009, with implementation from April 2010, except where otherwise indicated.