



Photo by Walter Oates/The Washington Times

Nicole Seisler, 8, connects a line from the FuelMaker pump to fill up her father's 1987 Ford with pressurized natural gas. Rep. James Moran of Virginia (center) and West Virginia Rep. Bob Wise see how it's done.

Backyard fill-ups are a natural gas for local energy saver

By Todd Smith
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Jeffrey Seisler may be the only person in the Washington area who can fill up his car while barbecuing dinner on the backyard gas grill.

Through new technology on vehicles powered by natural gas and with a compressor from a Canadian manufacturer, he can fill up his 1987 Ford Crown Victoria from the same line he uses to fire up the barbecue grill at his Alexandria home.

He doesn't even need to dig around in his pockets for exact change — he pays his monthly gas bill for running the kitchen stove, hot water heater, air conditioner and the car, which is equipped with a natural gas conversion package.

The new pump is made by Fuel-Maker Corp. of Vancouver, British Columbia. It is a four-stage compressor that takes gas from an incoming line, pressurizes it, and pumps it into tanks in the trunk. It uses a 230-volt dedicated electric line.

The pump costs \$2,500 plus an \$800 hookup fee charged by the utility, in this case Washington Gas Light Co. Converting the car to burn natural gas cost \$2,000.

"This is a step into the future," said Mr. Seisler, who as executive director of the Natural Gas Vehicle Coalition in Arlington is trying to drum up support for natural gas.

He maintains that natural gas is a powerful contender for weaning an oil-dependent public from a rapidly declining commodity.

Years of research produced an engine conversion kit in the early 1970s. Since then, many companies have transformed their gasoline-powered fleets to natural gas, supplied by a central fueling station at company headquarters.

Some experts say residential natural gas pumps are the next step.

They point to several advantages. Natural gas costs 60 cents per gallon but yields the same mileage as gasoline. Mr. Seisler's 10-gallon tank lasts about 180 miles. Natural gas

BE TANKFUL

Only a few U.S. gas stations supply compressed natural gas for vehicles.

Amoco — 1 in Washington, D.C.; 6 in Denver

Fina — Throughout Texas

Phillips — 15 in Oklahoma

Shell — 15 in San Francisco

Texaco — 10 in Oklahoma

Unocal — 10 in San Diego

Source: Natural Gas Vehicle Coalition

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burns cleanly, cuts carbon monoxide emissions by 99 percent and causes fewer maintenance problems for engines.

Natural gas, however, does have some drawbacks. Few commercial service stations offer natural gas at pumps, making long trips difficult if not impossible. And the two five-gallon tanks take up most of the trunk space.

Yesterday, the ease of filling up Mr. Seisler's car was demonstrated by his 8-year-old daughter, Nicole, as other workers from the coalition tended hotdogs on the grill. The compressor was quieter than the air conditioning unit.

Rep. James P. Moran, Virginia Democrat and Mr. Seisler's congressman, also was on hand.

"There is substantial advantages in natural gas," Mr. Moran said. "I'm attracted [to the fact] that 93 percent of the gas used is from the United States."