

# Alternative fuels offer environmental benefits

Canada's alternative transportation fuels offer much more than an economical and reliable replacement for gasoline: in many cases, they promise cleaner air for future generations.

Propane and natural gas, the gaseous fuels, have been widely proven as a viable alternative to gasoline in hundreds of thousands of applications across Canada and around the world. While these fuels are saving motorists hundreds of dollars in annual fuel costs, they are at the same time reducing environmental pollution.

The combustion of gasoline and diesel fuel releases a variety of noxious emissions into the air. The problem is especially evident in large urban areas where there is a high concentration of vehicles.

Gaseous fuels, on the other hand, are relatively clean-burning. With the help of catalytic converters, carbon monoxide and hydrocarbon emissions from propane and natural gas can be reduced by as much as 90 per cent. Lead emissions are eliminated.

Propane and natural gas offer special promise for urban mass transit systems, which today are largely dependent on diesel fuel. In fact, a demonstration project of natural gas-fueled city buses in Hamilton has to date produced positive results, and a similar project was conducted using propane to fuel buses in the Ottawa-Carleton region.

Methanol is a third alternative fuel that holds the promise of cleaner air in the future. While this alcohol

fuel is currently manufactured from natural gas in Canada, it can potentially be produced from wood, coal, oil or even municipal waste.

When used in place of gasoline, methanol can reduce hydrocarbon and other polluting exhaust emissions. When diesel engines are modified to use methanol, soot emissions are almost entirely eliminated.

Low percentages of methanol (up to five per cent) can be mixed with gasoline and used in conventional vehicles without modifications to the engine or fuel system. It is estimated that using blended fuel reduces unburned hydrocarbon emissions by up to 15 per cent and also reduces levels of carbon monoxide. Methanol also boosts the octane level of the gasoline, and for leaded

gasolines this can allow a reduction in the need for lead additives.

Methanol may also be used in automobiles in the "neat" or almost pure form. This requires the vehicle manufacturer to design the engine and fuel system to be compatible with methanol so that the fuel's superior properties can be fully utilized.

Testing is being done to determine methanol's suitability as a transportation fuel in Canada's harsh climate, and particularly to identify any concerns about durability of engine parts in cold weather.

In 1985, the first Canada-wide field trial of methanol-fueled large engines, called Project MILE (Methanol in Large Engines), was initiated. Sponsored by Energy,

Mines and Resources Canada, this ongoing program will obtain the data for a comprehensive evaluation of the viability of methanol as a fuel for urban buses, intercity buses and medium- and heavy-duty trucks.

In the longer term, electricity has the potential to become a promising alternative fuel. Electric vehicles themselves produce absolutely no noxious emissions to contaminate the atmosphere. Moreover, they are remarkably quiet. In countries like Canada, where the mainstay of electricity production is not coal, the overall effect on the environment of electric vehicles would be positive. Certainly the growth of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, known as the "greenhouse effect", would be slowed.

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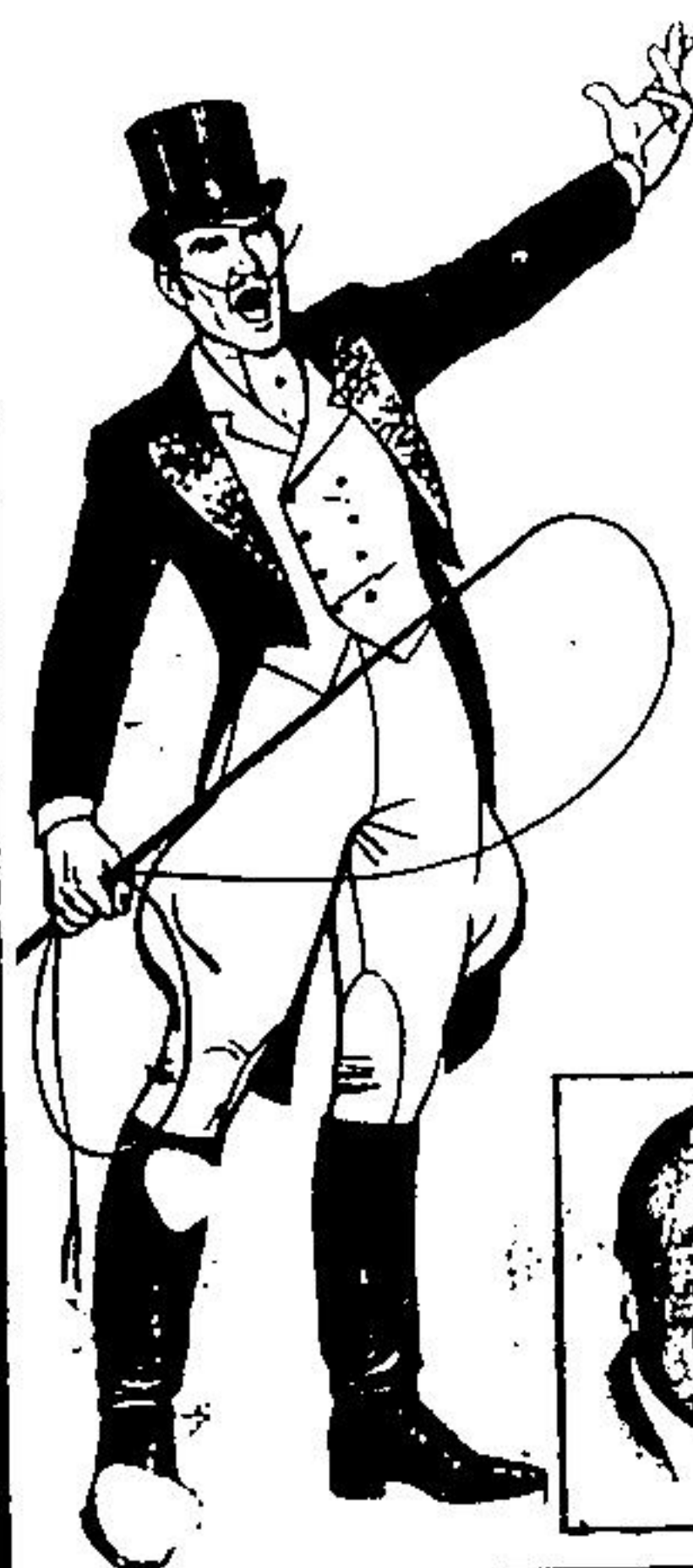
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