

# Giving fuel a boost

Richland man says fuel-saving device doubles mileage, but officials say consumers should be skeptical

**PRATIK JOSHI**

HERALD STAFF WRITER

**R**obert Pritchett says he's been able to double fuel mileage on his Ford E-350 diesel van to about 20 mpg with an investment of about \$400.

The Richland resident recently installed a hydrogen booster system on his van that takes water and separates out hydrogen to be burned in the engine. Pritchett is testing the system for an alternative energy group and selling it as an independent dealer. He insists the system, plus a special oil he uses called Power Up, can save a lot of fuel.

But officials say those feeling the pinch at the pump should be skeptical of the hundreds of purported fuel-saving devices that are on the market.

Cathy Milbourn, Washington D.C.-based spokeswoman for the Environmental Protection Agency, which has tested hundreds of so-called fuel-saving devices, said consumers should be skeptical, especially of those that claim to improve mileage 25 percent or more.

EPA tests have not found any device that does that, although there were no recent reports available on testing of hydrogen boosters.

Do so-called gas-saving devices work?

"Generally, no," Milbourn said.

She said EPA tests of many of these products found no improvement in performance or fuel efficiency. Also, some devices can harm the engine, void the manufacturer's warranty and violate pollution control laws, she said.

Milbourn said fuel-saving devices have been around since the 1970s at least, and whenever fuel prices increase substantially there's a rush of such products to the market.

For instance, gadgets like the Turbonator, SpiralMax and CycloneFuelSaver are installed in a vehicle's air intake and claim to provide a swirling motion to maximize gas vapor-



Photos by Molly Van Wagner | mvanwagner@tricity

Robert Pritchett of Richland claims a hydrogen booster kit has helped double the fuel mileage and reduce emissions from his diesel booster is one of several devices on the market that claim to help engines run more efficiently, but some experts are skeptical.

ization and improve combustion. Other products, which are tied or connected to the fuel line such as the Magnetizer and the Vitalizer, claim to change fuel molecules and boost mileage.

Monty Prather, an automotive technology instructor at Columbia Basin College, is among those who are skeptical of fuel-saving devices.

He believes that if any of the advertised fuel-saving gizmos worked perfectly, auto manufacturers would have adopted the technology.

That includes hydrogen boosters.

Prather said one of his students recently installed a similar self-built system on his car, and while the device may have slightly improved the car's power, there's no evidence mileage is better.

Another thing to consider is it's not easy for an amateur to accurately track fuel mileage,

and there's a tendency for someone who installs one of the fuel-saving devices to want to believe it works.

Prather said the fuel-saving devices tend to have a "placebo effect" because their users often change their driving habits, which can quickly reduce gas consumption.

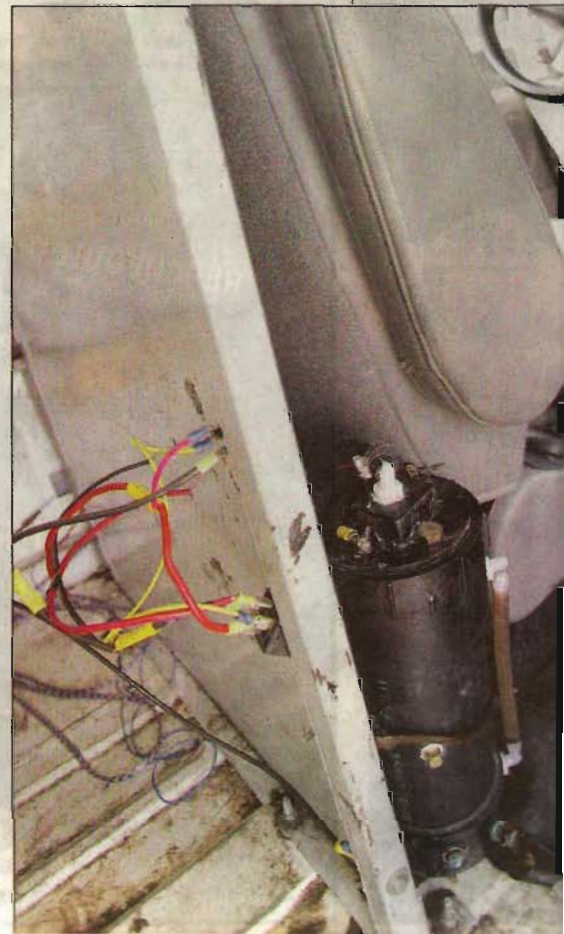
His advice: Drive your vehicle like the manufacturer designed it to be run.

But auto enthusiasts love to tinker and experiment in the search for improved mileage.

One of those is Richland resident Brad Woodworth, who's interested in the hydrogen booster systems and thinks they need to be scientifically investigated.

In the 1990s, Woodworth said, he installed the Vitalizer gas-saving device in his vehicles with positive results. He said mileage

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## ON THE NET

For more information about what consumers need to know about fuel-saving devices: [www.epa.gov/otaq/consumer/reports.htm](http://www.epa.gov/otaq/consumer/reports.htm)

saving and emission-reducing devices: [www.epa.gov/otaq/consumer/reports.htm](http://www.epa.gov/otaq/consumer/reports.htm)

To learn about EPA-approved fuel additives: [www.epa.gov/otaq/reports/fuels/additive/web-2nd.htm](http://www.epa.gov/otaq/reports/fuels/additive/web-2nd.htm)

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on his old Mazda GLC increased from 30 mpg to 33 mpg and his Jeep Cherokee increased from 17 mpg to 21 mpg.

That's why he's planning to test a hydrogen booster system. He recently spent about \$50 on the Internet to buy a design manual on how to build his own booster system.

The computer science expert said he plans to install the system on his SUV, which has 180,000 miles. "I don't care if the engine blows," he said.

However, Woodworth said he knows he needs to be careful because hydrogen can rust the exhaust system and can cause an engine to overheat. Because of that, he thinks hydrogen boosters may be just an intermediate step until hybrids or electric cars become prevalent.

But Gary Hall Jr., who owns Walla Walla-based H2O Hybrid Pro that sold the hydrogen booster kit to Pritchett, says hydrogen is the technology of the future. He began manufacturing his kits in March and said he's selling 20 to 25 of them a week. He says they're safe and have been popular in Europe

### Sure-fire ways to save gas

- ▶ Slow down.
- ▶ Make sure your vehicle is tuned up.
- ▶ Keep tires properly inflated and aligned.
- ▶ Drive at 55 mph on highways and use cruise control.
- ▶ Avoid fast "jackrabbit" starts.

and Australia for decades.

The systems sell for \$150 to \$1,300 and cost about \$150 to install on most vehicles, he said.

A serious auto enthusiast, Hall said he studied the concept for five years before he came up with his kit, which he said is more user-friendly than others on the market.

He insists the hydrogen booster system will improve fuel efficiency from 25 percent to 50 percent, but adds, "Each car is going to react differently."

Pritchett, meanwhile, says he's a convert to hydrogen. He also admits fuel efficiency is the result of many factors, including good driving habits.

▶ Pratik Joshi: 582-1541; [pjoshi@tricityherald.com](mailto:pjoshi@tricityherald.com); *Business Beat* blog at [www.tricityherald.com](http://www.tricityherald.com)

...thinks with thanks and "please." Particularly if you work in customer relations, remember to start with a friendly "Thanks for your inquiry" rather than an offi-

