

News Release

Is hydrogen left out in the cold?

Debate puts Government's electric car grant under the microscope

27 April 2009

Top industry experts will converge in Reading on Wednesday (29 April) to debate the future of alternative fuel cars and ask if the Government's drive for consumers to buy electric is pushing hydrogen vehicles off the road. The event, run by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMEchE), will touch on how biofuels, hydrogen and methanol may prove better alternatives to electric vehicles.

Over 100 people are expected to take part in the **Future Transport Fuels Debate**, from students right across to the engineering community. Anyone is welcome to attend the free debate at Foster Wheeler House, Shinfield Park, Reading, from 6pm – 9pm, with the chance to ask questions or air their views. The event comes just days after the Government's budget pledge to plough millions into the low carbon sector.

Kicking off the debate will be Hugo Spowers, founder of RiverSimple in Herefordshire, the company that designed the Morgan LIFEcar and is currently developing a hydrogen cell fuel car for urban drivers, to be launched in June. Mr Spowers will reveal why hydrogen should not be overlooked by the Government as a fuel to further the future of low carbon vehicles.

Other speakers taking the floor will be Professor Frank Palmer, who has worked as an advisor to the European Commission on biofuels, as well as for both Shell and BP, and Gordon Taylor, an engineer at Lotus Engineering. Prof Palmer's stance will be on biofuels from production to emission rates. Mr Taylor will highlight the pros of methanol – another alternative fuel which is the simplest alcohol used to fuel internal combustion engines – and how it can be used to power existing and future low carbon vehicles, focusing on his work with Lotus.

Speaking ahead of the event, Frank Mugford, Chairman of the IMechE Reading Committee, said: "By hosting the debate, we are hoping to expose some of the irrelevancies about alternative fuels. There are many misconceptions about alternative fuels, especially biofuels, and these issues will all come under the microscope. People will have the opportunity to clear up any worries they have about them and spark up a heated debate!"

Mr Spowers added: "The Government are supposed to be technologically neutral but by offering £5,000 to people willing to buy electric cars, they are not considering alternatives such as hydrogen fuel cells. It is possible to make highly inefficient electric cars but that has not been deemed to be a problem. It is fantastic that they are offering incentives to encourage people to lower their carbon emissions but all types of alternative fuel should be rewarded."

Encouraging people to choose greener alternatives is at the heart of the IMechE's work with its members. The Institution's Formula Student event, Europe's largest flagship motorsport event organised by the IMechE, launched its Class 1A category in 2007 to encourage students to design cars using alternative fuels covered in the debate.

Fact Box

- The Government's target is an 80% cut in emissions by 2050.
- Road transportation accounts for nearly 70% of all CO₂ emissions from passenger transport.
- 157 million tonnes of CO₂ is produced by the UK transport sector.
- Business Secretary Peter Mandelson previously announced an offer of £1.3bn in loans from the European Investment Bank to support the ailing car industry in developing new low carbon technology.

Ends

Notes to Editors

- The Future Transport Fuels Debate starts from 6pm at Foster Wheeler House, Shinfield Park, Reading and admission is free.
- For more information on this release or to attend the event please contact the IMechE Press Office on 0207 304 6888 or email media@imeche.org or contact Frank Mugford on 01276 35753.
- The Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE) was established in 1847 and has some of the world's greatest engineers in its history books. It currently has around 80,000 members in 120 countries representing mechanical engineers involved in a diversity of fields such as the automotive, rail, aerospace, medical, power and construction industries to name a few. Visit www.imeche.org for more information.